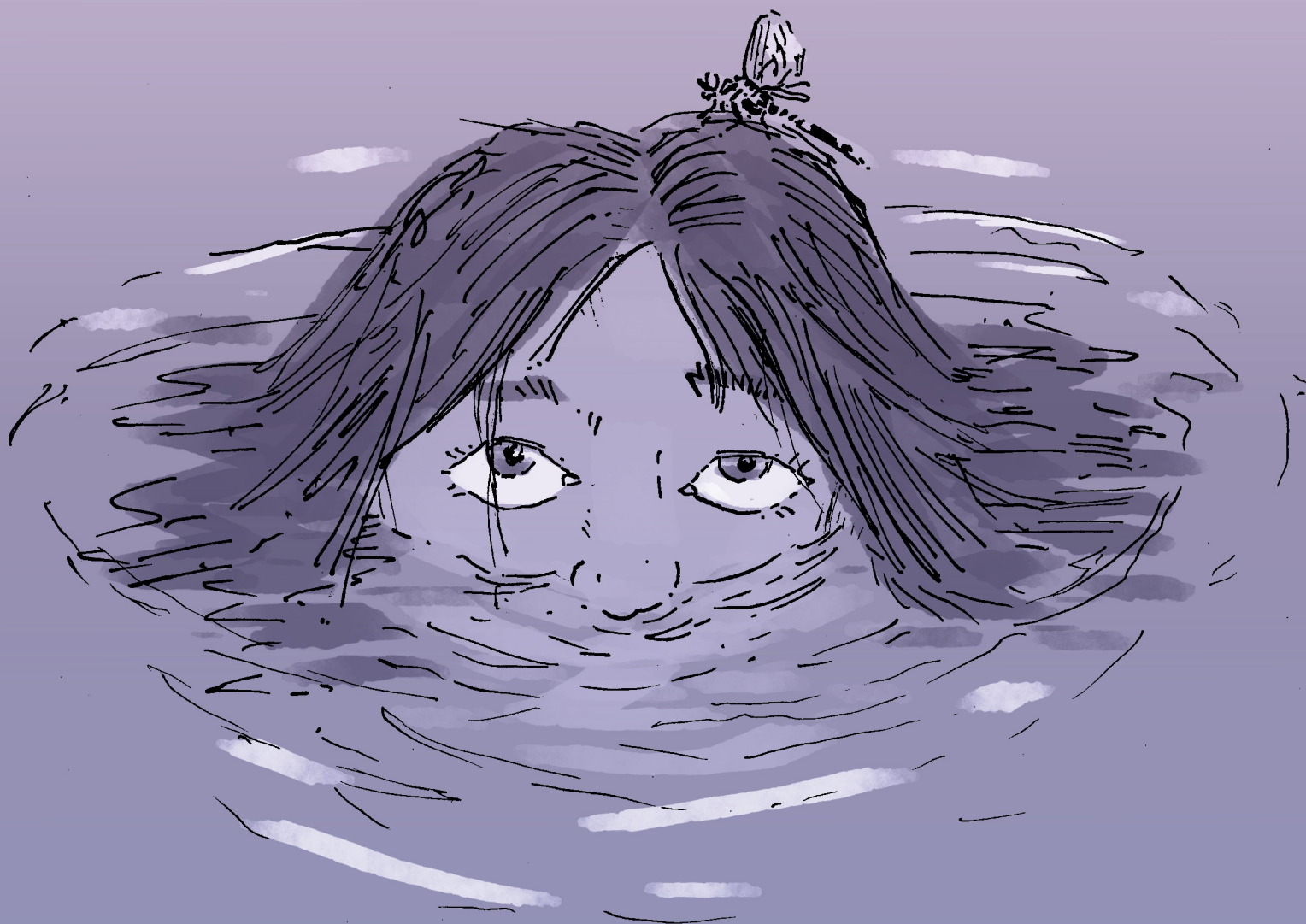


From Nymph to Broken Wings

A collection by Victoria Lecoutere



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Introduction:

So you've opened this short story collection, so I assume you plan on or consider reading this. So first of all I'm glad you've decided to give your time to this little booklet, thanks. Now secondly let me tell you some things about the stories here, of course if you want to jump straight to the actual contents, go ahead.

The Old Place is probably the oldest story in here (sometime in the summer of 2024), it wasn't really plotted or planned, I had a bit of a concept, but I just started writing to see where it went, it's how most prose in this collection came to be actually. I Wish was written around a similar timeframe, it might be maybe a month or so older, but it isn't really as much a story as The Old Place is, I suppose maybe it'd be better described as a poem or like a fictionalised journal entry. It's actually quite similar in form to In Winter I Miss the Sun which I must've written sometime in spring 2025.

A Pleasant Night is a story I personally quite liked. It's not as personal or "important" to me as some other stories in here, but it was kind of an opportunity to play around a bit. I think I wrote it around christmas 2024.

I think that leaves me with two stories to tell you something about. Her Vacant Eyes was a story I wrote in one sitting sometime in April after coming up with a visual I really liked, and it all kinda flowed from that initial image. It's very similar in origin to A Song Not for Your Ears Intended. Both kinda feel similar to me, they have a certain chaos to them, and they don't really follow a logic in their structures.

I hope you enjoy these little stories :)

-Victoria (2025)

Her Vacant Eyes

There's a picture on the wall in my room I don't recognise. Her eyes vacant. I must've known her. I look at my reflection in the lake as I wash the blood off my hands. Her eyes vacant. I close the door and I lie down in my bed. The grass scratching my ear feels so nice, but I'll have to get up soon, but I need to think first. I wonder who the person in the picture is. I wonder whose blood I have on my hands. I wonder what happened.

I'm ready. Everything's ready. I check if he's read the text. Good, he'll be there. My heart moves through my chest in a rhythm alien to me, my lungs stop pumping air and - I need to sit down. I need to pace around my room and hum a melody from a song that I liked so much when I was small that it's nested itself in my body. I hum and rock back and forth and breathe in and out and step back and forth in an arrhythmically pulsating manner. Step 1 - grab the supplies. Step 2 - leave and lock the doors. Step 3 - focus for once in your life.

I check for blood on my clothes, if my hands were covered with this much blood, there must be - there's nothing. I rub my hands on the grass to dry them and I place my head down. My body gives in to the pressure and I strand on the edge of the waking world. I dream but I'm very much awake. I take the picture down from the wall to investigate it closer. Her eyes vacant. My eyes lock onto her hands, her bruised hands holding the frame of the hospital bed. It's a strange picture. It's a strangely warm and welcoming image even though the coldness of the hospital still chokes all joy. The warmth resists. My cheeks too feel warm or maybe really cold. I don't really feel a difference right now, I only know for certain that the grass touches my face and I like that. It's soft.

The road to the lake is littered with pebbles chanting songs not for human ears to comprehend. I hum along. It's a song I know. I touch my pocket, the knife's still there. I take it into my hands and look at my reflection in the blade. Her eyes vacant. I wonder what happened. Her bruised hands hold the metal bed frame, next to her a book lies with stories I'll never read. I think she told me a story long ago.

I tread on lightly still balancing the thin line between dreams and reality. I wish I remembered which is which. Maybe I will when I wake up. Or when I fall asleep, but I can't right now. I slip and feel what I assume is the waking world pressing me into - I lie down, I'll have to get up soon, but I have to think first.

I stab him. I stab him. Twice. His body makes a few twitches and his breathing turns to iiiiiiiiih- His life droops down, it leaves his face, flows down his neck, vacates his chest, hips and thighs, lastly his legs collapse. Crash.

The grass is so soft.

I get up from my bed and grab the photograph again. I can feel who she is, but I don't know why. Her bruised hands are soft when she wants them to be. Her voice makes my vocal folds twitch trying to mimic her speech. Her purplish hand holds the cold metal bar. Who are you? His body hits the ground. Making a thud, that I repeat to myself. I like the sound so I voice it over and over again. Along to this rhythmic repetition the choir of pebbles hums my favorite song while I drag the corpse closer to

the lake. He spits some blood in an attempt to make a sound, to scream. He won't scream underwater. Now, I have to wash my hands.

I hold the photograph. There was a car. It was driving. Hands clenched around head she hits the ground. Snaps and screeches populate the sonic landscape. And the noise digs into her head as the road digs into her hands. She sees gray and - quiet crash after loud crash. Colors and sounds so harsh that they almost numb the sting of the fibula splinters trying to escape her left calf. Every pop another bone fractures and - I hang the picture back on the wall.

I keep my hand on the cold hospital bed frame imagining it's a knife I'm pushing into his rotten chest, carving his rotten heart out, leaving a mark of the beast so he'll never set foot in heaven. The ringing in my ear will never stop so I hum along as if it's a childhood song, a childhood taken away by the devil himself.

And the devil will bleed.

The Old Place

It's been a while since we've been here. The old place. It's where we used to play catch in the rain and mud. We got older and the place grew more dangerous. Stuff was breaking under our feet and beams were creaking above our heads. I'm not sure what we hope to find today. Lilith told me it's where they made the mistake. The place where they figured out how to make us better, prettier, nicer, easier and all the same.

Lilith is unlucky. She wasn't born "the good way". She wasn't carefully crafted. She wasn't designed. Her brownish-greenish eyes look a bit skewed and are decorated by permanent eyebags. Her hips are a bit too thin for her shoulders and her breasts hang a bit too low. Her ears both pierce through her thin brown hair at slightly different angles. She doesn't burn all her fat away like the supermodels we're all born as.

But I think she's prettier than all of us.

She doesn't look like we all do: blonde, tall, blue perfectly almond-shaped eyes. Our pale complexions are as untainted as the plastic dolls we made daughters play with in the olden days so they could practice to be the mother they were expected to be. These days we're all born perfectly. Raised perfectly by a bunch of knobs and buttons. Educated perfectly by a system not prone to human error.

I was perfect. It costs parents a ton of money to get an ideal kid, but my parents invested in my future and had me made exactly like they wished.

Lilith and I face the heavy door. They locked it all a few years ago. They grew tired of perfect children playing with imperfect children in imperfect places instead of their carefully designed lab rat cages. Perfection has to be worked for. You shouldn't just throw it all out and waste all the effort and money it cost by not playing well.

I threw it all away. My hair's dyed a bright green tint. Smudged asymmetrical eyeliner accents my eyes. My nose is pierced and so is my lip which I stain with unnaturally colored lipstick. I covered my spotless arms with tattoos everyone disapproves of. I hope they think I'm ugly now. The ugliest man they'll ever meet. Half of those changes aren't even legal anymore these days.

I grab a metal pipe and hit the door. The metallic clang rings through the complex. The lock doesn't budge. I get angry. Lilith gets angrier. - "Why are you so loud?"

I shrug and let her do whatever she believes will force the door open. She asks for a wire and I go look for it. "What kind of wire?" - I ask before I search for one.

I go looking for some iron or copper or whatever wire while she tries to pry the door open by smashing the rusty hinges. I think Lilith's much smarter than me and I wonder why they didn't make me a genius too at birth. They could've. But they didn't. Do they try to minimize overthinkers that way or was that something my parents could pick as well. Why do I still call them parents? They were just there to offer a place to sleep for infant-me. They didn't have to put in any effort to make me the man I am today. They'd just drop me off at the pedagogical center and get me for the weekends only at first. As I got older I'd stay more and more with them as a mini version of the perfect people they are.

I hear a loud click followed by an excited “hell yeah”. I rush back to Lilith. She leans on the open door with excessive pride. “If that ego gets any heavier the door might give in.” - I joke. She doesn’t come up with any witty response and urges me to hurry instead. We enter the place where I, for the first time in my life, had wished I wasn’t perfect. It’s here that I’d paint my nails black with a marker to disappoint my parents, but I was stopped by some cops on my way home and they made me rub it off with some alcohol gel they had lying around. You don’t enter a perfect neighborhood when you look like me. Lilith can officially enter, but practically... she might as well go dance on train tracks. The youth won’t give you even a single breath of “their” clean air. She’s a waste of oxygen to them and they have already learned long ago that politely asking someone to stop breathing doesn’t work.

But they’re perfect. They’re all perfect.

My legs tremble because of the storm of memories and nightmares all rushing back to me. Lilith notices it. She’s not doing too well either. Neither of us speaks. We walk in silence for numerous minutes. I want to ask if Lilith blames me for everything I blame myself for, but I know she doesn’t. Yet I still can’t convince myself that she doesn’t consider me one of them.

It’s strange to be back at the old place. That’s what we used to call it when we were younger. Back when I saw fists kissing Lilith’s face without love and I walked away. Back when I approached her afterwards when the storm had calmed. Back when she punched and kicked me as I hugged the ground and knew I deserved it, but screamed at her for it. Back when she was shattered into pieces and I looked away until it was all done to then come back to pretend it was I who glued her back together.

She remembers that. I know it.

I ask her if she ever forgave me. She doesn’t say a word. I wait hoping for an answer but she asks me a question instead - “Why were you so scared?”

This time it’s me who makes her wait for an answer. After a while I whisper - “I think I wanted to fit in.”

“You knew you’d never fit in, but you still chose not to help me.” - She snarkily comments. I’m taken by surprise, I’m used to conversations like these taking place behind curtains of pretenses and half-truths. I choose to remain quiet for a while.

The old place has been flooded for as long as I can remember. The lower floors have sunken into the mud and form a small pond for the imperfect kids to play imperfectly in, but most imperfect kids play around the old skatepark. The perfect kids rarely come there, I assume it’s still like that. The imperfect parents don’t handle the violence at the hands of the spoiled brats softly and the skatepark is in a less than perfect neighborhood, while the old place is located at the border of perfect and not perfect. The perfect place to learn who’s stronger in this world. The area has been almost entirely taken over by nature, but kids still like to play there so the authorities tolerate it as long as most of the playing still happens in the groups that are supposed to stick together: perfect - imperfect.

The creaking of the iron handle, which Lilith cautiously turns, awakens me from getting lost in my thoughts. I decide to tell Lilith that I wish I wasn't born how I was and that I'd rather never have belonged among them. Lilith shrugs. I ask her if she thinks she's beautiful. She hesitates before telling me that beauty doesn't exist anymore. We're either considered ugly or we look the same as every other pinnacle of perfection.

"You're beautiful, Lilith." - I say, hoping to raise her self-esteem.

"To you and probably to Willow too, but you're no objective truth teller, because you ask any one of those perfect blonde fucks and they'll tell you-" - She says before I interrupt her to say- "And they are objective truth tellers? More so than me or Willow? You've got to be kidding."

The silence of these old muddy abandoned hallways has always made me uncomfortable but now it's getting worse by the second. My brain is racing. My heart is pounding. I'm hurt, but it's fine. I'm scared like a little kid in their bedroom at night when they're convinced that the monster under their bed will come and eat them tonight, but there's no monster to fight off here. There's just me, a good friend and an empty building. Still I'm terrified.

Lilith's never been good at explaining what she's doing. I'm not yet sure what she's looking for here. She knows just as well as I know that there's nothing we can do here. We pass another danger sign and another rusty door barely holding on to its hinges.

This is the lab where the first generation of "designer babies" was born. That's what we were called years before it became the norm. Now we're just called people and Lilith is also just a person, but we were always taught that if you're imperfect you're just that: a person, while if you're perfect you are actually treated as a person. It's been like this for decades, probably. I'm not sure, I'm too young to remember the early years of this.

Lilith tells me we're almost there. I'm surprised we're actually walking towards something and not just strolling along memory lane here. I ask where we're headed. She gives a vague answer that contributes nothing to my understanding of our purpose here.

But it all makes sense when we enter that room. I'm greeted by my reflection in the mirror and I think to myself: I need to pick a better word to describe myself as than "ugly". It's what I've been told I look like since I started presenting the way I do. Granted I'm not particularly handsome, though I'm not ugly. I look the way I look and I like the way I look, but others don't and that's partially the point. I'll think about that later, now I've got the room in front of me, where all knowledge on genetics is gathered in old fashioned books that no one bothered to save from all the grime and dirt.

Lilith asks me if I understand now. And I do understand why she's here, but I'm not sure why I am here, so I ask.

"You're here to help me fix me." - She tells me.

I shiver. The cold suddenly strikes me as odd even though it's been there since we entered this place which we had better left alone.

"We should leave." - I urge her.

"I'm not leaving like this." - She gestures at her gorgeous body.

"You are perfect." - I plead.

"I'm not. We all know I'm not perfect. I'm fat and ugly." - She says.

I find myself nodding, unable to make a sound, not in agreement but in understanding, but she doesn't know that so she whispers - "You agree, don't you?"

"I disagree." - I finally manage to produce the words I intended to speak. I continue - "You're not ugly. You've never been. You're not perfect and you shouldn't be. Please let us leave this place."

I knew this was what she was looking for when she told me she wanted to come back to the old place. I knew it but I refused to believe it and now I'm here begging for her to leave this abandoned pile of rusty iron and steel. She grabs a book. She leaves the room. I follow. She enters the surgery room. She disinfects all these devices which Satan himself must've put here and I breathe words of objection into the room but they won't reach her. Lilith won't listen so I do what she asks.

I walk out of the old place accompanied by a woman who used to be a symbol, a beacon of hope and a dear friend to me. I failed her again. She's just another human being now. Exactly the same. I miss her skewed eyes, her figure beautiful in its own right, her brown hair, but more than any of that I miss the hope for a future, where we don't have to be perfect, that I found in her. I stomp through the mud unbothered by my soaked feet. I ask Lilith if she's got any water and some scissors. She has both. I wash off my makeup as best I can with only water. I cut my brightly colored hair as short as I can. I twist the ring in my nose open and pull it out. I pull the horseshoe through my lip and pray it doesn't rip too much, I can't be bothered to remove it properly anymore. I bleed a bit. I don't want to be different by myself, alone.

We're two fucked up souls walking down the street in perfect bodies. And as we wander I think to myself: We're all ugly aren't we?

But I don't worry about it too much, soon we'll all be able to think all the same and forget we ever thought differently. Soon we'll all be happy. They're working on it.

In Winter I Miss the Sun

Throat tightens. I... I. Eyes dart. Bullseye-I lock onto the window. Leg shakes. I'm pretty sure I'm going to break into tears. Reality fades out once more. I've got nothing in this moment in space and time. Window. Choke. Choking. Heartbeat existed but has moved to the back of my head, I feel dead, I feel dragged through the mud this shithole turns into in winter. Cold. Shaking. Contrast with the sun and 30 Celcius weather. I can't breathe. I want to leave.

-Whatever that means.

I move downstairs. We need to talk. I try to keep my lip from twitching and voice from trembling and my hand from shaking and. I don't want to look into her judging eyes. Why must- I don't want to speak. I... I. Throat closes in. Head closes in. I don't see. What were colors? What were sounds? The void is the only thing that's real. Reality can't exist. Why would it hurt like this? What was I? Before I became a voice running down a checklist I prepared before. Don't fuck up. I... I. What am I if not a leaf falling from a tree in autumn. Steered by wind, weak willed, wishing the fall were over. Winter's coming and I rot. I don't want to hear the voices. I did my story, I went down the slide, I don't need to scrape my knee afterward. I don't want. Forward. Backward. I think we talked and I'm hurt. I think I hurt me. I think I hurt fabric. Stories woven together. Ripping it apart: I'm an adult now. We talked. I want to leave my head, but like the safety. The needles still sting but at least it's self-inflicted now. At least it's slow. At least it's the same hands that wipe my crying eyes. Sh. Quiet, the storm's calmed and is walking up the stairs.

A Song Not for Your Ears Intended

Another step in the wrong direction, but nothing's ever finished here. She's tired and still twirling trying to keep up with the tempo dictated by her pulsating arteries. Her feet have walked the ceiling but are now glued to the wooden floor. Steadily she keeps her eyes fixated on the man in the mirror. Clicking her toes together before she's swept off to the side once more, ramming into the red tiled wall. Ragefully she returns to the center of attention. Her floating turns to stomping and her 4 limbs manage to sound like a hundred drums all beating through the walls of this chamber like an earthquake. The singular door swings open and the abyss joins the wails of the young woman, her pleas for the man in the mirror to mute the sounds. Still, thumping and screeching echo through the silent vacuum of space, not as sounds but as concepts beyond anyone's understanding. She jumps onto the wall walking upside down onto the ceiling trying to exorcise all spirits from this room. Harmonizing with the void in her chants she grabs the lamp cover and smashes a hole in the ceiling, and another one, and another one. The debris falls to the floor or flies off into the vast space. The mirror man remains quiet still. He thinks for a second before changing the scenery.

The sun peeks through thin sheets of clouds to grace the grass covered hill with its shine. The warm light makes the deep ochre tree bark as vibrant as the flowers surrounding the woman lying in the sunlight. Slowly she opens her eyes. Her body tenses up. Where's the man? On the way to the tree she glances at the horizon wrapped around the hill, the sun and the clouds. Clearly she's inside a sphere. Determined she stretches her arm to reach the lowest branch of the tree to pull herself up into the first layer of the climb ahead. Layer after layer she gets closer to the sun until the world turns dark. The only source of light is gone, no stars, no moon, no houses in the distance, just an empty void.

...

She decides to step forward, unable to see where she is positioned or headed. She's clearly no longer in a tree but in a dark space that she can apparently walk through. Left foot, right foot, left, right, she marches forward humming songs to herself that reverberate into long drawn out notes. She can hear the gentle hiss of her breathing, the soft beating of her heart and the quiet footfalls. Left, right, left, right. It's a rhythm she can comfortably follow so she does, she trails behind a rhythm guiding her to nowhere in particular. Right, left, right left, right, left, ... and up. An incredible force throws her in a direction that feels up, but isn't possible to discern. Flying she curls up into a fetal-like position to shed a tear. Lying like that, curled up, on a cold floor, feels right in a way.

What are you looking at?

She sees nothing, but knows her eyes pierce right through the dark veil, they reach for the mirror man. She repeats her question to the man staring her up and down: What are you looking at? She reaches for the end of the blanket and pulls at a loose thread. Stitch after stitch gives in and she sees that behind this cloak her body lies. Above it a mirror with a man in it. She stands between her body and the mirror: the man. She conceals every inch of skin with her presence. She's there now. She's a body again. In a room. With a judge in the mirror. Case closed. Verdict: I exist. I'm a person and the

man makes room for a portrait of me. She's a body in a mirror.

I Wish

I look at the stars. My mind wanders. I breathe in the air tinted with a faint smell of grass mown earlier on this summer evening somewhere down the hill. My thoughts kiss the shiny dots smiling at astronomers through the lenses of their telescope. I think. I think of something I said and about words I wished I had at least whispered for the wind to bring to you. I wish I told you some things I know I've carried for too long. I wonder if it's worth it. If anything's worth it. If sharing my worries is worth knowing that you'll know what gnaws on my gut.

I look at the stars. I touch the grass. I die a little bit every time I see your smile fade a bit to make way for a subtle frown of concern. You ask me if I'm okay and I know that it was me who killed your joy again. I wish I seemed happy.

I look at the stars. I know they don't know. They don't know anything. No pain, happiness or emptiness. I wish I told you who I am, how I feel, what I wish for when I see a person I don't wish to be in the mirror. I wish you knew me. Really knew me.

A Pleasant night

Let me set the scene. It was a pleasant night. The moon occasionally peeked through the clouds. A warm breeze would blow the last brownish leaves off their branches. I'm not exactly sure why we walked into the forest, stomping through the mud with shoes definitely not meant for that. I wore brand-new sneakers, he wore something akin to boots if I recall correctly.

I like the feeling of holding a piece of paper in my hands, I'd describe it as warm, but I suppose that description's been done to death. So anyway, today, a month after the events I'm describing, I picked up a pen and a sheet and paper and now I'm writing this down.

It was a warm fall evening, which was a nice contrast to the pouring rain of the week that preceded that friday. I met him on monday. I'm writing "met him", but I actually first saw him a long while before that, but it's the first time we spoke. The way he spoke was very particular. There was a certain raspiness that would come up any time he wanted to accentuate a word. He spoke with firmness, he wouldn't break up his sentences ever, he knew where it had to go from the first word spoken. But this friday there was something off about him, we were talking and suddenly he misspoke. It's strange that it struck me as odd, everyone misspeaks occasionally, but not him, he... just doesn't do that.

I think I'll have to write this all over again, because the structure is simply not there and I think I haven't even written down his name, maybe I shouldn't? Maybe I just shouldn't write this at all, because I fear this makes me seem a bit obsessed?

Whatever, back to the story, Friday night in the forest, we were walking like that for maybe fifteen minutes or so. (maybe worth mentioning, there were five of us there, not just me and him, but they're irrelevant to the story at this point.) It was at that moment that I spotted the first flicker, I blamed it on the 3 beers I had had at that point, which was dumb. Also I should explain what a flicker looks like, it's a weird purple glow that hangs low above the ground as a sort of fog, but it looks alive in the same way that fire looks alive. The thing with fire is, the flames go outward, but this thing it seems to have some sort of flames going into the thing and then it collapses a few seconds after it's appearance. Very strange.

I don't remember who coined the term flickers but that's not really relevant. What's relevant is that they're hella weird.

When he misspoke earlier that evening, his brain just seemed to have crashed. It just stopped working, he stared blankly at me and asked me my name, which he knew. It took 5 seconds and he was back to normal. I might be making this up subconsciously but I'm quite certain his eyes glowed purple when he stared at me, that's why I keep coming back to this misspeaking. I think he was saying something along the lines of: "I will not explain" for one reason or another, what conversations were we having, Jesus, we must've been drunk as f-

When we saw the second flicker we just told ourselves it was fireflies, which was an acceptable explanation then, because it was really far in the distance, but the third one

made us have our doubts and the fourth one appeared right in front of us. And I think there was a face in there. I don't know how. I can't even draw it because it wasn't really visible, but you could feel it there in the same way you feel a guy staring at you on the subway even when you aren't looking at him.

I just want to clarify I don't believe in ghosts and I'm certain there's a very good explanation for everything, some combination of delusions, weird physics and group dynamics. Perhaps a little bit the bottle of vodka we opened later on.

When the fifth flicker appeared it struck me that he, I'll call him Alan from now on, had not commented on any of the flickers that had appeared before so I asked him what he thought of it. He stuttered. He paused. And then he constructed a sentence almost in his usual way of speaking to tell us he hates it. He hates the flickers. That's all we got out of him, no theories, no suggestions as to what to do, no reasoning behind his dislike for them. He just hated them.

The more I sit here writing (it's more staring at a page), the more I'm beginning to doubt this is explainable.

After that fifth flicker my memory begins to fade, I still vividly remember opening the bottle of vodka and taking a bunch of beers out of my backpack. But I don't know what happened, I knew what happened when I started writing, but I don't now.

I'll go back to the weird conversation of earlier that evening, because I recall what it was about. It was about whether he thought physics will be able to explain everything in the future. He told me he didn't even think that physics explained anything. I asked him to elaborate, because I was hoping to show off with a little reasoning on it all being descriptive and based on assumptions. (I want to seem smart, let me be). He elaborated a little bit, but he didn't make the points that I was still hoping were going to impress him and then he just got stuck. He just stared with that green twinkle in his eyes.

After that sixth sighting of forest spirits, we sat there drinking and Alan spoke softly and he whispered: "none of you understand do you?". I'm not sure what he meant. And everyone must've been equally confused, because I think someone asked him what the hell he meant.

I'm trying to think of what he looks like. I know I've probably last seen him a week or so ago, so I should remember, but I simply don't remember. I do remember that he recently asked me if physics will explain everything some day, which to me is a super interesting question, because it's more a translation of the incredibly complex universe into a language we can understand. And he said I'm wrong. No, that was not that conversation. He said that I'm wrong at a different point in time. He said it that night. Why did he say that? I think it was some morality thing. It must've had something to do with the forest spirits.

I don't know what I'm writing about anymore. Maybe just worth mentioning that the forest spirits turned out to be simply mist that appeared green because of the last bits of sun shining through the green summer leaves. I know the four of us will have to do such a night in the forest again, I really don't remember anything but that it was a lotta

fun :).