

A FORK IN THE ROAD

by Rainah Gregory

Fog hung like a damp towel in the humid clot of night. The moisture caught between the mountains compressed my tired body as I stumbled down the road. Rocks crunched under my weathered shoes, pulling me away from my dormant Honda carcass. Dead. How could my car shut down in the middle of nowhere? Leaving me to roam amongst the spiked bushed forest, with its gaping voids of oblivion carrying an infinite supply of secrets I wish to stay a stranger to.

After what felt like centuries, my eye caught a fire lit in my peripheral vision. Without warning, my body lurched toward this mysterious beacon. Dauntless. As I approached, I laid eyes on three beings.

“Hi,” spoke one.

“Um, hi,” I responded. My voice stuck dry.

“You okay there?” spoke a woman, a long chocolate braid trailing her spine.

“My car broke down.”

“You look tired, man,” spoke the last of the trio. A red worn hat creased his ginger locks.

“Yeah, I’ve been walking for a while.”

“Well, welcome! Take a seat!” said the first.

“I don’t want to intrude...”

“Nonsense!”

I complied, sitting myself on a fallen tree. I felt their eyes peel me apart. I wasn’t prepared for such judgement.

“You have nice eyes,” spoke the red-hatted man. This took me aback.

“Um, thank you,” I managed to squeeze out.

The woman was now leaning forward, tracing her eyes from muscle to muscle on my limbs. “Do you work out...”

“Dan,” I breathed.

The first man glared at the woman hard and cold. He then turned to me, his face softening like microwaved butter. “Sorry about that, Dan. They haven’t been outside the campsite for a while. Meeting new people can become a bombardment of questions.” He wore a deep blue shirt. It reminded me of the ocean. I don’t know why. Maybe because I was dehydrated. “So, do you like camping, Dan?”

“Yeah, actually. It’s been a while, but I loved it as a kid.”

“We love camping!” erupted the woman. Her eyes gleamed in the misted moonlight.

“It’s a way of life for us,” said the red-hatted man.

“How long have you been out here?”

“Three years,” said the woman.

“Wow, that’s amazing! And survival has been...”

“Tough, Dan,” spoke the first. “There are months where we’ll have fantastic weather conditions and a thriving food supply. But then there are times where we are tested. Like now.”

“Now?”

“It’s been a few weeks since our last decent meal.”

“Really?”

“We’ve been eating a lot of plants,” whispered the woman in disgust. Apparently not a vegan.

“We can probably photosynthesize by now,” gruffed the red hatted man. The fire flamed, igniting his freckles like specs of paprika across his cheeks.

“What a view you have.” I gasped as I stood to survey the mountains.

“Take your shoes off,” said the red-hatted man.

“Feel the grass under your toes. It’s life changing,” breathed the woman.

I complied. The woman threw me a spray can.

“Garlic and olive oil?” I read.

“It’s a repellent.” She gleamed. “Do your wrists while you’re at it.”

“So why this life? What’s in it for you?” I was intrigued now.

“Well, to be honest with you, Dan,” started the first, “we’re quite different from city folk.”

“We have different tastes,” said the red-hatted man.

“We aren’t really ‘accepted’ into society,” clipped the woman.

“How do you mean?” I scoffed.

“People don’t understand us,” said the first.

“What’s there to understand?”

“We practice Cannibalism.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Me, too.”