

Untitled

By Zachary Hathaway

Prologue

The car slows to a full stop as the gate to the park opens. It then pulls into a parking spot. A group of teenagers step out of the van with all of their camping gear: Tents, chairs, and things like that. They begin to make their way to the campsite.

“Let’s see... James me, and Cavan. All three of us accounted for,” Cooper whispers to himself.

“Hey, Coop! Which site are we at?” James calls.

“Uh, I think we’re at Site Erie,” He responds.

“Got it!”

The group begins their trek through the hills. The moon casts an eerie glow across the lake as they move. The wind howls. The night is still, the lunar body of the sky, casting a cool shine, lights the path. The air is clear and crisp, the pollution of the urban and suburban regions yet to contaminate the calming, yet ominous atmosphere of the canadian woods. Just as they reach their site, a drop of water hits Cavan’s shoulder.

“I’d say we should move a bit faster. I think a storm is setting in,” Cavan calls to the group.

“Really? Dang, okay. Best get moving then. Try to bury the electronics under blankets and such, just in case,” Cooper responds.

The group begins moving in unison, the pattering of their feet echoing through the spruce forest moving to a light jog as to set up camp in time.

The group, in a panic, sets up camp before the storm reaches its zenith. Cooper hammers the pins of the tents into place with metallic clangs, solidifying their places and preventing the winds from whisking them away as it batters the land. Quickly, each member of the group slides into their tents.

Cooper can't seem to fall asleep. His heart is racing, for some odd reason. There's a dread he can't seem to shake as the wind howls around him, rain battering the tent he lies in. Minutes pass, and the dread seems to pass. However, just as he was about to give in to the warm grasp of sleep, a clap of thunder echoed through the forest, the trees creating a ground-shaking echo of the sound that startles Cooper, a shiver running down his spine. He can't bring himself to close his eyes, feeling as if something bad could happen any moment. That passed dread slowly crept back in, leaving him shaking and whimpering in his sleeping bag, unable to sleep, leaving him restless, and leaving him terrified.

First Encounter-

Date: (REDACTED)

Cavan snaps awake in the middle of the night. "What was that?" He slowly climbs to his feet and pulls back the curtain-like door that seals his tent from the outside world. The area reeks of moist, humid air. He scans the area, his eyes darting back and forth across the darkened pine woods.

The crack of a branch echoes through the campsite. Cavan, his heart racing, turns in the direction of the noise. He steps out onto the moistened and rock-riddled dirt. Just as he begins to turn, he catches a swift, upward movement into the tree canopy. The branches rustle for a mere moment as Cavan recoils. His eyes widen, looking upward. A bloodstained deer-skull looks down at him, two, shiny red eyes holding its gaze tight on him. Cavan stares, not sure

what to do, how to act. It doesn't seem to be trying to hurt him, but it doesn't seem docile.

The gaze of the beast almost feels alluring. Cavan can't bring himself to blink, however, he doesn't want to meet its gaze, either. Suddenly, the skull seems to vanish in an instant, out of sight from his gaze. Cavan backs away into his tent, a feeling of dread slowly creeping over him, unsettled by the horrific sight he just beheld.

The sun peeks through the thin nylon of James's tent. He puts on hiking gear and steps outside. Knowing his role, he throws out the wet firewood from the night's storm. He then begins to jog down the path to the general shop for dry wood.

Soon enough, James finds himself before the shop. It's fairly small, maybe a thirty by thirty feet space. He pushes open the door and steps inside. A voice calls from the desk, "Welcome! How can I help you today? I'm Geo, and if you have any questions I'll answer them for you," He says. "No worries, I'm really just here for firewood," James responds. "Got it, it's out back under the tarp if you don't know." Geo says in return.

With that knowledge given, James grabs a pocket knife, sets cash down on the counter, and runs out back to grab firewood. Just as the door closes, a voice seems to beckon to him. "Come here, dear child. Please, come to the lake. I've something to show you." "Who- Who's there? I- whatever you are, stay back!" James promptly responds, his voice shaking and panicky. Unnerved, he gathers a pile of firewood and marches off, hiking back to camp.

"I'll just ignore what just happened," James mutters to himself.

Just as James comes over the hill that leads to the campsite, he notices something in the trees. He walks over to get a closer look.

“Oh dear god,” James says in disbelief.

A limp, mutilated body lies skewered by a tree branch. Portions of flesh seem to be missing from the face and torso, savagely torn out by something, perhaps a dull knife, or perhaps teeth. However, the bite marks weren't clean enough to be the teeth of some sort of predator. Perhaps they were the teeth of some sort of omnivore.

James whispers to himself, pondering the consequences of being caught near the scene. He considers calling for authorities, but even emergency signal wouldn't serve as it should in this region of the Canadian woods. Leaving, though considerable, wouldn't be likely either. The region lies within the grasp of heavy walls and gates, only opening once you are given your exit ticket after a certain amount of elapsed time. That thought leaves James with one question, that being, “What are these walls trying to contain?” James, however, dismisses the thought, not wanting to leave himself as paranoid as Cooper is. He straightens his back, holds his head high, and clears his mind. Whatever beast lies in the woods, he does not fear.

THE END