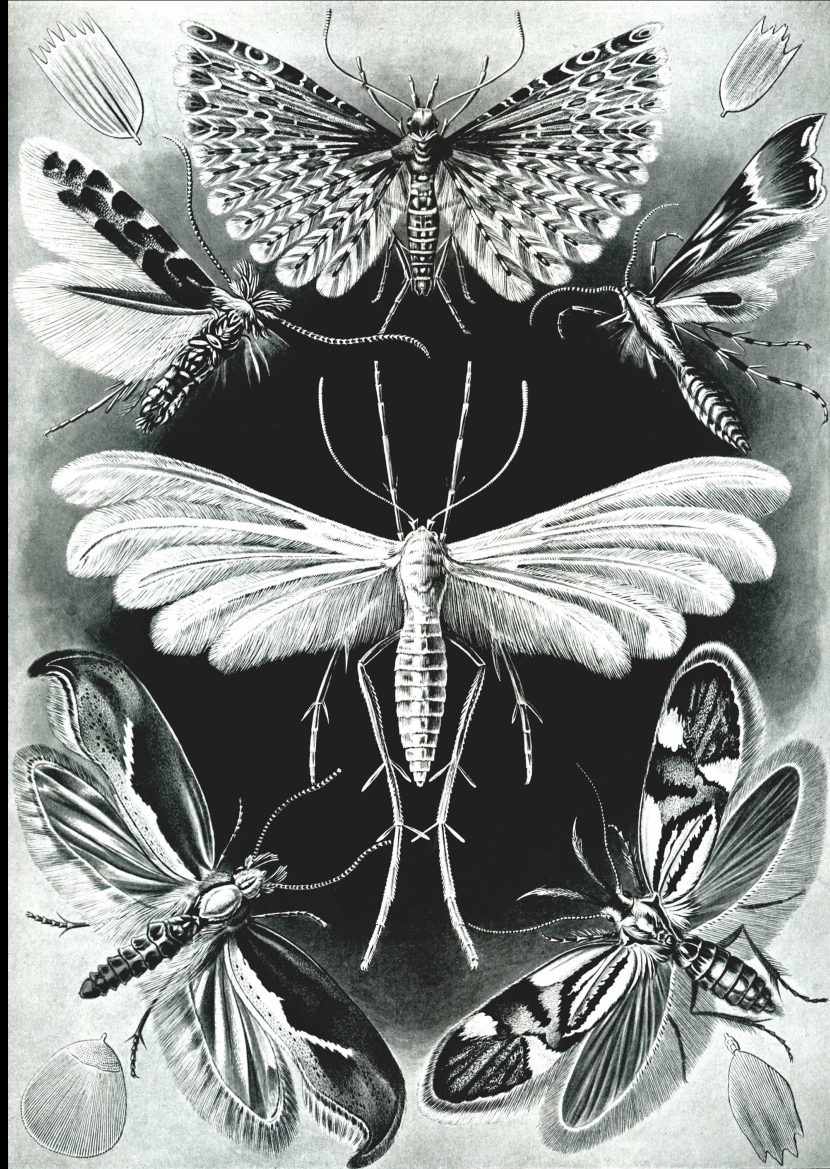


Blackest Ever Hole



Brian O'Blivion

An Act of Kindness

You got towns where moss gets tossed around.
And towns where wind fusses up dust in your
mouth. We got rolling heads. We got heads that
roll right up to where you're standing, look up
at you with their weird and wide pleading eyes,
mouthing sorry sentences. Lips like the legs of
lab frogs on a slab, twitching sticky and
staticky. Lifeless heads all the same.

It's said that if a rolling head rolls its way over to you, stops at your feet, that means you're obliged to scoop it up off the blackened ground, cradle it in the crook of your arm, and go find a body that's a good—or at least decent—fit for it. Peruse the shelves down at the service shops. It's a hell of a blessing to get found by a rolling head. A body joined, all oiled-up and slick as a slut, a layer of gauze between the worst asbestos winds and those pink parts that make you all too human.

Sometimes you see guys walking around the dust fields with their hands in their pockets, late night or early morning, kicking up dust, wandering around hoping to God a head will roll along and stop right there, right where they're standing. It's not so hard to imagine that sort of loneliness, is it?

The worms underground take everyone to the end of the line. I get on and wait. Sliding through the rooty and plugged webbing of the land. I get off and stop off at a water fountain. It's bone-dry.

This town is all circles; there's no such thing as sharp turns. There's nowhere to hang your coat. Not since the bedbugs started nesting in everything soft. They nest in the folds of facial tissue, festering in the pink plumbing of your neck—those loathsome bugs.

Outside beneath the horrible metal sky, I see a head rolling down the street. A dozen or so guys, they lunge for it, try to get in front of it, make the thing stop in front of their feet. But it doesn't stop. Just hops, flops around them with a spring-like intensity. I can't really blame them for trying, those guys. Just like I can't really blame the head for not wanting to stop for just any sad sack.

Dead-ends can be all kinds of awful if you come up against one and you don't know where you're going or where to turn to. I've spent too much time outside lately. I've sucked in too much dust. By now I've coughed up a bag of blood. Least I think it's blood. It could be tar.

Tonight on the television there's a program about sub-humanoid toddler creatures.

My refrigerator's filled-to-bursting with meat. I can't stop buying it. Ribs, T-bone steaks, ground chuck—it doesn't matter what it is.

The butcher, he doesn't have a name. You hardly hear the thunk, thunk, thunk of his cleavers ever since the cows and pigs and horses have gone missing. Can't say where they were trying to get to. Maybe drowned crossing the rivers or buried in the ash seas. It doesn't matter, really. What matters is that they're gone.

So I do my part. Chip in. I buy as much meat from him as I can afford and I stock it away. He'll keep his cleavers sharp a little longer, until things turn around. And I'll never forget the smell of something that lived as it turns—a reminder, really, for what's worming around beneath any sort of glow I might accidentally let myself feel on any given someday.