



Speed of Light by Robert John Miller

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They were on the run with everything they would ever need, mostly the two bags full of eyeballs sitting in the backseat of their 2003 Hyundai Elantra hatchback, but also the other two bags full inside the hatch, driving a steady cruise-controlled 65 miles per hour straight across Texas. John, chair back and feet up on the passenger's side, carried another handful as back-up in a fanny pack strapped around his waist. Every few miles he'd toss one in his mouth, swish it around like the remnants of a boba tea, and launch it out the window.

"Those are supposed to be back-up eyeballs, John," Mary said. "You keep chawin' 'em up we're not gonna have any left."

"I know, baby," John said. "But the balls are just too good."

"You keep spittin' them eyeballs, somebody gonna notice."

"It ain't illegal to have eyeballs," John said. "We got four inside our head right now."

"You ain't gonna have any eyeballs in your head, you keep spittin' 'em," Mary said.

"Keep the window down but quit spittin' 'em. It stinks in here."

"Ain't nobody back in Webberville gonna say they seen nothin', babe. We got all their eyeballs right back there."

John maneuvered his left arm back behind him to dip into one of the bags to pop a few.

"If I can't swish 'em then I'm gonna squish 'em," he said, and the Elantra revved up to 75 to pass the only other car on the road.

"You're so dumb," Mary said. "Just set still."

Nearly all species of animal have evolved some sort of eye, which is a body part that reacts to light. There are about ten different types of eyes, from a pinhole eye, which operates without a lens like a pinhole camera, to eyes like adult human eyes, filled with jelly. There is at least one species whose entire skin acts like an eye, seeing everything in front of it. Other species have eyes that are very good at sensing types of light that humans cannot sense, which lets them figure out which way is up when they're out flying around. There happens to be more ways of seeing than there are number of eyeballs in the world.

"Five-hundo a ball. And we got what, four-thousand? That's, like, a million dollars, baby. I'm squishin' up a million dollars back here. We're like a pawnshop for eyeballs, baby. They're gonna call us heroes."

The crime worked like this: You find a small town, a couple thousand population, one bank. You rob that bank. You cut the phone lines, you cut the electricity, you cut the back-up generators (should they have them). Make sure to wear a mask. You take whatever money the bank has on hand, probably a few thousand dollars: That's your gas money. That's your snack money. If you get stopped here, everything looks like just another heist. But this is all just the setup.

Once you have all the staff and all the patrons and any security calm and restrained, and you've collected all their phones and valuables and weapons, and you're sure no one else in town has been alerted that something is going on at the bank, that's when you start the real operation.

Because this isn't a bank robbery at all.

You pull out your melon scoops.

This is an eyeball robbery.

"Looky here," John said, holding up his left hand with an eyeball on each finger, stuck right through the pupil. "Just like them olives on Thanksgiving."

The human body, on the whole, is very expensive to maintain. It must constantly be fed, watered, exercised, stimulated. It takes up most of most people's time. And yet, the sum is worth less than its parts. You're wearing a multi-million-dollar suit, right now. Blood. Hair. Heart. Lungs. Kidneys. Livers. Eggs or sperms. Skin and bones, and bone marrow. And corneas. Corneas are part of the eye. In fact, corneas are among the most in-demand.

"Now looky here," John said back in Webberville, practicing in the mirror. "In the land of no-eyes, the people with bags full of 'em are king. We just happened to just find these fresh eyeballs just settin' by the road. Just settin' there. Now if you want some eyeballs we got some to sell, no questions asked. Maybe not exactly two eyeballs for everybody but I'm gonna guess pretty darn close."

Later, everyone in town would buy back their eyeballs and no one would be interested in asking any questions because they would already know the answers. But the eyes will have gone bad by the time most people get hold of them, so they will just put them in jars by the sides of their beds.

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Biography

Robert John Miller's work has appeared in New Flash Fiction Review, X-R-A-Y, Peregrine, Monkeybicycle and others. You can find more stories at robertjohnmiller.com. He lives in Chicago and is working on a novel.

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