

Face Changer

The Hollow Land - a place where life twists and contorts, where whispers sing in a phantom chorus. The stars there gleam like the eyes of the dead, scattered across a tattered veil of night, as the heart of the earth beats its hollow war drum. But it's all an illusion, my father had said. Shrouded behind that mirage is a place of faceless deer and silent birds.

I once dismissed it as a fireside tale, until the day I stumbled upon a rusted sign, its arrow beckoning toward the shadowy depths. A wave of awakening fear rippled down my spine as I stepped onto the cracked and forgotten road. The forest thickened, devouring the last of the light. Above, jagged branches clawed at a bruised and bleeding sky. The air turned still, deathly silent. The chirping of birds and the breath of the wind vanished beneath the weight of the shadows, leaving only the crunch of brittle leaves to echo in the dark.

Then, I saw them, hundreds of animals frozen in the inky darkness, a mangled fox with hollow eye sockets, a slender deer with a blank mask, a withered raccoon with an erased face - only emptiness. They stood motionless, devoured by the forest's choking darkness, as if life itself had been drained from them. I could only stare in horror as more creatures emerged, each faceless, hollow, and empty, swallowed mercilessly by the darkness.

I turned around to escape, shivering from head to toe, but my feet refused to move. I was rooted to the ground, paralyzed by sheer terror. The path I had taken earlier was gone, but in its place stood a man, my father.

"It's okay," he said, his voice warm and familiar, "You're safe now."

But my father died three years ago.

It was not my father. It was not the man who mysteriously disappeared after a hiking trip, not the man who had once held me in gentle arms, who comforted me when I was scared.

The man twisted his face into a grotesque smile. Flesh rippled and slid over itself, his face melted away, revealing only skin stretched tight over bone, as a low, wet slither of sound whispered through the air. More figures emerged from the forest, my mother, my best friend, my dog. All faceless. All wrong.

I turned and ran, blood hammering through my veins, lungs screaming with each gasp. The forest twisted around me, trunks forming steep walls, roots gripping my ankles. Branches tore at my skin as I stumbled into a clearing - and there it was: the Village of the Lost.

People wandered aimlessly, their faces stolen, their souls devoured, their identities erased. One slowly turned toward me, and I knew the shape of that face. Mine. My own face stared back at me, hollow-eye, lip curling into a silent, mocking grin that seemed to whisper my inevitable doom.

The Face Changer had chosen me. I screamed, but no sound escaped. My voice, like my face, had already vanished - claimed by the Face Changer.