The Prey in the Storm

By Laura Olmos

A young boy walks tensely in the vibrant forest, hearing the songs of the birds and the scurrying of a critter running past his feet. His head snaps towards the direction the little animal scurried off to, which then he began to follow.

Something drops from the sky; it is wet and light, but as more falls, it begins to engulf him. Rain. Harsh rain that won’t seem to end. The boy stops to look up at the sky with his pale blue eyes, wide open, the raindrops plunging into them and rolling off as though tears.

The boy closes his eyes giving them a gentle rub, then continues going down the same path. Seconds turn to minutes, and minutes to hours until it feels like days passing, but he is determined to keep going, for what reason, he doesn’t know. All he knows is that what he is running away from is very evil.

He puts one foot in front of the other; the thought of something catching him terrifies him to his soul. There is no way he will stop. Only when he knows he is safe will he catch his breath, never before.

He tripped; his head banging against the hard tree trunk with a loud thud. Blood drips down from his nose, rushing into his mouth, leaving a bad taste of iron and copper sharp on his tongue. His consciousness fades in and out while he starts to crawl. Grabbing wet dirt with one hand and exposed tree roots with the other, he pulls himself forward.

All the active animals run to find shelter. Foxes bundle in borrows, trying to stay out of the rain. Squirrels groom each other, seeking the comfort it brings. Birds huddle together for warmth, quietly chirping to each other in their own secret language. But as if sensing something the little boy couldn’t, all their beady black eyes snap to focus on an emerging figure, clouded with shadows.

A monstrous figure slouches, as though its long dangly arms are weighting it down towards the ground. A face so distorted and warped that the birds would have fled if not for the rain. The one thing that could be distinguished from this disgusting horror was the double barrel shotgun in its right hand. It drags the gun behind it with no care for the dangerous tool, as if it were a toy.

In desperation, the boy attempts to get away, clawing at the ground with flailing limbs. The muddy dirt is getting increasingly harder to hold; his legs slipping behind him. The air grows heavy with each breath. The tightness in his chest is painful, hindering his goal of escape.

His emotions are becoming overwhelming. Thoughts running too fast to fully understand his next action. He is going to die.

Fear is controlling his body, pushing, demanding, begging him to move. The small boy is desperate to do anything to get away from this monstrosity, but his muscles are pleading for him to stop, to give them a chance to rest. The pounding in his head becomes too painful to ignore. The more desperate the little boy becomes, the more his vision blurs. The trees blend into each other, looming overhead, as a possible end draws near.

This is all in vain. The creature aims the shotgun at the crawling boy. The safety on the gun clicks. A lanky crooked finger rests itself on the trigger. The boy tightly squeezes his eyes closed, hoping this dream, this nightmare, would end.

Silence.

A deathlike silence that bears the air of a funeral, unfit for the living forest.

Like the moments before an execution.

After a few seconds of stillness pass, a painful wail, sounding from the heart, is heard. His hands clench at his wounded knee, embracing it to his chest. Warm blood spills through his hands, staining them red, the smell of rust pouring out. The pain is blinding, white light fills his vision.

Smoke leaving the hot barrel of the shotgun, the last cartridge sits heavy inside. The shadow covered monster moves closer to the boy. It crouches down, tilting its head, to stare with vacant red eyes that pierce like daggers into his soul.

The long finger pulls the trigger again, the barrel right on his shoulder. The shot rips straight in and goes through to the other side, prompting another cry. The rain can’t hide the streaming tears that are pouring down his face. His hands clasp to the new source of pain, applying pressure to the open wound.

The gun, now useless, is left on the ground, laying dead. The creature, who knows that the boy will not survive for long, fades into the shadows behind him.

The boy slowly opens his eyes. He sees that the dangerous monster is truly gone and lets out a sigh of relief. This moment is short lived as pain jolts through his body once more. He can’t move, his arm and leg limp against the dirt. Moments pass. Blood continues to leave his rapidly paling flesh. His pulse grows slower and weaker.

His time is ending, never to see the morning again. Gazing into the night sky, pain wracking his body, the boy lets his head fall to the side. His pale blue eyes focus on the animal beside him, a decomposing bird with maggots wiggling through its flesh.

The young boy finds it ironic; he is going to be that bird, dead on the forest floor with no one to comfort him, no one to hold his hand as he takes his last breath.