

Feed

When I was younger, around elementary school, I had a crush on a girl. For some inane reason, I thought she was the most attractive person on the planet. At the time, I had retained the knowledge that relationships in such youth never lasted. In fact, that inkling of reason in my head prevented me from making any advance, romantic or otherwise. As years passed, I found myself questioning why I found her so lovely, so entrancing. Upon entering high school, the truth revealed itself before me, the massive weight of question finally answered.

I wanted to steal her life. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not a psychopath trying to steal a girl's face in some cliché film you'd see from the early 2000's. That need I felt, that hunger, was to be better than her. To surpass her, to steal her ability, her intelligence, her beauty. The first time I realized this, I concluded that I was a parasite. It's become a much more complex situation than that now, but for the sake of proper storytelling consider me the human replica of a leech. I spent most of high school drifting about, watching her from afar, careful not to interact, a shadow's shadow. Upon graduation, we went our separate ways, me to the city and her to some fancy college on the West Coast.

I had been accepted into Habersham College, a school so mediocre and poor that they had misspelled Habersham as "Harbersham" on their acceptance letter. There was no hope here for anyone with even a semblance of a frontal lobe. I shortly found myself wandering the streets, becoming a familiar face to many bartenders in the downtown area. On one particular rainy night, I sat down on a stool across from a woman whose clothes had been soaked. It seemed to me her umbrella had malfunctioned, so I offered her mine. "I couldn't. How will you make it through all this rain if I take it?" I chuckled at the thought. "I'll likely be here even after it stops." She smiled at me. What a delicious, enrapturing smile. I was bewitched. I talked with her through the night, exchanging anecdotes and lessons learned. Of course, most of my "stories" had been fabricated, patched together from eavesdropped conversations and stolen memories. Oh, but to hear her laugh again. That dazzling, thrilling, joyous laugh. I was so sad to see her go. I woke up in my bed, and all that remained of her was a shriveled bundle of skin, about the size of a grape.

I continued this trend for a while, with poor results. My bar patronage dropped, and in their place I attended addiction meetings and the occasional frat party. I do not know what drew her to me that night, but I was determined to recapture the essence of what made it so. The pit in my stomach grew, the universal necessity to eat what had been daily delivered to me on a silver platter. Reluctantly, I returned to my bar crawl. Familiar faces passed through, and I presented them with a pleasant greeting and a warm smile, but in actuality I found them of no interest. That younger, witless version of me could not comprehend that we had already encountered the means to our aching appetite. Why get lucky in one city when you could get lucky in hundreds? Towns, counties, the odd rest stop. They would all be my playground, my kitchen of delightful cuisine with every ingredient and spice at arms reach. The only obstacle in my way was the transportation and where I would stay during my saunter across the continent.

So, I took up a second job. I barely went to classes at university anymore, and I doubt the school even remembered me with all the misbegotten clowns and failures they allowed into their ranks. An institution deformed and corrupted down to the very core. I stayed in the city a few more months, saving for a decent car that could last me some odd hundred thousand miles. The last thing I bought was a prepaid cell phone, obviously only in cash. I called a threat into the school from the parking lot, watching as the alarms blared and sobbing students fled for their lives. What an admirable sense of fear!

The road trip was the most fulfilling my life had ever been, in more ways than one. I fed off many different kinds of people, from all walks of life. A man I met had been employed as an astrophysicist at NASA, before retiring to spend more time with his kids. I wonder if they know where their father went, and if they might feel profound sadness or anger towards the idea he abandoned them for a more truthful life. This thought grows on me like a tumor, and it must be severed.

By now, the majority of my food had been identified as missing persons. The apartment I was renting had been a sufficient place to sustain myself. I changed the channel to the news, bearing witness to a collection of photos, all of them my meals. Most showed them at the peak of their lives, wearing sunglasses, suits, sundresses, you name it. As my eyes shifted across the screen, remembering each and every sensation, my craving returned. I threw open my door and faced the crisp hallway air. I rushed down the steps, eager to experience selfish satisfaction.

I met a woman that night, who brought me back to the memory of her. I could see it in her long hair, the eyes that formed their own atmospheres. As we stepped back into my apartment, I was overwhelmed with pity. I sobbed till the sunset, rolling in my tears. I missed that feeling I held so long ago. I hated the animal inside me, the ravenous void that demanded my soul alongside all those who I had so gluttonously taken from love and life. The woman left me to my own devices, and I watched as the one I adored so vehemently walked out on me for the second time.

The police found my apartment about a week after I had left. Their press release revealed the recovery of a small jar of wrinkled fruit, but you and I both know what they really are. People across the country call me a few different names. The Passenger, The Lamprey, The Leech, The Parasite. You can probably guess which one I like the most. I took a bus out of town the morning after. Decided to find her, wherever she might be. She's likely graduated by now, off living the good life, maybe with a husband or children. It doesn't matter. The truth is that anywhere in the world, at any age, I'd find her. I'll watch her from afar, like I used to. No need to eat so much with a full course in front of you. But every now and then, being on the road gets me hungry. So I hope you don't mind, but I'm absolutely starving for company.

Name: _Gent

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