

Winter Is The Best Time to Die

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Abstract—Home now. Trying to recover. The trees are bare here in Pennsylvania. Funerals and keeping it together. Rest, for a bit. There's more to come. Let's make sure we are ready.

Index Terms—paused

INTRODUCTION

I didn't get a chance to write much this month. The first semester of graduate school really kicked my ass. I ended up doing alright, but dang, it was tough work. I keep saying that the worst is behind me and I have reasons to believe it. The New Year is right around the corner. I'm eager to see what comes next. To make up for the lack of writing this month, I'm including a short story I wrote for a creative writing class back at RIT.

Trapped

He jabbed the knife into the side of a sycamore, and began to etch a heart.

"This will be here forever," he strained as he pushed the blade deeper into the trunk "to remind you of our love." He looked over his shoulder and grinned, eyes twinkling with unbridled excitement. The shredded bark fell from where the man was working and made a small pile at his bare feet along the floor of the forest. He was wearing a baggy, slightly wet orange shirt and tan shorts with spots of moisture on them.

The early night was silent and the milky canopy hung high above the ground in the moonlight. The birds had gone to sleep and all of the night critters crawled quietly along the forest's surfaces, watching. Only one thing broke this silence.

"And another!" He yelled, swinging the knife across the face of a rock. Sparks flew from the edge, and a chalky line was left on the surface of the great boulder next to many others. He got to work with the blade, muttering words of love and compassion. "We can never tell anyone about us, do you hear me?" His breathing was frantic as he slid the knife against the stone, and a layer of sweat was forming on his forehead. Curly brown locks of hair stuck to his neck and shoulders. "I'm in love with you, do you hear me?"

A creek was running nearby, quiet enough for a baby to sleep near. It sauntered through the ground like a white snake on this peaceful night, but upstream there was hysteria.

"Keep me close to you," he shivered as he sat in the water "and don't let me go." He was laughing now. Wide eyes looked nervously around, and his knuckles were blue from the cold. He emerged from the stream and took off his soaked clothes. "Don't look at me!" He went behind a large rock and sat in the dirt for a long while, rocking warmth into his body and grinding his teeth together.

Alone, he remained there. Pale skin stretched around ribcages and a spine, and his long fingers pressed into the

packed dirt around where he was curled up on the ground, naked.

"Listen, we have to get out of this place," he sat facing the rock. The worn blade was resting next to him. "We have to, we have to, we have to," he caught himself on this tirade, and brought his knees closer into his chest. "Tonight."

He got up and started walking. He stumbled forward, tripping over rotten logs and sickly moss. The forest spun around him, and his firefly eyes flicked back and forth between his clenched hands and the dimly lit foliage passing around him.

He walked passed the sycamore, and picked up his pace, eyebrows pressed inwards on his brow into a look of profound concern. His jaw was ruining itself from sheer tension, and the night was no longer silent. He got to the rock with all of the blade marks and stopped for an instant before it. He vomited, and began to run. Naked, he sprinted between trees. Every tree had a deep heart carved into the side. "Let me out!" spit flew from his mouth and as he pressed onward with his escape. He continued, long hair trailing behind his head. He tripped into the stream where he had been earlier that night, and he sat in its current weeping to himself. He emerged from the waters what seemed like hours later, exhausted, and collapsed on the ground in the forest, forced into sleep by fatigue.

He woke up the next afternoon to birds chirping and the warmth of the sun on his body. He looked around, confused, and saw his clothes on a rock nearby, damp but mostly dry from being out in the sun. Next to them was a knife.

"What a lovely day." He stretched. "I think I'd fancy some time with nature." He put on his slightly wet clothes, picked up the knife, and began to walk around, carving hearts into the sides of trees and whispering words of love and compassion.