



Ode to Sappho.



Warning: Contains stories of horror, monsters,  
disturbing and distressing themes.

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Bedroom

My eyes snap open to see something scuttle out of view in the dark, slip into the wardrobe and pull the door close with a faint click.

It's not right.

I look outside to see a sky tinged with green, the world abandoned, the street lights are dark. I'm in a mirror world of our world. The rain is falling upwards. There's scratches and knocks on my bedroom walls, covering every square inch, carved in deep like they'd want to carve into me.

I step out of bed, heading for the door. Something tells me not to open it and I crawl back into bed, just as a knock comes from the hall, along with a soft voice, a familiar voice, pleading with me to let him in, that he knows I'm in here, I hear his footsteps as this monster without a face paces the hall outside my room, sobbing, telling me to let him in. I want to.

I want to.

I want t

I don't know what he'll do if I let him in. He stole my mother's voice from her throat, I heard her screams, know she's dead, but her mannequin is pleading with me from the hall, knocking softly on my door incessantly for hours, adding to the chorus, until it's knocking into my skull. The blanket over my head can't block it out as her voice starts to cry. The knocks get more incessant, it's sobs get louder, it's somehow pacing yet knocking in the same place every time, devoid of pattern, frenzied, as I try to drown it out, what does it want, if I fall asleep it'll get in, it'll get me, I can't get out I can't get out it won't stop knocking why

won't it stop crying please be quiet please be quiet please  
be quiet pleas

I feel another thing slip under my bed, joining the one in the  
wardrobe, distracting me from the one in the hall. They're  
not trying to hide from me, they want me to know that  
they're there, know I'm

scared, they're just waiting.

I don't know what for.

I sit up, and hear everything  
hold its breath. The knocks  
stop. The sobs halt. The rain  
freezes.

There's a mirror across from  
me, projecting my pale face  
back at me. And as I stare, I

see my reflection blink, twitch, and I stay deathly still  
along with the rest of the beasts hiding, paralysed, staring  
into those eyes that are trying to capture my own, trying to  
see it again, afraid of what will happen if I catch it  
happening, if it'll confirm that I'm in the mirror, if  
something else is watching me to see if I'm doing the same.

I hear the monster mannequin mother outside start to  
leave, soft padding footsteps heading back to where it  
came, but there's still more monsters trying to get me,  
including the clone in the mirror, the real me, am I the fake,  
waiting to strike, waiting to pounce, waiting to strike,  
waiting for me to let my guard down.

It's 3am.



Bus

You look up from your lap to find the bus almost empty, save one man sitting up front, watching you. Your eyes drop back to your hands, not wanting to seem rude, and you glance outside, only to see the world covered in a red glow. Your eyes trail back over to the man, to see if he's still staring. You hadn't noticed him when the bus was full, but now that it's quiet there's no denying his presence. He's smiling at you, huge and unnatural, his grin stretching from cheekbone to cheekbone, so wide you swear that if he opened his mouth his head would rip in half. You try to avoid looking, but his eyes meet yours and it somehow stretches further, your eyes not leaving his, unblinking, eternally staring.



You notice the bus isn't moving, but when did it stop? The driver seems to be non-existent, when did he get off? Where did the other passengers go? In order to leave you'd have to walk past him, and the walls seem to be closing in as he seems closer and closer to you.

His smile is saying that he wants to rip your eyeballs out through your teeth and devour you piece by piece, so you can watch, and you have to get away but you can't move, watching as metallic black tentacles start to swim out from under his seat, lifting him in the air, and you stand, your bag dropping to the ground, your belongings scattering to the floor, your phone skidding under the seat in front of you. The man continues to rise, his skin shedding and breaking way for scales, and you fall to your hands and



knees, trying to reach for your phone with desperate fingers.

His smile gives way to a snake head, his skin falling to the floor with a sick thump, those tentacles filling the floor of the bus, crawling along the ceiling and slithering over the walls. His smile gives way as he opens that snake mouth and you see rows and rows of sharp teeth, his mouth a tunnel to hell, an endless black pit of teeth and smiles and ink as it starts to drip down from his tongue.

You grab your phone and desperately put in your passcode, but the screen is backwards and you can't open anything.

There's no escape.

The tentacles have blocked all the windows now, the inside of the bus looking like it was dipped in thick black paint, surrounding you, and his snake head is now inches from the ceiling, and you can't tell where the snake stops and the tentacles begin, and you're swimming in the liquid tentacles now, dropping your useless phone and trying to scream but at the first opportunity they launch themselves down your throat, in your ears, in your nose, filling with what seems like black, gooey dread, pulling you towards his face with those still human, unblinking eyes, and just past him you can see the lights on the clock on the front of the bus still managing to shine through the ink.

The tentacles fill your eyes, leaving you with the numbers etched into your brain.

It's 3am.

Street

You never listened when your mother warned you not to walk alone at night. You have before, and absolutely nothing happened, so you wrongly assumed it was fine and headed out into the black, down those streets you knew but no longer looked familiar. The absence of light started obscuring the details, like a bad con job that's trying to convince you that you're in the same place, but you're not. People can always uncover whether a painting is a fake. You look to the darkness as you cross the street, not that there would be anyone out at this time. To the left, the streetlights are blaring the way you remember. The way they should be. To the right, the way home, they're off. The dark is all consuming and empty, a void where the houses should be but seem to no longer exist.

You make another wrong assumption, assume that someone must have just hit the power box and that's why the lights are out. It's just a human error. Horror movies



aren't real, aren't based on a foundation of fact. Those movie monsters had to come from somewhere, and it wasn't experience, it was imagination. You take the right street, the wrong street, and continue on your path.

It's incredibly hard to see, even whilst squinting with all your might, like you used to do as a kid. Squeezing your eyeballs as hard as you could to try and make out any of the words on the whiteboard, sitting as close as the desks would let you. This time, there's no glasses to put on to clear everything up.

You're walking slowly, carefully. You don't want to trip. You can barely even see your feet on the ground, shoes disappearing from view if you take too big of a step. The houses are all dark too. No lights inside, no porches providing safety. It's like everybody's sleeping, or out for the night. Your mother always told you to keep lights on at night, one outside and one within, so people would know someone's home. It's a safety thing, she told you. You're less likely to be broken into if someone thinks you're there. You wonder if the entire neighbourhood's mothers forgot to tell them the same thing. It's universal, right? Like telling your kid to look both ways before crossing the street, always say their pleases and thank yous, to lock the doors at night. Things you teach them to keep them safe, teach them politeness, raise them right.

You're pondering.

You kick something.

You freeze.

It was heavy, and big, and long. You don't know where it went, so you crouch down, patting the cold ground to look for the object. Your hand lands on something hard and shrivelled. It's somehow colder than the air around you, and you slowly drag it towards you. Into your vision comes a curled pair of fingers. One is outstretched in a point, connected to what looks like an arm. You fall back, letting go of the skin dried like jerky. You take a few deep breaths, trying to calm yourself down. Surely that's not what you saw, is it? Who would leave something like that out here?

Was it connected to anything? Have you stumbled across something you shouldn't have?

You squeeze your eyes shut as tightly as you can, shaking your head like an etch-o-sketch to get rid of the thoughts of exquisite corpses. Without opening them, you reach out, slowly, cautiously, like putting your hand in a box with a spider. You find the limb, close your hand over what seems like a wrist, and pull it upwards.

It flies upwards with your hand, so much lighter than you originally thought. Were you imagining things?

Your panic pauses, and you inspect the thing again, only to see bark. A limb, yes, but of a tree. The fingers? Jagged from how it had come loose. You give a slight breathy chuckle. Oh, the imagination. You envy those who lost theirs in adulthood. If it had been daytime... oh you never would have even given the wood a second glance.

You toss the now light article of terror aside, feeling a little silly. You're psyching yourself out. It's not like you're in a haunted house, at first, your hand thinking it's touching brains and eyes, and it turns out to be spaghetti and peeled grapes. There's no reason to be afraid. There're power cuts all the time. And you're almost home. It'll be okay.

You slow down your steps. Don't want to kick something else. It's kind of nice, you think, being out here in the dark by yourself. And so quiet. You wonder when the streetlights are going to come back on, and when this street is going to end. It seems much longer than you remember. It doesn't help that you can't see any of the markers you would usually follow, like people's distinct houses. There's always the pink one with dahlias in the garden, the grey house with the

round windows, the two-story white one with children's stickers all over the upstairs and even on the letterbox. Don't people say things look different in the dark? That it's more difficult to figure out where you're going? You certainly agree with that. It's like you're in a hallway, with no end.

You don't notice when it first flies overhead.

You continue walking, absorbed in your own silly thoughts that won't matter in ten minutes and continue to reflect on how quiet it is. The houses are still as they should be, structures of concrete and steel and wood and other materials that don't move, aren't alive, you think, confident in all of these wrong assumptions.

The darkness and the quiet don't bother you until the chill hits, and you bundle your coat tighter around yourself, your breath making fog puppets in the air. It wasn't this cold earlier, was it? Why the sudden chill? It's like a burst of wind has come just to make you shiver. You try to look up to see the stars. You must be able to, right? With all of the light pollution gone? You think you can make out a cloud maybe, but even the moon seems to have bid farewell.

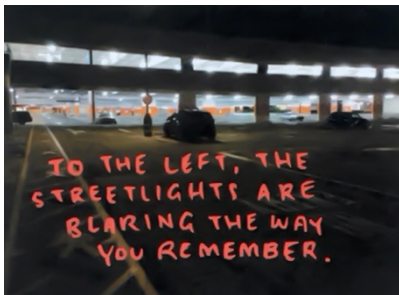
Something might have moved, but you assume it was your breath again, because that's what it has to be, right? It couldn't have been that cloud moving. It's too big to be a bird, too close to be a plane, it's just your imagination, like those movie monsters. All figments of an overactive, stimulated imagination.

You keep walking.

But soon, it gets harder to walk.

You don't notice it at first, still trying to get home, walking a little quicker now that it's so cold, but each step starts to take more effort to lift up from the ground. You assume that maybe your shoes are starting to stick to the sidewalk in the cold, and you look down futilely to check that everything looks the way it should. Maybe you stepped in some gum. You can't seem to see anything amiss; everything seems fine. You can't silence your suspicions though. And the fact that now you're almost having to pull your legs up off of the ground with your hands. You don't want to touch the ground, worried your hand may stick too, but maybe your legs are just falling asleep, maybe there's nothing wrong, and you're just freaking yourself out. You reach down, nervous due to the scare earlier, and gently touch the ground.

It wobbles under your fingers.  
Jiggling like jello.



You spring back, the ground seeming to cling to your fingers from the light pressure. This can't be real, you tell yourself. You give a slight spring of your knees, and everything seems to tremble. It ripples throughout the pavement, going through the

trees, the houses, you feel sick. Everything that should be solid, the grass, the ground, it's all turned to a thick syrupy slime.

Every time you try to take a step the ground bounces, sticking to you, trying to slow you down. You start to panic, start to try and walk as fast as you can away from the

slime, trying to remember quicksand rules like that would be any help to you here. One step. Two. It takes all of your strength, and it gets harder to breathe. You can barely feel your feet anymore. You can sense your energy fading. The slime seems to wobble with laughter. You have to stop. The slime starts climbing you like ivy. It grips your ankles, and it feels like your lungs suddenly collapsed in on you. There's no way you could move now.

It swoops overhead again, and you notice this time. It growls, shaking the ground that's gripping your ankles and sending the vibrations all the way up your body, and you realise how wrong all of your assumptions were. It's not a nice night. It's not a pleasant thing to walk in the dark. The earth, if this is the earth anymore, wants you to be caught.

The ground keeping you stuck, it wants you to be caught. The planet is working against you, everything surrounding you *wants you to be caught*.

Except your own brain.

You scream into the silence, it being swallowed, nothing returning to you. You whimper. Is anyone even in these houses around you? Can anyone hear you at all?

That only helps the thing flying over ahead. It heard you loud and clear.

It growls once more, seeming to get lower, and closer, and you take the chance the ripples gave you to try and struggle out of your spot stuck on the sidewalk. You free one foot, and try to run, but the ground sucks you in.

It's

pulling

you



down.

The street has evolved, turning into an ocean of gel. It's holding its shape of paths and roads, but rippling as you create waves, sinking quickly, up to your knees. You desperately try and push forward into the black. It's no use.

The creature lands behind you, the entire world trembling. You lose your balance and fall forward, hands getting stuck too. You don't dare to look behind you. This isn't real, you keep telling yourself, this isn't happening. Your fears are pulling you forward, the world is pulling you down, and you can tell that the beast behind you is too big to be of earth. It must be bigger than a whale, blanketing the entire street behind you, the entire *neighbourhood* behind you. You squeeze your eyes shut, not wanting to see the thing, not wanting to cry, trying to swim in the gel, up to your waist, your struggle is futile but you continue to try. All you can manage are the wiggles of a worm that knows it's caught in the beak. You remember how you learnt in school about worms, that when they're cut in half they turn into two. How they're blind. You wonder deliriously if you've become one. If your body will still be alive if this thing snaps you into two, like a toddler and a crayon with too much force. You can feel it reach out towards you, sensing this massive presence. You stop moving.

It's going to get you.

It is no use.

You have so easily resigned yourself to your fate. At least you won't see it.

You start a little chant to yourself. Like a prayer. You wonder if there's anything after death. What the monster can do to you.

*It's not real, it's not real, it's not real, it's not real, it's not real, it's not real.*

The outstretched fingers curl around you, effortlessly pulling you from the ground. You start to cry. It's so cold. Its hand is easily five times your size, its skin feels like rubber. Like a mannequin. It feels wrong. You're being lifted towards it. You can feel its breath on your hair, like a strong, odorous wind. Something licks at your face, pokes at your limbs. It smells like salt.

You recall your mother's warnings. Never walk alone at night. You wonder if she knew what was really out here. Something surrounds you in warmth. Your mind goes blank.

*This isn't real.*

You should have listened. It's 3am.

School

The hallways are stark, white and chipped paint. You don't remember arriving, just continually walking along and along and along these hallways with the paint and the paint and the paint.

What class were you trying to get to? Your mind can't remember, going down these corridors endlessly as you're trying to get to where you were going, but where were you going, where is this place, the walls familiar but barren, familiar but strange, familiar but empty.

You're walking down the centre, arms outstretched but not touching the sides, endlessly trailing down these corridors. You turn around and start walking back the way you came, but it's more of the same and it's pointless trying to find a sense of direction.

You stop. Continuing would be more of the same, you know, so you try something different. You pull and push on a door handle, but nothing budes. You try to peer out of a window, but it's more stark white blankness. There's a feeling of false calm, your surroundings are trying to keep you thinking you're safe, but your gut is sensing danger.



Something's following you.

You stayed still for too long, heard a noise from the corner to your left, and you immediately start walking again, more scared of the noise to think of whether it was

actually a friend, because your brain is telling you that you do not want that thing to get you.

It hears you moving and speeds up, and you hear the scratching, scraping, sliding noise of it as if it's keeping up

with your pace, but there's nowhere to run in this endless maze of corridors, each one looking the same, each one stark and blank and white and white and white and white and repeating.

You tell yourself this is all a dream, and start pounding on the doors, hoping desperately to wake yourself up, cause enough noise to shock your physical presence into awakening, but this thing following you hears the noise and gets faster, and you hear horrid excited sounds coming from what you could only describe as a lump of flesh, it gargling and shrieking at a high pitched whine that gets faster and faster, sounding like someone is strangling a baby and a dog and your mind and you go back to running but you stumble over yourself and fall to the ground, pursued by the corridors and endlessly sought after by this thing that you can't even see, you attempt to stand but it's futile, clutching to these walls that are now burning up and everything is so hot and you fall again, curling up and beginning to cry.

The thing following you knows you won't get up, so it lets out a long, excited, guttural scream. It can see you, but you desperately don't want to see it, only listening as it drags itself towards you, you can hear dripping and clattering and moaning and panting and it's almost at you now, you can sense teeth longer than fingers and fingers longer than arms, there was never an escape from the thing following you down the halls.

It's 3am.

Driving

They say not to drive at night, too easily swayed by the headlights around you, beams of temptation, and poor visibility. The world becomes a different place, the house you grew up in turning into a living creature, the trees hiding something behind them in the dark. Watching you. You ignored all the rules and drove anyway, car winding down back roads and desolate highways, but the night never seemed to end. When your car dash hit 3am it wouldn't click over to 3:01, and it only hit you as you hit something in the road, that you hadn't seen another person for a while.

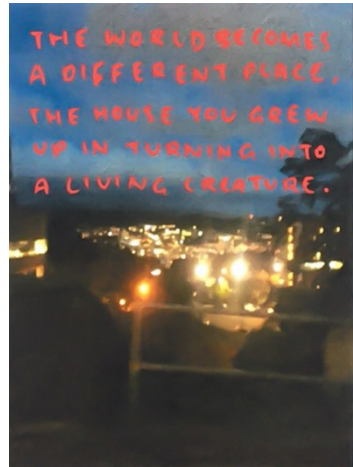
It made a funny noise as you hit it, a kind of whimper that made you slow and pull to a stop. It can't have been human, you hadn't seen anyone on the road, headlights at full blast but not a thing had shown up, clear, blank grey road until you hit a bump that made a whimper and now you've stopped your car and you're overthinking it and you don't want to get out.

But you have to see what it is.

Maybe you did hit someone, someone lying on the road, and now they're whimpering for help and you can't just leave them there, you monster.

So you turn your car off.

And you look out the windows to see if you can see anything but there's nothing, just grey road swallowed into the black, especially when you look behind you.



You take a deep breath to steel yourself, and step into the night, step into the void, step into danger, allowing yourself to be swallowed whole.

The first thing you notice is the screaming. The second is that there's blood everywhere.

You couldn't see it inside the car, it didn't exist from inside the car, but as soon as you opened that door you had to resist the urge to vomit. It's all over your windshield, your tires, your windows, and the road is practically painted. The screaming is coming from back where you thought you might have hit something, that whimper gone full blown primal scream for their life. You panic, naturally, and dive back in, and as soon as you close the door, everything stops.

You look out the clear windows, the transparent windshield, nothing even remotely out of place. You open the door to a horror, but from the inside, there's nothing but that empty road and a small whimper. Your mind tells you to drive away, but you don't listen.

You step out once more, covering your ears with your hands and trying your best to step around the puddles of blood, heading into the dark where the noise is coming from. It gets louder, you're unable to block it out, and it's impossible to see.

You almost stumble over it.

There's a woman, but not quite. She's been torn in half by the force of your car, but her body is entirely too long, stretched out thin, with six pairs of arms instead of just one. She's screaming, mouth a gaping tunnel, the limbs on her body flailing about in writhing pain, and you take one look and run. Back to the car, back to safety, back to



where none of this existed, and you get to your car door when the screaming stops.

So you stop too.

You didn't want to, but something told you that you needed to look behind you, turn around, look back, turn around turn around look behind you look around turn back behind behind behind behind behind

She's standing at the edge of the darkness, ten feet tall at least. Body repaired and so those twelve arms are attached to that one measly pair of legs, head hidden in the black, just out of view. You're in a standoff, staring at each other as you're frozen to the ground, sneakers slick with her blood, and then she starts to run. At you.

Her arms are waving wildly and that scream is back, and you try desperately to get back into your car but this time when you enter she doesn't disappear and you have blood all over you and she's coming and running and your car won't start and you can see her in the mirror and you were warned not to drive at night and

It's 3am.

Swimming

Deep blue water.

It's cold, and you know that. The freeze makes you feel alive. You stripped, leaving your clothes on the bank in the dark, left unattended in the place no one goes. The lake is surrounded by a steep, sharp cliff on one side and trees on another - the only person you've ever seen here has been your reflection. The moon provides a milky pure light, rippling off of the waves you create as you start to step in deeper, your toes digging into soft sand and mud, getting between them and creating a blanket. The chill runs up your spine, causing you to smile. Your breath makes clouds in the air, and the mirror you shivers. You take a deep inhale; ice running down your throat and through your nose, before sliding fully under.

Deep blue water.

You can't open your eyes. That's the first thing you notice. Your breathing is cut off by the water around you, but you knew that, that's to be expected, what isn't is the lack of sight. You try rubbing at them, squeezing them tightly shut like you're trying to be rid of a monster in your closet, and try to open them again. You're blind. Or are you?

Your eyes are open.

It's so black it's like looking into nothingness.

You resurface, everything coming into view again. The trees, usually vibrant, are masked in this dark grey tone, the water shimmering like ink, and the only thing you can hear are your laboured breaths as you try to catch it again.

You've been here before. You could see the bottom when you were here before, nothing but rocks and the occasional plant, this lake is shallow, you tell yourself, it was shallow when you were here before, it's just a trick of the light.

Deep blue water.

You breathe, to dive under again, your head is usually clearer under there (but not this time), but a noise from the trees stops you. It's been unusually silent, you realise. Nocturnal animals seem to be avoiding this lake, but now there's a sound from the trees and it's not you. It rustles again, to your left this time, sounding closer, and you're overcome with fear. It's a fear that you don't enjoy like you did the cold, it feels similar, gripping your throat and running its hands down your spine, but this isn't the same. It's not exhilarating, not a feeling of private excitement but of external control, something is making you freeze against your will.

Sound again, closer again, crunching of leaves and cracking of sticks again, and you need to hide. It's too far to the bank, you're so much further out than you realised, how did you get so far out, the lake was so much shallower when you were here before, so much smaller when you were here before, it's like it's opened up like a mouth to begin to swallow you.

The only place you can hide is under.

Deep blue water.



You duck down, almost forgetting to hold your breath until the last moment, causing you to leak some of the inky water into your mouth, and it tastes wrong, it makes you choke, but you don't dare raise your head, no matter how much you're struggling.

How you can hear it under the water you don't know. It sounds like you're holding a glass to the door when your parents are arguing, just loud enough that you can make out words but slightly muffled as they try not to alert you to anything wrong, and it's looking for you. That's what you think, like you're so important that something you don't even know is looking specifically for you, for what you don't know.

You hold that precious breath until you feel yourself get lightheaded. And, just as your vision starts to become properly dark, not just from the water but from the brain shutting down, you hear it retreat. And you resurface, spluttering, trying not to be too loud in your distress so it won't hear an easy target and return. You grip your throat, coughing up what feels like burning despite the water being almost ice, and feebly return to the bank. You cling to the sand, your shoulders exposed to the air, which seems warmer now than the water, and think yourself lucky. You flop over onto your back, regaining strength with every second, and as you push yourself upwards

something drags you down.

Deep blue water.

It's too fast for you to react, you're suddenly back into the blackness, something pulling you into that void that you had just used to escape danger, you watch as the bubbles from your mouth float upwards and you kick and try to pull yourself back to the surface with as much strength as you

can muster but it's no use, you're dragged down down down  
down down into the deep blue water.

And above the surface, the lake grins.

It's 3am.





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