

Creative Writing Contest 2023

Taken by Sophia Friedrich

Short Fiction – 2nd Place

I remember growing up hearing stories from the elders who managed to survive. You would know it's coming when the leaves would change and wither away, when the wind was crisp and biting. They said that savages would come and slowly pick us off in preparation for their dreadful celebration. They'd kidnap us, gut us, and display our remains to ward off spirits. They'd always pick off the strongest and healthiest first, as if showing us the futility of our situation—that there was nothing we could do.

I was born small and deformed, so I managed to make it to the end. I watched as everyone I knew and loved were chosen, one by one, leaving me behind. I tried not to think of what my fate would be, but the changing season wouldn't let me forget. The number got smaller and smaller every day, and I wondered when I'd be next, when my time would finally come. And it was today when my luck had finally run out.

The sky is clear, and the sun shines bright as if mocking my plight. I can hear rustling behind me. As the crunching of leaves comes closer and closer, I can feel immense dread rise up in me, knowing I can't escape and can only vainly hope that I would be passed over. The noise stopped. Long, spindly fingers brushed against my skin, examining me, turning me over. A wheezing laugh was the only warning I had before I felt it grab my head. I had been chosen.

I feel the wind whip about me, and then I'm falling. I hit the back of the truck, slamming against the side. I can feel my side bruising. Suddenly there's a lurch, and we're moving. The vehicle speeds off as I panic, and before I know it, the movement comes to a jerking stop. The hand reaches down and grabs me again. As I'm dragged away, I take in my surroundings. I see a ghastly abode, and to my horror, I see my brethren's corpses surrounding it. Their eyes had been gouged out; their mouths hung open in jagged expressions of horror.

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I'm dragged through a dark corridor, and when we come into the light, what I see strikes fear into my very soul. Across a table are wicked tools of torture. The innards of corpses were removed and lay placed in bowls; some were spread on sheets and left to dry out. My horror is immeasurable. It was not enough that we are used as decorations for this sick ceremony, but they eat us as well!

I see them pick up a large, serrated knife and approach me, and I try to brace myself for what's about to happen. They hold me down and plunge the knife into my flesh. I can feel the sharp pain shooting through my entire body as they start sawing. The knife jaggedly cuts away at my skin. They rip the top of my head off, and I can feel it rip out parts of my brain along with it, and they start scraping away what's left. I wish desperately to lose consciousness, but it seems that whatever's keeping the corpses outside alive is keeping me awake.

I can feel an arm reach in through the hole, ripping out everything in its way, the tools scrape away, hollowing me out from the inside. I see my entrails pile up on the table beside me, watching what should be inside me sitting next to me. The last thing I see is that savage's grinning face as it plunges its knife into me.

I've never experienced such darkness. For a moment I'm floating, the only sound being the savage's feet creaking on the floorboards. Then I hear a click and the wind as I join my brothers. I'm put down, and the savage walks away. It feels like a long time has gone by when I hear the sound of screams carried by the wind, and I realize that the savages' holiday must have begun. Suddenly, there's a bunch of footsteps that come dashing towards me, and I hear a knocking on the savage's door. As the door creaks open, there is a jumbled shout of "TRICK OR

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TREAT" from a group of voices. I hear a crinkling noise as something comes closer to me, and an incredibly young voice says, "Wow! That's the coolest jack-o-lantern I've ever seen."