



The Ambassadors

Every hour, on the hour, a ghost train dissects my village. The tracks tell no tale of the passing monster, just cold steel laid to transport our coal-mining ambitions out of this rural prison: mountains the weathered walls, winter our warden. Every hour, on the hour, that whistle blows and I am torn asunder—whiskey my warm conductor.

I drink to the moon, I drink to the stars, and each night I sleep like a tie and have ambitions to die—two cold beams running along the crook of my neck and the bend in my knee. Each night I pray the humming is real, something more than this apparition, this hollow holy ghost.

The train stops once a year, the doom and gloom of a visiting darkness. The whistle still howls—every hour, on the hour—calling the saints to ready their day. And on this day, when the train stops, the township ambles to the tracks, like the promise of a parade, to see the haunting horrors. As the ambassador, I crawl off my bed to welcome our guests, the traveling circus of goblins and ghouls, banshees and abominations.

The demons though, they belong to us.

I drink. I drink like my father before me and his father before him, ambassadors just the same. The whiskey warms as the fires start, of house and home, of fur and of feather. The watchers wail to the

plunder and curse, tears accompanying an occasional cough—

The coal mine will kill us all, like our fathers before us and their fathers before them. But suffering works slow; tonight we watch the devils dance—

And everyone looks to me, the man who sleeps with the trains, as if I could stop the charades. But this isn't my mess, this isn't my fight. I only go there, to the tracks, to die—if only in my dreams.

I look to the faces: the gluttons, the greedy, the ones who touch where their hands *do not* belong. These are the neighbors, the councilmen, the ones who watch our children. These are the faces that strip the land, rape the resources, and take without tribute. These are the faces that have forgotten animals still kick and scream when we slit their throats and drain their blood.

I drink to forget, I drink to forgive; I cough with them, but I do not sleep with them. They do not know I choose these tracks because I have more to fear than goblins and ghouls, banshees and abominations.

The train only stops once a year, but every hour, on the hour, it tears through me. I go to sleep at night, alone and asunder, the nape of my neck on the cold of the beam, knowing fully well there are far worse things in this world to have nightmares about.

