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Men from the other villages have joined us. And we're searching for him now, each with a grim tattoo on his face, beating methodically the bushes and shrubs on the surrounding hillsides. With sharp sticks, later to be used as tomato-plant stakes and bird traps.

Already, we've flushed several rabbits and a mother quail. Which immediately gave us the broken-wing signal. "Be careful with the nest," the blacksmith mutters, wiping his eyes with charcoaled hands. The creatures stare wide-eyed, surprised that we ignore them. For we've been known to tear a rabbit limb from limb while its heart still beat. No one's hungry. We'll return another day.

(Last night, in the middle of the silver-dazzled night, the moon set to slice the mountain tops, he crawled. Through an open. He crawled through an open window. Plopped softly to the floor. Nipped with canine teeth the breast of the blacksmith's daughter. There must have been a scream. But no one heard it. She simply didn't arise this morning for breakfast. He howled as the moon drew his throat. I was too sleepy to recognize what he was saying. That he had nipped the breast of the blacksmith's daughter. That she had jerked up with her hand on the mutilated breast, a splotch of red against fervent white. Looked with dumb terror and slowly-stretching mouth at his head. At his smiling, tilting, quizzical head. That she had for a moment gazed past him to a gathering of surrogate stars (for she'd only imagined their existence). That she had fallen back. That the thick moonlight was at last penetrating her face. My wife shivered, rose from the bed and squatted in the corner, the steam rising warm beneath her. Shivering, she slipped beneath the quilt. We made signs of the cross, offered a prayer to the Virgin and returned to our separate dreams.)

The women in the village, after dressing her in donated white, have begun to pile wood in the central square. Each family provides

a portion of the ritual cord necessary to do the job. Some give a little less as they are old and beyond most harm. Others donate more. They have daughters the same age. Or sons that might begin to howl. Still others chain their horses to huge logs resembling dessicated monsters and drag them groaning to the square. These dig their limbs into the ground and resist. To no avail. For many days, till the cleansing rain, these grooves will be the only reminders of what has taken place. We'll all be careful not to step in them. They might begin to bleed again.

(Truth is, we had thought little of him till he stole her nipple. He lived alone in the mountains. In the high caves, adapting to his four-legged existence with the ease of someone who had planned it all in advance. But he disturbed no one and his occasional howls blended in with those of the real wolves. I, of course, recognized the difference — when I wanted to.

Still, we have no quarrel with the fiend. We all know what it means to fall beneath his shadow. Daily, we are flooded with stories of his new conquests, those we thought incorruptible succumbing to his blandishments, falling away like withered branches from the great tree. And daily, the army of misshapen animals he has gathered to worship at his altar grows. Yet, as you can see, we are understanding folk. Unlike other villages that rounded them all up on the occasion of the first full moon — when they emerged and went in search of plateaus, we let him be. "Let him be," the blacksmith said at the time. "Even my hammer does bad work once in a while." It was his daughter he would have married.)

We're only beating these bushes as a token measure. I know where he is. And I'll lead them there when the time comes. For the moment, unsure as we might be of everything else — this is our first hunt — it's certain the capture must be effected at night. So we have spent the afternoon moving in the wrong direction. Towards the village. Sometimes beating the same area two and three times. Overturning boulders where only mice and millipedes could hide. Some of our more impetuous youths, so filled with the lust of life, insist we haul him in immediately and "make an example of him." They know none of the ritual (even the most experienced among us are only vaguely aware of them). Not even the fundamental fact it must be done after the sun goes down. Else, she won't revive. I don't explain. They mumble words under their breaths and mutter accusations of false compassion. Because he's part of my family. Because he's my older brother. But I don't have to answer them. If they're not careful, they'll return less an eye. Or holding a useless

arm. In such a case, I'm perfectly within my rights to defend my name. Even the blacksmith himself, beating the bushes with the same steady hand he uses drumming on Easter Sunday, doesn't insist.

(The circuses, the former leper colonies, the prisons, are packed to the brim with people who can't stop dancing. Or howling. Or flicking their tongues. And — even though it's against some law — their keepers are provided with a steady supply of tarantulas. A sting for a dance. They recruit them from the hills, string them in long untethered lines (for who among them would dream of escape?): dancers, wolves, spiders, song-birds, bees, snakes. But we in the village are enlightened, have no use for such cruelty. Besides, Our Holy Mother Church has proven they're highly infectious. Many times, those watching begin to act in the same way. They must be purged.)

The fire's been lit. We see it, flicking multiple tongues into the night. Sparking and hissing. Spitting arcs of flame at the moon. It's imperative the village be kept bright, that all dark corners be banished. Both for us on these mountains and for the blacksmith's daughter. Invisible creatures with scarred red eyes creep along the edges of light, leaving the possibility of footprints. Searching for her. A howl. The blacksmith pauses for a moment on his stick's downward swing. Another. I shake my head beneath the torch. It's not my brother's howl. He can't erase completely the human element. My ears are tuned to his voice. When he could still talk, he kept mostly silent. Wandering about the village. Peering into windows. Smiling, head tilted. In the past few weeks, he has spoken to me often. But not tonight. Tonight, he's silent again. Or was I always interpreting senseless howls?

(The fiend takes whomever he wants whenever he wants. Except me. He can't take me. I've tried it. The tarantula, I mean. I've let it bite me repeatedly. Even in the most vulnerable spots, squirming with anticipated pain. But to no avail. In the end, it always crawls away in dejection, looking back balefully. Betrayed. Nothing can deliver me to madness. To that state of simple bliss. When I do howl, it's not through some external force, some manic pressure. But only in response to my own will. I'll always be human. With no hope of joining my brother in a spontaneous duet.)

Blood red fingers of sun fade away across the gorse. Time to change direction. The young men perk up. Those from the other villages have come far enough. Their duty done, they head for the

fire to await us. The rest of us turn one at a time. In this way surrounding the cave. Another formality. He won't run. The edges of my flesh tingle. I'm the lodestone, carrier of bad news and non-being. Fresh flowers were placed on my parents' grave this morning. In order to appease them. Forgive me, I whisper. Thick particles fly at me.

It's no use trying to lead the others astray. To some real wolf's den perhaps. Whose scarlet eyes would drive us into a frenzy. Would roll us down the mountain with the sticks becoming our worst enemies. No use. I'd always—at the last moment, at the last possible moment—point myself in the right direction.

(As a child, he ran through the streets with the stray dogs. Occasionally, I'd join in, but he knew I was there only to keep an eye on him.

The blacksmith's daughter had been promised him in marriage. They made a fine couple. Until he asked her to get down on all fours.)

Soon, soon. We'll catch sight of his cave. Small bones scattered across its entrance. Triangular piles no wolf could erect. But he hasn't killed these creatures whose bones he displays so gaudily. He only places them at the entrance to his cave in the belief it'll enhance his image before the other wolves. His tiny jaws aren't powerful enough to tear raw flesh. Except for nipples.

We'll poke our smoking torches with caution into its mouth. Comfortable in the thought that fire decomposes the savage beast. Sends it exploding in all directions. We'll find him huddled in a corner of the cave. In the farthest, deepest corner amid stench and defecation. His body packed into the least volume possible. His hands over his head in an attitude of surrender. Urinating as well? We'll circle him. Tie him to a stick. Bind him like a wounded deer to the stick. He'll look up at me, eyes filled with pulsing veins, blood rushing to his head. I'll cry out not to hurt him as they wave the torches across his face and along the ridge of his spine. And then proceed to poke him myself.

(The worst. The most embarrassing. Was when he removed all his clothes. Dropped his pants at the least provocation. Then, he could always be found in the middle of a crowd. Doing tricks. Panting. Sniffing at their legs. I made efforts to cover him up but he always tore the clothing off as quickly as possible. In a blind rage as if he were being suffocated. I feared his being caught naked, appendages dangling. I feared his nakedness would lead to even more brutal behaviour on the part of his captors. On my part.)

We'll drop him roughly in the village square. An explosion of dust. And surround him as he's untied. Incantations circle in the air. They drop like bits of hot fat to scald flesh: "Demon, hie thee home!" "Get thee gone into the pit!" "Into the dark with thee and thy kind!" The blacksmith's wife will attack him with a bloodied axe. Only to be repelled by a hammer-blow from her husband. Our incantations — I'll scream the loudest, implore God the most — will be of no avail. Two of the braver men — from the next village — will tie his hands behind him. And pass the stick between his shoulder-blades. I'll be crying. I'll be sobbing. Memories of childhood will cascade from me and tumble into the fire. Will be charred by the flames. Will be spit out again in throbbing lumps of meat and gristle.

(The body of the blacksmith's daughter has been prepared. Those weeping against it no longer notice the powdered stain above her left breast. They're distracted by the fragrance of roses. The thick braids of garlic. The fact that soon she might be breathing again.)

The priest — the wizened priest — will emerge from his tiny chapel and bless the air. Someone is sneaking away to fornicate behind a hut. We'll turn our backs to the fire. Our shadows moving with the flames, playing crudely against the priest's vestments. For the first time, I'll feel a loathing, a disgust, for my brother. Here he is, being cleansed — "Leave the soul of this foul sinner, oh accursed demon. Make way for the bounty of the lord." And he lies there.

Motionless. Cowering. Not once howling. One howl. One howl and I'll fight the village for him. One howl and . . . Nothing. Only a tinny yelping whenever the priest orders the demons to enter the boar tethered to a grass rope. Thin and diseased. Squealing for mercy. No one but a blind fiend could be fooled into accepting such a substitute. Or a god, perhaps, who takes the larded bones and leaves the meat.

I'll ask myself over and over why he isn't howling. What's wrong with him? The priest will drone on as we prod him. Push him. Close the circle. There's a demon here in the form of my brother. Animal grunts from behind a hut. I must push and prod him the hardest. His appearance is most deceiving. But he means nothing to me. Less than nothing. It's only a demon. Only a red-eyed, four-legged, forked-tailed . . . only a . . . With a moon-warping scream, the blacksmith will lift my brother into the air. High over his head. And hurl him into the fire. Something drops on the way. Falling from my brother's mouth. I crawl over to pick it up. Now the howls begin. The priest re-blesses the air. And turns away. The pig has been spared. Its owner can now offer it to God. The howls continue. They're not my brother's. He has no voice. The blacksmith's daughter will rise abruptly. Scream out last night's moon slicing the mountains and the stars crowning her head. There is a shout of joy. We've succeeded in cleansing her of the fiend's stain.

With the bloodless nipple in my mouth, knowing at last why my brother refused to howl, I'll scramble away. Falling over two spent bodies behind the hut. Rising again. Away from the fire. Whipping my fists into the air. Away from the fire that's searching for my eyes. Running. Scurrying down the snaky paths where a sharp stick waits. Impaled. Impaled by the giant who holds me wriggling in the air. I smile.

(But now, at this moment, at precisely this moment and at no other time, after slowly beating the bushes in search of his cave, I am standing over him, I am standing over my brother, I am standing frozen over my brother in the midst of a procession of torches, with both hands fastened to a stick lifted high, later to be used as a bird-trap, now at its peak, at its moment of descent, about to crush his skull, I am the giant reflected in his red eyes, at this moment, at no other.)