

Suddenly, he looked up at her again, over his raised shoulder and ice tore through her veins. She felt as though someone else was inside him, peering out through his eye sockets and wearing his face like a costume. His eyes were dead voids and yet brutally alive and hyper-focused. She had never been looked at with such impossible precision. It cut her to the bone and froze her in place. Whose eyes were peering from his sockets? Those eyes did not fit on any human face that had ever existed. Her eyes darted over his features, desperately seeking normality and familiarity, but those foreign eyes sought destruction. Her body was instantly tense. The tiny warning hairs on the back of her neck prickled and sent a cold rush to radiate down her spine.

There was something clawing at her psyche now, a sentiment that she wanted to banish because it was unfathomable. She desperately tried to silence the inner voice, she shoved it downward, but it was relentless. This could not be. This could not happen. Not to her. She was immune. She was special and she would not be this woman.

*You are going to die today.*

It came up. The vestigial voice came up somehow and she wanted to scream. She wanted to run. She wanted out of this truck and out of these woods. She chanced a desperate glance out the window and saw nothing but a lonely and infinite line of dark trees, their branches hemming her in, encasing her in a web. Her panicked breath hit the window and fogged it up, obscuring her vision. She stared at it nonetheless, refusing to look back at him. It didn't help. She could feel those eyes...furious black, rimmed with a thin circle of blue, an organic eclipse protruding from his skull. Then she felt breath on the back of her neck.

*You are going to die today.*

Impossible. The words floated up into her brain, front and center, and hovered there like a billboard. She moved for the door handle to run into the night. He would chase her. She felt that in her bones. He would chase her and catch her. She was in the middle of the woods with a stranger. No one would hear her. No one would help. The end.

As she began to dart out, she glanced back briefly; she had to see if he was following her. What she found on his side of the truck stunned her into inaction. She watched in abject terror as his face morphed again, this time into a bizarre amalgam of a sneer and the savage anger from before. It was as though he was trying to laugh through a white-hot rage and his features were resisting it, a nigh un-nameable expression...

Just then, as quickly as it came, his mood transformed. He looked downward, sighed, and relaxed while letting out a long breath. His critically tight facial muscles

released their unholy configuration. His shoulders slumped as he exhaled. He dropped his hands from the wheel. His eyes belonged to him again.

“Sorry about that...I remembered something I forgot to do at the school. Your talk about school reminded me of it. Sorry I was a little sharp just now.” His voice had taken on its usual pleasant cadence. His expression became almost pleading and chagrined.

She looked back at him, in shock and deathly white.

He very slowly snaked his hand onto her shoulder.