

ALBATROSS

(sample)

A Story By Isaac Scego

When she awoke, she was upside down. Her hands were above her head and blood pooled from her upturned nostrils, spilling over the bridge and into her eyes, turning her vision red. For a moment, she tried to blink it away, much like she would sleep from her eyes. The reality of her surroundings had not yet revealed itself. For now, there was no reason to be frightened. No danger at hand. At least, not that she could see or hear, which was strikingly little.

Finally, she willed her hands into motion. Hordes of needles kneaded her flesh. Drums pounded within skull. Her eyes, red with blood, bulged in their sockets, as though about to pop.

Rubbing the blood from her eyes, her vision finally came into view. Through a webbed windshield, she saw a long stretch of road. Sinewy trees towered on either side, moving in a gale-like wind. Red light spilt through the shattered windows, and the singed smells of the wreckage encaging her melded became overwhelming.

But then, Fran noticed the center mirror.

Cracked and half-gone, it rested next to her head. She blinked through the redness of her vision. In the reflection, she was offered a clear view into the backseat.

The seats were disemboweled, foam entrails gushing from tattered leather. But this was not what caught her eye. Indeed, what captured her attention, and what made the tears return, was what was not there at all.

The man was gone.

Now, her circumstances revealed, she squirmed in her seat, scrambling to undo the seatbelt. When she did, her shoulder collided with the indented ceiling of the vehicle, strewn with bits of glass, which sunk into her flesh and ground against her collar bone. She let out a small cry. Tears mixed with the blood already in her eyes. Somehow, she managed to get the drivers' side door open. It squealed on bent hinges and she spilled over the cold ground.

Rocks and glass gouged into the soles of her bare feet as she stumbled to a standing position. Her dress—a laced wedding dress—was smeared in her own blood, ripped at the hems and stained with mud. As she walked, the headlights of the corpse that was her car split through the darkness, sending her shadow streaking out in front of her.

Silhouettes seemed to loom around her, as though the world were shifting, constantly in the midst of change.

A groaning sound tapped her on the shoulder and she turned back.

From behind the car, a figure stepped into view. The man was naked, his burly figure bathed in the hot singe of the brake lights. He stood up straight, chest heaving with monstrous growls. And in Fran's brief glance, she saw bones stabbing out from beneath the flesh of his knees. Still, he seemed not to notice. The human façade had fallen away, and so this beast's true nature was finally revealed.

Fran ran faster, her left leg refusing to work. The coarse surface of the road peeled the skin from her dragging foot, leaving a smear of blood behind her.

Then, the man was moving. Running.

The sounds of his cleft bones mincing together, cutting out of his flesh, echoed through the night as he came at her.

And as the distance between them slimmed, she prayed this was just another one of her dreams. That this man—this evil spirit—was just another trick of her own bullying mind. But the reality of this place, of the cold darkness around her and the knowledge that she was alone ran at her, much like the man she met in a small bar only one week ago.