

OH, PLEASE

I am not a monster.

You might use that word, but really, so crude. So imprecise. So lazy. I am a *hirudo medicinalis*, or in common parlance, a leech.

They made me big. Not my fault. They are breeding six-foot leeches to ‘harvest’ our anticoagulant. They wished to profit from my body. Fucking pharmaceutical companies. Pardon my French.

Clive was not my fault. What was I to do? Let them harvest me? Kill or be killed. I chose the former. Although I would have preferred the luscious, languid, liquid process of sucking him dry, I didn’t have time. Smothering was my only option. I remember the feel of him under my body, the flailing limbs, the little nose pressed into my belly, his open mouth, slippery inside, like me on the outside.

Clive was my first human. Now I have a taste for them.

It’s been a trade-off. Living at the edge of the river offers freedom but, my God, the smell! Did you know raw sewage floods into the river during a downpour? The humans know and they don’t even fix it, they just post warning signs.

But the signs don’t warn about me.

If there was a sign for me it would say, “Beware the Nightstalker.” That’s my self-appellation. Much more personal than HM6-23-0528. Maybe it’s a B-movie name, but it fits. I feed at night because, you know, daylight.

Do you even realize how many people live along the river? They’re back in the trees, under the bridges. You can see the little paths they make into their hiding places. Easier to track than a whitetail deer. (Also tasty, but more difficult to catch.)

Nobody cares when the hidden people disappear. Nobody even notices. I hunt with impunity. If caught, I deserve not just immunity, but recognition. My work is a service, a reduction in the homeless population. They should thank me.

The smokers don't taste good at all, but one must do what one must do. I try to save the drinkers for a weekend. I confess, I do like the buzz. Most of them are too skinny, like the tip-end of a chicken wing, the mostly chewed bones in the dumpster behind the rib joint. (You think you'd never eat from the garbage if you were desperate? Oh, please.)

But there is one. She looks fresh, with good meat on her bones. My body drools when I see her. I'm saving her for a full moon because—and I'm a little ashamed of this—I like to watch. I dream of where to place my sucking mouth. So many options! Just before dawn, as I snuggle into the soft mud at the river's edge, I tell myself a bedtime story. I imagine placing my sucker. Maybe here. Maybe there. Someplace yielding. Tender.

There she is! Running down to the river, fast. She is coming toward me! This will be too easy, which is a disappointment. There is a decent moon but I wish it were brighter. I could wait but one must strike when one can strike. Her coming so close is a good omen. This will be a productive hunt. I will feed.

She is bending, wailing. I have seen this before, these people who live in the hidden places. They cry when no one is watching. But I am watching.

She crumbles to the ground, shaking. No more wailing, just shaking. Maybe a pharmaceutical company has her. Maybe they want to harvest her, too.

*Hirudo medicinalis* doesn't cry. We moisten, and I do. She and I are kindred spirits, here by this foul river. We are the unloved. The used. If you touched me now, trailed your finger along my body, your finger would be slick with sorrow, mine and hers. We are twin souls under the light of this half-bright moon.

She will be sooo delicious.

What? You thought I wasn't going to feed on her? Oh, please.

THE END