

Anne

By Oonah Barnes

"Would you like me to print a receipt?" The cashier asks, looking up from the screen and tilting her head to one side, black ponytail swishing. Her tired grey eyes bore through me. The fluorescent lights reflect in the speckled white tiles. I shake my head, "No thank you," and pick up my bags, shoes squeaking on the floor.

I walk briskly across the dim parking lot. My sedan's rusted door thuds heavily as I pull it shut, shaking the silence that had settled with nightfall.

It's nearly empty outside. Save a red Toyota, there's no sign of anybody else.

Once I pull out of the spot, I look over my shoulder at the store. The streetlights gently flicker, and for a moment, the lot goes black. I turn back to the road and keep driving. My car shudders, jolting me forward, but keeps moving steadily. The streets are nearly empty. Foreboding grey clouds line the western horizon.

I turn the radio on.

A pop song plays through a thick static, notes distorted. Trees start to envelop the sides of the road until they're all I can see in any direction, and the only thing lighting my path is my car's headlights. The music succumbs to static. I turn it off, letting the quiet of the night come rushing back.

"I know what you did".

The sound startles me, my hands suddenly contracting. I nearly crash into the hemlocks lining the road, but my head clears in time for me to swerve out of the way.

"You thought your diabolical little plan would work," a familiar voice hisses, *"You thought you knew what you were doing."*

I look over my shoulder, shaking.

There's nobody there.

I swallow, "No, no," I murmur to myself.

It can't be her.

She's gone.

The trees begin to blur; they all look the same.

The road gets narrower, a cliff is visible through a thin line of trees.

A single handprint appears on my windshield.

I try to scream, but no sound emerges from my mouth.

My fingers have become cold lead that my wrists strain to support.

I turn the windshield wipers on, but the handprint is still there. I crane my neck to check the road behind my car.

It's empty.

Another print appears, mirroring the previous one.

I squeeze my eyes shut for a second. This is not possible. This is not real. My heart is vibrating in my throat. I open them again.

A pale skeletal figure darts away into the trees.

Warm air rushes past my ear, *"Don't you remember me?"*

It's not possible.

She's not here.

Not anymore.

Sweat loosens my grip on the steering wheel.

Ahead on the road.

The figure.

"You don't recognize me?" I can't feel my body anymore.

My fingers slip.

Her pale blonde hair glows in the light.

Amber eyes.

Time stops.

My car crushes trees.

Slips off the edge.

Over the cliff.

It's Anne.

"I'm sorry," I whisper.

She laughs.

I fall.