

THE CHESTNUT REVIVAL

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HORROR + LOVE

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Short Story
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Be Kind



INFINITY AND THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE

He looks me in the eyes as he hands me the rubber duck.

It's pink with a black top hat and a cane under the wing. I catch his eyes, keep the gaze until it feels like an eternity has passed between us, twice.

"Thank you," I tell him.

It feels like the sun set suddenly, surely. I bite my lip, put the pink rubber duck into my coat pocket and start down the corridor.

By the wall is The Doomsday Machine. An industrial End of the World At Your Fingertips device in sapphire blue. At first I wonder why it isn't red, like everything else in the room is red, though it feels as if this machine should be black. Blue feels like an odd colour for a Doomsday Machine, especially in the light of day.

I step into the room, pull the duck out of my pocket and place it on the writing table next to the window.

There was an image at the far end, a surreal zebra in a position that seemed like something out of Dali's mind.

My room is nice, the bed is big enough for three, a large photograph of a Japanese woman above the bed. She is wearing a strange hat and her lipstick is immaculate.

I hate it. The hat especially.

I have half a heart to call the reception and tell them I haven't booked a room with a Doomsday Machine in it but I quickly change my mind.

I have a mission after all.

Instead, I go to the window to see if it is still on the horizon.

The Thing.

It is.

I sigh and pull the heavy drapes for the windows. It wraps the room in nighttime darkness, it's as if I can make it come and go as I please.

THEME

End of the
World

Eternity

Bleeding Hotel

Green Parrot

Seagull

Love

Evil

Photography

Doomsday

Machine

Darkness



It feels good after the ordeal in the hotel lobby, with the stranger.

I lie down on the bed and think of his eyes, and how I was sucked into them for an eternity. It isn't like me to be this affected by handsome eyes, but here I am, craving more.

I sleep for a while and when I wake up again it really is dark outside, not just behind my curtains. I get up, drink a bit of water, hoping to clench the thirst I have felt since I got to the hotel.

I doesn't help.

But it's time.

I put my coat back on, put the duck in my pocket, make sure I have the hotel key and then I head to the hotel bar.

It is full of people of all shapes and sizes. A dilly-dallying man moves in slowly, he jerks a greeting towards me as if he knows me, raises an invisible hat from his head and bows slightly.

"Drink?" he asks.

I just shake my head and walk slowly to the shadier side. There is an empty table underneath a picture of Marlene Dietrich, sit down and wait for something to happen, anything really, but I have been told that I'll know it when I see it.

An elderly man with grey hair sits sloping over his table to my right. A horrifyingly hollow woman sits beside him. She looks grim as she glares over at the bar, her blond strands of hair covering half her face.

Her eyes speak of murder.

I get up and move slowly towards them, but someone beats me to it. She is tall, has dark hair with silver linings. There is a sense of drama about her. I go to the bar and order a beer while holding the rubber duck in my pocket the entire time.

Beer in hand I return to my table while keeping an eye on the old man and his lady. She is chatting with the woman with silver lining in her hair, she makes the older woman look half-dead standing next to her. The contrast is uncanny.

When the second woman, however, sits down the old man comes alive, leans towards her and whispers something in her ear.

An endearment? The blond woman sneers, but moments later the three of them get up and vanish down the hallway towards the rooms.

I find myself wondering if they, too, have a Doomsday Machine in their room.

It isn't until I have finished my beer that I see him.

The stranger with the eyes.

I smile at him, involuntarily. And again I get lost in those eyes, wondering what those eyes can do, what you could do with eyes like his, all eternity wrapped in a single glance.

I don't try to escape it. I let myself sink into it. If he encages me in time I don't have to perform my task.

When eternity has passed, again, I nod my head slightly. He smiles and breaks the spell, unfortunately. But when he approaches my table my heart pounds, he offers to buy me a new beer but mine is full still.

"You don't need to get me drunk," I tell him.

He smiles again.

He'll get me into trouble, but I don't mind being in trouble. I handle trouble for a living.

The first kiss is warm. The second burning.

I postpone the End of the World till tomorrow and go up to his room with him. The big bird above the bed croaks devilishly, and almost has me reconsidering but seeing the way the stranger moves his body, the way he seems freer than anyone I've ever met, as if his joints are loose, as if his soul isn't tethered to his body makes me reconsider.



The sex is blissful, feverish, intensive, slow and euphoric.

I leave before he gets the chance to steel the rubber duck back from me, before he wakes up, before he realizes that I am fervid. That I will never see this to the end, even given the chance.

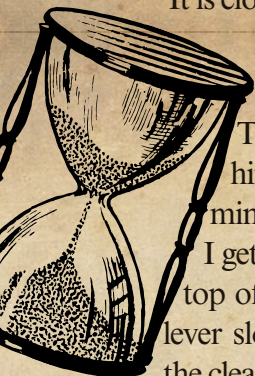
He will find out soon enough.

The Doomsday Machine is still in my bed when I get back to my room. I shower and wonder whether it's time. I turn to the window, naked, pull the drapes from the windows and look out towards the horizon.

Seagulls are screeching in the distance, hovering above the hotel and above the sea in the distance but I am startled when I see a small green parrot standing on the windowsill outside, looking in at me. It dances back and forth for a while, pushing its little head forward as if it wants to tell me something, or maybe it's break-dancing.

The thing is still on the horizon, big, sloping, deadly, maybe dead but my eyes are on the parrot. It scares me.

I pull the drapes for the windows again.
It is closer.



The knock on the door startles me. It is him. I know it's him. He has changed his mind. He is here for the duck.

I get it out of the coat pocket and place it on top of the Doomsday Machine, then I pull the lever slowly, then hastily reconsider. It could be the cleaning lady.

I put the complementary robe on and open the door.

The woman standing opposite me looks as if she has been drained of all life. Her hair is completely grey, her hands just bare bones, her cheeks hollow.

"He is back at it," she says simply, then she turns in her tracks and leaves down the hallway. I watch her huddle away and as she comes to the end of the corridor I watch her turn to ash, her remains float in the air and then they land slowly on the floor.

I hurry to put my clothes on, take the duck and go down into the lobby.

The old man is standing beside the blond woman, they are leaving. Array of bags surrounding them as the blond woman stands by the helpdesk, paying their bill. The old man looks remarkably different from before, youthful almost. It startles me.

I walk towards him and give him a look. He glares at me. He wants me. I can feel it, but not like the stranger wanted me, this man does other things to women.

I pull the duck out of my pocket and give it to the old man. I never thought I would let it go but here I am. He takes it, startled, still staring, still wanting me, wanting me in his veins, like a drug, like medicine.

I go back upstairs. I long for just one more night with the stranger, just one more moment filled with his eternity, his gaze one me as if only I matter in the entire world.

I place my hand on the Doomsday Machine. I steel myself. Walk to the windows and pull the drapes away and stare at the abomination in the distance.

I go back to the machine and start counting to ten.

My phone starts ringing when I reach nine.

"Hey, it's me," a voice tells me as I pick up. "Want to repeat last night?"

I don't ask how he knows my number. I just answer.

"Yes," I say. I know it is him. I know he has a mission, a goal. He was the one who gave me the duck after all.

"Is it off?" I ask.

"No," he answers quickly. "They still want you to go through with it."

"One more night?" I ask.

"One more night," he says. "He's coming back," he adds.

I don't believe him but I sit down on the bed to wait, count my toes slowly, one at a time. Then I stare at the sapphire blue machine.

It is quite ugly.

"I could do this forever," I tell him afterwards. He says nothing so I start putting my clothes on and leave.

His silence is tangible.

On my way back to my room I see the old man. He is back, like the stranger said he would be. He is alone this time, floating in the corridors like a ghost. He used to have grey hair but he doesn't have grey hair anymore. It is dark and lively. He looks decades younger, but I know it's him. I recognize him.

The woman who turned to ash before my eyes, hollow. She paid the price.

"You," I say.

"He laughs, "Volunteering, are we?" he gloats.

"How did you get this way?" I ask.

"What? Eternal?" he grins. "We're all eternal here, one way or the other, aren't we?"

"But you are different," I tell him.

"The devil's penis," he says. "Spicy as hell, sparked something deep within me, made me mad at first, and then when I realized I could live forever I knew that the madness was just a concept, their concept and not mine."

"The devil's penis?" I ask.

"Look it up, I don't have time for you," he says and walks slowly down the corridor. The blond woman that always hung with him before is nowhere to be seen.

I go to my room, pull the drapes open and put a chair close to the Doomsday Machine. Somehow the duck is sitting on top of the machine as it did before, and I wonder stupidly if it will quack once I pull the lever.

Hesitating, I think of the stranger.

I will never get enough of him. I will always want more.

I place my hand on the lever and look out the window. The uncanny thing is closer now, much closer.

I let my hand slowly glide down, lever in hand. The duck quacks.

Then everything goes white. Crystal clear.

I see before me the image of the bird above the stranger's bed, a red pencil on his night-table beside the hot-red phone with the words "HELP ME" written on it. Then I see his eyes again, the stranger's eyes. Nothing but his eyes.

I am still lost in them. Trapped.

Somehow, I am still sitting here, gazing into his eyes. The duck is in my pocket, my cradling the soft plastic. The image of the horrible thing on the horizon still ablaze in my mind. The Doomsday Machine still sapphire blue, untouched.

"Let's go to my room," he says.

I say nothing, but I kiss him again.

I always will get back to this moment. That's why I pull the lever.

