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Silver Eyes

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Drew Coulombe

Silver Eyes

“Will it be the usual for you this morning, Oliver?”

The brunette waitress approached the table, revealing a sketchpad from behind her bleached white apron and flipping it open to a clean page. She liberated a pen from the confines of her unkempt bun, gnawing on a mouthful of Juicy Fruit while tightening the scarlet ribbon that held the entire disarrangement of hair together. The man in the vinyl booth stared blankly at the laminated menu as though looking straight through to the vacant seat across from him.

“Oliver?”

Oliver was an older man—his eyes outlined with wrinkly inlets and hugged with thin framed spectacles. He wore a mustard polo with chestnut colored corduroys and loafers straight out of the 1950s.

“Hmm? Oh. Yes, black coffee and slice of apple pie, thank you,” responded the man softly while slowly shifting his attention from the words he wasn’t reading on the menu to the young waitress blowing vibrant yellow bubbles with her gum.

His hair was thick and grey, neatly combed over into a steel waves that flowed well with his cowlick. Age spots framed his yielding expressions like small tan islands adrift a pale sea. On the backs of his hands, faded blue veins dispersed under translucent flesh, while his eyes were deep brown and wide like an orphaned terrier, working well to show the melancholy hidden within.

“You got it,” said the waitress clicking her pen on the sketchpad and then slipping it back into the organized mess of split ends.

Oliver watched her nimble legs move passed the adjacent tables and towards the kitchen, reminiscing to the days when he too was young and limber. He glanced over to the trio of tennis balls at the base of the aluminum cane in his lap, exhaling a sore breath at the memory of when he would have volleyed them back and forth with his sister on the street back when they were young. Ever since her death back when he was seventeen he'd been all alone—never finding a partner nor having any close friends—a simple life of seclusion, captive to his small one bedroom apartment while working for a small company at home from his small room with an even smaller salary.

The waitress made her way back to his booth, balancing a tray of dishes at her shoulder while navigating through the maze of tables and red cushioned chairs.

“Here we are, black coffee and two slices of apple pie,” she said placing a hot mug and plate of pastry in front of him.

Oliver scrunched his nose, looking up to the waitress with vulnerable brows, “Two slices?”

She smiled at him as though admiring his solitude, “Second one's on me—think of it as a loyalty reward for coming here so often this last month.” The waitress gave him a friendly wink with her silver eyes and then meandered around the café, wiping down long deserted tables or checking in on the other forlorn customers scattered amidst the foundation of wash-white tiling.

He looked down at the extra slice, feeling even lonelier in the realization of having no one to share it with. His hands trembled with age as he lifted each sad forkful to his virgin lips, hints of cinnamon bringing him back to family Christmas gatherings long ago—huddling around

the birch yule log, fueling the warm flames with carols and laughter. But that was only a memory now.

Oliver freed his trifold wallet from the suffocation of his back pocket, the brown exterior crimped and stained and the creased hinges worn with age. He unfurled its tattered limbs and selected a \$100 bill from the leathery guts, placing it under his empty plate before hobbling out the front door.

Just as he left the café, he woke up. Back on his little mattress in his little apartment—his thin sheets soaked through with sweat. He coughed himself awake as his breath eluded him. The taste of cinnamon faded from his tongue as he transitioned back into reality. Back into his sad life.

Oliver wasn't a normal man. Ever since his brain injury back when he was seventeen he had never been the same—a car crash—tossed end over end in a hail of cherry red shrapnel as his 1954 Chevy Station wagon veered off a hairpin turn and down a ridge of loose gravel. The doctors never thought he would wake from the coma, convincing the already inconsolable family it was time to let go. It was only until moments before pulling the plug that Oliver jolted forward coughing the life back into his lungs and returning to his normal state. Well. Not actually normal. Something happened to him in his deep slumber. Something extraordinary yet monstrous—a malfunction of the mind, invoking the supernatural and ingraining it into his psyche. It only took 24 hours. 24 hours until they eventually passed. For quite some time he was unaware of his condition, not making the connection that the people around him were dying by his own hand—or mind more like it.

It happened when he slept—in his dreams. In the beginning it occurred at random. He'd dream of someone he'd recently met: a second cousin at a relative's wedding, the postman with the suede shoes, even the transfer student down the hall from his dorm room in the city. For months Oliver had these vivid delusions, usually one or two dreams per week depending on how many people crossed his recent paths. He never took the time to read the paper or tune into the news when he was younger so when his dream subjects started getting sick, he was oblivious. He remembered looking out his dining room window, the postman with the suede shoes disappearing from his daily route, replaced by a burly man with a hat too small for his pudgy head. Same with the others. He remembered the transfer student being carried out of his dorm room on a canvas stretcher only a week after the first day of classes. Marvin, the 7-Eleven clerk, got sick after Oliver went in to buy a bottle of Coke and pack of Hot Tamales. He'd overhear muddled conversations through the plaster walls—his mother and father spoke of the afflicted while he watched *The Twilight Zone*—"have they found a cure yet?" he'd hear his mother ask in hushed fear.

"No, they don't have a goddamn clue," his father would respond, helplessly dialing in to the static voices of the Motorola radio in the kitchen.

Even three months after the car crash Oliver still hadn't made the connection to his paranormal abilities—it wasn't until his dreams started involving people he already knew that he realized what his mind was capable of—not until the night he dreamt of his family did he know what he had become.

That night, that horrible night, he was back behind the wheel in his cherry red Station Wagon. His father sat shotgun with the morning's paper sprawled out across his lap while his mother and sister sang Buddy Holly in the back. He drove for a while. Long enough for the

moon to reveal itself through the closing day. He switched on the headlights, aimlessly guiding their Chevy onward in an oval spread of visibility. He had no idea where they were going but he kept driving. Kept driving—the white mediating lines disappearing and then reappearing one after another in a hypnotizing pattern. The others having fallen asleep, Oliver's eyes slacked in the lulling silence, his vision becoming fuzzy as the road carried on into oblivion. He couldn't help but to close them.

One.

Two.

Three.

He opened his eyes, jolting in sudden realization of the dire consequences, but it was already too late. He yanked on the leather steering wheel, the rubber tires screaming with agony as the car drifted towards the steep edge of a bend camouflaged in darkness. The front wheels leapt from the ground, nosediving into the shadows as the family awoke in collective cries. The car's front fender met the earth after freefalling for what seemed like ages, throwing bodies around the car like a gruesome game of musical chairs while hurling the vehicle into a forward spiral. It landed on the back fender, folding the vehicle like a tin can as it ricocheted one last time towards the light of the moon. What was left of the car fell silent as it landed nestled against a valley of birch trees. The sky rained with glass and metal as Oliver woke from a confused daze to mangled limbs and silver eyes staring lifelessly into the night sky. Their bodies were painted bright crimson, motionless and inextinguishable from one another. He closed his eyes again—one, two, three—his mind drifting into blackness as he fell back into an unconscious state.

When he awoke he was back in his bed, huffing for oxygen as reruns of The Twilight Zone flashed silently in the corner of his bedroom. For almost an hour he wept in relief and fear, still heavily perspiring from the gory memories he'd just witnessed.

He cleaned the garage, helped his sister with the dishes and even worked by his mother's side in the garden that day as if to repay his family for killing them in his dream.

He got up before everyone else the next morning, laying in the living room, reading Archie Annual comics as if to get his mind off the scarring images from the night before. He waited. And waited. Hours went by without hearing even a single snore or creaky floorboard. Not even the sound of shifting sheets or running water from the upstairs bathroom. He went to investigate the unusual stillness, tiptoeing up the stairs to his parents' bedroom. He cracked the door and peered through the opening, turning cold with horror at the sight before him.

"Mom! Dad!"

Oliver rushed over to a pair of breathless bodies, their skin pale and their eyes wide and drained of color. He shook their paralyzed shoulders, neither of them showing any form of response.

"Lily!" he screamed pulling his own hair in disbelief as his eyes swelled with helpless tears.

"Lily!" his voice broke into a shrill as he jumped down the stairs to his sister's room, almost freeing the door from its hinges as he pounded it open.

"No, no, no, no, no," he cried choking on his words looking over at her matching silver eyes and stiff lifeless limbs curled up in white linen.

He fell to the linoleum floor: cold and dead like his sister and parents. He laid there all night in deafening silence until the cries of his howling heart sang him to sleep.

“Will it be the usual for you this morning, Oliver?”

The waitress wiped her starch caked hands on the white apron draped over her skinny neck, pulling out a sketchpad beneath the stains. She unsheathed a pen from behind her head, repositioning the red ribbon that held up her disheveled brunette hair. The man in the vinyl booth stared at the menu with wooden expressions, focusing in on the spaces between the words on the page instead of the words themselves.

“Oliver?”

He rotated his neck slowly, keeping his eyes fixated on the blank spaces.

“Oliver?” she repeated after a pause of silence.

“Hmm? Oh. Yes, black coffee and slice of apple pie, thank you,” he said shaking his trance and turning his attention to the waitress blowing vibrant yellow bubbles with her gum.

“You got it,” she responded, writing down his order before drifting back through the “employees only” door into the kitchen.

After a minute or so she emerged balancing a tray at her shoulder, snaking her way through a sea of tables and chairs before approaching his booth.

“Here we are, black coffee and two slices of apple pie,” she said placing the steaming cup and plate in front of him.

Oliver looked down at the extra slice and then back up to the waitress' eyes, noticing them evolve into hollow grey stones as their visions melded. She stiffened like a board, falling backwards to the ground in pale paralysis. He knew there was no use calling an ambulance since she'd be dead by tomorrow anyways. Instead he finished his pie and coffee, clutched his aluminum cane and walked out the front entry, stepping over the limp body like he'd done countless times before.

When he got back to his small one bedroom apartment he laid in bed, tuning into a Cubs game as though unfazed by the events that just took place. He felt nothing anymore. In fact, it was today that marked the 60th year since Oliver's accident, 60 years of holding onto the knowledge that anyone he'd ever come close to in life would simply slip away into eternal slumber.

Back before his old age had snuck up on him, there was a time when Oliver thought about finally telling someone about his condition—maybe there were other people like him, maybe he could find help and get his curse lifted. He knew it wouldn't stay a secret though—people would call him a freak or murderer—antichrist maybe. Even if he went to find help, the doctors wouldn't last long. It was always inevitable no matter how hard he tried; it was simply engrained into his own fate. There was no avoiding it. He even kept a tally in his high school yearbook—each few days crossing off another classmate's picture with black marker until it was only his own. There was nothing he could do. He started doing the same with the phone book, though he only grew more depressed as the yellow pages filled up with black streaks.

After moving into his apartment, there was a point when Oliver even tried to suppress his neurological anomaly—staying inside—hidden, avoiding everyone at all costs, even pretending to be blind when he left his apartment. He fashioned a makeshift “feeling” cane out of a broomstick and coated a pair of old spectacles in thick black paint to hide his eyes. He never talked to anyone if he didn’t have to, avoiding encounters at all costs. The maid that cleaned his room was the only one he ever let enter into his life. He took a liking to the maid even though, through his blind façade, had never known what she’d looked like. Her voice was young and he could tell she was beautiful just by the way she hummed while dusting. He would have asked her out had he not been cursed with his lethal mind. But it was impossible—and it didn’t even matter anyways because, given his luck, he accidentally saw her in the dining room mirror one day and now she’s six feet underground. What was worse was that she was actually beautiful. Maybe they could have dated. Maybe they could have gotten married he thought. He was devastated and lonely once again.

But now, after 60 years, he could hardly feel the sting of loneliness anymore, his heart callused over by the monotony of all those he’d put to rest. He stopped pretending to be blind over the years, each day going out in the world without any hope—without remorse. He started going to the funerals of his victims as well, however, needless to say that only led to more funerals. He lost track of the death count. The bottom of a whisky bottle was the one place he was able to find any sort of solace for his pain. The alcohol helped suppress his thoughts and dreams. It was like his own form of medicine. Though, one night, taken over by the liquor, Oliver sunk lower into his sadness than he in a long while. He contemplated suicide after trashing his apartment in a rage fueled tantrum. The carpet was covered in broken glass and wooden shrapnel from dining room chairs—he sobbed amidst the mess, clutching the broken frame of an old family Christmas

photo against his broken heart. He dug up his father's old six shooter from the bedroom closet and took another hardy swig of booze, but once he touched the cold barrel against his forehead he couldn't go through with it. He didn't want to leave the world like that. Not with his father's gun.

That night after the incident at the café Oliver just laid there motionless, watching the Cubs strike out as his thoughts drifted amidst shambled memories until finally numbing his mind to sleep.

That night he dreamed a dream unlike the others. This time he was all alone, his feet buried beneath the thick mist of what looked like a single cloud suspended high above a blue ocean. He wore a shimmering white gown with pearl buttons and golden cuffs. The air around him felt soft and warm on his skin, swirling around him like an embrace from a long lost friend. He noticed an unfamiliar sensation located between his shoulder blades, turning his neck only to be greeted by a large pair of lucent wings extending from his back. He slid his hand through the silken feathers, inching toward the cloud's edge until his toes met the air. Looking down to the sea of blue below, he closed his eyes before taking the leap.

One.

Two.

Three.

He jumped, falling and falling until outstretching his pale wings against the velvet wind. He smiled with utter joy as he approached the endless expanse of stagnant water, soaring just

above its cool mirrored surface. Oliver looked at the reflection smiling back at him, his eyes were bright silver like glistening diamonds. He widened his smile and flew away into the golden horizon.