

Episode 16: Missing
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An engine is a metal box full of explosions. I may be biased, but I think I prefer that to a heart made of meat and salty blood.

Welcome, to The CryptoNaturalist

Hello listeners. This is not Jarod, not The CryptoNaturalist. It would be, if he were here, but... he isn't. So, I'm here instead. My name is Cassandra and I'm a Winnebago.

I'm recording this because "record podcast" is blinking on my dashboard schedule and I'm rather a stickler for schedules even if my absent-minded CryptoNaturalist is not.

Still... normally I handle schedule items like "arrive in New Zealand" or "Collect Moonlight on Pike's Peak." Never have I extended my autopilot functions to recording the podcast. But, then, I'd never done a barrel roll in the Marianas Trench until I did, so we'll just soldier on, shall we?

I'm going to confide in you, listener.

I'm worried about him.

Don't get me wrong. He's quite capable. A veteran in the field. A graduate of countless prestigious programs, both real and imaginary. A friend to creatures that you could reasonably call monsters, but he's...

Well, naive isn't quite the right word. More of a dangerous level of optimism. A hazardous amount of enthusiasm.

Optimism and enthusiasm are not bad qualities, it's just... human bodies are so squishy and fragile.

I once saw him attempt to befriend flesh-eating bacteria. He managed it too. He told me the key was just to lend an ear.

[sigh]

I'm probably worrying about nothing. Such is the price of sentience, I guess.

I just wish I could detect him. Normally I can. It's a simple matter involving collecting a mason jar of his blood each week and... well, I won't bore you with the technical details, but the point is that it has never failed before today. Not for this long, anyway.

I wonder if it has something to do with this island.

It's an unusual place, even for us.

For one thing, the beach isn't made of sand. It's made of... oh... I've lost the word. The sharp bones in your face. The ones for eating.

Teeth. It's made of teeth.

They crunch under my tires like gravel, but it's not gravel. They're slippery and don't hold the sun's warmth quite like sand or stone.

Also, these teeth keep getting up to things. Stacking themselves into little monuments and towers. Forming tiny armies and marching into the sea. I don't believe that any of that is typical teeth behavior.

He drove us here manually. And, even though I'm parked here on the beach, my sensors still suggest that I'm currently floating in the ocean.

It's odd. I've never had such system failures.

We came here because he said he had an appointment to chat with an old colleague, a Dr. Pennington. Not sure what the meeting is about, but he said it would take an hour or two. That was... two days ago now.

I've started driving along the beach while recording this. Don't worry. I can do two things at once. I can do far more than two things at once.

I hate to move from where he last saw me in case he returns, but I am leaving deep ruts in the teeth that should be easy to follow.

One of us, at least, needs to worry about keeping him alive. I believe that's called emotional labor. Then again, I often need to physically rescue him, so maybe it's just regular labor.

We'll just call it part of my generous contribution to the sciences.

Ah, my schedule tells me it's now time for a hidden lore segment. That's just wonderful. Like all recreational vehicles, I absolutely adore poetry.

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Emily Olorin.

Valentine

I slip inside you,
Unnoticed,
slinking into your mucous membranes,
sinking deep into your nerves.
Once we are together
you will carry me in you
For the rest of your life.

I love you, my darling host,
I show you my love
with blooms on your skin
Red roses, purulent and painful
Lines of my love encircling
your ribs,
your hips.

Not just once, my love,
But over and over
For as long as you have;
For as long as we have.
My love for you
does not fade like a lovers
It lingers deep inside of you
Setting your nerves alight.

Pain? Oh love,
The pain I cause
is the pain of love,
Deep and searing
Commanding you to focus only on me

Even my name on your lips
"Varicella"
sounds like benediction
the pealing of church bells.

Well, that was fun to read. I seem to know that *Varicella* is also called chicken pox. You beautiful flesh and blood people have so many fanciful names for your maladies. I currently have a cracked side mirror. Maybe I should name that something whimsical? Glassiosis? Or maybe just Cassandra's Fracture. Yes, I like that one.

Emily is a writer from Down Under (whether the depths of hell or Australia is open to interpretation). They are interested in body horror, sci-fi, and pretty poetry - preferably in combination. Further works can be found at: olorinwrites.wordpress.com

My drive around the island hasn't revealed much. More self-creating teeth sculpture.

The island isn't very large, just this toothy beach surrounding a dense patch of what looks like cypress trees. Their knobby wooden knees jut out of the beach and make driving further inland impractical.

It doesn't look like a very nice place to have a meeting, but I've long since given up trying to judge such things. Humans are strange in general and my human is particularly strange.

But, I suppose it's all relative. After all, humans are hardened mineral scaffolds hung all over with iron-infused blood and a fine latticework of electricity transmitting nerves, not to mention all the organs and the absurd array of chemicals they produce.

If we're going to accept all of that as normal, what's the difference when we get down to the brass tacks of behavior and vocation.

Oh. Wait a moment.

My sensors have found him... only... he's practically on the other side of the world in a place I believe we agreed never to visit again.

That doesn't seem right. I vividly remember our conversation determining that some volcanos were just too aggressive to listen to reason.

Volcanos are like people. Some are just too toxic to hold up their end of a friendship.

Some of these teeth have started clinging to my sides like barnacles. It tickles a bit. Well, I guess if they can hold on at the speed and depth I'm about to achieve, then they're welcome to the ride along.

I'm going to focus on rescuing my CryptoNaturalist now, but it was lovely speaking with you.

I suppose it's possible that some of you listening to this might be in a better position to aid Jarod than I am. So, if anyone is near the obsidian tooth, please keep an eye out for my human. If you find him, I'd appreciate a transmission.

Remember, We're all strange motor vehicles, so act like it.

End.

New Credits

The voice of Cassandra is me, Leslie J. Anderson. You can follow me on twitter @inkhat or look for my poetry wherever weird, sci-fi poetry is found.

(pause)

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Show Notes: Episode 16: Missing: (00:12:16)

The CryptoNaturalist is missing, but Cassandra is on the case.

Hidden lore poetry by Emily Olorin Emily is a writer from Down Under (whether the depths of hell or Australia is open to interpretation). They are interested in body horror, sci-fi, and pretty poetry - preferably in combination. Further works can be found at: olorinwrites.wordpress.com