

WHAT THE FLESH CANNOT KEEP

By **Sharkchild**

The haunter behind space was there when I opened the back door and stepped out into the fading light of the sun's decent. The air was shallow, almost brittle, and I felt its coarseness claw at my lungs in breath. Around me, paleness seized the atmosphere like a fever sacks the color of flesh. The pallor was so severe that it brought about a fatigued contrast between the sun and its surroundings, causing flickering beams of glare to stretch out with hands of keen deception.

On the soil just outside my farmhouse, I sensed it, beyond the bounds of the seen, watching me intently. It had worlds to devour with its attention, but it gave that attention—at this moment—only to me. Through my mind's eye, I was given a perception of its face through an unwarranted form of communication. The medium of imagery was so fierce that its face was projected, most likely in some hallucinatory manner, in the sky before me. My actual eyes gazed beyond matter into its sinister demeanor.

I had stopped in my tracks as soon I noticed it, surrendering to a quietus. Just as it focused on me, I focused back at it: an entity larger than the sun it loomed behind. It was not angry or passionate, vengeful or anxious, but strangely content. In our exchange of awareness, there was no alteration of expression or revelation of intent.

This occurrence could not be timed, but eventually I felt a sudden, quick sensation of dread. I saw and felt a flash of death. There was a short burning like the spill of acid over skin and then there was nothing. I looked behind to see my flesh—my body—fall away from me to the ground while I remained standing as a specter of what I once was.

The sunset's colors then harbored a grave of which I had no comprehension. Each shade and highlight layered over my perfect, lifeless body as if they were mounds of fresh soil and my remains were already lost to the bowls of the earth.

I squat beside my corpse and prodded it with my invisible, un-present fingers, but quickly found there was nothing to gain from investigating the body. I turned back to the haunter behind space, but it was gone. I was left alone to ponder my catatonic ascension.

Off in the distance I heard my daughter yell to her mother that she was coming to beckon me to dinner. It was at this moment that a significant cancer of fear enlarged within me, draining my senses and sanity. I watched on as my daughter left the house and made her way in my direction. Each time her feet hit the ground I felt a reverberation of pain surge through me. The closer she came, the more severe the discomfort. The direness of my situation was grotesque!

Without contemplating my ability to speak or communicate in any fashion, I shouted out to my daughter, "Mira! Mira, do not come over here! Stop! Do not come any further, Mira!" My voice leapt from the voids of hell and sounded in a hideousness of frequency.

"Daddy, is that you—what is wrong?" Mira returned, ceasing her movement. "Where are you?"

My incorporeal heart sunk with the agony of the unmerciful stabbing of daggers.

“Do not worry about that,” I said. “Go back to Mommy and tell her I will be over shortly.”

“But I want to go with you,” Mira exclaimed.

“I cannot go with you right now, Mira,” I regretfully spoke. “Please go back to Mommy and tell her what I just told you.”

“Okay, Daddy.” Mira turned around and left, hesitantly.

If ever the mountains of all pain could be moved and placed upon a soul, then their base surely became my pitiful refuge. Veins, rivers, root—each and all tore their way to my core, drowning me with the fluid and nutrients of divine suffering.

I turned back to my body which still lay helplessly upon the ground and began to claw at it with arms I did not have in a fever of rage previously unknown to me. It had to be hidden I decided; it had to be ripped, shredded, and dissipated from all possibility of substantiation. I could not bear to look at it: the symbol and legacy of life discarded, never to be mine again. I was to be the priest of my own wretched funeral, sentencing the cadaver to the endlessness of darkness.

It was at this time, under this stress of hate, that I first acknowledged the wicked leverage I had over the natural sciences of the earth. For most obvious reasons, I was no longer a part of any physical realm. The first example of this truth was the perception I received of a nearby pack of wolves converging vigorously into the distance on some immediate mission. I could not see them. Instead, I could sense them and their location; I could understand their lust for meat and drive to kill. I knew their speed and their weight, and I knew the number of follicles upon their hides.

When I assailed upon the wolves with supernatural velocity, I revealed a second example of my deviant abilities. I decided that I wanted to find the wolves and no sooner than I made that decision, I was there.

The wolves were to become my pallbearers.

Like the tales told of so many ghosts, I retained the ability of communication, but unlike those tales, I gained an ability of communication with all things, animate and inanimate, alive and comatose. With this quality I encircled the wolves and behooved them in the art of their wicked tongue:

“Follow me!” I convinced them. “Follow me to the treasures of my generosity!”

I led the wolves as a shepherd leads sheep and when we reached the auburn structure of my farmhouse and its worn, tired walls; when we moved upon the soils of all my labors and came upon my lying body, I changed my command, devilishly:

“Take and eat!” I told the watering mouths of the wolves. “Take and eat!” I told them in the whimsical, horrible language of my new birth.

The wolves graciously and savagely carried off my body in their anxious jowls while nipping and howling with perpetual glee. I watched contently as the evidence of my deathly departure disappeared into the dusk. I tried to leave to my imagination the picturesque devouring that shortly later ensued, but my evil perception gave me full details of each exotic bite. Even the pleasures of the wolves drove hard into my apparitional senses.

After my body had been scattered amongst the intestines of canines and focus returned to my consciousness, stars slowly began to pierce through the veil that was the night and I found myself looking into the heavens behind them to catch a glimpse of the haunter behind space. Unfortunately, all was still and disgustingly normal; I saw no monstrous entity.

After a profound sorrow ricocheted a course through my emptiness, hollowing even more those strange passages of inconsistency that completed my being, I hovered a fragmented path of regret towards the meal I hoped my family had already begun to eat upon. When I reached the side window that overlooked the simple dining table, I stopped to gaze reminiscently at those people of my life that had, and still were, dear to me. They were eating, but were doing so placidly. Mira occasionally looked out the window in wonder of my arrival. Little did she know that she not only found my arrival outside the window, but the actual glimpse of me she would ever again have.

Under my new capabilities, I saw my family in a way I had never known them. I saw through them and in-between them. I saw my wife Margaret's impatience with me; I saw Mira's worry over where I was; I saw Timothy's wandering thoughts of imagination. And beyond that, I saw the blood course through their veins and the life that was theirs shining out in beacons of illumination.

I did not notice the repulsion of it at first, but it soon began to boil with undeniable disgust inside me. Their glow of emotions, their expressions of life, it was like poison to me and I could not remain in their proximity.

In a rush of abhorred vengefulness, I left the house and ascended instantly upon a remote mountain of terrain I had never traveled to. In every pitch, sound, and tune of communication I then knew, I called out in vehement and guttural anger to the haunter behind space. My ethereal voice cracked and wavered with hideous repercussions. Animals of all kinds squealed into the night.

My essence never tired, and so I screamed effortlessly for a duration no being should ever be able to. The animals that hollered in the distances were soon peeled horribly from life as their disturbing unrest began to cease with the bursting of their fear-tangled hearts. Thereafter, there were no sounds but my own. I only then stopped my cries when I realized their insignificance.

Upon that moment, when I felt lost in a nightmare that could only be conjured by the most nefarious of creatures, I remembered the haunter behind space's face. I remembered its ghastly features: the eyes that covered every surface, the souls within them, and the vulgar, detestable complacency of existence that saturated every ounce. It was in the distances of space that I had originally seen it, and so it was in the distances of space that I then pictured it, looking once again at my hapless shape. Its gaze was my death, and perhaps it was death itself I found looking at me from within the heavens.

I wanted nothing more than to see it once again, to know that it was there and that I could find it. In experimentation of my limitations, I shot upward into the sky with vengeful speed. I passed the atmosphere and outer rims of the earth; I sped by the moon, Venus, and Mercury as I made my way straight for the sun and the vast homage of universe behind it. On and on I traveled until the stars danced around me in a play of the unthinkable, each act and dialogue of profuse verse lasting longer than that of the one preceding

it. The cosmos leapt about me in the solitude of its enormous infinity, and still I sailed on in pursuit of that vile entity who fathered my undead transformation.

Eventually, I stopped under the blanket of universe expanding around me and looked once more in hopes of catching the haunter behind space. As before, it was nowhere to be found, but it was in that instant that I remembered something that had been so hastily forgotten amongst the turmoil of my recent endeavors. I remembered what lay in the chamber beneath my farmhouse, behind three doors of which all required different keys. I remembered what I did to it and the lack of reasons why. I remembered why it had to be a secret and how I could feel no remorse for it, or guilt. It was these evils inside me I remembered that the flesh could not keep, and it was these things that began to inexorably torment me for eternity—the same eternity which shown no mercy, for I was now lost in the greatest maze of all existence, with no recognizable star to guide me back home. The earth was but a speck of dust floating in an unsearchable ocean of galaxies.