

ALEXANDRA DALEY

Survival Instinct

There is something within us, and it is logical and unforeign but unnoticed. Even the animals sense it: the brainial stun that tells us what is pain, what is fear.

But here, in the autumn forest, it is different.

The moon is a mere suggestion—scribbled light on a depressed sky—and the fallen leaves are stiff sheets on the ground, covering the path I once followed. Weathered trees bend down, and I can feel their sunken backs, can hear the echo of snapped bark. They collapse like I do, their limbs thinning into the dirt as if they want to leave and cannot. I must have travelled far to get here, and now, our growth stilled, the forest and I linger beneath a sky ruined and unsafe.

Only the shadows are orderly, always one step ahead or behind, showing us where we will be or where we have been. Like fortune tellers, they have a message: reach for the moon who knows what will happen. She tells no lies. But I do not yet see how the moon trembles and hangs on to the fading dark or that she harbors an unspeakable truth, like the sea birds that fly inland to avoid the coming storm.

This autumn has been here too long and I have been here too long with it. Days, and the forest thickens with brown, becoming a maze where trees dispute my attempts to find the sun and reach the orange-filling sky. They say I am wrong.

The moon's face is carved of bone.