

Roly-Poly
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EXT. OLD BARN - NIGHT

The old wooden building stands alone in an abandoned field.

A gentle and consistent PATTING is heard.

INT. OLD BARN - NIGHT

AMY SANTIAGO (25) is tied in a chair and gagged. Her blonde hair covers her slumped over face. A kerosine lantern sits on a nearby wooden crate.

The PATTING is louder, though still soft.

She stirs. Through her hair, she sees ROLY-POLY, a chubby black man (40) standing nearby. His back is to her and--

He's juggling!

Numerous wooden balls land in his hands with the gentle PAT and are immediately thrown up into darkness. It's too dark to tell how many he's actually juggling.

Amy MOANS.

 ROLY-POLY
 (southern accent)
I was wondering if you was ever
gonna wake up.

She struggles in her chair. She says something, but her gag makes it unintelligible.

 ROLY-POLY
Heck! Sun's gonna be up in less'n
an hour.

Her screams are MUFFLED by the gag.

 ROLY-POLY
I know. I know. You're Daddy's
the chief of police. Your boy-
friend's a bounty hunter and
they'll kill me if'n I touch you.
I heard it all before, Missy.

He continues juggling.

 ROLY-POLY
Do you know what the world record
is for juggling wooden balls is?
Sixteen! Sixteen balls!

The balls flow between his hands and the darkness above him.

ROLY-POLY

My personal record's forty-nine.
Forgot when it was, but Teddy
Roosevelt was in office. I
remember that.

He turns toward her, leaving the balls to drop to the ground.

There are DOZENS OF THEM!

They fall to the ground in loud THUDS and bounce around.

ROLY-POLY

Kept them up for fourteen
alligator!

He wears once-colorful clothing. Old lace trim and buttons.
Colorful patches are sewn over the elbows and knees.

Amy screams something through her gag.

ROLY-POLY

You know. One alligator. Two
alligator. Three alligator...

She says something completely unintelligible.

ROLY-POLY

Okay, you lost me with that one.

He reaches for her gag but stops before grabbing it.

ROLY-POLY

If you scream, I shove it back in
again, okay?

He pulls the rag from her mouth.

AMY

Please don't hurt me. Please.

ROLY-POLY

Why do you think I'm gonna hurt
you, Missy?

He looks at her ropes.

ROLY-POLY

Oh yeah. Forgets about them...

AMY
Please let me go. I promise I
won't tell anyone.

ROLY-POLY
If'n I kill you, you won't tell
anyone.

Roly-Poly shoves the rag into her SCREAMING mouth.

ROLY-POLY
Okay. That came out wrong and I'm
sorry. I apologize.

She stares at him in utter horror.

ROLY-POLY
Can we try all over again? I take
the rag outta your mouth? And you
don't scream?

He pulls the rag out.

AMY
Please don't kill me...

ROLY-POLY
Kill you? I ain't gonna kill you,
Missy. I admit, when I first saw
you in that bar, I was thinking it.
Thinking of feeding on you.

He steps over to the wooden balls. He backspins one on top
of his foot and kicks it up in the air.

ROLY-POLY
But now, I ain't.

The ball lands gracefully on the back of his hand. He raises
and lowers his arm. The ball rolls up and down it.

AMY
Feeding?

ROLY-POLY
Feeding. Yes'm.

He flicks his arm and the ball leaps in the air. It lands
gently on his other arm. He steps toward her.

AMY
W-why? Are you a cannibal?

ROLY-POLY

No.

He throws the wooden ball in the air. It lands in a baggy pocket in his jacket.

He leans close to her. In the lantern's light, she sees his bright red eyes. A smile reveals his FANGS.

ROLY-POLY

But you're close.

She GASPS. As she opens her mouth to scream, he gently put his hand over it, stopping her.

He pulls his hand away, pointing a controlling finger at her.

ROLY-POLY

Is your name, by chance, Hemmings?

AMY

Hemmings? No.

ROLY-POLY

You ain't a Hemmings?

AMY

Hemmings was my mother's maiden name.

He CLAPS his hands once, smiling.

ROLY-POLY

I knew it! I could smell it!
Could smell it in your blood.

AMY

What?

ROLY-POLY

Blood is like your name, Missy.
You pass it down to your children.
And I could smell it in your blood
that you's a Hemmings.

AMY

What are you talking about?

ROLY-POLY

You had a grandmother, or a great
grandmother named Charlene
Hemmings, right?

AMY
I don't know.

ROLY-POLY
Don't know?

AMY
I never met my great grandmother.

ROLY-POLY
Died in 1870? Under very weird
circumstances.

AMY
(long beat)
My mother and grandmother use to
tell me that my great grandmother
was killed by a wolf--

He steps to the other balls. He points to her, smiling.

ROLY-POLY
That's her! She was killed in her
home on November 24th. I remember
'cause it was the day before Thanks-
giving. But it wasn't no wolf!

He backspins another ball on his foot and kicks it up in the
air. It lands in the same pocket as the other with a CLICK.

ROLY-POLY
It was me.

He nods his head playfully.

ROLY-POLY
She was on the porch waiting for
your great granddaddy to come home.
I was hunting when I saw her there.

AMY
You killed her? You--you drank her
blood?

ROLY-POLY
Hey, if'n I don't eat, I die. Just
like you.

AMY
And now you're going to kill me?
Drink my blood?

She squirms in her seat.

ROLY-POLY
 (pauses thoughtfully)
 No. No Missy. I ain't.

She stops and looks at him.

ROLY-POLY
 I'm not.

He kicks a wooden ball. It bounces off a support beam and ricochets upward. Looking at her, he casually catches it.

ROLY-POLY
 You like stories, Missy?

He rolls the ball along the back of his hand.

ROLY-POLY
 I love stories. Love hearing them.
 Love telling them.

AMY
 What are you talking about?

ROLY-POLY
 Stories! When I was a youngun'
 that was all we had. Didn't cost
 nothing to tell. Didn't cost
 nothing to hear.

He looks at her and sees the terror in her face.

ROLY-POLY
 Still think I'm gonna kill ya.
 Don'tcha?

She meekly NODS.

ROLY-POLY
 Well, I ain't. I ain't because of
 your great grandmama. 'Cause you
 remind me of who I use to be.

She looks at his smiling face, confused.

EXT. TOBACCO PLANTATION - 1860'S - DAY

A southern plantation in all it's splendor. Slaves work the grounds, under supervision of the overseers.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
 I was born on a tobacco plantation
 in Davidson County, Tennessee
 somewhere around 1838--

SLAVES build a barn.

A pulley raises a large crate of shingles to the roof. Roly-Poly (35) stands at the roof's edge, juggling three hammers. When the crate reaches him, he takes it--

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
 Where I was a carpenter for my
 master, David Daniels. Don't think
 I left the plantation more'n three
 or four times, my entire life.

And brings it over where other slaves work on the roof.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
 For most of us, this was all we
 knew. We worked for Master Daniels
 and that was it.

He looks in the distance. War-torn Confederate soldiers drag themselves along a nearby road, like an army of walking dead.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
 Worked for him even after President
 Lincoln freed us in 1865, on
 account that no one told us.

EXT. PLANTATION ROAD - DAY

A dozen BLACK MEN and WOMEN walk together; BLACK CHILDREN follow them. They're dressed in rags and carry bags and boxes with them. In the background is the plantation.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
 Wasn't until after harvest time in
 1869 that we found out the truth.
 We was free men...

The group reaches a crossway in the road. They look up and down the road. Roly-Poly has a concerned look on his face.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
 Problem was, we had no place to go.

A few men in the group nod goodbye to the others and walk up the road.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)

No one set things up for us. What
they was gonna do with all these
free colored folk?

Two adults and three children slowly walk the other way,
staying close together. They leave Roly-Poly and another
man, DONNY (30), by the gate.

ROLY-POLY

I heard something about forty acres
and a mule, but I didn't see none
of it--

They shrug their shoulders and walk up the road.

INT. BARN - PRESENT - NIGHT

Roly-Poly leans against a corral gate, looking at Amy.

ROLY-POLY

Maybe Master Daniels kept them
things from us, like he kept our
freedom as long as he did.

He steps from the gate and wanders around Amy.

ROLY-POLY

Me and Donny headed north together.
We grew up on the plantation
together. Worked together. Ain't
never been apart.

EXT. CHURCH GROUNDS - 1870'S - DAY

Roly-Poly builds a picket fence around a small church.
Nearby, Donny saws planks on wooden horses.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)

We found enough work between us,
even if it was mostly for food and
a place to stay.

An elderly black woman steps up to Roly-Poly. She gives him
a tin cup which he happily drinks from. The two talk (MOS).

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)

We never knew if we'd have a roof
over our heads or a hot meal in our
belly, but we didn't mind...

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Roly-Poly stirs a pot over a small fire as Donny drinks from a bottle. Roly-Poly takes it and drinks.

Lively fiddle music is faintly heard.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
We had our freedom.

Donny points off in the distance, talking to Roly-Poly (MOS).

Covered wagons are parked nearby. Several figures move around a fire. One person plays a violin.

Roly-Poly and Donny watch until one figure steps from the darkness. They jump to their feet upon seeing her.

KEISHA, a beautiful black woman (25) with perfect skin and seductive eyes, steps up to the two. Her long silken dress flows in the breeze, giving the illusion of gliding.

They look at her, amazed.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
Her name was Keisha. She and her family were free slaves like me and Donny. And they was heading north.

She says a few words to them (MOS), smiling. They smile back, like anxious school kids.

The two follow her to the wagons.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
They saw our fire and said they wanted to have us for dinner--

INT. BARN - PRESENT - NIGHT

Roly-Poly leans over to Amy, face-to-face with her.

ROLY-POLY
Believe it or not, that joke was old in my day.

EXT. CAMP - 1870'S - NIGHT

Donny struggles as several vampires feast ecstatically on him. Blood sprays everywhere.

Keisha holds Roly-Poly, a few feet away. He squirms, terrified, but can't break free. She smiles at him.

She sinks her teeth into his neck. Blood trickles down his chest. He immediately goes limp; his eyes are lifeless.

INT. BARN - PRESENT - NIGHT

Roly-Poly stands in front of Amy, looking somber.

Long awkward silence.

ROLY-POLY

I died that night... You hear about how folks are reborn when they become vampires, but we ain't... We die.

Amy looks at him. Some of her fear is replaced with sadness.

ROLY-POLY

And that ain't nothing I'll never forget. Never... You think being a slave is being powerless and not having no control. Let me tell you. Dying's something else.

He brushes the hair from her face, revealing bright blue eyes. He looks at them. Sadness grows on his face.

ROLY-POLY

And I hope that's something you ain't never have to know about for a long time.

With a quick tug, the ropes fall off Amy. She looks at him.

AMY

You're letting me go?

ROLY-POLY

Yes'm.

She slowly gets up, watching him. He stands next to her, humbled--almost guilty. She walks to the doorway, cautiously and frightened.

Roly-Poly doesn't move. He stands, head hung low.

ROLY-POLY

Missy?

She turns to him.

ROLY-POLY
If'n you don't mind, I'd like to
finish my story...

She stops.

ROLY-POLY
My story's real important. Please?
I hardly get to talk to nobody no
more. It'd be nice if you stayed,
even for a little while.

She slowly steps toward him. He smiles at her, sadly.

ROLY-POLY
Thank you, Missy.

INT. COVERED WAGON - 1870'S - NIGHT

Three vampires hold the struggling Roly-Poly down.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
I barely even remember what
happened for the two days and
nights after that.

Keisha sits near his head, watching. She looks concerned.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
I fought like the devil, hisself.
And when you become a vampire,
you's suddenly five or ten times
stronger than when you was alive.

One of Roly-Poly's arms breaks loose from his captors. He fights and overpowers the others.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
I was strong from being a field
nigger. Those that killed me,
well, they was all house niggers
when they lived...

Silhouettes on the wagon's canvas walls show one figure thrashing at the others, savagely overpowering them.

The lone figure is brutal, snapping necks and beating his opponents until there's nothing left of them. He leaps from the wagon--

It's ROLY-POLY!

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
They didn't stand a chance.

His eyes dart left and right, filled with fear.

He runs off into the night.

INT. BARN - PRESENT - NIGHT

Amy leans against her chair, a short distance away from Roly-Poly. He picks an old canvas backpack from the floor.

ROLY-POLY
Only thing is, I didn't know what
was happening to me.

He fishes through his pockets for the wooden balls and drops them into the bag.

ROLY-POLY
Didn't know I was becoming a--you
know...

AMY
A vampire?

ROLY-POLY
Didn't even hear that word for
nearly sixty years. Didn't know
what a vampire was.

EXT. SMALL FARMHOUSE - 1870'S - NIGHT

An oil lamp lights the porch of this tranquil scene.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
Didn't know what I was.

INT. FARMHOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

The bodies of a man and a small child lay on the wooden floor, covered in blood.

On a nearby table, the bloodied corpse of a woman lays on the table, next to a kerosine lamp. Horror is written across her face and in her dead eyes.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
Just that I was hungry.

Roly-Poly sits on a stool, in the corner, elbows on knees and chin in hands. He looks down at the corpse by his feet.

A young girl.

Roly-Poly lifts his head up, looking around. Blood drips down his mouth.

Tears roll his cheeks.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
And terrified... After you feed,
that's when you feel the guilt of
what you done.

He gets up and hurries to the door, eyes darting around.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
And that's when you hear all their
screams in your head.

He runs out the door and into the night.

INT. BARN - PRESENT

Roly-Poly drops two more balls in his bag. He looks tired.

ROLY-POLY
I never was a violent man when I
was alive. Even when Master
Daniels had us whipped, I never--

He looks at her, pleading his case.

ROLY-POLY
When we found out he kept us after
we was free men--I never thought of
doing anything bad to him.

He paces the floor. She jumps with every move he makes.

ROLY-POLY
Believe me, Missy. I always been
good. Never cause trouble for no
one. But this demon in me... When
he's hungry, he takes over. And he
leaves me with the guilt.

EXT. DARK FARMHOUSE - 1870'S - NIGHT

A bloodied hand grabs the frame of an open door.

Roly-Poly pulls himself out the door. He runs off, leaving behind a bloodied print.

 ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
The worst of it was, with each
feeding--

EXT. LAKESIDE - NIGHT

A body floats in the water, lit by moonlight.

Roly-Poly stands by the water's edge.

 ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
The guilt grew less and less.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Three men in Klu Klux Klan robes ride horses along a dirt road. Two of them carry torches. They AD LIB chatter.

 ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
It was, like, with each night, my
hunger was more important than the
lives of people around me.

Roly-Poly runs from the woods. A quick blur, he leaps up and grabs one of the Klansmen, dragging him into the night.

 ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
Some lives more'n others.

EXT. RURAL HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a quaint little house.

CHARLENE HEMMINGS (35) sits in a rocking chair, lit by a kerosine lamp.

 ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
Then came the night I found myself
in Quincy, Missouri. Wasn't part
of no plan. I was just there...

She's very prim and proper-looking. She sews a shirt collar.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
And so was your great grandmama.

Roly-Poly stands next to a tree, not even trying to hide.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
She was waiting for your great
granddaddy. A member of the local
chamber of commerce.

Charlene holds up the shirt to the lamp's light. She SIGHS
and resumes sewing.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
And there was an important town
meeting about a new railroad line
coming through town.

Roly-Poly watches her. A slight smile grows on his face.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
She sat there, doing her duties
like a proper wife.

She looks up. He stands in the front yard, looking at her.

She jumps up, startled. She eyes the front door, only a few
feet away. Roly-Poly stares at her.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
Until she saw me.

Charlene races for the door. Roly-Poly lunges at her. The
two crash through the door of the house, with him on top.

He grabs her head and jerks it aside, exposing her neck. He
sinks his teeth deep in her flesh.

Her body goes limp.

After some time, he lifts his head up.

An expression of realization appears on his face. He looks
down at his victim and gently strokes her cheek.

ROLY-POLY (V.O.)
For the first time since I died...
For the first time since I started
feeding...

He smiles, satisfied.

INT. BARN - PRESENT - NIGHT

Roly-Poly slowly walks around.

ROLY-POLY

I didn't feel bad. There was no
guilty feelings in what I did.
Whatever was in me that made me
human was no more. It was gone.

He stops at the remains of a small window frame. Moonlight
shines through on his face, bathing him in pale blue light.

ROLY-POLY

When it came to being human, all I
had was my memories... and as time
went by, my memories faded on me
too.

He looks at Amy, sadness written all over his face.

ROLY-POLY

And that made me feel even deader
inside...

He slowly walks from the window.

ROLY-POLY

I didn't want to be this way,
Missy. Believe me. I didn't ask no
one to make me like this.

He walks near by her. She seems more relaxed now.

ROLY-POLY

This is what being dead really is,
not being able to feel happy or sad
or anything... And I been like this
for more'n a hundred years. Not
feeling nothing.

He spins and faces her, causing her to jump.

ROLY-POLY

But then I realized that you's
family to Charlene Hemmings, I
remembered who I was. And what I
was like.

AMY

All this because you smelled me?

ROLY-POLY

Cause I smelled your great grand-
mother. You know how people say
they look just like their momma? I
can tell family by their smell.

He reaches into his bag and pulls out several wooden balls.
He starts juggling two of them in one hand.

AMY

And now you can feel things again?

The gentle PATTING is heard.

ROLY-POLY

No, Missy. But I can remember what
it was like, now. And that's
something.

He looks toward the barn door. Dawn light begins to show.

ROLY-POLY

It's gettin' near that time, Missy.
Sun'll be up soon.

She looks at the door, surprised, as he brings several more
balls into play. The PATTING sound quickens.

AMY

You're still letting me go?

ROLY-POLY

Don't need to eat every night.
Been meaning to lose a few pounds,
anyway.

AMY

What'll you do?

ROLY-POLY

I do what I gotta do. Nothing
changes for me.

AMY

Where will you go?

ROLY-POLY

Maybe west. Ain't never been there
before.

She looks at him, slightly confused.

After a long moment, she starts walking toward the door.

ROLY-POLY
You have a good life, Missy. Stay
safe.

She looks at him, trying to find the right words to say. He watches her.

She reaches the barn door.

 ROLY-POLY
Missy.

She turns around; he's about thirty feet away.

 ROLY-POLY
I changed my mind.

He lunges at her, fangs exposed.

The balls land on the dirt floor with several loud THUDS.

EXT. BARN - EARLY DAWN

Sunlight faintly appears over the distant hills. Things are very serene and silent... except for the muted sound of PAT PAT PAT PAT PAT....

FINAL FADE OUT