

THE
WOLF'S
HOWL



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THE WOLF'S HOWL
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The Wolf's Howl

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Preface

Many fans of the horror genre like a good anthology. Whether it's movies, series or books, with multiple authors or just one, anthologies are a way to tell scary stories very effectively, quickly, raw and cruel. Whoever dominates horror in a few words, in a short time, can consider himself a very talented person, because it is not easy to create the climate and the characters quickly and convincing enough that the horror takes effect and do what it has to do : shiver the reader / consumer of the genre.

Luckily I met Larissa and her work. As a big fan of anthologies and short stories, it was a pleasure to get her book, "The Dark Shadow", and a great pride too. Seeing women writing terror and so accurately made me excited. Since then I started to follow her work, to work with her, and I had the honor of working on this book (besides the many other projects we have together, a partnership that promises to extend for a long time to come!).

"The howl of the wolf" is a book of short stories, an anthology that connects by locals and legends with similar themes and elements that are completed: wolves, dogs, jackals, lost women - and one can understand the word "lost" in different ways - a big highway, a strange city and fear. The fear, especially, is in all the narratives of this book. You may feel fear flow through your veins and shiver the hairs on your body. I dare to say that maybe you feel your leg weaken and your hands shake, with a cold sweat running down your spine.

If you hear howls at night it may not be just your imagination. Better to be careful.

Jessica Reinaldo

The Evil Eye

From when I was 5 until 10, my grandma told me bedtime stories. Their contents were a little jumbled together, everything she made up made little sense. They couldn't make, in our real world. That's why I loved bedtime. It was the time I'd hear grandma Wanda's weirdness, forged in her unusual mind. She was my father's mother. He'd say that, after her husband died, she went mad in delusions. I didn't see grandma as mad, I've always thought she suffered, due to an excess of creativity, and that left her a little uncomfortable near others, and became introspective and apathetic. The only moments Wanda was herself was when she was telling me stories.

One of them chases me even today, in my adult life. Grandma called it "The Evil Eye", and was about her glass eye. It was terrifying to stare her face from the left, due to that dead, stagnated, false eye... she knew I felt repulsed, so she sometimes covered her face with a scarf, so I wouldn't feel bad during the stories.

Wanda told me she lost her eye due a slip from my grandfather, he accidentally shot her in the left eye. Fortunately, the bullet didn't damage much of her head, staying lodged only in her left eye socket. The solution was to remove the entire left eye, and put on that strange glass copy. My father had a different version of that day, having seen his parents in a confusing fight, resulting in the shotgun going off. No one besides my grandma will know the truth about that, but if her truth was that of an accident, let it be.

She'd tell me that the eye actually worked, she could see through it, since it was made by a sorceress. My childish mind would create the craziest images, while she narrated every fact concerning the creation of her eye. In her story, there was a universe beside the one we know, and terrible things happened there, where spider-bodied women lived together in

peace with horse-headed men. If you didn't see them directly, you would be fine, but if they thought you were staring at them, very bad thing could happen to you.

Today, I believe Wanda, exhausted from having to look after me with her bedtime stories, told me that so I'd close my eyes and go to sleep quickly. I know those were the only moments she could be herself, but I could hear the tiredness in her voice, during the last months of her life. Soon, Wanda didn't come anymore, and my mother told me she was hospitalized, very sick. She died of tuberculosis, in a sanatorium, and I think that such creative mind didn't deserve to wither away in such fashion.

Truth is, after so many years; after I had a successful life, after becoming a respected judge; after years trying to reach this coveted position, I began having nightmares again. The nightmares that made me tremble in fear during childhood. In one of them, the same one almost every night, Wanda visits me with her evil eye, cursed by an evil sorceress, dark and shadowy, who lived in a place called Tumbled Stone: the portal to an endless hell.

After one more night, waking up in a jump, drenched in cold sweat and wrapped in the dreadful atmosphere that stuns us after a nightmare, I saw the object there, in darkened room, on my nightstand. It sparkled twice, while I forced my eyes. I reached out and touched the small glass eyeball. It was the same – or very like – grandma Wanda's. I immediately let go of it, all of my body trembling, in a panic. I considered calling my parents, but soon remembered they, too, were already dead. Everyone who knew of it were somehow gone, I had no one to talk to, even though I knew a lot of people. I was rigid, staring at the eye on the nightstand.

Wanda's ashes were scattered across the farm she lived with her husband, the place she loved most. It was impossible it was her actual eye, or that this was even happening. I closed eyes and tried to fall asleep

again, hoping I was stuck in a dream, awake inside it. With much effort, I fell asleep, and when the sun rose, I couldn't wake up. I opened my eyes, and saw nothing but darkness. I felt the space ahead, the bed, the nightstand, and it was still there. The eye rolled into my hand. I opened my eyes wide: nothing. Total blindness.

I spent the day with the eye in my hand, rolling in my palms, without seeing it. There was no despair, unlike I expected. Only a resigned comprehension that I've woken up completely blind. Even though I had lots of work at the office, I stayed on the couch.

At first, it was slow, like an image from a dream during a nap, taking shape while I opened my eyes, and stayed in the dark. In the dream, Wanda was with half-human, half-animal creatures, like the ones she described during my childhood. However, there was someone else with her: a strange, beautiful woman, dressed in black. I knew what I should do as soon as I stood from the couch. My body seemed guided by some kind of outside force. Maybe this is how a puppet feels: carried away, taken. I went to the kitchen, stumbling, grabbed a spoon, which I used to force my eyes out of the sockets, and felt blood flowing like tears.

Such was the pain, that I fainted on the spot and, when I woke up, could see again, with unknown and stunning clarity. I touched my face, were there were two glass eyes in place of mine. I stood up, uncertain, like a child who just took their first steps. The day was so bright, so dazzling, and even the smells were different: more real, more honest. I left the house, to a garden that were mine, but different nuances, and they waited for me: women in the shape of spiders, men with horse heads, and the female figure in black, staining the clear harmony of the surroundings. She lifted her face, disfigured by time, withered, bluish and horrible, looking like a dog's muzzle instead of a mouth.

She lifted that muzzle to the skies, and I've been dragged by an unhuman and evil force, that paralyzed me there, standing in the garden, and as

such I remained: stagnated, staring at all those creatures proliferating in front of me, enveloping me, bewitching me. In the distance, I heard the sound of sirens, very vague and unsubstantial, voices from

another world surrounded and took me, the world became a mixture of layers, smells and sounds, I couldn't pick up nothing besides that new, devilish reality to which I was awakened.

Last Balloon

As the balloons rose to the skies, Bia's eyes sparkled. She seemed to hold her breath, enchanted like very few times in her life. Holding her father's hand, she couldn't take her eyes off from that huddle of hot air balloons, the baskets carrying the conductors away. She immediately knew what that admiration meant: a possibility that, someday, she too would travel to very far away. Bia looked to her father, who also smiled, but lacked the spark in his eye. He smiled like a mannequin would, expressionless and opaque.

Bia laid her head on his shoulder, containing the trembling that always went up her legs when they were close. For many years, she tried to understand that trembling. Fear? Dread? Disgust? She didn't know, but suspected it was all that at once, there wasn't a word that amassed everything hateful and revolting.

- Let's go back to the restaurant, honey – he squeezed her hand, like he always did when issuing an order.

Bia just nodded, discouraged. They entered by the room's backdoor, going to the table occupied with her father's coworkers. She sat beside him, crestfallen. When no one noticed her, she enjoyed looking at them and analyzing each one in every minute detail. That was her life, travelling with her father to his business meetings, fulfilling his wishes like a lifeless ragdoll.

- Every year, around this time, they make this balloon festival. I guess it's a competition – commented the older of the three men. She knew he was her father and the other two's boss, just by how they listened to him, always subservient, with guard dog's eyes.

- It's pure boredom. Watching hot air balloons in the sky? Bumpkin stuff – Rony, the other man, so fat, that Bia could see his protruding belly

touching the table, trying to burst from the dress shirt. When he laughed, the cutlery tinkered, like a thunder coming out of his round teeth.

- It's a matter of culture, Rony. We too have our metropolitan weirdness – answered Bia's father, more interested in finishing his scotch.

Bia lost focus of the observations. She saw their mouths moving and talking, but couldn't hear them. Every noise in the restaurant seemed suspended, like her ears were muffled. She let herself go by her loathing of those glutton mouths, chewing fatty rare

steaks while talking. The adipose jowls under their chins looked like the jiggling pudding carried by the waiters.

Bia looked at her father, who had his eyes on her for a while, always observing her with a trace of temerity. His fat, hateful lips moved urgently. She couldn't hear him, still inside the bubble she was trapped into every time she felt hanging by a thread, almost losing control. A man, standing in the restaurant's garden, stared at her. She lost focus from her father eyes, totally fixed in that scene. He used a wolf's head, but she wasn't scared, only curious. With the hot air balloon festival happening nearby, maybe it was someone's idea of a joke. She ignored the shivers in her spine, created by the visage. It was a very real head.

- Bianca! – her father's voice snapped her out of the stupor. She looked at him gingerly, uninterested. She wanted to keep staring at the man in the garden.

- You're ok, honey? Are you feeling alright? Brought your medicine? – Bia denied, and her father's coworkers looked at her curiously. In other circumstances, she'd be embarrassed, but in that moment, she was more interested on the figure at the garden, that wasn't there anymore.

- I need to go to the restroom, Dad. I'm a little nauseated...

He nodded, watching the daughter leave the table, and told his coworkers.

- Since her mother died, she blacks out sometimes. Stays out of focus – he stirred his drink – I have to be very careful with Bianca, she’s very sensitive.

The two men agreed and resumed their business talk. Bianca was sitting in a toilet, hands sweating, and her entire body trembled. She pressed her belly, remembering the aberration that grew there.

- When she completed 15, I had to struggle to throw a party, but Bia never cared about it. What’s unusual to a 15-years-old girl? Not wanting a party? Impress her friends? – he took advantage of the silence between a conversation and another to talk about his daughter again.

- She always seemed older – Rony said – Developed quickly. With all due respect, your daughter is a beauty,

- I know – They exchanged smiles.

Bianca stood from the toilet, the seat stained with dark, yellow spots. She felt the dizziness mess around with her senses. Out there, she could hear a volley of laughter. A cacophony directed at her. Before she passed out, the lockless door opened, leaving her body exposed outside the chamber.

She saw the other side of the highway, the luxury hotel behind her, which hosted her father, looked bankrupt, abandoned. The man extended his arms up high, and waved in a greeting. Because of the sun, his tongue hung, like a tired wolf’s wide smile. Bianca stepped on the road, not bothered by her skin burning as she walked. She knew what she had to do, as if she had been prepared for that her entire life. Stumbling, she walked to the wolfman, who waited her on the other side. As he caught her, she felt droplets of saliva on her face, just as brightly colored hot air balloons rose in the turquoise-blue sky, in a magnificent dance.

- It’s time to go.

He couldn't speak, but she heard him inside her head.

- In the last balloon, Bianca. Yes! – he panted, while dragging her, not caring about the flow of blood between her legs.
- I want to say goodbye – she looked back, at the luxury hotel where the meal was happening – From daddy...
- He was never your father, yes!

For a moment, she felt cold running up her spine, paralyzing all of her senses. That voice in her head, the smell of earth and blood, all too familiar and, at the same time, so strange

- You never were anybody's daughter, Bianca – the wolf-headed figure stopped dragging her by the hand, allowing her to stand up on her own – You're only the mother.

The pain came as if a horse's hooves burst her pained belly. Bianca bent over, feeling hot liquid running between her tights, and that malformed thing crawling out, like the last demon at noon. It was nothing but a perfect representation of the wolfman before her. Howls echoed everywhere in the prairie. She knew in that moment, that the balloon moored next to the wolfish figure was hers, and she should embark it, to the skies, reddened like the blood that covered her feet.

- I've never felt... so light – She smiled, tearing up.

The wolfman took the newborn creature in his arms, and licked all of his fluffy face, cute as a puppy, and devilish as a beast, ravenous for its first breastfeeding.

- That's because you've lost control for good. Yes. The last balloon won't wait you forever. Go.

- And him? – there was no trembling anymore, when she looked to her offspring in the creature’s arms, only an icy indifference, a slight interest due to the puppy eyes.

- He will tread his own path. Take vengeance on the evil men. There are many evil men here. Yes!

She didn’t wait for him to finish speaking, going straight to the balloon, with stumbling steps and a wildly spinning mind. Her eyes were dazzled by the last red evening lights, not allowing her to see where the other balloons were going, or even if they were really there. For the first time, she felt alone, but free, when her balloon took to the air.

- It’s already half an hour your daughter went to the restroom, Oskar – Rony had his arm up, to ask the waiter for the bill.

- I’ll go check... - Oskar threw some money for his drinks, and went in the restrooms direction

As he got near, he felt he wouldn’t want to go into the restroom, something told him to go back to the table, but went in anyway. As he saw his daughter’s body on the cold floor, collapsed and blue, the open eyes, somehow smiling, staring at the ceiling, he fell on his knees, asking himself the question that would haunt him for the rest of his days: “What have I done to you, Bianca?”.

Death Invites

“Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream. Make him the cutest I’ve ever seen. Give him two lips like roses and clover, then tell him that his lonesome nights are over. Sandman, I’m so alone...” the turntable on the corner made the music echo, with the needle punishing the disc. The reception was empty, the ceiling fan spinning in a Sunday laziness. Andrea had left the counter two hours ago, on lunch break, the first time she took that long. The endlessly repeating music made the hostel look like a ballroom at the end of a party.

Out of the vacation season, the place was left to the shadows, but that wasn’t the case, it was high summer and they expected every reservation to be occupied. They weren’t, so Andrea and her husband were going through bad times in the business. It was hard for everyone, she was tired of Samuel complaints about local economy, the construction of an amusement park in a nearby town, that changed the tourists focus to the modern natural spas. Tumbled Stone was slowly becoming a ghost town.

The guest’s steps came in a hurry, his wide eyes announcing his extreme urgency. He yelled while ringing the balcony bell.

- Please! Hey, hostess! Hey! – his tone was haggard.

Also, no sign of Matilde, the cook, who probably took her lunch break long ago. He took his phone, trembling, the ambience sounds made his head fuzzy, sluggish, those distant and scratched voices in the hall’s corner. “Mr. Sandman (Yes?) bring us a dream, give him a pair of eyes with a come-hither gleam. Give him a lonely heart like Pagliacci and lots of wavy hair like Liberace... Mr. Sandman, someone to hold (someone to hold)”.

The device had no signal. The young man sat on the reception’s couch, and insisted in growing agony. He looked everywhere, waiting, while the

music kept playing. No one else was there, but he felt something approaching. In a jump, Levi looked to the entrance door, but the relief was brief. There was nothing there, no one. So, whose steps he heard approaching? That breath, a shadow, maybe... He moved away, trembling head to toes, not understanding where the panic came from.

He couldn't contact his brother, the room they were in didn't open, but Levi was sure that something very bad had happened inside, because the room gave off a musty, rotten meat stench. He tried to break the door and got only a pained shoulder. When the phone flashed the "battery low" sign twice, Levi gave up, and decided to look for a landline there. He picked the reception's phone up, and heard a dead line.

He saw the cut wire by the wall, and the game began to become clear to him. They were toying with him, the maniacs who run the hostel. Could it be possible?

Levi entered the administration room, calling for someone. He could feel someone accompanied him, just like the turntable's music that, while distant, seemed to enter his ears and pester his thoughts.

- OI! Someone! – he yelled through the scullery and kitchen.

No answer.

At least, not in the first minutes.

Levi pushed an ajar door with the tip of his foot, and saw extended feet, one of the shoes displaced at the ankle. He recognized the receptionist's, Andrea, shoes. He talked to her the previous night, when they checked in. Levi and Fred just wanted a little fun, far from the metropolitan fuss, nature trails, maybe tourist girls. He didn't enter the room, and ran to the reception, stunned.

He hurriedly searched the balcony drawers, the key panels, but he found nothing. Levi went back to the room's door, that he tried to open, and called his brother many times. When an answer came, it was from an unknown voice on the other side of the door, that slowly creaked open.

The turntable's sound exploded through the floor he was in, the verses strongly overlapped, like soundwaves of whirling chaos. "Give him a lonely heart like Pagliacci and lots of wavy hair like Liberace... Mr. Sandman, someone to hold (someone to hold)".

- Hello, Levi. I've been waiting you for hours – the prone figure in the dim light beside the bed projected a gigantic shadow, that covered the entire bedroom. – To dance.

Levi jumped when he heard the door shut close behind him. His eyes took a long time to adjust to the dark, then he noted his brother crookedly strewn on the shower floor. The spinning music, rising from the stairs, muffled the shower sound and spread through his mind's walls.

There wasn't enough time to question the figure's identity, but Levi felt its cold hands touching his neck, in a gravelly caress. It didn't look female or male, but something

shape-, time- and dimensionless. A shadow, a sound, something that crawled through the air undeterred.

He felt his feet slide through the room, subjected to that being's will, little by little the distance decreased, and the music got louder and louder, resonating through his head's walls. Levi remembered the rapture he felt every time he took refuge in rustic landscapes, some kind of matter relocation to something abstract, losing body and weight, that was how he felt in the moment that engulfed his entire body.

That night brought a hot breeze, promising to break the monotony in which the humble hostel found itself, among the most beautiful hills of

Tumbled Stone. Andrea was trying to solve her crosswords puzzle, while her cigarette burned in the ashtray. She didn't notice the man coming down the stairs, with a horrified visage, until he put his hands on the balcony.

- That song. That damned song in the turntable....

Andrea's eyes rose from the magazine, and she stared at Levi, slightly concerned.

- Turntable? What are you talking about?

He seemed stuck in a somnambulism fit, something Andrea knew very well, as her youngest son had lots of similar fits while living there with them, before he got over his night terrors. She turned around the balcony and touched Levi's shoulders, guiding him to the sofa, not wanting to scare him even more.

- Sit here... You're dreaming. I was really concerned about you and your brother... You were both so pale, after the hiking trail.

- Dreaming... - he whispered after her words - I dreamed I was dancing with Death.

Andrea disappeared behind the counter, but wasn't away for long, as she soon brought a glass of water to the guest, but there was no sign of him. It was like he never even existed. She felt shivers running her entire body while standing there, looking around to be sure she was in a known place, without a turntable playing on the corner.

The glass breaking on the floor was the result of what Andrea saw dancing down the stairs and whirl past to the hostel's entrance door. A Shadow, a dark giant dancer, a breeze that brought an old, scratched song, brought from afar by a turntable's needle.

“Give him a lonely heart like Pagliacci and lots of wavy hair like Liberace...Mr Sandman, someone to hold (someone to hold...)”

The Breath of the Beast

Because it was summer we were excited with the perspective of days away from the city's fuss, days enjoying nature. While Marcus drove by the highway, towards his family's farm, I observed the beautiful scenery that passed by the window. The day was hot, the sun shone in a clear blue sky, announcing that nothing could go wrong. In a day clear as that, nothing could go wrong.

We stopped for the second time in a gas station, for snacks and restrooms break. I knew Marcus for over 10 years, we weren't together as a couple, he was one of my best friends and faced an exhausting divorce at the moment. His marriage was on its last legs for the last three years and I heard every complain, saw every wrinkle that he and Bianca faced. I tried my best to make them go ahead on their relationship, because I knew wasn't lack of love that soured the marriage, it lacked a lot of other things both of them never found out.

I was smoking outside the charming restaurant when I saw a car parking, and from it came out an enormous man. He must've been 2 meters tall and heavysset, musclebound instead of fat, with gigantic hands. I held a laugh, the scene of him leaving his car behind was comical, the car seemed too small to hold all of that mass of flesh. Marcus exited the restaurant and joined me, lighting his cigarette. I remarked about the newcomer, his stature drew everyone's attention. Marcus gave a relaxed smile, and said nothing about the strange man, who soon disappeared inside the restaurant.

- She called me twice, but I was driving. Then, she sent outraged messages.

Everything must be her way... - Bianca again, as in the last three years.

I shook my head, rebuking her attitude

- Ah Marcus, relax. You'll soon be free of this situation.

A commotion made me look inside the restaurant, and noticed loud voices inside, the people behind the counter sacredly ran to the restrooms. I looked in utter curiosity and exchanged a glance with Marcus

- What the hell? – he asked, throwing his cigarette on the floor.

Before we could understand what was happening, one of the clerks ran through the door, screaming “Help!”. Marcus and I exchanged a look of pure amazement. And he ran inside the restaurant, but I held him before he could enter.

- Let's go! Are you mad?! Let's call the police!

Marcus pulled his arm and ignored my pleas, running into the restaurant. From where I stood, I could see the enormous figure of the man moving with surprising calmness, while lifting something above his head. Due the shelves blocking my vision, I struggled to identify what he was doing, as he seemed to smash something on the floor. Some people managed to run, and in one of them – a thin man – I noticed bloodstains.

I lost sight of Marcus, some gas station clerks were also running inside the restaurant. I didn't know what to do, everything suddenly became a bizarre series of unexplainable events. My head spun like I was just out of

a spinning carnival ride. I ran to our car, the parking lot was almost empty, but for a van and a car beside ours. There weren't many people in the restaurant at that time, but I still could hear some desperate screams. I didn't dare go near the restaurant, and Marcus had the car keys, so I waited outside, circling the car like a lunatic. I didn't notice when tears began running down my face, panic taking over every muscle in my body and spreading through every rational thought in my head.

I went back to the restaurant's front door, a silence strewn inside the place. I heard only a radio at the distance, I couldn't pin where the announcer's voice came from, as it seemed to come from inside my head. There was no sign of Marcus or anyone else. The restaurant was empty, the ceiling fans spinning lazily in their loneliness. My legs shook so much I had to go down a few times to try to get them under control, nerves on edge, making clear thought difficult.

- MARCUS! – I took a breath and shouted into the restaurant, as I wasn't going in, never, ever. Drops of blood decorated some of the food displays, as in an abstract painting.

I felt my pockets, searching my phone, at that point of time I couldn't remember where I've left my purse. "Inside the car..." I remembered and, going there one more time,

looked at it. Looking through the passenger's window, my purse was on the seat, open. With my forehead touching the glass, I felt my strength running out in my tears.

- Lost something? – A voice came behind me.

Through the reflex on the glass, I saw Marcus, standing behind me, face

splattered with what looked like blood.

- Marcus! – I held his shoulders – Are you ok? – He had an absent expression, his eyes staring at me, but looking dead.
- Sure, let's go!

He took the keys and turned the car alarm off. I looked in the restaurant's direction, the large man didn't come out, just like he was never there to begin with. Not questioning, desperate to get out of there, I went into the car, my entire body trembling.

- What was that? What happened in there? – Marcus put the car on reverse, not listening to me.

He drove back to the highway in total silence. I saw his inexpressive face, and noted that wasn't blood splattered on his face, it was something translucent, whiteish.

- Marcus, what happened? – I shouted and shook him, but he kept impassive.

A better look made me realize that a liquid ran out of his ear, as yellowish and viscous as the droplets that painted his face around the nose and mouth, his stubble covered on the stuff. I felt cold run up my spine, he was driving at full speed, the car ringing in protest.

- Marcus, for the love of God... - I held to the car's panel, such was the speed that my body was thrown to the sides at every corner, even with seatbelts. There was a spark in Marcus faded eyes, something inhuman

and insane, something funny.

- Elisa, I've never felt so... full of energy in my life! – and uttered an insane laughter.

As I looked through the window, the scenery alternated without the previous beauty, trees and fields seemed twisted, somehow unfocused, outside reality. I covered my face to muffle the tears that exploded again. I cried and cried, Marcus flew the car and once in a while let go another mad dog's laugh. I looked at him a few times, among tears I couldn't see his face clearly, it had become tortuous, what I judged was from my tears, but as I calmed down, I noticed his face melted, as if his skin was sucked by a vacuum cleaner.

I screamed as loudly as I could, in the confined space of the car, the scream echoed and vibrated the windows glass, making me swallow my own desperate voice through my ears. A buzz took over my mind as if from a untuned radio. Marcus face kept melting. The noon sun illuminated the wrinkled skin mass that formed around his neck. The fleshy beard made a grotesque lump with his skin. That was the man that left at the gas station. That was the large man's face.

Cowling at the door, I tried to open it. If I fell from the car, I'd probably die, at that speed, but it was better than being at the side of that diabolical figure. I started to pray in whispers, that became desperate screams. He only laughed and laughed, his mad dog's laugh.

The radio turned on by itself, echoing a powerful woman's voice, mixed with my prayer she screamed "But I'm just a soul whose intentions are good! Oh, Lord, please, don't let me be misunderstood...". I fainted, my head seemingly pressed from every direction simultaneously, my stomach

spun before the pestilence that exhaled from that giant man. His body wasn't Marcus', but he wore his clothes, now tight for his size. I didn't see anything after the radio turned on, loudly echoing the repeating music.

When I opened my eyes, I saw the sun in the middle of a blue sky, its rays blinding me for a few minutes. I sat in the middle of a field, the bushes prickled my body and my head throbbed. I took my hands to my face, fearing it would be melted off, my last memories of Marcus liquefying into the large man's figure from the gas station took over my thoughts once again. I looked around, my heart racing in panic, but there wasn't anybody around, no car, no strange figure. My body was dumped, but I seemed unharmed. I checked my head, that throbbed unbearably above my nape, there were no

wounds. I heard wild dog noises far away, a shiver went up my spine. I had to get out of there as fast as I could.

I got up with a lot of effort, my legs seemed atrophied, I dragged my feet through the field. I heard cars down at the highway, but I couldn't see it where I should. Everything around me was a great deserted field, twisted trees and dried bushes from the long drought. I walked a few meters and fell on my knees, my head spinning so much I had no bearings whatsoever. It was like falling into empty spaces, I felt my body plummet down, but I kept just kneeling. The dog's howling came closer and became more frequent. Little by little, I noticed I was surrounded by them, staring at me from a short distance. I collected some pebbles and threw at them, but they kept unmoving, circling me. Among them I noticed a figure approaching as if a projection, an unfocused illusion. The large man stood among the wild dogs, that went greet him as if their owner.

The music that played on the radio when I fainted echoed from somewhere far off, I turned my face in the direction of the sound and saw the silhouette of an abandoned car. I gathered what was left of my

strength and run clumsily to it, but it was too late. An atypical breeze blew in the stagnated air, droplets of cold sweat drenched my face, as the breeze brought a whisper, a breath that was nothing more than a laugh: the mad dog's grunt. I fell on my bruised knees again, my head so heavy that my chin touched my chest. I remembered when I almost drowned as a child, the pool's water entering my nostrils, mouth, ears... and when my father managed to reanimate me, it ran warm from my every facial orifice. That was how I felt: As if water run into my ears, nose and mouth, water from a warm pool, I felt drowning even while I knelt in a dry field, drowning inside myself, losing me in the amorphous mass of that giant and "molluskish" man's body.

I reached the car on strong legs, my whole body took shape, growing, distending. I felt my entire skin pulling from every direction, I still was myself, Elisa, but I increasingly drowned in the translucent liquid that blocked my every thought and breath. It was a fight against the large man, who kept laughing and laughing inside my mind. I entered the car, the music rumbled sweetly, I could hear clearly and it was pleasing to listen to: "Baby, do you understand me now sometimes I feel a little mad. Well don't you know that no-one alive can always be an angel...". I drove into the highway and put the pedal to the metal. A breeze blew in the stagnated interior of the car, it brought a mad dog's laugh, mixed with the beautiful melody coming from the radio, just like I felt my soul, increasingly merged with the devilish large man's body.

Road Murderer

Some memories will never fade, despite how much time passes and we struggle to. We know that wounds heal, but some simply keep pulsing raw, and time just increases the pain. To whom lived what I've been through, there's no "time heals all", there's no comforting when you know firsthand the Devil's face and the torment of walking through hell after it reveals itself.

I was traveling with my girlfriend, we were returning from a short time in her parent's house, we were young, and made lots of plans. We had our entire lives in front of us, I was 19 and Veronica just turned 18, and we believed we would stay together forever, until old age and death would take one of us. All those fantasies we have when we believe we'll live forever, but something happens and shatters our hopes, and something that'll destroy our stupid illusions will always happen. On the one hand, that's a good thing, as disappointments help us grow, but what happened to us had no good side. It was a macabre awakening to a universe, until then unknown to us. We were surprised by it, the instrument of some old diabolical force. It's the closest that I can get to a description to that man who stopped us in the highway, asking for help.

- Hey – he waved his arms by a car's side, desperate. By sheer curiosity, I slowed down, Veronica seemed interested too, her body almost over mine to take a better look through my window. I stopped the car beside the man waving his arms. He came in our direction, seemingly tired and surprised – Hello...

He took a very good look at Veronica, but I judged it to be a gimmick of his, as he looked like a bar-hopper, I could smell his aftershave mixed with some kind of alcohol.

- Could you give me a ride to the next gas station? I had a problem with my car, my phone's battery is dead... As you can see, I'm having a bad day – He gave a half smile and a saw a golden tooth in place of a canine.

Something in that man made me feel anxious, maybe the excessive number of rings he was using, or the bruises on his hands. A bar fight, was what I thought. Veronica soon spoke:

- Sure, I don't think it'll be a problem, as long as you help with our gasoline – I looked at her, a little suspicious, but she had already offered to help.

I'll never know why she agreed so suddenly. Maybe something on his look, somewhat magnetic, just like the nightly animals possess in the dark. His eyes sparkled, was what I thought when he lifted his face to the sky, his eyes where a faded blue-gray. They made me remember my grandmother's eyes, who had cataracts, and her whitened eyes gave me the same bad felling as these man's.

The man turned and went to his car, I stretched my neck to try and take a look at the plate, but I couldn't see. There was something wrong there, I saw a figure in the backseat. I looked at Veronica, who was on her phone.

- Veronica... - I whispered, as if she could hear me for that distance – there's something wrong... - she eyed me, and then man, who was already standing beside my window. All I could see was the bright, shining belt buckle.

- Can I go in the backseat? – he asked, without getting down, and I said yes, without knowing very well why I was letting that stranger into

my car. He entered and shut the door, his smell taking over the entire car, making me open all the windows.

In the rear-view mirror, I saw he couldn't take his eyes off Veronica, and now chewed very slowly on a toothpick.

- You were travelling? Or do you live nearby? We're practically in the middle of nowhere – he kept silent for a while, sort of way from his own body. I had to ask again, and he came to his senses.

- I'm travelling, just like you two, I guess. – I exchanged a look with Veronica, she seemed a little suspicious, at that point.

- Yes, we're driving back home. Where are you from? – I followed every move of his in the rear-view mirror. His hair fell to his shoulders and he had a poorly kept goatee, unshaven. His entire appearance was strange, defined something unpleasant, I couldn't point why he was in my car. I thought about stopping and

tell him go get off my car, but in that moment, I knew we were or would be in trouble.

- Just small talk, so we wouldn't be silent the entire time... - in that moment, I felt the cold of a blade touching my neck, and his beard prickling my ear, along with his breath.

- Pull over, and we'll have our small talk. – I pulled the car over. Veronica didn't act, I dared a look at her and she was white, eyes wide tearing at the corner,

- Look... - I tried to say, with my hands in the air, by pure instinct – Let's talk, you don't have to hurt us. You can take everything, the car, our belongings, we have little money – he looked at Veronica, and the toothpick went up and down between his teeth.

- Get down, cutie. Off the car. – she took a while to obey and I could feel the knife pressing my neck, his hand firm and breath under control, he didn't seem agitated or nervous, he was dead calm.

- Get down. – He didn't shout, just whispered, I saw through the rear-view mirror his bat look. She got down while he locked my hand to

the steering wheel with a pair of handcuffs, that I couldn't see where he got from.

Outside, I saw Veronica walking uncertainly, looking back at me pleadingly. I was powerless, a despair was taking over every trembling muscle in my body. I knew he was going to kill her, but I was too distressed with the suffering she was going to be subjected to. The man didn't look the merciful kind, I blamed myself every moment for having let him in the car. He got down and told me to keep quiet, he wouldn't take very long. It was instantaneous, as soon as he left the seat, I started to shake violently and scream for her to run. But she seemed to not understand, she had a stunned and feeble look.

The man had long legs, she wouldn't make it. He got close to her, and as he caressed her hair, forcing her to look at me, he put himself behind her, keeping his eyes fixed on me. I didn't want to look, I closed my eyes, but they opened again every time. I shook more and more, hurting my wrists on the handcuffs. My legs contorted in an endless agony, as he started ripping Veronica's flowery dress, leaving her exposed in her underwear. Her arms were painfully bent back. He would rape her for sure, all I feared was he wouldn't do anything worse than that, as there always something worse, and always will be. He didn't rape her, he simply flayed her alive, cutting slivers of flesh from her breasts. Her screams echoed around, scaring desert birds from their nests. I felt my life draining away with every piece of her that he cut with a gleeful smile, his golden tooth wandering in my disturbed mind. I spit curses and insults at him, shaking so much that I felt the small bones in my wrists twist and swell.

Then I noticed that figure from his back seat by the roadside. Behind the man, a shadow hovered as if dancing to each movement he made against Veronica's body. A lean silhouette coordinated his arms, but I couldn't say from where it came because it looked like smoke, but there was no fire. Without a doubt, it was an animal presence, a large breasted female

dancing behind the man's moves. It was disturbing and insane, but in that moment, I didn't care about it.

The bloody and disgusting ritual lasted a very long time, she didn't die, only ceased screaming when he scalped her long blond hair, laughing and talking just like a child. I had no strength left to scream, sweat drenched my entire body, running from my head and dripping on my eyes. Not even death could abate me, I didn't care if I died, as that man was destroying my life, flaying Veronica alive for me to see.

When he finished the gruesome work, he got close to the driver's window, his face dripping blood and his tobacco stained teeth exposed, sneering.

- Still want to know where I came from? – he cleaned the sharp blade on his checkered flannel shirt. I felt my eyes burning with hate and sweat. His face appeared to me, eyes like a soulless animal. – from hell, buddy. And that's where your whore just went to – Defeated, I gave myself to a hysterical crying, that I had never experienced before. He went away, without looking back. In the distance, I noticed a group of wild dogs looking at him, tongues lolling, eyes sparkling in the descending gloom of the twilight. Slowly, the animals came closer to Veronica's remains, and feasted. I had no strength left to scream, or cry, or suffer, as dead as her. I looked at the rear-view mirror, the shadow that accompanied the man fading in the highway, and he seemed, strangely, larger from a distance, as an inhuman creature. I fainted.

I was found by a patrol car on the following evening. They took me to a hospital and, while I was there, a detective asked me a series of questions, wanting to know about Veronica. I told everything I witnessed, feeling lost and numb. At last, I asked about her body, and was told that they found nothing but bloodstains and her tattered clothes. The man was never caught and no one knew his whereabouts, he was like smoke,

as if had never existed to begin with. Sometimes, I ask myself if demons exist, and after what I witnessed, it's not hard to believe in evil forces acting over some human beings.

The Wolf's Howl

1.

- It is disgusting – Camille said while drying the hands on her pants – you have to see, Roy, the walls are stained, and I'm not talking about mold – she got her face close to his, whispering – it's shit!

Roy had to hold a giggle to keep from spitting his lunch.

- Roadside restrooms, honey. It happens – the took the last bite from his enormous burger and, while Camille took her seat, she stirred the remains of his lunch, with a nauseated expression.

- How long until we get there?

Roy shook his head negatively, but he really didn't have a clue of how long they still had until they arrived on his parent's house in the country. They crossed more than three cities already, and still didn't seemed to be close. His father death forced the couple to leave their suburban life behind, but he didn't complain, as he liked the road and besides, he had a large inheritance from the old farmer to receive.

Finishing his lunch, Roy told Camille to wait on the parking lot, while he relieved his bladder. After paying the bills, she left the restaurant and waited for him beside the motorcycle, trying to make the wait something more tolerable, she lighted a cigarette.

The men's room didn't look much different from the women's, graffiti

covered a good portion of the walls. Most urinals were broken, only two filthy ones remained. When Roy finished peeing, he noticed a stain cover most of the urinal's interior, but it didn't look like shit or some kind of fluid. He got down and stared at the stain, that seemed to shift and move, like a Rorschach test.

- Man! That's blood – he spoke out loud, his dizziness increasing, and he had to lean on the wall. Roy, in his despair, asked himself if it was his blood. The idea almost took shape in a hot throb he felt on his back, around his kidneys.

Camille had already finished her cigarette. She looked at the dryness of the field in front of her. The weather was dry, what made her breathing “work badly”, as her deceased grandmother used to say. Camille didn't accept that the long years living with tobacco were the main culprit. “No, it's just the changing weather, that makes my ‘-itis’ (rhinitis, sinusitis and so on) to flare up” she told Roy, who as an ex-smoker, proud of his willpower, got the habit to try to take everybody to the “clean lungs” paradise.

The still air made her dizzy, it was hot and Camille didn't know how many minutes – or hours – she was standing there, waiting for Roy to exit the restaurant. She looked around, the parking lot seemed emptier. Roy's sports motorcycle rested between a jeep and a car with a “I love my wife” sticker on the rear window. Despite the queasiness and the anguish from the wait, she managed to laugh from what she read.

She decided to go after her husband. The cashier didn't see him pass by, the clerks also hadn't noticed him. She went to the restroom area and called him twice. Tried calling him on the phone, it rang inside, a low sound, a whistling and lonely ringtone echoing in the empty men's room. Camille hang up, deciding to enter and make sure he was alright. “It's just a stomach ache”, she thought, remembering the shit in the women's

room and smiled nervously, like the ones preceding a nervous wrecking.

2.

The noise bothered, as if a rock were stuck in the tire's rubber. Oscar Salvago stopped on the roadside three times in a row, to get down and check, but there nothing on the wheels, tires or whatever it was. So, how could that noise be so persistent?

- It's not in the engine, honey? – Gertrude seemed tired, the trip became way longer, due to the pace they're going with that noise.
- No, darling, there's nothing wrong, maybe it'll stop now...

On the backseat, Matheo was drowsy, and was throw from side to side by his older sister, Nadia, who was 15 and each day seemed surlier.

- The car will explode! – Matheo yelled, rapturous, throwing his arms up as if that was reason to celebrate.
- Don't be stupid, stupid! – Nadia rolled her eyes and touched her forehead to the window, when she saw the smoke and told her father. – Dad! Dad! There's smoke back here!

Her eyes wide, a panicked Nadia grabbed her father's seat, as if the smoke could kill her.

Oscar didn't have time to slow down before they lost the rear tires. One of them went spinning and bouncing, the car swinging on the road. Nadia screamed so loudly that she cancelled every noise from the other

passengers.

When he managed to stabilize the car, Oscar noticed the dense dust cloud on the air, barring all sight. It was like being trapped in a cloud. Gertrude made a sudden movement to open the door, but her husband stopped her.

- Stay still, let's wait for the dust to settle... - Oscar knew they were out of the road, and that calmed him about possible crashes.

- Dad – Matheo's voice were barely a whisper – what are we going to do?

- Wait. Let's wait the dust to settle and see what happened to the tires. I'll fix what have to be fixed, it's going to be alright, champ...

Nadia gave her father a doubtful glance.

- What's that? – she pointed to her window, the dust dissipating, and they could see shapes in the distance. Over the prairie hills, lots of shadows gathered together.

- WILD DOGS! – Matheo yelled – Those are desert dogs, dad! They only attack in packs – the boy remembered from his beloved science books – and eat small animals. I'm small, dad, they'll eat me first! – he became hysterical.

Oscar tried to notice the shadows, not caring for his son's fear. Gertrude turned on her seat and took Matheo on her lap. He was 6, but cried like a baby, what bothered Oscar very much, because he knew his wife had a share of guilt in the boy's behavior.

- Nadia, you have your phone? Call the police and send our location.

- Look, there are more wolves coming! – Gertrude looked and hid Matheo’s face on her shoulder, to spare him the view.

- Those aren’t dogs, must be wolves, scared with the noise the car made – Oscar opened the door over his wife’s and daughter’s protests to him not to go out. Nadia tried to make her phone work, but had no signal there. She could get out with her father, and walk to the roadside, where she was certain to receive some signal. She looked at the shadows, there were more than 20 of them, wolves or dogs, she didn’t know, but panic grew inside her.

Oscar was lowering the left tire, his pockets full of fireworks Matheo got as a gift from his grandfather. It was from his town they were returning, a 3-hour drive became infinite. Oscar felt drained, his son’s whining, plus the low country music on the radio left him on the edge. It was better to be outside with the wolves, better than go inside and face his helpless family. Wolves? He asked himself for a moment, how he knew those weren’t jackals? He didn’t, but had a certainty, clear as the noonday sun.

They got close enough for him to see their shapes, curious eyes and sniffing snouts, at a distance. Gertrude felt cold sweat drop from her forehead, while she rocked Matheo, he buried his face between her breasts, muffling his despair. Nadia watched her father, fearing that at any moment the animals jumped on him. Oscar got up and looked around, the animals being the last thing on his mind. The tires simply had jumped from the wheels, as if they’ve been ripped off. There was nothing to do, besides waiting for help.

- Did you get it? Have you called the police? – he put his head inside and stared at his daughter.

- Dad, your eyes... - she cowered on the seat – what happened?

Gertrude saw the redness in Oscar's eyes, which looked like a pair of fireballs.

- WHAT THE HELL! Give me that – he took the phone from his daughter hands in such violence, that a loud, bone crunching “Crack” was heard inside the car, Nadia's wrist twisted all the way. Matheo lifted his face and faced his father's fury through the window, his screams echoing through the prairie again, Gertrude was stunned and couldn't move, at first. Nadia was too shocked to react, just staring at her twisted arm, not noticing her father's last movements.

They advanced calmly, going down the hills, many paws synchronized, Oscar looked around, his mind being taken over by some sort of monstrous strength. The howls came, one at first, then another, until there were many euphoric howls, echoing through the prairie.

3.

When Camille left the men's room, there were no one else on the restaurant. Her memory returned to Roy's body, imploded in the cabin, flesh and offal everywhere, just like a cartoon character that swallowed a time bomb. She tried to calm her nerves, with the motorcycle key on one hand, she walked to the parking lot and drove into the highway. She didn't look back, she didn't call anybody, as there were no signal. She just left.

Camille went as fast as the motorcycle could, welcoming the wind on her face. She would find some place with phone reception, some help. The restaurant was empty, no one to ask for help. Where was everybody? Questions formed inside her head, as waves endlessly crashing over each other. At some moment, she realized tears wouldn't let her see the road, she pulled the motorcycle over to take a breath, and heard howling

nearby.

Those were sparse, frightening, terrifying howls. Camille took the helmet off and looked ahead, a veil of smoke swirled up in the sky, where a car seemed abandoned. She turned the motorcycle on and dared to approach a few meters. The howls ceased, but she barely noticed. She walked out of the road, taking notice of a distant crying. “A child’s cry”, she thought. The first thing that crossed her mind, the most rational thing, was an accident. Camille tried her phone again, but it didn’t even turn on.

- Hello – she called loudly, while she got closer to the car. The wind was the only noise there, not even the crying sounded anymore – I must be mad, that’s it. I went mad in that restaurant, it’s not possible...

A sharp pain came from behind, as if a truck severed her legs. Camille fell on her knees when Oscar hit her in the legs with a tire iron. Then, the howls began again and still in the numb of the pain, she could see the shapes getting close from a distance.

- I TOLD YOU and you don’t listen. – Oscar said aloud, while charged again against Camille’s legs, who tried to crawl away on the floor. His eyes were two diabolical flames, like night jackal’s eyes.

- There’s a sun that never sets – he pulled her hair, her face turned to an unbearable light in the sky – there’s a sky that never goes dark, I can’t stand whining.

Camille felt tears running down her face, her hands in an involuntary act tried to rebuke his violent pulls. Oscar dragged her through the prairie, her knees throbbed, she was sure her legs were backwards, smashed, such was the pain she could only think of it – and Roy in the men’s room – something had gone out of her husband, simply ripped out from inside of him. “Don’t be stupid” she tried to think, while being dragged through

the hot, rough prairie ground, “it’s not a horror movie, things don’t come out of people, you’re dreaming...”. She screamed as loudly as she could, and they began to howl again.

4.

It was night when Camille opened her eyes, her entire body hurt, she couldn’t place the most painful place. Her arms were tied to her back, her mouth stuffed with a filthy balled sock. He hummed, seated behind a campfire, the flames so high they reached the skies. Oscar faced her with the same insane, entirely black eyes. By his side, Gertrude’s corpse was feasted upon by some jackals, who fought over the burst entrails. Little Matheo was in shock on the other side of the campfire, Camille thought the boy might be dead, if not for the slight movement of chest when breathing.

- I didn’t want to do that, you know? – Oscar got up, the jackals growled, delighting themselves on his wife’s flesh – All this mess. Everything is a mess all the time – he gesticulated while standing up in long, strong legs.

Camille saw his face while he said that. It was something Roy always said: “Everything is a mess all the time”. How that lunatic knew that? She gave up on trying to make sense in all of that and tried to move her wrists to get rid of the bonds, but it was a very strong duct tape. All she earned was some ripped skin.

- You come and go through the road and never know where you want to go. Just passing by, right? – he was close to her, she could smell his sweat and blood – Everyone that passes must pay a toll, understand? – he touched her chin. Camille

trembled in fear, her body seemed to shake from the inside, and the cold froze even her thoughts.

- What happened to Roy – he whispered to her – I’m here, love, everything is a mess all the time – He smiled. Camille noticed he took from his pocket a gnawed finger, still showing marks from a ring. She shouted, the sock stuffing her throat; the air hard to come by, suffocating. It was Nadia’s finger, he slurped it as an animal tasting a prey. The howling began again, but Oscar kept staring at Camille, an absent look, as if he had become a statue at midnight.

While the howls proceeded, the man stayed still, Camille fought her bonds, in utter despair, trying to get out of there. She tried to call Matheo, the boy unmoving. Oscar kept still, empty eyed, while she got rid of the tape on her wrists. She crawled to Matheo, as she couldn’t stand up with her shattered knees.

- I need you to get a grip on yourself, boy! – she whispered to Matheo, who just stared at her, pale and silent – please, we need to get out of here, help me walk. My motorcycle, it... - The boy stared at her, the same emptiness in Oscar eyes were there, in his face. Camille heard a thump behind her, Oscar’s body being reduced to nothing more than a pile of offal and feces. Matheo touched her shoulder, the howling echoed once again through the prairie.

- Everything will be ok, lady – he smiled a strange smile. Just like a wolf’s.

NINA

“Nina, my name is Nina. I’m still 20 and have a great job.” I can’t forget that, that’s why I repeat it endlessly in front of the mirror. My face, covered blood and dust, didn’t look the same anymore. If it wasn’t for the green eyes, I’d say it was a mask, the face of a woman I didn’t know.

The last hours were only a blur. I know my name is Nina, but what else? What do I remember besides my name, my age and my job? I don’t know. Seated on the bed of this roadside motel, I try to remember what my mind insists on forgetting.

I’m writing in a notes block left on the nightstand. The space is cramped, I’ll try to summarize what I can remember. It was midnight when Eliot arrived in the motel, he made me wait more than 6 hours, locked in this minuscule room. We had a brief argument over the lateness, once more I swore we’d never meet again, knowing I wouldn’t keep it.

He seemed more tired than usual.

- I run over something... - Eliot could make me feel guilty every time.
- How? Are you ok? – I asked him and he just nodded affirmatively, before entering the shower.

I left the room to check on the car, the damage on the bumper told it was a serious crash, something large. I remember thinking “Maybe a cow, a horse... a large animal”, this region have many farms, it’s common to find such animals on the road.

I waited for him to leave the shower, so we could finally get together, but the night wasn't what I imagined. Eliot spent most of the time silent, when room service brought our food, he barely touched it. I thought it was something with his family, his wife or one of his children: a boy and a girl. The accident had swept them from my mind. I didn't think about it until Eliot mention them.

- It's weird – he was making the bed so we could sleep – When I hit the animal, the car skidded on the road. When I looked through the rear-view mirror, there

was nothing there. I got out of the car to take a look, and there was no blood, nothing. I don't know... - he laid down and curled himself, trembling.

I finished my nightly snack. It was agreed that we're going to a music festival, that happened every year in this town. Exotic animals' exhibition and everything else what the lovers of a rural lifestyle liked. I wasn't so excited as Eliot and, in that moment, he seemed very tired.

- Maybe it ran away, you didn't injure it that much...

Eliot didn't say anything else, he fell asleep very soon. I took a shower and laid down. I arrived at the motel at 18h, waited a very long time for him, so I thought the tiredness would make me fall asleep as soon as I laid my head on the pillow, as Eliot had done, but on the contrary, I took a long time to fall asleep.

I remember I had a very bad dream, something related to Eliot's accident, but I was the driver, not him. Behind his truck's steering wheel, I had

crashed into something standing still on the road, but when I got down to take a look, the run over creature was Eliot, but disfigured. He had dog paws for hands, and didn't moan, only howled. I remember trying to scream inside the dream, but instead, I woke up screaming. I looked to my side, and he was sound asleep, unperturbed by the noise. I stood up and went to the bathroom, to wash my face. As I got to the bed again, I remember hearing the engine from Eliot's truck starting. The last thought I had was "We're getting robbed". I left the room, and then I remember nothing. Just a blur.

I woke up with the morning sun on my eyes. I was curled up, lying down at the motel room's door. The dust bothered me, and soon I began to feel pain in my entire body. When I saw that my nightgown was drenched in blood, I screamed for help, but there was no one there. The motel reception was deserted, a sign of "be right back" hang on the entrance door. I ran through the rooms corridor, every one empty, the doors open, only ours were still closed. I entered, calling for Eliot, and I took some time to realize the blood wasn't mine. I sat on the bed and stared at my reflex on the dressing table's mirror. It was a unpleasant surprise to notice I didn't remember anything, even my name was lost inside my head. I started thinking on it. The letter "N" spun and spun in my memories, in a strange ballet. "Nina", I remembered how I hated my name. But I couldn't recall the rest of the night.

I flipped the room, called Eliot and his phone rang on the nightstand. It's almost night and he isn't back yet. Neither Eliot, nor the motel manager, or even the people who work here. The only car in the parking lot is mine. I ask myself what have I done, because a certainty is growing inside me: I've hurt someone, all the blood covering me makes my suspicions worse. But what about the memories? They don't come to me. Only the blur remains.

So, I try to remember the exact moment I woke up from the bad dream through the screaming. Eliot bleeding on the road, run over and twisted,

the paws for hands and the howls. I'm sorry I can't remember, I fell sick, my chest hurts every time I breath or cough. In two coughing fits, I spit a piece of flesh wrapped in matted hair. Before throwing that grotesque undigested food on the toilet, I try to exam the hair strands on it. I can't figure out what could it be, what it meant, but I'm sure that you'll have better idea about what happened last night. Maybe my memories won't come back, and even basic information about me will fade, because the only thing I'm certain of is that I'm not the same. And will never be again.

I.

When the baby's cry echoed through the house, reaching all around, the birds flew from their tree hideouts. The mother, exhausted and crestfallen, could smile again. It was her child, reborn, the return of her lost first son, but her rejoice was short lived. The midwife looked at the woman on the bed and the moving baby wrapped in blankets for a long time.

- What's wrong? - screamed the mother. - what's wrong with my child?

The mother reached out, and the midwife, powerless, handed her the baby. Outside, the father pressed his hat to his chest, staked in front of the bedroom door, afraid to go in, because something was not right. He could feel through the shivers that ran his body.

After the newborn's first cry, a silence took place, increasing the father's apprehension. Taken by an afflicted curiosity, he moved to enter the room, but his wife's screams made him withdraw, before entering for good. Something was very, very wrong, he knew. Containing the amazement he got closer to the bed, and couldn't hide the horror on his expression.

II.

He only noise was the windy rain outside, the narrator was silent, while lighting his third cigarette that night. The two women around him exchanged a suspicious look.

- So, what happened?
- He's buying time to think on his next tall tale.

The storyteller smiled with malice. In the room, the dim light came from the women's phones, their face seemed to float in the darkness. The strong rain didn't seem to go

away soon and the cottage's electricity wouldn't return any sooner. The three of them remained in the night's gloom.

- What makes you think I'm telling you a lie?
- Please, Kaleb. You're trying to scare us, but that won't work on me.
- Right. – he took a pull at his cigarette, looked at the window again, to the rain whipping the windows.

III.

The rains that season were sparse. They left the baby, a girl, in the unbearable heat of the barn, where her only companions were the flies and the pigeons that infested the place.

- Doctor, what can we do? – the farmer chewed a piece of tobacco and spat a hard ball at his feet, visibly not believing.
- I've never seen something like this, Mr. Miller, I'm sorry. I took your daughter's case to my doctor friends in the city, but even then, none of

them have seen anything close to it. I dare to say it's the result of some deformity during pregnancy. Let's just provide the best we can so that she grows less dependent of you. We're the baby girl?

- It's my fault, isn't it? - Carmen served coffee, letting her nervousness show on her shaking hands - isn't that right, doctor? She's deformed because I couldn't generate her properly

The doctor took a sip of coffee and saw her husband's disapproving look directed at her. He decided to appease the situation.

- Of course not, Mrs. Miller, we can't predict such things. Those are science's unexpected events.

- God is punishing us... first He took Yago, and now sent us a monster - Carmen left the room, she wouldn't let herself cry in front of two men.

- So, Mr. Miller, where's the baby girl? I'd like to exam her, now she's 6 months old.

Mr. Miller seemed embarrassed, shifting on his seat, and took a cup of coffee for himself.

- She's at her grandmother's house, Carmen's mother, in the city. We'll bring her back in the evening. It was the best way to contain that woman... Doctor, she says a lot of awful things about her daughter.

- That's normal, Mr. Miller. She's traumatized by what happened, it's just a matter of time until the acceptance phase begins.

Even though the doctor didn't believe in the father's tale about the baby being with her grandmother, he decided to not pry in family matters. He promised Mr. Miller that he would talk to a friend, who studied hysterical women's minds, and make an appointment for Carmen. Mr. Miller

seemed a bit calmer concerning his wife, and said nothing about the baby.

At the end of that day, the barn was engulfed in the growing shadows of a very hot night. Mr. Miller heard nothing, and feared the worst, that she would be dead. He got close to the crib, that had before served as Yago's repose, and found the baby asleep. She was reddened by the long hours of heat, covered in mosquito bites.

- I'm sorry, my daughter – he dried the sweat from her forehead, and lifted the sheet that covered her deformed legs, revolted. He ran back home, stunned. He prayed every time before entering the barn, so she would be normal, that those legs were nothing but a bad dream.

IV.

Long months have passed, and the Miller couple kept their daughter in a lonely and hot existence in the barn. The father visited only to feed her, and the mother wouldn't even come close to the door, slowly convincing herself the girl didn't exist. Mr. Miller seated before his wife at the dinner table, after an exhausting day, raising cattle and rearing the last horses he had bought. The year was 1876 and the farmer's life wasn't easy, they've had been attacked by savages and bandits, many times.

- Howard came this afternoon – she took a sip of soup and cleaned what's left with a piece of bread, not looking to her husband.

- What did he want?

- News of the girl. You should keep her quiet, you could hear her crying from the Hernandez lands, those filthy mongrels.

- Maybe you should do your role as mother, and take care of that, Carmen. I'm working all day, you know that and I don't need the sheriff

nosing around here now.

- It's my fault.
- Let's not go into this again – Mr. Miller slammed the spoon's handle on the table, and saw his wife's suffering look.
- I've never told what I've done what I did before finding out I was pregnant. I didn't tell because I thought it was silly.

He pushed his plate and left the table, vexed and exhausted from the last conversations with his wife, the subject always turned around the child and to do to her.

- I had a very realistic dream, Andy. One of those we wake up from thinking it really happened, and you know I don't dream...
- I don't want to know, Carmen. Don't talk of it now, I'm fed up with you inside the room, crestfallen all day long, or praying all the time, not helping with the crops, not doing anything. I'm tired of you!
- LISTEN TO ME! – she stood up, slamming her hands on the table, the hair scaping everywhere from the heavy braid. Before, Carmen was a beautiful Spanish-descended woman. Now she was just a half-mad lady. – Please, listen to me. I've been trying to talk about it for days, but I don't see you anymore. – she walked to her husband and grabbed him by his shoulders, looking him in the eyes. To her surprise, his eyes were empty, absent and tired. He stood still, not moving or pushing her, there was no emotion whatsoever on his face, hardened by time and loss.

She kissed his face and leaned on the table, summer was over, they could hear the wind outside, announcing the harsh winter.

- I had this dream with a pack of jackals, of wild dogs, I don't know... I can't precise which one, surely you could. They entered our house, and I seemed so real, Andy, I could smell their stench of death and decay. Their eye seemed to glow yellow and ferocious, I screamed as loudly as I could,

but I was alone. You weren't here. One of them, the largest, brought something on its mouth, and put it at my feet. I was in the living room, sewing baby's clothes... it had laid down half of our son's face. – she hugged herself, feeling tears run down her face, helpless. Mr. Miller didn't care, he just looked at her, coldly and disbelieving – It was his face, I could see the small scar, from when he fell from his crib, perfectly. Yago fell all the time... his death couldn't be any different, had to be a fall from a horse. The horse he loved the most... how could it happen, Andy? –

she dried the tears on her apron – When I reached to his face, what was left of it, the largest jackal bit my hand, he ate it slowly, as if savoring it, just like a man eating a rare steak... But that wasn't the worst part of the dream, the worst part was being violated by the three other surrounding animals. I woke up hurting everywhere, inside... I don't know what was that, I thought it was silly, until she was born... how she was born, those legs...

Andy sighed and left her alone in the kitchen, saying nothing to his wife, who gave herself to the crying, restrained for days on end.

V.

The thundering increased, just like the rain. It was Pietra who asked for a break.

- That's horrible! Disgusting, Kaleb, tell what the child had already.
- Patience, darling, the history is almost at its end.
- I'm getting sleepy, you could've let me tell a history and you'd see what real terror is like – Yasmin smiled to Kaleb, with an accomplice's smile that Pietra didn't like in the least.
- It's not a horror story, Yasmin – He put the cigarette out, got his packet, and saw it was his last – The history is about this cottage: Andy and Carmen lived here, where that happened. My grandfather told me

that every time we came to spend our vacations here.

- Even so, he made that up to scare you, grandfathers do that all the time. Mine told me about a man who wandered with a large sack, kidnapping children to eat. Adult bullshit to scare children. We should open another bottle of wine. – Pietra bent over her boyfriend's lap and looked to Yasmin.

- Why didn't you bring your boyfriend, Yasmin?

She shrugged.

- We're not dating, Pietra, you know that. We're just... going out

- Do you want to listen the end of the story or not? – Kaleb fingered Pietra's hair who turned to look at him. If that history was to scare, it was working with her. Yasmin, on the hand, was to skeptical to let herself go.

VI.

The sheriff visited the Miller couple two more times before they decided to get rid of the child. At first, Andy was resistant to his wife's idea, but soon gave in, because his tiredness was greater, his eagerness to get rid of Sheriff Howard's visits was stronger. Carmen suggested to throw her in the property's well, but Andy couldn't do that. After all it was his daughter, and he grew fond of her. To his wife, murder seemed easier, but he couldn't.

They spent nights discussing about the child's death, she was 1 by then, but didn't seem to have developed very well, due to the conditions she grew up in. Always laying on her crib, unmoving, watching days and nights go by. Carmen accused her husband of cowardice, sensible and weak for not killing her. He suggested that she's do it, but Carmen justified her belief in God would blame her for that, and as Andy wasn't religious, was free to kill.

The fuss lasted some weeks, until Mr. Miller found the solution while riding through his property, during his fourth attempt to drown his daughter in the river that cut his lands. The lands on the other side were inhabited by savages, Andy Miller often had problem with them, or the endless war for land, between them and the capital's army. He didn't know much about those creatures, only they worshiped demons and ate their children. If they ate children, he could leave her to be found, maybe even calm them with the offering. That's what he did, Andy crossed the river and rode for an hour, until he saw smoke rise to the skies, from the indigenous camping.

Carefully, he left the child at the entrance of their village, anyone who walked by would see her, but to make sure she would be found soon, he shook her awake. She, scared, started to cry, a loud cry that startled the birds. He jumped on his horse and bolted home. Problem solved. For years they had no word about the girl, or the people who found her. Carmen and Andy lived their last years with the certainty that creature had been only a nightmare on their lives. It wasn't Yago reincarnated, couldn't be. Carmen, on her deathbed, confessed to a priest and her husband that she'd made a ritual, so that Yago could return, desperate due to the loss and pain, she tried everything, even deal with dark forces. In tears, she asked the priest for forgiveness from God. Amazed, the cleric gave her pardon but, when she closed her eyes, exhausted and deteriorated due to tuberculosis, he confessed to the husband what she had done was very serious. Where she had guidance to seek evil to recover the lost son?

- In her dreams. – said Mr. Miller – After our son died, Carmen had these strange dreams. Sometimes, I'd wake and didn't see her on the bed, I had to look for her. She was outside, under the tree where he fell and was trampled by the horse; or

naked, walking among the animals. I never knew what happened, I was scared to see her in that state, priest. Not fear that she'd get hurt or something like that, but of her. She seemed another person.

The priest blessed the home and gave Mr. Miller orientations. When Carmen died, she wasn't buried beside her son, behind the barn. She was cremated, as the priest indicated. Andy didn't think about his wife for the next years, or the storms that came after Yago died. Bit by bit, the daughter's existence and her abandonment left his memories. He died peacefully, at 75, his heart simply stopped beating while he rode, in peace.

VII.

- So? – Pietra stood from her boyfriend's lap – what happened to the girl? What was her deformity? That's it?

- Well, all that I told you was just to explain the origin of the haunting said to linger here for the last decades. At the end of every year, the girl returns to take vengeance, she feeds upon people's negative feelings, through their dreams. The tales said the savages raised and worshiped her, as a god-child, because she was different from the caucasians. They believed in different things, worshiped strange things. She gained a lot of strength among them, who saw her as the daughter of an old god.

- That's bullshit! – Yasmin stood and stretched, the rain had calmed, but electricity wasn't back. – I think I'll go to sleep, that awful history made me sleepy.

Kaleb smiled, and stood with Pietra, who seemed uncomfortable and thoughtful.

The two of them went to the bedroom, while Yasmin stayed in the living

room, trying to make her phone work. When she got ready to sleep, Pietra felt shivers run her body, waited her boyfriend and hugged him.

- Kaleb, what was wrong with the girl?

He laughed

- Did I scare you?

- No, I just got curious

- Yasmin is right, honey. That's all bullshit my grandfather made up to scare me. He never told me what was wrong with her, that's up to the listener – Kaleb kissed her and closed his eyes, as he was tired from the hours on the road, the trip was long.

Pietra tried to sleep, but couldn't. For a couple of minutes, she fell in a light, disturbed sleep. Her mind came and went to the scene told by her boyfriend, her imagination running wild trying to solve the mystery of the child's deformity. When she finally fell asleep, after 3am, when they've went to bed at 19h, Pietra heard a baby crying in the distance, as if coming from the neighbors, but the closest farm was very far away. She sat on the bed and looked to her side, Kaleb wasn't there. With growing fear, Pietra left the bed, checked the room's light switch, but they still had no electricity. She walked by her phone's lantern, but the battery was nearly dead. Before calling for her boyfriend through the cottage's corridor, she heard noises coming from the living room, the baby cry ceased.

Pietra stood still between the kitchen and the living room, disbelieving. Kaleb and Yasmin were trying to muffle the noise they made, but let a loud moaned whisper out. He was over her like a mating animal, it was

grotesque and nearly inhuman. It didn't look like normal sex, looked more like an assault. She searched her memory about every mention Yasmin made about Kaleb: "You're lucky, he's a big deal", "Kaleb is not only handsome, he's rich and smart, intelligent. Every woman in the world would like to be in your place". Pietra felt nothing but a big emptiness inside, her head boosting Yasmin's moaning.

"What am I watching?", that question suddenly appeared in her mind while she walked to both of them, eyes staring and mouth open, in pure shock.

- Pietra? – Kaleb's voice came from very far away – What's wrong? – He stood from the couch. Yasmin saw her friend on the phone, properly dressed, talking to Kaleb. But Pietra's mind kept projecting that scandalous image of betrayal, feeding jealousy, insecurity and hatred.

She walked by him saying nothing, covering her ears to leave Yasmin's moans behind, and left to the porch. Kaleb called her from somewhere distant in her mind, Yasmin's voice joining his, but Pietra ignored them, only listening the animal sounds of betrayal. She kept walking, her feet touching the damp grass. Among the trees surrounding the property, she saw dozens of yellow eyes, watching. A howl broke the night's silence,

growing until it hit Pietra squarely, knocking her down to her knees. She couldn't stay up, among those yellow eyes, and from the trees, a half-human form came out, bringing an enormous jackal by her side. The woman had a dog's legs, that made her walk on all fours most of the time, but at that moment, she was proudly up, imposing. Her face looked like a dog's muzzle, her eyes small, yellow. She smiled to Pietra, from her fangs and mouth came a carrion stench, and hugged the kneeling girl, eyes fixed on the figures standing on the porch. Kaleb was breathless, Yasmin pale, holding her hands to her heart.

- What the hell is that? – Yasmin whispered to Kaleb – We have to take Pietra back!

- I think it's too late – Kaleb ran inside the cottage, seeking his grandfather's shotgun, kept over the living room's furniture, but the horrible noise, followed by Pietra's scream confirmed his suspicions: it was too late.

- Buried

“Tumbled Stone Summer Festival”, the sign hoisted between two power poles had faded colors, that were once very bright. In the downtown area, happened the famous summer festival, that brought people from everywhere. For four days the artistic frenzy shook Tumbled Stone's peace.

The sign trembled in the rough wind, Giulia lost herself in thoughts, prostate in front of what's left of the festival. Her professional camera stayed at her chest, and while she made mention of taking it to her eye, she never did.

- Hypnotized?

His voice came from behind, followed by a laugh.

- It's been half an hour you've been staring at that sign, Giulia. Let's go, we have to take the road back

She looked to her friend trying to hide her embarrassment. They went to the parking lot where their car was parked. It was a cheap lodging for the

festival's four days. Bernardo invited Giulia to eat before they go, and he noticed her staring at the festival sign on the other side of the street.

- Bernardo, I need to see your photos of the festival...
- Now?
- Yes. Let's eat and I'll tell you what happened yesterday...

Bernardo stared at her for a while before they seated at the balcony of the restaurant. Giulia asked for a sandwich she didn't really want and he delighted in his lunch. She looked her friend's camera, in shocked silence

- Yesterday I found a woman at the festival, that was in every picture I shot. Curious, I went and asked her to take a picture together under the festival sign, because she wore very weird clothes, as if from another century. Must be some

thematic thing... she isn't in any of your pictures, and I'm sure you shot some of her.

- Maybe she isn't there because I'm a better photographer than you. Nothing I don't want appear in my pictures. – Bernardo smirked.

Giulia put his camera on the counter, sighed, her dispiritment not only due to tiredness

- I've lost all of my pictures, Bernardo. They simply disappeared from my camera. It's like I've never shot any... That's what bugging me about this woman. She fucked up all my work.
- But Giulia, what do you mean by "disappeared"? And what that woman looked like?

She had no time to answer, Bernardo saw Giulia jump from her seat and run madly through the restaurant door. He paid for both their lunches and went after her, who was already crossing the street, heading to the field where the festival took place. Bernardo ran and called her for a long stretch of road. They crossed the entire field where the stands were set, but he couldn't find Giulia. She had vanished.

He stopped to try to see her, there was no way for him to lose sight of her, or for to keep hidden, because it was a dusty and hot open field. Bernardo breathed deeply, he found it was hard to, in the heat of the place. He found himself holding Giulia's camera, before leaving the restaurant he grabbed hers and left his behind. He swore, wishing to find her as fast as possible to get out of there.

He began to walk where he judged to have last seen her, and called her name many times, his voice echoing everywhere, in strange tones. He had not realized how far he was from the road or the town, going farther into the prairie after Giulia, not taking notice of the way back to his car. Bernardo stopped, exhausted, no sign of her. Nothing. He looked at the camera on his hand and turned it on. She told the truth, there were no saved pictures. None. But they had worked together on the festival, he saw her shoot many pictures, even showing him some, between workdays.

He thought on how frustrated she must've felt for losing all her work, but his head wouldn't stop thinking about the woman she said having seen. Why Giulia left that way? When Bernardo lifted his face from the camera, he got his answer. He saw a woman watching him. She wore a long, frayed dress, outdated, and was barefoot. Her face couldn't be seen against the sunlight, she was like a mirage in the distance.

- HELLO? – he shouted in her direction, assuming that woman not to

be real – Giulia? – the wind brought a familiar whisper, Giulia’s voice calling him.

Bernardo took the camera to his eyes and pointed it at the woman. Scared, he pushed the camera away, that woman couldn’t be captured by the lenses, she didn’t exist in the camera’s world. Even though, he started shooting several pictures while walking to that feeble figure. She didn’t move, kept still as if only a projection. When he was two steps away from the woman, he put the camera down from his face, but she wasn’t there anymore. The camera started to emit a noise, as if a film being rewound. He looked the screen, where the pictures went by in a series of random images, the pictures Giulia had shot during the festival. They were all there, passing in maddening speed.

He was open mouthed, watching the camera’s movement, the images passing as if a movie, in every frame, the woman was standing in the backdrop. Giulia was right, she was in every picture, hidden, watching, her face blurred and diffuse. The last pictures, however, didn’t fit Giulia’s work, looking like subterranean galleries, hidden places. Bernardo couldn’t tell where his friend had shot those pictures, that seemed recent, as if just shot.

- GIULIA! – he ceased watching the camera. He felt nauseated, the harsh sun interfering his perceptions. He resumed calling her and walk aimlessly.

What Bernardo couldn’t tell the policemen were the reasons for Giulia to run away or how was she before disappearing. Devastated for not being able to find her, after more than 5 hours looking before finding his way back to the restaurant, he couldn’t explain anything they asked of him. During the entire police investigation, Bernardo didn’t let go of Giulia’s camera, only doing so after they took him to the police station. They

didn't find anything saved on her camera, and even the pictures he shot during the festival didn't contain anything revealing. For a long time, he was suspect for her disappearance, he also blamed himself. He knew she was alive somewhere, during some insomniac nights, more and more frequent since that day, he could see her walking through the arid prairie, behind the woman in the pictures, hungry and thirsty, only a desert ghost. Bernardo couldn't keep as a photographer because the memories of Giulia's camera working on its own haunted him every time he took a camera to work.

*

The light is weak, most of the time it's only darkness. She heard steps and voices above, but it's all weak and stuck in another world. The open eyes seemed always closed due to the dark, and her body gave in to every pain. She didn't remember how life was on the surface, or who she was before entering that hole. Her only memory, the one that filled her mind, was the woman who visited every week. Or was it every night? Every year? Giulia moved and feels part of her atrophied legs by the long time immobilized, her head the only thing kept above ground, capturing the rare breezes that blew there. The worst thing was the hunger, but she would bring food, she always does, hanging from her strong jaw, the unbearable stench of carrion becoming fragrant to her stomach. It's a long process, like the one butterflies go through, she was determined to keep alive, even if she didn't know what kind of life she had before. At each of the woman's visit she thinks that will be the moment of fight, of confrontation, the moment when she will be able to get out of that situation and kill her! Face her. Subjugate her. But it never happens, because the hunger is always stronger than her will to fight.

Epilogue

In 1989, in the Tumbled Stone city archaeological site, hidden grounds were found among the caves and prairies, that researchers believe to be an old family graveyard. The arrangement of bones found there, and the way they were buried, vertically, side-by-side, led to the hypothesis of a large family or a tribe.

Artifacts and bones were transferred to the local historical museum, kept by the mayor's office and research institutions. For years, visitors and researchers searched those graveyard caves, seeking to know better the place that housed for centuries a large portion of Tumbled Stone's history. What few knew is that history sometimes become a manipulated version of found sources, to build a place's memory.

When Professor Zyart Konch died, the secrets behind the official Tumbled Stone history were revealed. Zyart was chief researcher of the 1989 excavations, that found the oldest vestiges of Tumbled Stone population. He was responsible for cataloguing and filing everything that was found by the research group. Zyart took longer than expected to finish his studies on the found native graveyard.

In a mess that involved religious groups, political forces and legal authorities, the archeologist wove a commissioned history, seeking to enlarge the properties of local ore, to attract more and more tourists. Tumbled Stone became known as the "Energized ore city", a group of mystical caves said to be capable of energetic change in people.

Before dying, Zyart wrote a letter to yours truly, with the location of all his notes, files on the graveyard, and the 1989 work. Zyart asked as a last wish that the true information of what was found in Tumbled Stone was

to be released on the newspaper I founded and always have prized honesty. According to Professor Konch “the people can’t keep on living under the black veil of ignorance”, and that’s why I decided to publish his notes without any modifications. I know I’d be a thorn on the side of many important people by exposing the truth about the native graveyard, if something happens to me after this publication, you’ll know where the blame lies. Or will I be just another prey of the evil town, Tumbled Stone? May God bless us all!

Zyart Konch notes:

1) Around 100 skeletons, buried vertically, side-by-side, were filed. They were in the whole extension of the northwestern caves of the Tumbled Stone’s prairies.

The bodies were headless. Where were the heads? Why were they taken? Some kind of religious rite?

1) Due to difference in bone structure and genetic pattern, they can’t be all related. The lack of heads would represent some kind of punishing or torture? Why were the bodies hidden in caves?

2) The bodies were in shallow graves dug by animal labor. The hole patterns aren’t result of digging instruments like shovels. They were made by large animals. As a matter of fact, we found skeletons of wild dogs and wolves next to buried humans.

3) The animal bones would be there to protect their owners, or watch the dead? It’s becoming harder to define something about the graveyard, because it diverges from the most adopted conventions used to analyze ancient graveyards.

4) We found a woman’s skeleton near the graveyard. It’s the only female skeleton found in the field. Her physical build is very large, and very well preserved. She must be 2m high when we display her on the table, but her legs are twisted, looking like a dog’s. Maybe the bones were

mixed with those of an animal? Possible. Religious worshiping representation? Possible.

5) The woman is our first priority. There is nothing like her in any other study of the local tribes. She's unique. Her dental arch is peculiar, all the teeth are canines. In a human being, the dental arch is composed of 32 teeth, divided in incisors, canines, pre-molars and molars. However, in the skeleton, more than 40 teeth were disposed, and every one a canine. They're intact, time has not acted upon them.

6) Maybe the buried were sick, or war prisoners? That would explain the lack of heads. I must emphasize one detail: by the marks on the bones, their necks were not severed by a blade or tool, but by teeth or claws. The animals, most likely, attacked them while they were buried, only their heads out of the ground.

7) I've consulted a local folk legends specialist, the woman's skeleton may be due to a, long spoken of the local ancient dwellers, wolf worshiping, or to wolf spirits. But the twisted legs seem to belong to another animal, but after closer inspection, they were part of the same skeleton. We still need to find which tribe the woman was part of, due to her extreme peculiarity. It may be a case of a genetic defect, maybe she was buried with other "invalids".

8) Time is playing against me and they're pressing me to hand over my notes on the native burial ground. I'll do what they want, but I can't expose the woman's skeleton, not before I find her origins and explanations of her being among the beheaded.

There was a happening that made me speed up my studies and abandon the found research material. I'll handle the collected data and the history they want to tell, but I must leave written what has forced me to abandon research without any satisfactory conclusion.

When I arrived at my lab, I didn't find the woman I've been working on her for the last months. I've contacted the authorities at once, to report the theft, but they couldn't recover my research material. They haven't found the bones, much less who could have entered my lab to steal them.

Through the security cameras we saw that no invasion had taken place, and no one took any type of samples from the 1989 excavation. When we checked all the recordings, my assistants and I could comprehend, not without a growing fear and panic, what had happened. The recordings are low quality, but enough to erase any doubts we had over the woman's origin. I leave filed along these notes and in the right moment, they will be revealed to those interested.

Security camera images

Camera 2 (lab):

The lab is completely still, shrouded in the night's darkness. Something moves over the table, from under a blanket. The blanket falls, revealing an empty table.

Camera 5 (courtyard):

A figure slides over a courtyard window, fall to the ground on all fours and shakes itself due to the rain. It walks sniffing the air, and looks directly to the camera, the eyes alight, like a wolf's

Camera 7 (parking lot):

The trees surrounding the property move, a woman's figure streaks by, running on all fours.

After 30 minutes of recording:

A loud noise echoes, just like a howl.

The authoress:

Larissa Prado was born in Goiania-Brazil, an inveterate admirer, researcher and independent writer of the horror genre, has produced fictional texts for over 4 years. Other publications:

Collectibles: "Hidden Treatise on Horror" (2016), "Myriad Free Theme" (2017), "Tenuous Line - Supernatural Tales of Terror and Suspense" by Andross Publishing. "Thorns and Roses" (2017) by the publisher Illuminare.

Ebooks: "The Art of Terror: Memento Mori" (2016), "The Art of Terror Volume 2, Volume 3 and Volume 4"; "The Art of Terror: Letters and Commemorative Editing" (2017) of the project The Art of Terror by the independent stamp Elemental Publishing.

The book "The Shadow Coming of Darkness - Cosmic Tales" (2017) by the Elemental Publishing Seal.

Collection of the project "Word is Art: Tales and Chronicles" (2017).

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