

Evils Are on the Hunt

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Lost in the Woods

Nine in the morning. The clock's pendulum swung, and Kevin covered his ears with pillows as the clock sounded.

"Wake up!" shouted Kevin's mother, entering the room, as the clock stopped making its noise.

Since Kevin's father had died in a car accident when he was eleven-year-old, mom raised Kevin single-handed, but there were no lapses in his upbringing. Kevin loved her and respected her for all the sacrifices and struggles, she did for his better future.

"Wake up, Kevin," said Ms. Moreno, sliding the window curtains. "Your friends are waiting for you down in the living room."

"Tell them, I'm sleeping," muttered Kevin, throwing a pillow aside and covering himself with a blanket from top to bottom.

Mom sighed and left the room, murmuring, "Twenty-three. Still act like a child."

After several minutes, Kevin felt as someone was pulling his blanket.

"Please let me sleep, Mom."

Someone jerked the blanket and swiftly dragged it on the floor.

Kevin frantically got up and sat steadily on the bed, rubbing his eyes for a clear vision. Kevin crawled to look down at the floor, slowly craning his neck. No one was there. Being scared, he cautiously grasped the blanket lying on the floor. Suddenly, four hands emerged from beneath the bed and tightly grabbed Kevin's hands.

Kevin screamed while trying to free his hands. The tight grip on his hands ceased, and his friends came into sight from under the bed.

"F-Fredrick! Z-Zara!" said Kevin, goggling at them.
"What're you doing here?"

Ms. Moreno entered the room and said, "I sent them up here. They have been waiting for you for the last two hours."

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

Fredrick, Zara, and Ms. Moreno stared at him with an annoyed look. Perhaps Kevin had received his answer; thus, without blurting a word, he proceeded toward the bathroom.

While he was opening the bathroom door, Zara shouted from behind, "Hurry up! We're already late."

Kevin turned around, ceasing his moderate hold on the doorknob.

"Late?" he asked.

“Don’t try me, Kevin,” said Zara, her thin face turned red as her anger was rising.

“I don’t understand what you’re talking about.”

After a moment of staring, Zara said, “We’re going for hiking at the Greenland Woods Mountain. I told Fredrick to inform you.”

“I haven’t received any message from him.”

Zara’s angry look shifted to Fredrick, who didn’t dare to look into Zara’s eyes.

“I’m sorry. I forgot to tell him,” said Fredrick, looking down at the floor like a kid who fears his parents, living in his early twenties.

Zara raised her hand, and Fredrick pulled his head back, closing his eyes when her hand had almost reached his face.

“That’s wrong, Zara,” said Ms. Moreno calmly as she didn’t want to be so hard at her.

Zara dropped her hand and walked out of the room, glowering.

“You two kiddos always make her upset,” said Ms. Moreno, frowning, and she exited the room.

“Try to get ready A-S-A-P,” said Fredrick, and he exited the room.

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Kevin quickly packed his hiking backpack and rushed to the living room.

“Wait!” said Ms. Moreno.

She handed them a lighter and said, “It is always a good idea to keep a lighter when you visit the woods. It might help to protect you upon a wild animal’s attack.”

“How?” asked Fredrick.

“Animals fear the fire. If you show an animal the fire, they won’t come near you.”

“Wow!” said Fredrick sarcastically, “Thank you so much for your precious advice and,” he raised a lighter up parallel to Ms. Moreno’s face and resumed, “for this.”

“Don’t be funny, kiddo,” said Ms. Moreno, narrowing her eyes.

“We know, Mom. Animals fear the fire,” added Kevin swiftly, “But I don’t think all animals fear the fire, the same way not all humans fear every animal.”

“I don’t care what you think, kiddos,” said Ms. Moreno with sharpness in her voice as she was ordering them. “Keep these lighters safe with you in your pockets.”

“All right!” said Kevin, sighing in disbelief, and he put the lighter in his cargo pants’ pocket. After him, Fredrick put the lighter in his sweatpants’ pocket.

“Thank you so much, Ms. Moreno,” said Zara, giving her a hug. Kissing one another on the cheek, they separated, and Zara walked to the exit, putting the lighter in her jeans’ pocket.

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After three hours, Kevin, Fredrick, and Zara were near Greenland Woods Mountain at the far end of Pennsylvania, on a warm summer day in June, riding in a convertible Ford Mustang while listening to music at a low volume.

With the beginning of a zigzag road to the woods, their cellphones lost the networks.

“Fuck!” shouted Fredrick as he accidentally exited the GPS while trying to change the song.

“Relax, buddy!” said Kevin while sitting like a king on the back seat. He tried to retrieve the location on the GPS map on his cellphone, but he failed as well.

Zara just followed the signs for Greenland Woods Mountain. After a few miles, she slowed down the car to read two signboards; one was on the right side of the road that read EAST GREENLAND WOODS MOUNTAIN; another was on the left side of the road that read WEST GREENLAND WOODS MOUNTAIN. Having no idea which signboard to follow, Zara followed EAST GREENLAND WOODS MOUNTAIN in a rush when the car behind them kept honking.

As the car continued in the unknown direction, in the mouth of towering trees, the extended branches of the trees shading

over the steep asphalt, the bright sunlight stopped reaching them; Kevin, Zara, and Fredrick's hearts throbbed as they proceeded on this scary, narrow path.

"This place is scary as hell, Zara," said Kevin. "I hope you researched this place online before bringing us here."

"I didn't."

"What?" vocalized Kevin and Fredrick in unison being shocked.

"This place seems haunted," said Fredrick. "We should leave."

"I agree," said Kevin.

"I can understand Kevin, bro," said Zara, keeping her tired eyes on the road. "He has his own issues. But I didn't expect this from you."

"Well! I don't know what to say. However. Since you've mentioned Kevin's issues, I would again recommend leaving this place."

Kevin looked at them as they were using him as the guard to cover their fear of this eerie place.

After a while, he said, "I would like to go hiking."

Surprised, Zara glanced at Kevin in the rear-view mirror.

Fredrick turned to him and looked Kevin up and down as if he was inspecting him.

“Bro! You don’t have to take it personally. Right now, at this point, I’m also scared. I wasn’t using you as a guard to cover my fear, perhaps Zara did, but not me at all. If you are scared, we do not need to go in the woods,” said Fredrick.

Kevin looked around at the towering trees and said, “I-I’m not.”

“Why did you quaver then?”

“I am NOT afraid,” said Kevin, locking his eyes with Fredrick’s.

After a short distance, the car exited the mouth of the shadowy path, and Zara’s eyes captured a small house-like structure under a clearly visible blue sky. Having the bright sunlight again on them, Zara, Fredrick, and Kevin sighed in relief.

Zara parked the car in front of the building. There were some blurred words in black ink on a dusty wall; trio read: RESTROOM.

“We’ll follow the trail from here,” suggested Zara. “It would be easy for us to find a way back to our car.”

“Sounds great,” said Fredrick.

Kevin nodded in agreement, looking outside the window at the trees.