

FRIDAY THE 13TH **Tommy Jarvis**

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Prologue...

The sound of soft leaves and the occasional sticks crunch and patter. It gets louder and heavier, faster. The shape of little feet scurrying like a rabbit is forgotten as the legs moving those feet as fast as possible, jumping, running from hell, running for life.

They don't even bother to slow down. They zig-zag as best they can, losing breath in their body all the while as fast as they get it back. The sound of running gets louder and louder from behind. They can't get away as the sound eclipses the sound of their little, torrential pounding of their heart.

Their feet are swept out from under them as they are tackled to the ground. Big, thick arms keep them prisoner as they struggle to break free. They struggle even more as the sound of two more sets of footsteps come closer.

"Damn, Gary, he almost got away from us this time! Sure you got em?" A big, bearded man with dark hair and pungent onion breath looks at the young boy who is still struggling in his dark blue jacket.

"Help!"

A thick, meaty hand clasps over their mouth as they try to scream again. The hand brings their head back, and their eyes meet.

"No one can help you now. But, you better shut up and behave, if you know what's good for you."

A younger, muscular man with short, blond hair, and a middle-aged man with a bushy mustache, slightly-wrinkled skin, and a pot-belly, kneel down next to Gary.

Gary looks at the younger man. "What do you want, Pete? A leg or a wing?"

Pete smiles, slowly showing his teeth. "A leg. I might have room for both! Ha HA!" He cocks his head back and laughs, so loud that he howls. They all laugh,

oblivious of the boy crying, until Gary feels the tears flow over his fingers. He doesn't care.

Gary turns to the man with the mustache. "I guess you're shit out of luck, Benny!"

"That's bullshit, and you know it!"

Pete moves his hands over to grab the boy's legs, but the boy kicks his legs up and out, almost making contact with Pete's face. He backs up, studying the herky-jerky motion of the boy's legs, looking for just the right moment to grab them. He does with both hands.

"Gotcha!" The boy's muffled screams have no effect on them. Benny moves his hands around Gary's thick, muscular arms, then stops. His hands slowly move away, tip-toeing through the air, hovering along the boy's body. They stop, just above the stomach.

Benny looks up at Gary and Pete. "Just a little appetizer."

Pain explodes from into his neck and out from his eyes as he feels burning, hot pain flowing from his neck. The other two men scream as Benny falls over, back and to the side as they stare at an arrow that has gone through his neck, spurting blood.

Gary lets go of the boy. He does not run away. Frantically reaching for the pockets of his jacket, Gary pulls out a .38 caliber pistol, pointing it in the direction of where the arrow came from.

"Who's out there?!"

Gary manages to hold the gun steadily, seeing nothing but trees that are almost swallowed up by thick, green leaves.

A soft, scurrying sound moves around a few feet to the right. He points the gun at the area of the sound, and fires. They don't scream, not even the kid. He covers

his ears with his hands, tightly.

Another sound goes off to the left. He fires again, seeing nothing. His hand starts to shake along with his body, ever so slightly, as he breathes deeply.

A quick snap of a twig sounds off behind them. He twists his body around quickly, and fires. A bloody body of a squirrel, with its guts splayed out on the ground, makes Gary smile a little.

The sound of an object knocking against wood echoes from behind where Gary shot the squirrel. He turns around to face the sound, and fires without fully looking.

A heavy wet sound splashes a few feet in front of them. It is a wet log. He unwittingly fires in the direction it came from, expecting to see someone there. Again, there is nothing but the trees.

He screams as loud, and hard, as he can. "Where are you?!"

He turns around, left and right, desperately looking for any sign of movement.

Gary hears the faintest sound of a step onto wet leaves. He turns to it, and his heart turns cold, stopping as it skips, hearing the click of the gun.

A man stands there, dressed in a dark green t-shirt, and blue jeans. He has brown hair, and deep, unmoving eyes that are just as unmoving as his toned, muscular body.

For what seems the longest time, he stares into Gary's eyes, sizing up the situation, seeing him for what he is. Neither of them blink, or turn away. Finally, Gary does blink, involuntarily.

"It's not... It..." The words disappear from Gary's mind as the man's eyes bore into him more, burning through him. They seem to say everything, and so much more. But, these eyes know. They know what was to happen if he were not here. He

can guess where they have been, and where they would go.

The younger man, Pete, snaps out of his fear, realizing what has happened to his friend, lying on the ground, with an arrow in his neck, bleeding out, drowning the ground, and his lungs.

“You sick fuck!” He reaches into the front pockets on his jeans and opens up one of the blades of a red, Swiss army knife. Pushing himself up, he stands, holding the knife at his side.

The man stops looking at Gary, and looks at this other man, holding a knife. He doesn't look at the knife. He only notices the intensity of his eyes. Looking past that, he can still see the fear in the man.

Still unmoving, he watches as Pete runs at him. His mouth moves a little, spreading ever so slightly. If anyone were to freeze time and see it, they would notice the faintest hint of a smile. If they were to know him intimately, and his past, they would know he is smiling so much more on the inside.

He does not move as the move builds up speed, running at speed. At the last second, he brings up his hand to thrust the knife into him, in the hopes of gutting him, the way he knows so well.

In half that time, the man grabs Pete by the wrist. He brings up the arm, and with his other arm, in one fluid motion, the man uses his other hand to break Pete's arm, snapping it like a tree branch.

He screams, and his scream echoes so loudly birds and leaves flow and move. But, there's not enough time to know it, or even remember it. In the same second, as the knife falls from Pete's useless hand, the man swings and twists the arm, thrusting the arm almost blindly to Pete's face with an audible squish sound. As he falls, they all see blood spurting from his face, and two of Pete's fingers rammed into one of his eyes, up to the

hilt, stuck there like a grotesque statue.

The man looks at Gary, and he takes off running, leaving the boy, who is curled up in a ball, looking down. The man watches Gary run, and after a few seconds, the man heads back the way he came, not worried about the possibility that his prey could get away. In his mind, he can't.

As fast as he is running, he knows the size of his body is slowing him down. He gains his breath as fast as he loses it. He almost feels he can go on forever as he runs faster, skipping and hopping over logs, brushing branches. He feels he is back in school, decades ago, but never far away in mind and heart. He was quite an athlete back then, but years of alcohol, smoking, junk food, and not enough exercise has taken their toll on his once youthful and healthy body.

His lungs wheeze. He feels his spit build up thickly until it can be chewed upon. In between breaths, he spits out chunks of phlegm, hearing it make contact with a tree, leaves, or moss-covered ground. He hopes that in the straight line he moves, he sharply turns, thinking that will throw the man off. This man can be right behind all this time, and there would be no way for him to know unless he turns around.

He doesn't want to. He doesn't want to stop. But, he has to. His body starts to ache, spreading like a fire that has all the fuel it needs. In no time at all, he feels it more and more. Chugging along with a pattern that keeps getting more disjointed, he collapses.

Crawling along, he wheezes in high-pitched squeals, not stopping even as he finds a thick oak tree for cover. He rests for a few seconds, waiting for enough of his breath to come back. It does, barely.

Slowly turning around, he peeks from behind the tree, and sees endless miles of woods, unmoving, soundless. His eyes dart in every direction, desperate for

something to tell him he's not alone. That man can't be gone.

The soft sound of a car engine traveling makes him turn his head back around. At a guess he thinks it's about a mile away. If he hurries, maybe, he can get help, and get out of this alive. The thought of that makes him smile. He can't remember the last time he was this happy.

A few short breaths, then slowly taking a big breath, he pushes himself up, using the tree for leverage. Looking back again, and seeing nothing, he takes off running again, in the direction of the sound of the traveling car.

The pain is almost gone, and it doesn't surprise him at all. He feels he is back in his youth, running in gym class, hoping for that finish line to be only his. Not only that, it's not that he feels no pain, but his muscles are soaked with adrenaline. His brain is drunk on the power.

The ground starts to slope. From the far right, a few miles away, another car can be heard, just like the one before. It is getting closer. If he could cry out, he would. He doesn't know that he's too tired to do so, and that his lungs are shot.

The ground slopes a little more. Thick trees, and thicker leaves and bushes block his way, hiding him. He slows down a bit, afraid that he will fall. Careful steps down, he brushes away branches, almost barreling past bushes, doing his best to ignore the pain as they scrape and scratch him.

Through it all, he sees the shape of a blue, compact car, and the road, far below and ahead. With each step, he stumbles, threatening to fall. He pushes his breath up and out, and each time he does, his wheezing gets louder, not quite able to yell.

Thirty feet more, and he can collapse. He can feel his voice miraculously come back, bubbling back to the surface, from nothing. Pushing through all the past, he feels he's made it, as he is about to leap down, tumble down, go for broke.

An arrow pierces his head from behind, into his brain, with the tip pushing out from between his eyes in a bloody splash, stealing his voice and surprise forever.

Chapter One

The wind blows through the short, cropped, blond hair of Jack Cross. He sings along with the rap music, sung by a white, rap group, the “Beastie Boys”, which is playing loudly out of the speakers of his red, convertible, Pontiac Firebird. The sun is shining, reflecting off his dark sunglasses. Not a care in the world, for the moment.

Though on a paved road, he is surrounded by a thick, endless forest on either side of him. Massive, towering trees, seemingly older than life itself, stand as monuments of nature. As he sings, he has a smile on his face. But, he’s as happy as he could be. Recent events, and the dread of future ones, smother him in an icy grip. The scenery, music, singing, and the fast driving, barely keep those thoughts at bay.

A stop sign creeps up on him on the side of the road, and he slams on the brakes with a loud squeal of rubber. To his right, another road extends off into the forest, but that road is unpaved. He doesn’t care why. He looks at the road, thinking of, and dismissing the idea that a cop could be hiding there, or anyone, ready with a ticket, or anything.

His foot barely eases up on the brake when from both sides of the road, something stirs from the bushes. They shake, too much for it to be just animals.

“What is that? Who’s there?”

His hand involuntarily starts to reach for the volume control on his car stereo. Fluid motion from the bushes on each side stops his hand as people quickly rise up and out from cover.

A quick glance at these people gives fast recognition for Jack as he laughs at their sneaky surprise. A thin, teenaged girl with straight, red hair, and a teenaged boy

with green eyes, and long, dyed black, curly hair, approach the car from the left side. The girl is wearing designer jeans, and a tight shirt, outlining her breasts and nipples, while the boy is wearing a black shirt and jeans, which match his hair and mood.

On the right side, a teenaged, muscular, yet toned boy, wearing gray gym shorts a navy blue shirt which match his blue eyes, and a teenaged girl with brown eyes, straight blond hair that is curled at the ends, and wearing a lavender mini-skirt and purple shirt, come up to the car.

Jack immediately flicks a knob on the door, making the windows go up. He can only guess what these people will do. Not exactly what, but only what kind.

They surround the car on all sides, dancing to the music. In the first few seconds, they move in time to the music's beat. The red-headed girl moves along to the right side, and as she bends down, she licks the window from bottom to top, while the blond girl lifts up her skirt. She's not wearing anything underneath, and bumps and grinds onto the window.

The boy in black jumps onto the hood of the car, while the boy in athletic clothes steps onto the trunk. Jack looks through the windshield, and barely keeps an eye on the rear-view mirror, as he sees these boys drop their pants enough to moon him. They rub their butt cheeks onto the glass, making screeching noising as their wriggle their bodies.

Jack is laughing, too caught up in it all to be mad. Who cares if his almost-new car gets a few smudges? They can always be cleaned off later.

The blond girl pushes the boy in black off the car. He manages to catch himself as he tumbles, landing on his feet, while yelling, "Hey! Watch it!" She gets onto the hood, while the jock joins her. They start to kiss, while the other two kids sit on the trunk, holding onto the car's open roof.

“Let’s go already!” the boy up front yells, slamming his hand on the windshield.

“Better hang on, bitches! And if you fall off, it’s your own fault!”

They all scream happily over the music, picking up volume double-time as Jack pushes down on the gas pedal. The tires screech loudly, and the car leaves dust and wood particles in the air. They hang in the air, just as their happy screams do, until they disappear.

A wide expanse from the trees is laid out in an even level, where log cabins stand erected. Wooden tables sit about fifty feet away in front of one of the cabins. A white van sits off to the side, in-between two of the cabins. Past the cabins, the ground slopes down, where a lake can be seen, shining under the sun. On the shore, canoes and wooden paddles sit on a rack.

The door opens from the cabin with the tables in front of it. A man who looks to be in his mid-thirties, with short blond hair cut into a crew cut, a muscular build, wearing blue jeans that match his eyes, white tennis shoes, and a brown shirt, walks out of the cabin carrying a clipboard. He is walking fast as he looks down. His face looks just as frustrated, with squinted eyes, lips pressed together. He is breathing heavily.

Another man in similar clothes, and short brown hair, follows him out of the cabin.

“Hey, Jim! When do we expect the rest of the troublemakers?”

Jim Sanders stares out into the forest, and one of the wide paths leading into it. He shakes his head. “They should have been here by now. The only reason they’re not here is because there wasn’t enough room in the van, and the budget cuts. Besides, they didn’t show up with the rest. I’d drag them here myself if I could, but, well, you know.”

“Uh huh.”

“What about the ones that are here already?”

“If you ask me, I think they’ve sweated it out enough for now. Time for some fresh air.”

Jim turns to the man, smiling. Ok, bring them out.”

Ben Davies walks back the way he came, and over to the cabin next door.

When he reaches the door, he knocks on it.

“Yeah?!, a firm, male voice yells.

“We’re ready”

That same firm voice yells again. “Ok, maggots! On your feet!”

The sound of bodies moving off of chairs or benches, and feet touching the floor in an avalanche of firm rubber bombards the immediate area. It stops and becomes a pattern. That pattern comes closer and closer, very quickly to Ben’s ears. It stops, right behind the door.

Ben opens the door, finding a line of teenagers with solemn looks on their faces. They walk out of the cabin, still being a bit cold under the shade of the cabin’s awning.

Jim extends a hand towards the benches to the six kids that find a spot on a bench, each turning towards the men in charge. They see the man who was keeping them company walk out of the cabin and join the others: A muscle-bound, bald man with a slight tan, wearing a dark green shirt, and matching khaki shorts.

“Thanks, Greg.”

Jim looks over a list of names on his clipboard. His eyes glaze over the faces that go with those names. He silently fumes over the five names that are still absent, kicking up dust into the air as he walks past the kids.

The sound of a loud engine roars up, along with the sight of a red Pontiac convertible, still having four people hanging on to it. As it slowly gets closer, it stops about twenty feet away from everybody. Jim quickly walks over to the car.

“Where have you people been?! Do you want to get into more trouble?!”

Jim says that, even though he’s only looking at Jack.

“Hey, I told you we would be here, didn’t I?”

“You didn’t just tell me: you told the judge, too, and your parents.”

Jim looks at the kids still hanging onto the car. “What do you think this is: a carnival? Get off of that! The ride’s over.”

Jack opens the door of his car, taking the keys out from the ignition, which are swiftly taken from his hand by Jim. He sighs, and gets his breath back, turning to those who were on his car.

“But, how did you guys get to where you were hiding?”

The boy with the black hair and clothes pats him on the shoulder. “We hitched.”

Jim shakes his head at them. “No wonder you’re here. Sit down on the benches with everyone else.”

The five remaining kids walk over to the benches, and find a spot to sit down, or squeeze into. As they do, they see Jim walk in front of them, stopping in-between the benches, with his arms crossed.

“If it were up to me, you would be in jail. But, for the next three weeks, you’re mine. In that time, you won’t see any junk food, or alcohol, or any of those drugs, that your mommies, or daddies, or any of your suppliers get for you.”

He looks at them all, in the eyes, choosing his words carefully. They just come to him. “That seems to be the thing to do with kids your age: getting wasted,

braking into someone's home while they're on vacation, and having such a good time that you trash the house. And you don't even care that you're caught! Until you sober up."

"But, if you think you were sober then, you don't know what sober is. Take a good look at what you see. That sky, those trees, even that lake, way down there. You won't really be able to appreciate all this. Why? Because, if you haven't figured it out by now, this is my own, private, little boot camp and rehab all rolled into one. Paid for by your parents: too poor to afford the fancy clinics all those celebrities and rock stars go to, to dry out for the season."

He can feel sparks of anger spurt up from their mostly solemn eyes. He smiles at that, relishing it.

"By the way, before you start really hating me, my name's Jim Sanders, that there's my right hand man, Gentle Ben, and that tough guy over there is Greg. Now, Christina Mitchell..."

"Yes? Here!" A tall, blond teenager with permed hair raises her hand. She is wearing blue jeans, and a turquoise, turtleneck sweater.

"Good. Audrey Cooper!"

"Yeah!" A girl with blond hair dyed electric blue on one side, and an inch into the tips of the hair on the other side, raises her hand quickly, letting it drop. Her dyed jeans and jewelry glow brightly in the sunlight, contrasting with her black, rock band shirt.

"Ok. See those bags by the van?! The two girls see where Jim is pointing, their eyes finding their packed bags sitting next to the van.

"Grab your stuff. You're in cabin two."

Audrey looks back at Jim. "What happened to cabin one?"

"It's taken, by me. Remember, you're not here for the luxury. Now, let's

see... Mike Jones, and Kevin Croft!"

"Here!", they both say in unison. Each of the boys have short brown hair, muscular builds, wearing dark blue shirts, and gray sweatpants. They are almost twins, to the untrained eye. They stand up, and walk over to Jim.

"You're already dressed to suffer. Good, it'll save time. Cabin two."

"Frank Walsh, and Keith Carver!"

"Here!", they say, one following the other. Frank is a slightly chubby kid with wiry-framed glasses, brown eyes, short, spiky black hair, wearing jeans, and a blue and white-striped shirt with a small, polo horse over his heart. Keith is a tall, slightly toned, yet muscular kid with short brown hair, freckles, wearing jeans and a red shirt.

They approach Jim, and as they do so, Jim looks at Frank up and down, shaking his head again, only slightly. "We'll get rid of those extra pounds."

Jim quickly looks at Keith. "And that attitude."

Keith's jaw drops, shaking his head in disbelief, staring off into space.

Gaining his composure back almost instantly, he stares at Jim, wondering what's going on.

"What attitude?!"

"The one you're hiding. I can smell it. Grab your stuff. You're in cabin two, also."

They walk off to get their bags as he checks off Frank's and Keith's names of the list on his clipboard. Jim turns around to the remaining five on the benches.

"As for the rest of you two. Who's the driver of the sweet ride?"

Jack Cross steps up, wearing blue and white basketball shoes, blue jeans, and a black, rolling stones shirt with the trademark red lips and tongue on the front.

"That would be me, and I would appreciate it if you didn't take it out for a joyride."

“Your name?”, clearly ignoring the fact that he took the keys away a few minutes ago.

“Jack Cross. Try not to forget.”

Jim finds his name on the list and checks it off. “Ok. Now, which one of you is Gerry Mitchell?”

The kid in black clothes and black hair stands up. “I am.”

Jim looks at Gerry’s appearance, then looks at the list, checks the name off as he finds it. “We’ll try not to let your colors run or fade.”

Gerry tilts his head slightly, giving a sarcastic smile.

“Karen Michaels?”

“Yep!”. The red-headed girl pipes up, getting off the bench.

Another name checked off. Jim looks at the boy in athletic clothes. “You obviously aren’t Laurie Smith, unless that’s a really good drag act you have going there. So, it must be you.”

Jim’s eyes fall on the blond-haired girl, causing her to laugh a little while nodding, looking down. “Uh huh.”

Jim checks her name off. “You must be her prince. Sir Robert Brand.”

Robert jumps off the bench, landing onto it as if he’s trying out for a team. “That’s me.”

Jim just stares at him. “You’ll have to do better than that while you’re here.”

Checking off Robert’s name, he then looks at the absence of baggage by the van, then back at the five kids. “I don’t know where all your luggage is, so unless any of you know how to do magic...”

Gerry clears his throat. “Look in Jack’s trunk.”

Jim looks at all of them in a mix of disgust and disbelief. Jack raises his

hand. Jim waves him down.

“I’ll get everything.”

He begins to walk towards Jack’s red car, and as he does so, he calls back to the five kids. “Now I know what you’re majoring in.”

Karen yells above the laughing. “What?”

“Breaking and Entering!”

They laugh even harder, even Jack. He stops before the other do, looking angrily at the others.

Chapter Two

David Tucker breathes heavily as he moves around a punching bag, darting, choosing his moves carefully, as if the bag were a real person.

Bam! He punches the bag with thick, muscular arms, making it sway back. Darting to the left, his left hand goes out as if to confuse his opponent.

Bam, Bam, Bam! A quick right, left, right with his gloved fists, he circles the bag in the opposite direction it goes. As the sunlight peers through the windows of the dusty, second floor room, he thinks of the events that have led him here: the senseless number of deaths in a once-peaceful town growing in rapid succession; the relief of it suddenly ending; the regret of not being able to do more, and the confrontation with Mayor Cobb; the subsequent resignation as Sheriff.

But, it had not been completely ruinous. He had not expected to know Pam Roberts, a survivor of the ordeal, any more than he had before. Sure, there was an attraction from afar, and was never sure if the feeling could be reciprocated. He was sure something was there, just as he was sure that Jason must have had something to do with the killing. As he was right, to a point, with the former, he was right with the latter.

Pam thought things were starting to come back to normal, as she made sure that Reggie was returned to his parents soon after, all the while making sure that Tommy

was stabilized in his recovery.

Within days, he physically recovered to the point where nothing had happened, to his point of view. The cut on his chest stopped bothering him. Mentally, he was a mess, caught in a storm of dreams and hallucinations.

One quiet, warm night, he decided to leave the hospital. Slipping on his clothes, he noticed nobody was in the hall as he peeked out of his room. Around another corner, a nurse walked down the hall, away from him. His heart racing, he carefully walked, fast and silent, a few feet behind the nurse.

He noticed the elevator, and a door for the stairs, soon afterwards. Hearing more people coming, he went for the door, still moving quietly as he turns the knob. A step at a time, he breathed deeply as he walks down. He kept track of the floors, few as they are, until he reached the end of the stairs.

Sounds of people talking, walking by, filled the air. He reached for the doorknob, and quickly pulled his hand away. Breathing heavily again, he closed his eyes, swallowing his dread, and slowly took hold of the doorknob, turning it. As he opened it, he expected to be caught, but why would he? He's done nothing wrong.

His head went from left to right, checking the hall, seeing if anyone noticed him. Doctors in lab coats, nurses in scrubs, and visitors, adorned the hall's traffic. He figured there's nothing to worry about, so he opened the door.

The smell of fresh air greeted him, contrasting the antiseptic smell in the air. A group of guys went past him, with high-school jackets on, so he followed them, hoping he could blend in.

The air continued to get better and better as he went on. A sudden gust of air, and he saw the front doors of the lobby slide close. He kept his head down like the rest of them, and they all passed through the sliding doors, no words spoken among them.

Walking out into the quiet, starlit night, he went past the ambulances, paramedics, and rows of cars. He let himself be swallowed up, into the uncertain future, wondering where he could go. His gut told him to go west, but first, he needed some supplies. He knew what to do.

It was not long that the hospital noticed that Tommy was gone. Pam was beside herself with worry. Only for Tommy, and what could be happening to him, never thinking that he could possibly harm anyone. What he did was self-defense: what reason would there really be to think he's a danger to others?

She didn't care that her license was taken from her, though what happened was not her fault. Deep down, she felt she could have done something to prevent everything: maybe given different chores to Victor, and kept a better eye on Joey, making sure he wasn't so idle.

With no one else to turn to, and with David being too willing to help out, being so understanding given his own situation, it was only natural for them to fall for each other. In less than a week, and Tommy seemingly gone forever, they packed up their things and headed west, in the hopes of starting anew.

They set up shop in a two-story shop, offering their services as private detectives, in St. Louis, Missouri. It took almost all of their remaining money they saved up to fix the place up. The first night there, they slept on the floor, wrapped up in each other's arms in a blanket. The next day, they sat in their new office, waiting for the phone to ring, praying anyone would notice they were there.

The sun went down. They were about to pack it in for the day, maybe go out and take a tour of the city, when a knock on the door startles them.

A short, old lady with dyed, curly blond hair, and wiry, oval-shaped spectacles, walked in the door, carrying a cookie box. "You must be new in town. I

always offer a batch of my cookies to whoever's new in town.”

Pam and David looked at each other, smiling. It was better than nothing. They greeted the woman, and took the sugar cookies that were handed to them. As they ate, the old woman said something that made them stop eating.

“By the way, you do solve cases, don't you?”

At first, they were very simple cases, such as investigating possible infidelity, fraud, or misappropriation of funds. But, they quickly became more violent, involving, assault, vandalism, theft, kidnapping, and the big one: murder.

Their backgrounds gave them enough experience to handle equal parts research, and being able to handle trouble, as it frequently arose. Much of it was challenging, but it was fun for them, too. The fact that they were working again, actually making a difference, together, and that they got to travel a little, made things very worthwhile.

It was as if the recent past almost never happened.

As he continues to hit the punching bag, David also thinks back on one of their recent cases, taking them to Mardi Gras. Losing themselves in the crowd and noise of the parade, he slipped an engagement ring onto her finger: a gold band with a small emerald.

He hits the bag ever harder, a little more, with that thought, blocking everything out, such as the sweat caking his face, and his heavy breathing.

He doesn't hear the creaking of the steps on the stairs. His body becomes numb with ecstasy, moving this way and that. His breathing, the punching of the bag, and his steps, blur together, until he hits the bag hard enough for him to lose his breath. Grabbing hold of the bag, he wheezes, doing his best not to fall, with closed eyes.

Soft, thin hands drape a brown robe over his sweat-soaked gray sweatpants

and hooded sweatshirt. Slowly, he lets go of the bag, letting his arms slip into the robe. Wiping the sweat from his face on the right sleeve, he turns around to see Pam standing there smiling, wearing blue jeans, a navy blue blouse, carrying a tall glass of chocolate milk.

“Thanks.” He takes it from her hand and downs half of it in two seconds. He raises the glass to his mouth again, but she presses on the glass, stopping him.

“Hey! Save your appetite, ok? I’m cooking downstairs.”

“Oh? What are we having? Or do I have to guess again?”

She walks away, towards the stairs, letting the sunlight coming in from a window touch her features, especially her face and hair. She is glowing in the light, naturally, with her golden hair, and lack of make-up.

The few seconds she is in the sunlight seem to last forever in David’s eyes, but the sight is gone as she reaches the top of the stairs. “You’ll find out. Come on. I promise you’ll like it. It tastes good. It really does!”

He laughs as she says that. Over the past few months, she has turned him around, regarding his habits. Gone are cigars and ashtrays, and the smell that would normally follow. The usual routine of junk food meals that would surround healthy ones have been cleaned away. A steady pattern of a diet that has been surprising, and vigorous exercise, has allowed him to lose weight. When he last weighed himself, he noticed twenty pounds have been shed, mostly from his stomach.

Following her down the stairs, the smell of herbs and spices get stronger as he sees her go from the stairs, and into the wood-paneled, and white-tiled kitchen. Sneaking up behind her, he embraces her from behind, lifting her up, making her yell out in surprise.

“Put me down! I have to check on the food!”

David looks at the stove. Bubbling pots full of water, with vegetables and seasonings swimming and swirling in them, steam rising from them, sit on the stove. Below the pots, the light for the oven shows a container with chicken and vegetables. Both of them can tell everything is almost done cooking by the smell, so he puts her down.

The kitchen table is set perfectly, so they will be sitting not too far from each other across the table. On the counter, a small television set sits, with a manila folder resting next to it. He picks it up, holding it up in the air for Pam to see.

“Uh, I thought we were done with this for today?”

Pam turns around to see the folder David is holding. “Right. We are. It’s just that I wanted to go over some things we may have missed.” She turns back around, tending to the food.

David walks over to the refrigerator, opening it in search of a drink. Pitchers and containers of teas, juices, and milk fill his line of sight.

He pulls out the jar of mango juice, and as he puts it on the counter, gets a glass from a cabinet. Pouring the juice into the glass, he sips it a little.

“Missed? How can I forget? I swear we were THAT. CLOSE.” He holds his thumb and forefinger out in the air, about a centimeter apart.

He takes the drink and the folder and sits down at the table, looking through the folder as he waits for dinner. Notes and photos they’ve gone over countless times to the point of memorization, about a kidnapping case, turning into extortion. The details play out in his head automatically: an upper-middle class family’s young son is violently kidnapped when the parents leave a babysitter in charge. She’s assaulted, and the parents are contacted by them soon after.

The police have many theories, but no substantial leads. The mother comes

to them in desperation, pleading for help. She tells them of her own theories that she told the police: the past groundskeepers may be involved. Detailed descriptions are given, as well as past addresses and references. They check up on them, including possible hang-out areas.

All turn up empty. Suspects disappear from their places of residence, including them emptying their bank accounts before the kidnapping. Anyone else would think they would be long gone. Days would go by. The cops would think the boy would be turning up dead. Pam and David thought differently. All that effort told them the kidnappers had to still be close by, somewhere.

It was sheer luck that Pam recognized one of them, through a heavy disguise. On a sunny afternoon, she's shopping two towns over. A man passed by her. Her gut told her he wore a toupee, and as she turned around, she noticed the fact. That slip on his part made her follow him, and she slipped, too, as he noticed her following him. He ran, and a car chase ensued.

The only thing that allowed them to get away was not that they could drive better. One of them was a very good shot as they shot out their two front tires on a busy street. In minutes, their hopes rose and fell. But, it was not a total loss. Pam managed to write down their license plate number.

David looks at the picture of the kidnapped boy, of a much happier time: smiling, running in a field, with the wind blowing his hair around. He drops the picture as Pam takes his plate from him, and puts a little bit of everything onto his plate, and then does the same for herself.

“Do you mind if I turn on the Tv?”

Pam sets her plate down at her place across from him on the table. “Sure. Put the news on. Maybe they know something we don't.”

He starts to get up, but she reaches the Tv first, turning the knob, and turning another knob, finding the news channel. They start to eat, waiting for the news to come on.

In-between mouthfuls of chewing, David lets one of the tastes sink in. “You’re right. This does taste good. It’s doesn’t have that cardboard taste.”

Pam swallows her food. “See?”

The jingle for the local news comes along, and they turn to look at the screen, seeing familiar faces to go along with the themed music. What they see next makes them freeze, with Pam dropping her fork onto her plate. The boy that David was just looking at in the picture is on the screen, hugging his mother in a police station.

With that, the faces of the three kidnappers matching each of their descriptions that appear on the screen make their heartbeats race. They then cut to a police chief telling that the kidnappers were killed by mysterious man in the woods, and how they were killed.

Pam instantly recalls the news clippings of the infamous Jason Voorhees, and the many ways in which he killed. Not only that, but the way he was as he did it. He could sneak up on people, better than death ever could be, and play mind games with his prey, too.

She knows it’s not him. She researched every article about him, including the one about his cremation, and how people celebrated the event. Whatever happened in the woods, whoever saved that boy, must be a coincidence: she’s certain of that.

Then they cut to the chief again, telling of the boy giving a description of this man. Each part of the puzzle becomes more clear in her mind as she reads them, seeing them in her mind’s eye. She thinks of someone from her recent past.

She doesn’t want to. In her deepest wishes, she felt everything from the past

was finished, and she was safe from it. No chance was there anything coming back, nor there any survivors of it, being affected to the point of not coming back. But, as they finish giving the description of the man, her heart has already been on a freezing freefall, with no ground, ever.

A detailed sketch, fitting the description of the man perfectly, is put up onto the screen. That thick, brown hair, now a little longer, with a clear complexion and high cheek bones, all complement, yet contrast the eyes. They're the same as before, but the way they're drawn, it's as if they belong to someone else. They seem almost alive, as if they're looking right into her, knowing everything about her.

Pam's heart suddenly becomes warm, then quickly hot from the inside out. Her voice comes back, and with it, she cries out.

"Tommy!"

Chapter Three

"Come on, you worthless fleabags! Move those arms! The dead can swim faster than you!"

Gerry does his best to ignore the slow fatigue in his muscles as he swims alongside the other kids. Only half a mile out, a few hours since the sun came up, and he still has been able to keep his breakfast down. All around him, the rest of the kids move along as if they've been swimming all their lives, with no sign of fear.

Behind them, Jim, and his two assistants, are each paddling in their own canoes. Greg is paddling much more than the other two, almost as if he's trying to crash into them. He smiles as he continues to yell a few feet behind.

"Move it, ladies! It's not an audition!"

Flashes of recent memory come back to Gerry: running in place, doing sit-ups, push-ups, and other exercises, on the shore of the beach. All while Greg yelled

individual insults at everybody. Gerry could tell that many of them swallowed their tears, and their guilt, just as they are doing now, and pushing through it.

He's certain he's feeling the same as they are. As soon as they immersed themselves in the water, the cool water refreshed them, feeling almost reborn. The more athletic kids know this other feeling from before, but the rest that are feeling the adrenaline running, are forgetting the fake, euphoric, slight-of-hand that drugs did.

He wishes he could go on forever. He hopes that he can last long enough, at least so he can see shore or take a break.

A mile away, a square raft sits out in the middle of the lake. The sight of it warms him up deep inside, doing its best to push away the temperature of the water that is growing colder.

They all push themselves harder, feeling as one, or so they think. The sound of coughing is heard by Gerry next to him, which is then behind him.

He whips his head around, seeing the wet, dyed hair of Audrey, spitting up water. She is treading in place, doing her best to stay afloat, but continuously bobbing under the surface.

Greg can't help but notice. "I didn't say stop!"

Audrey reaches for the side of the canoe that comes close to her. Greg whips the paddle out of the water, smacking her hand. She yelps in pain, making her struggle in the water more.

"We're not offering any sympathy here, young lady!"

She turns to look at Jim, who looks at her with a blank, yet disappointing glare. "What if we weren't here? You have to fend for yourself. You think anyone is gonna save you?"

In the midst of her struggling, she sinks below the surface.

Ben notices all this, and leaves the disgusted, apathetic Jim and Greg behind and jumps into the water. Gerry swims under the water to help him out. Both of them clearly with the bright sun cutting through the water. Each of them takes an arm of hers, and push themselves to the surface.

Gerry grabs her from behind and gives her the Heimlich maneuver, making her cough up more water. Her eyes flutter open wildly as she spits up, gasping for air in-between. They hold onto her as they swim over to Ben's canoe, thrusting her up and onto it. All the while, Grey and Jim watch while saying nothing.

When Audrey is safely in the canoe, breathing heavily, Greg snaps back to his old self. "Good job, guys. Gerry, get back in gear and follow the others! Move!"

Gerry turns around and swims towards the raft. Ben turns to look at Jim and Greg with intense, burning eyes.

Gerry sees the rest of the kids at the raft. Some sit on either side of it, and some hang onto it while still in the water. Keith laughs as Gerry swims to just a few feet away.

Gerry looks up at him. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing. You missed it. Is that your girlfriend back there?"

"No." Gerry looks at Frank, then back at Keith. "Is he your boyfriend?"

The rest of the kids laugh while saying "Oooooooooooooo!"

Frank give Gerry a cold stare while Keith looks visibly angry. Frank waits for them to quiet back down. "That's not what we saw at the party, remember? You were talking for hours, and then you went somewhere in the house, and nobody saw you until the cops showed up."

Gerry swims to the right of them, grabbing onto a corner of the raft.

"So what? At least I have better odds of not having my virginity anymore."

Oh, you know what? The same goes for you, too. I don't even want to imagine what you two do with each other, but I can't help but notice."

Keith and Frank leap into the water right next to Gerry. Their hands are on him in no time. Though he tries to fight them off, it does him no good. They push him underwater, holding him down, as he flails about under the surface.

The kids on the raft laugh as they see what's going on. Some cheer them on. Others stop laughing and simply stare. Finally, after a few more seconds, Karen jumps into the water.

Digging her nails deeply into their arms, drawing blood, making them cry out, Frank and Keith release their hold on Gerry, allowing him to come back up for air.

Frank looks at the cut on his thick, meaty arm, and the blood trickling along it. Keith hold his arm where the cut it, while Frank then looks angrily at Karen. "Look what you did to my arm, you bitch!"

"That's what you get for trying to kill my friend, Mr. No Dick!"

The other kids stifle their laughs, while Keith moves closer to her. "We weren't trying to kill him. We were just dunking him!"

"Fuck you!"

Karen smacks Keith across the face, while Gerry elbows Frank in the chest. The others cheer them on as Karen and Gerry smack and punch Frank and Keith. They grab hold of them, and dunk them underwater, holding them under for a few seconds, then let them up. They do it again and again, in rapid succession, and each time they do, they hold them under a little longer than before.

"What the hell are you kids doing?!"

Everybody turns to see Jim, Greg and Ben come closer in their canoes, along

with Audrey in Ben's canoe. Karen and Gerry suddenly let go as they hear Jim's voice cut through the noise the kids were just making.

Keith and Frank flail violently to the surface, coughing and gasping. Jim sees them, then looks at Gerry and Karen.

"We already had someone almost drown just now. Now I see you're purposely drowning these two?"

"They were trying to drown Gerry!"

Gerry looks at her, then at Jim. "It's true, sir."

Keith looks at them disgustedly, while hanging on to the raft. "They attacked us first!" He raises his arm up, still bleeding a little. "Look what she did to my arm!" Frank raises his arm up, also.

Jim looks him in the eyes. "I don't care. Would you like me to kiss it and make it better?!"

Jim looks at the rest of the kids on the raft, and those hanging onto the side. "The rest of you head on back. Now!" They splash into the water, rushing away from the raft, swimming away. The sound their swimming makes is so soothing as they swim away from Karen and Gerry. It seems to call to them, but Jim's voice cuts through that euphoria, cutting it off.

"Whatever you have going on is going to stop: right now. You're here to shape up and get sober, not try and kill each other. May I remind you you're also here to avoid doing time? No? Good. Now, I want you to sit there, on either side of the raft, for an hour."

Gerry turns to Jim, who watches Ben and Greg follow the others. "Then what?"

"Then you'll have to catch up to the others. Just prey you have enough

energy not to collapse. If you just sit there, and not argue, you should be fine.”

Jim paddles his canoe around the other direction, and follows behind Ben and Greg. After about a minute, hearing the sound of Jim’s paddling fade enough, they all turn to look at him, then at the rest of them. They stare into space, daydreaming, hearing and feeling the motion of the water.

“Ok, snap out of it! Into the water!”

They open their eyes, shaking away their naps. They stretch, noticing that the time that’s passed has felt like an hour. Slipping themselves into the water, they acclimatize quickly to treading water again.

“Let’s go!”

They spread out from each other, swimming at a slow, steady pace, staying behind Jim, mindful of their own energy. They lose themselves again in their repetitive swimming patterns, burying their emotions all the more as they move on.

As Gerry swims, he can feel the animosity coming from Keith and Frank. Safe for now, but if he doesn’t watch it, they are certain to get back at him somehow, at some point soon. It would most likely happen when they’re alone from the three in charge. Gerry thinks upon the certainty with equal parts dread and relish, tasting it deep down along with the sweet, bitter taste of the water on his surface.

The next few minutes pass along with the feet they swim. They all manage to forget the recent events, to a point, until they feel their muscles swell with adrenaline again, drowning any pain or damaged pride.

Deep down, they smile, though they’re too busy to do so literally. As fast as they go, Jim maintains his speed as he paddles. The distance, the time, and euphoria the kids feel as they swim, blur together, until the sight of the shore comes into view a little less than a mile away.

They can see the others doing tai-chi exercises on the shore. Gerry looks on the sight with comfort. He doesn't expect to be run ragged the whole time, until they collapse. It makes him move his body more, faster, until nobody, not even him, realize that he's passing the other up. He's right next to Jim's canoe. Neither of them is aware of each other presence until Jim looks to his left. In the midst of his recent disappointment, pride slowly breaks and cracks his tough veneer, barely, as he turns away.

Gerry looks past the kids on the shore, and in his shaky sight, sees the forest. The depth of the darkness, the trees that are thicker and thicker in that depth, are a beautiful invitation. In this moment, he fools himself that there is nothing wrong in the world, or where they are.

In his steady rhythm, he scans the beginning of the forest. In the distance, the shape of a man appears in that depth, and then is gone, as if it were never there. Though to him it is only a speck, he dismisses it as a trick of the light and dark, mixing together, part of his imagination.

If he could see up close into the forest, he would see a man. Hidden behind thick bushes, calm eyes look at them in the lake, through binoculars. These eyes can see their bodies up close, as if being right next to them: breathing, tasting, and feeling all along.

Lowering the binoculars from the eyes, the calm, emotionless face of Tommy Jarvis looks at the open expanse of the land. In the depths of his mind and in his heart, he feels many things. Pain, rage, and yet stability, set to mix inside him, fighting for control.

Bringing up the binoculars again, he looks at the man in the canoe paddling in front of the teenagers. He thinks upon the man's apathetic nature, and narrows his eyes. He imagines what he could do to him, and spreads his lips into a smile, tasting, relishing

the anticipation.

Chapter Four

Detective Harry Donaldson sits behind his desk, sipping coffee from a styrofoam cup. His thick white mustache contrasts his thinning head of short, white hair, complementing his lined, slightly pudgy face, and slightly overweight body. He listens to the noise that comes from the rest of the police station from his office: people telling jokes, various footsteps, and always the rowdy voices from those arrested.

It seems to happen like clockwork. Despite all this, Harry is content. He smiles to himself, with his whole face, as he closes his eyes, leaning back in his chair, imagining himself somewhere else. He pictures a hot, sandy beach, with beautiful, thin, young women, in next to nothing, or nothing at all. He can feel the rich, thick texture of the sand as it warms up his feet, massaging the soles.

From behind, and all around, he can feel hands on his thick, bare, and hairy chest, which caress him, where his conservative black and white suit is today. His eyebrows go up as those hands go slowly down, down his chest, lost in euphoria.

A sudden knock at the door brings him out of his daydream. He is shaken awake by the noise as he sits up. He maintains his composure as he still retains the recent memory, with a happy look on his face.

“Yes?”

The door opens to reveal a young, uniformed officer with short, brown hair. “Sorry to disturb you, sir. There’s a couple of private detectives here. They say it’s urgent.”

Harry’s eyes narrow as he thinks of what this is all about. Just as he thought he could relax, even if was for a few minutes.

He nods. “Send them in.”

The officer opens the door wider to let Pam Roberts and David Tucker into the office. Pam has on a cream-colored jacket, a tan dress-shirt and blue jeans. David has a black leather jacket, a white dress-shirt and blue jeans.

As the door is closed, they notice the absence of any chairs in front of the desk, but their urgency makes them not care. Pam barely notices the nameplate on the desk as she extends her hand first, shaking hands with Harry, then letting David do the same, as they exchange names.

“Well, I would offer you both a seat, but I’m afraid I’m having new chairs brought in tomorrow. Obviously, you can’t wait.”

He looks down at his bad joke, then quickly looks up, ignoring it.

“Would you like to tell me what exactly I can help you with?”

David looks Harry in the eyes. “We’re here about the Bobby Thompson kidnapping case. We were also investigating. I believe we had contact with one of the other detectives here about it?”

“I see. Well, since you’re here, then you must have heard the news. The boy was found by a good Samaritan driving by, and thanks to them, he’s back with his folks. Other than the fact that those scumbags were killed by some kind of vigilante, personally, I’d say the case is closed. But, we all know differently, don’t we?”

Pam steps forwards slightly, as if choosing her words carefully. “I happen to know who the vigilante is.”

Harry leans forward, giving her a cold, inquisitive look as he narrows his eyes a little. “And how would you know that?”

Pam looks down, feeling the guilt well up inside her, sighing. “Because he was a patient of mine. Up until a few months ago, I was the assistant director at the Pinehurst Halfway Center for troubled teens and young adults.”

Harry raises his hand up. “That’s enough. I know who you are now. You, too, Mr. Ex-Sheriff. I read the papers. But, I will say that I’m sorry for what happened. I really am.”

Pam looks up at Harry, feeling a little better at the sign of sympathy.

“Maybe you can clear up some things for me, Miss Roberts. Such as why this person went after these three guys, and left the boy alive. Also, when someone with a very traumatic past with emotional problems is forced into another traumatic experience, was not put on twenty-four hour guard? I’m sorry: you said you know this man’s name?”

“His name is ‘Tommy Jarvis’. As to why he didn’t bother with the boy, I believe he didn’t consider him a threat. More so, it was a big coincidence that he was there when he was. He probably heard the noise they were making, and decided to look for himself. Noticing the boy, and the situation, I’m certain he saw much of himself in what was going on.”

Harry looks at her surprised, with wide eyes, turning his head slightly.

“Coincidence? No, it’s not just that. It’s bigger than that. But, please continue.”

“When Tommy came to Pinehurst, he was not a threat, to himself, or anyone. There were isolated incidents when he became violent, but he wanted to be left alone, in peace. I felt that considering his past, he made progress, and after that man who dressed up as that killer...”

David clears his throat. “It was Roy, one of the ambulance drivers. He dressed up as Jason Voorhees.”

Pam looks at him. “Yes. I felt that Tommy was putting his past behind him, and although he was forced to defend himself again, I was hoping against all odds, when I would peek into his hospital room, that his mentality was sound.”

Harry sighs at her words. “Well, you were wrong, because obviously, what he witnessed set him off. There could be any number of things that would set him off, at any time, and you were going to release him into the general public?”

Pam leans over, putting her hands on the desk, looking down at Harry. “Look, it wasn’t my fault what happened to him. I don’t think anyone could have prevented what happened, or what’s happening to him now.”

“I take it you’ve put out an APB not just on Tommy’s description, but on the kidnappers’ car he stole?”, David asks.

“Yes, but that was just about an hour ago. Bobby was found four hours ago, so Tommy could be anywhere by now.”

“In theory, he could be anywhere, but you have to consider his initial path. He went from the east, and made his way west. Unless he got spooked enough to change that path, which I doubt that to be the case, he most likely decided to continue heading west.”

Harry looks at him intently, while he sips his coffee, taking in David’s thoughts. “Ok, let’s say he will make his way west. I think it’s safe to say he’s not going to find the biggest rock he can find, and crawl under it. Odds are he still has the same car, given the amount of time has passed. What types of areas do you think he’ll be looking for?”

Pam straightens up, about to speak, but David beats her to it. “He’ll be wanting to return to the past, what he’s familiar with. The life he knew before Jason Voorhees took it away from him.”

Pam looks at David, shocked, that he took the words from her. Usually it’s her that comes up with insightful information that people don’t normally think about. She realizes that he did research of his own, too, on his own time.

She smiles at him, embarrassed, but maintains her composure. “Yes, right. Not just that, he may be still looking for what he can’t have, which is what he was looking for in the first place. What we all want at the end of the day: peace. I’m certain that’s not his top priority anymore. So, where would he go? The wilderness, away from civilization, would be perfect. The more secluded, the better.”

“That would leave out any state parks, because at this time of year, they’re full of people. Kids are out of school; families; no expectations of any danger, besides wild animals.”

Harry looks at them both, content with what they’re saying. “What about camps?”

Pam thinks about it for a few seconds before answering. It’s early August, so kids should be leaving right about now. Besides, he let Bobby Thompson go because he wasn’t a threat, but...”

David picks up on what she’s saying. “But, anyone older, including teenagers, would be. To him, they would be sport. So, teens in a secluded area... Aside from private cabins, or boot camps, I can’t think of anything else.”

Pam looks at David wide-eyed, open-mouthed. She snaps her fingers. “That’s it! Boot camps! If Tommy sees that kind of aggression, it’ll set him off again. Now we just have to pray the car he took can be found, because I don’t think we have much time. He’s reliving his past, coupled with the fact that he’s killed again, though still in self-defense. He’s got a taste for it now.

Chapter Five

Rain pours down during the night, in heavy, continuous lines. The rhythm is seemingly never-ending in its swift motion and crackling sound as it hits the ground. Its steady way is soothing for those that sleep in the cabins, lulling them to forget where they

are, what they have done, and what they will do. Not a thing to think about, not even how they are.

Miles into the forest, a dark green tent is nestled around thick bushes and trees, covered enough so that only one man would know of it. Though leaves, shrubbery, and branches have almost swallowed this round cocoon, rain still manages to drop onto the waterproof material that makes up the outer lining of the tent.

All around, everything is quiet. The rain is the only sound, the only movement. No animals at all, for they sleep their sleep of peace. Within this tent, this womb, is another story. It is a story filled with rich, thick turmoil. At its center is a storm, threatening with the desire to rage uncontrollably.

Past the safe, steady pitter-patter of the rain, is a man, known only fully to himself. The concept of sleep for him is a familiar one from his past, though he is unable to find it now, this night. As he struggles to catch it as he has so easily before, his eyes stare off into forever as he opens and closes them.

Deep into his mind, he thinks upon years past, what brought him to this point. With a mind blown wide open, he is dragged into memory, into himself, and mystery. That ever-increasing mystery that is now becoming clear, for the meaning of Tommy Jarvis.

His childhood comes flooding back in vivid detail. All the sweet peaks, and the bitter, hideous valleys, and their depths within. All the times he's spent with his father, before the move to Crystal Lake. All the camping and hunting trips, learning how to stalk, kill, and eat what they killed. At nights, Tommy would hear stories about the legend of Jason Voorhees, and while would appear to be scared, he would never believe them.

Over time, he could see their parents' relationship deteriorating. Hiding in

his room, covering his ears, trying to hide from the loud arguments, he would stare at the posters of movie monsters, and think of all the nights his family would stay up late and watch old monster movies. Though sometimes it would just be Tommy and his dad, he would lose himself on those nights, wanting to know and love the horror genre more, but not knowing how.

The years were filled with tranquility, with almost no strife to be found, and certainly no bullies. His father made sure of that by making sure Tommy would be enrolled in self-defense classes. He wanted to make sure that Tommy would end up a self-made man, able to fend for himself, answerable to nobody. Spending hours practicing his moves, he was a little powerhouse, not to mention with fixing and maintaining the family car.

Out of nowhere, the day came when his mother could take no more. With no choice in the matter, he was taken from the suburbs, and transplanted into the quiet, seemingly peaceful town of Crystal Lake, sitting in the middle of nowhere.

Leaving his friends behind, what little of them he had, he felt alone as the first day of a new school rushed in. That day brought something new: hostility, for which there was no meaning. A gang of boys his age, weaving in and out of sight and discipline of the teachers, and the law of the land.

In-between classes, and during lunch, they would call him names, which would be every one of them in the book. Often running out, they would make things up, based on his looks, and his very nature. Though one would seem to lead this gang, which was a tall, brown-haired kid with freckles, he would flaunt how better he was than Tommy.

This kid was also often seen with a chubby kid with glasses and very short dark hair. Tommy wondered why this kid was never bullied, but no answer would ever

come. At first, the names were nothing. He just brushed them off, chalking them up to playful teasing, what they do to new kids.

It was nothing, until they changed all at once, becoming physical. They would push and trip him in the hallways, laughing all about it. They would flick food at him at lunch, and shoot spitballs, snap rubber bands, toss paper airplanes, and even throw marbles, at him during class. Only when their actions would disrupt the class, bother the teacher directly, would they get in trouble.

They would get caught frequently, and punished, but only to a certain point. It would never stick, and always fail to sink in. They would become more bold, and sneakier, making sure not to be seen in what they did. For the most part, the teachers were still being apathetic to Tommy.

The tension would build over time, and he would hide it. He would cry himself to sleep, over what would happen each day. He would dream of beating them up, fanaticizing of going past that point, tearing them apart. These feelings would threaten to become warm next to his heart, and at the same time, fear of what he could become.

In the midst of the noise and motion of the day, they attacked him from behind, catching him off guard, coming out of nowhere. Slamming his head against a door in the boys' bathroom, they grabbed him all at once, and lifted him into the air. He struggled in their hands and arms, like a caught animal, but it did not help. His yells and screams were drowned out amidst the noise of the school's kids, fuelling the fire of these kids' laughter.

They turned him upside down. His heart screamed along with his all of his chest with rage. The sound of them all laughing stopped being just that. Their voices mixed and merged into one, he felt it was the whole school laughing: the students, the teachers, his counselor, and the principle.

A spark welled up from his heart, burning hotter than anything he knew. As they slammed his head into the toilet, the pain of it all doused the spark as they held him under the water. It was only dormant, for the moment.

Lifting him up and out, after thinking he didn't quite drown, his glasses came off his face, floating in the water. They dropped his limp, seemingly unconscious body on the floor, walking away as if nothing ever happened, pretending that Tommy does not exist.

He would come to, and as he did, he would cry for what seemed like forever, lying on the floor. The cold surface of the floor that touched his cheek failed to comfort him. Running home crying in the middle of the day, running into the surprised arms of his mother would offer temporary relief. But, when she would confront the principal on what was happening, no permanent solutions would really help.

Constantly looking over his shoulder, he would anticipate another attack from them. Days, and even weeks, would go by, with no word, snicker, or laugh from those familiar to him. He would go to great lengths to avoid them, such as going to the bathroom at the other end of the school, or eating lunch at another part of the school. At first, he wondered why they, or anyone, didn't bother to look for him, or question him about his sneaky nature. He soon concluded that he didn't really matter to them anymore, or anyone.

The end of the school year was fast approaching. Tommy's heart would swell, eager to get out of the school. He would have the opportunity to visit his father again, after not seeing him for months. With another visit, the promise of a wonderful surprise hooked him into counting the days, dreaming what his father had for him.

On a bright, spring day, and a month away from summer vacation, Tommy ate lunch quietly, barely hearing the other kids' voices echo off and around the walls,

through the halls. Peeking around every corner, he walked slowly and carefully to one of the bathrooms, feeling safe, and alone.

His heart was calm, peaceful, as he was walking towards the door. No sound from outside was heard, no unlikely chance was thought of. He smiled proudly for the first time in a long time, meaning it, as he gripped the door handle.

As he opened the door, a quick flash of those familiar boys stood outside. He swung the door back, trying to keep it closed against all odds, hoping for someone to help him, knowing it not to be.

They pushed their way in fully, knocking him off his feet. As they came inside, they shut the door, barring the way, surrounding him. The tall, blond, freckled boy spoke high and triumphantly, letting him know that he can't get away from him. The words blurred together as their eyes met.

Even as two of them picked him up by the arms, slamming him against a wall, their laughter mixed and churned into one, building in volume, as their leader pulled out a pocket knife with a blade not so small, but bigger only to Tommy's eyes. Forever it was for the edge and tip to take to reach his neck, teasing its way to his throat. An inch away, the knife hovered in their hands, wondering just how to teach him, to mark him.

Realization came alive in Tommy's young, yet old mind. If either of them hesitated for too long, they would regret it. Not the very thought of death, nor dying slowly, but being marked for life, living as a trophy made flesh, brought back that spark that was doused from before.

The spark grew fast, flowing as it bubbled. Rage pushed up and out, burning hotter and sharper than any knife as the tip of the blade caressed his skin, scratching it. The slightest pinprick gave him all the reason and more as it drew a small line of blood. He could taste that spark as it flowed forever in every second. Though bitter, there was

another taste to it. It was sweeter than honey or any candy. It was soon to be so much more.

He broke free of their hands holding him. Grabbing the wrist of him who held the knife, he squeezed to his heart's content, making the boy drop the knife as he yelps in pain. The next second brought newfound strength as Tommy punched the boy on his left in the face, and the boy on his right in the same place. He didn't look or care as blood streamed and flowed from their noses. He simply slammed them against the wall, elbowing them in their stomachs.

One after the next, as they doubled up with pain, he grabbed them, throwing them across the length of the bathroom. Streaks of blood shined on the floor, with it forming puddles at their moaning bodies.

Another boy tried to run, but just as they reached the door, Tommy grabbed them by the shoulder, hauling them back. Pushing them into another wall, their head slammed into it, bringing a spray of blood streaking out. As they fall, Tommy sees the boy's head fall, and jump kicks him in his head. The boy was sent flying back in another direction, sliding on the floor, unconscious.

The last boy saw Tommy, finding the rage in his eyes. Tommy looked into their eyes, knowing the fear that finally shown itself not just in those eyes, but past them, and maybe for the rest of the boy's life.

Tommy took a step forward, then another, and another. Something bulbous touched his feet. It was the handle of the pocketknife. He kicked it over to him, smiling as it reached their feet. That made their eyes go wider and deeper in fear, but then the memory of Tommy from before came back, drowned it, as he snatched up the knife, still holding each other's stare.

He rushed at Tommy, with the knife out, prepared to not merely stab him, but gut him like a fish, as an example. Tommy saw him coming, and sidestepped the fast motion that seemed to move slow. As he grabbed the wrist again, this time he twisted the hand, hearing something crack as the knife dropped again.

The boy's screams that Tommy dreamed about for so long was music to his ears as he did not stop. He pummeled his chest repeatedly, feeling bigger and stronger than he was, not feeling any pain on his hands.

Grabbing him, he tossed his body against one of the bathroom doors. Collapsing against it more than bouncing from it, he struggled to stand and see Tommy again in his blurry haze of sweat and tears. He swayed as he put up his hands, trying to match Tommy.

Tommy stared at him in disgust as he jump kicked him in the face, sending spurts of blood dribbling from his nose. Loosing his footing, staggering back, he fell off his feet, crashing onto his butt instead of his back. Seeming to fall forever as his stiff back creaked then like an old rocking chair, Tommy simply walked over and kicked him again in the face, sending more blood flowing not just from the nose, but from a gash in the bottom lip.

Their head hit the floor with cold, clapping finality as sound of bone hitting echoed. Tommy breathed harder as he saw the still body of the boy that gave him hell over the past school year, seemingly for no reason. He saw the marks and the blood that flowed from him, and for those seconds, he wondered if what he has done was enough.

Before he knew it, he was kicking him, making his body jerk and fly about like a doll, or a dead body having their body come alive with electric shocks. He breathed even harder, feeling and hearing his heart pound, drowning out everything. With every kick, he felt that much better, though he knew the damage was done. He

knew, that until pain and fatigue would set in, and scream for him to stop, would he do so. As his foot kicked the boy, pushing him, he wondered if he could push himself past even that.

He could not hear the sound of his foot hitting the boy repeatedly over the sound of his heart. It was music to his ears, pushing him further and further over the edge. In that moment, he wanted to, for he could not think of all those years past, or even how and who he was.

It would be anyone's guess if he would have then, for out of nowhere, the large hands of an adult grabbed him firmly from behind, pulling him away. He did not go quietly or easily. As little as he was, he struggled fiercely, like an excited, rabid, starving, protective dog, doing his best to break free of the hold.

Tommy could feel his voice coming back to him before he could hear it. More arms came, dragging him away. As they did, he reached his own arms out towards those boys, screaming to do more, knowing he was not finished.

Further and further they became, and Tommy's voice became a shrill, piercing yell, crashing from the bathroom, and flowing all through the school. It rose even louder when he could not see them anymore as he was dragged from the bathroom, out into the hall, by teachers and the janitor. Managing to cover his mouth and keep many hands there, nobody there on that day would ever forget that sound.

In no time at all, he was held in the principal's office, tied up in ropes, and gagged with duct tape. He sat there, crying, after being carried there, fearing the worst, but at the same time, not caring. He felt the worst was over.

He will never forget how the time seemed to not pass, dragging on forever, though he was not facing a clock. In the midst of his mired, waking nightmare, his mother walked into the office, and felt the intensity of her words, and slowly felt better as

the principal felt himself slowly shrink in stature.

Freeing Tommy from his bonds, she immediately pulled him from the school system that day. They ran out of the school, and drove away, forgetting what just happened, with big smiles on their faces.

When they got home, he fell into her embrace, crying at first, but as her words sunk in, explaining how she would home-school him from then on, he slowly stopped as he felt more safe than he ever felt. She was his hero that day, and she always would be.

His sister understood right away, and completely. Despite the details, she was proud of him for standing up for himself, in defense of his life mostly likely due to the knife that was found, but also proud of her mother for laying into the school's principal, and taking Tommy out of what his sister, Trish, called a "deathtrap".

Finishing up the rest of the school year at home with mom, Tommy quickly forgot the tumultuous events, learning about more interesting things, in a better way than school would be. By the time he did see his father again, and when he discussed how understanding and proud he was, Tommy was bashful.

The surprise that was waiting for Tommy was a trip. They went to a small factory filled with sweet, pungent smells, and all kinds of busy sounds, constantly bubbling up. They stopped to watch a mold being made of a hideous, deformed face. A steel press came down over rubber and latex laid out over the mold. With a hissing sound, and a release of steam, a fully formed face brought a newfound wonderment to Tommy eyes.

They spent countless days there, as Tommy learned carefully how to make different kinds of masks, how to apply make-up, and to make puppets. At first, he used what he knew, making things from "The Muppet Show", but then he dug deeper into his

psyche, going past those movie monster from late at night.

He would play with them, fooling himself, for they would look real. When his sister and mother would come by, he would scare them at first, but then they would be surprised and amazed at what he made.

It appeared that they were a whole family again, never apart. But as they would lose themselves in the days that turned into weeks, then those few summer months, circumstances would arise, reminding them of reality.

As the fall did come, Tommy didn't miss regular school at all while his mother taught him her own curriculum. With no friends or enemies to miss him, he began to grow into a prince of his own kingdom, his vast wilderness.

Though on occasion, he would see kids from his old school when he went into town with his mother and sister. They would avoid him, and those boys who hurt him, and were hurt by him, ran when they saw him. Each time he would laugh at the irony.

But, in those last few hours of his remaining innocence that fateful night, he began to remember. His recent memories were peeled away, a layer at a time, until he saw this mystery, masked man, for the first time. As he chased him and Trish, he could not help but be reminded of that tall boy that terrorized him.

Like before, he came to his senses, and using his brain, made a plan to trick this man, this Jason. With his back against the wall, he lost himself in the moment, until Jason came after his sister again, and the machete was at Tommy's feet. Instinct took over, and as he stared at him, creeping up from behind, he desired for him to turn around, and face him.

Seeming to watch himself from afar as he slammed the machete into Jason's head, seeing it slice his head open, slowly, last forever, he felt safe in those few seconds

as he picked up the massive blade. He felt secure, knowing he needed to comfort Trish. Deep down, he knew he should not have looked back. Not just at the seemingly dead body at his feet, but everything else. He had to. He could not stop himself. Against all odds, he had to be sure.

With a look back, it took himself away for the last time, and fully. Those fingers twitching, trying to come back, brought back the terror fully. At first, he kept hitting him with the machete out of desperation. But, in those next few seconds that fell slowly away, he wanted to never stop. It was a desire that he wanted to covet forever, stronger than any drug he would never know personally.

Blood flowed and streaked as he hit vital areas. In quick flashes, he saw where he hit. He heard his sister begging for him to stop, to end his mad fury, and come back to her, to normality, but as the little boy in him was drowned out, he could not stop. He felt he was someone else, a brand new person, who felt that what he's doing now is second nature, happening throughout his life.

With his wide, mad, yet happy eyes and angry face, he lost himself all the more with every move. Even as he cut through his neck, taking his head, he could not stop. The few minutes he was killing Jason repeatedly for himself, did, and will always, last forever.

In his momentum, he became drunk with fatigue, feeling the power in himself be distilled from refinement. He staggered, collapsing to the floor, still holding the machete. Trish wanted so much to pull him off and away, but, she was afraid that there was a chance, however small, that Tommy could somehow turn on her.

For the longest time, they sat, staring at the pieces of the monster, not moving, hearing themselves breathe. When Tommy looked at her, she looked at him in surprise, then relief. She reached out her hand, and as he finally dropped the machete, he

took her hand, and they left for the hospital.

Tommy can still remember seeing the cold, dead figure of his mother in the hospital morgue as he hears the rain continue to fall. He can still feel his heart break as he wanted his mother back, wanting to do anything to have her alive and by his side. That same, strange fury of another came back to him then, as they tried to comfort him, but as he suddenly attacked the staff, they were forced to subdue and retrain him.

He can still hear Trish crying as she called after him, just he can still hear his mother's voice, as it was. Singing during the day, along with him, to music on the radio, or only to him, lulling him to sleep. His tears drench his face and chest as, though eventually crying himself to sleep, he does not know how long he can hold on to those memories.

Chapter Six

The sun shines through the windows of the cabin that houses the cafeteria. They're lined up in front of a sliver counter, holding orange, plastic trays. There are glass sneeze guards, and metal vats are filled with nutritious foods that consist of breakfast and lunch-type foods, such as scrambled eggs, and scalloped potatoes.

Ben scoops up big portions onto their plates, doing so without them asking. They all know that they're more hungry than they realize as they see the food pile up, for just like yesterday, it will only be barely enough.

Jim and Greg are already sitting at separate tables, eating the same amount of breakfast. When the first few kids sit down, they simply watch them, making mental notes of any patterns.

As Gerry looks ahead, he spots Audrey, in the ever-decreasing breakfast line. He notices, and tries his best to keep track of her as she walks off with her food, when Ben bangs down on the metal surface of a vat.

Gerry looks at Ben quickly, surprised and wide-eyed. “Ah! I’m awake.”

Ben smiles as he scoops up various fruits and puts them on a plate for Gerry.

“Good. Make sure you stay that way, or they’ll push you harder.”

Gerry looks at the fruits on the plate, liking what he sees. “Thanks. I’ll remember.”

Taking a glass of orange juice, and regular milk, at the end of the line, he looks around for a good place to sit down. He notices Audrey sitting alone at a table, at the far end of the cabin. He can’t help but walk over to her, as he remembers the day before, how she struggled, and helped to save her life.

As he gets closer to her, he sees the sunlight mix with the dark, as it blends with her skin and hair. The vulnerability is still all over her as she does her best to hide it, just as he does his best to hide newfound crush.

“Are you doing ok?”

Audrey looks up to see Gerry smiling more with his eyes, though he has a slight grin. Though they’re still wearing their uniforms, he can still see her beauty. She just laughs as she clears her throat.

“Yes. Sit down, already. They’re all staring.”

Gerry places his tray of food down carefully, then sits down across from her. She looks down, continuing to eat, despite him looking at her. After a few seconds, he digs into his own food.

She stops in-between chewing. “It was a cramp.”

Gerry looks up. “Oh.”

“I’m not the best swimmer, ok? Maybe they should’ve found that out before we were pushed into the water.”

“I’m sorry. Hell, I’m sorry we’re here. We screwed up, way too much, and

now we're paying for it. Let's just try and survive."

"Survive? That's easy to say. I almost threw up yesterday doing all those push-ups. I can't imagine what we have to do today."

Footsteps get closer, making them look up. It's Karen, looking down at them with the sun hitting the tips of her red hair. She's holding her own tray of food. She doesn't bother to ask if she can sit with them. She sets her tray down next to Gerry, and looks at both of them.

"So, what did I miss?"

Gerry stops looking at the eggs he's playing with his plastic fork, twirling it in his fingers. "Nothing. We were talking about yesterday. You were there, remember?"

Karen looks down as she closes her eyes and smirks. "Oh yeah. I just wish we could've done more."

Gerry takes a quick bite of eggs and swallows. "It's just as well that we didn't. We're not here to get in more trouble. Can you imagine what would be happening to us if we were sent to prison, or juvenile hall?"

Karen points her fork at Gerry as she eats her eggs. "Only one fight since we got here? That's not bad. No, in the slammer or juvie, there would be fights daily, and they would be placing bets. Not to mention the rape."

Audrey looks down into her food as she listens to what they say. She cringes to herself at their words, but as it sinks in, as hard as things are now and will continually be, she knows she's better off where she is now. She preys she gets used to it.

She looks up as she sees Jack walking over to their table. Just as he's about to slide next to Audrey, a loud voice cuts through the conversations that fill the air from each table. Jack freezes, hovering above the bench, holding his tray perfectly balanced.

"Hey!"

They turn to see who it is. They know before they see his face. It's Jim.

“Pick a seat, and take it! Don't go switching tables! Go back to your original seat!”

Jack stands up straight and slowly walks back to the semi-full table he was at, with his spot still waiting for him. Gerry turns around, watching Jack go back, but his eyes soon wander, to the table on the right where he's looking. Frank and Keith sit alone, eating their food, noticing Gerry looking at them. He can see the anger in their eyes, feeling the smoky haze across the room. He knows it's not over.

Gerry quickly turns back around, still feeling their burning stare from behind. He scoops up a forkful of scalloped potatoes, tasting the seasonings in it, letting it soak his tongue in the taste, mixing with the ashes of their stares. A few more, and as the aftertaste from before is drowned out, he gives a smile to his friends at the table, hungry for more conversation.

They spend the next few minutes continuing to eat their breakfast, deep in thought. Thinking about the food, how the day will go, it's inconsequential as they feel themselves get fuller for the day, as the food fleshes out their insides.

Karen speaks up as she swallows a mouthful of food. “Are they still looking at us?”

Gerry whispers next to her. “Who? The head nazi?”

“No. The Hitler youth.”

“Why wouldn't they be? What else is there for them to look at? Hey, Audrey. Are they still burning lasers into us or eating kryptonite?”

Audrey looks past Gerry to see Keith and Frank looking at each other while eating and talking. She sees them stopping to laugh with each other. She imagines them

plotting against her and her friends.

“They’re laughing to each other. They’re probably talking about us, too.”

Gerry smirks at Audrey and Karen, rolling his eyes after the fact. “So what else is new?”

They finish the rest of their breakfast in silence, hearing everybody else eat and talk, not paying attention to any individual words, just the sounds of them. Audrey can’t help but watch many of the other kids crowd themselves at one table, seeming to ignore her. She hears the other girls laugh and what the boys say, and wishes she was back home, never having done what she did.

At the same time, she’s glad she ultimately rebelled to the point of getting caught. At the same time, in the midst of trouble, she felt she was noticed for simply being alive, and not just a cog in a machine, going through the motions, setting aside her dreams.

In a way, it’s almost a badge of honor. More than a few hurdles next to it should be worth it, she thinks, as she thinks back, and ahead.

The sound of a whistle cuts through the rising, bubbling rhythm of conversations, causing two of the girls to scream and yelp. Keith and Frank laugh at this.

“Shut up! That’s enough!”, Greg shouts.

Everyone stops what they’re doing, and turns to look in the direction of the loud voice, since the whistle seemed to come from everywhere at once, echoing all around.

Jim walks down one of the aisles in-between the tables, letting the whistle fall from his lips, hanging from a thin, yellow piece of yarn. He looks at all the kids, and they look at him right back, giving him various looks: some warn and tired, some full, some mischievous, and there are those that are eager. He smirks at them all, wanting to

change all their looks.

“Now you know I’m not kidding about running you ragged. That little incident yesterday should let you know I’m serious. If you fuck up, it’s your ass. Hell, it could also be the rest of these asses sitting around you. Whatever any of you had going on before you got here, I don’t care. You’re here to forget about that, get clean, and get a natural high, by pushing yourselves.”

He turns to look out one of the wide, plate-glass windows, overlooking the seemingly never-ending forest. “I know you’re thinking we would be doing more of the same all the time, and ignore that forest we have next to the cabins this whole time, right? If any of you took the time to pay attention, you’ll have noticed the path running into it. This goes on for miles. How many? You’ll find out, so I hope you’re up for some sightseeing with your running, and you better have finished all your food.”

Jim sees Keith and Frank still scrambling to finish breakfast, chugging their milk, while Christina laughs as quietly as she can, shaking her blond hair ever so slightly, noticing their milk dribbling down their chins.

Jim catches all of this. “Don’t bother volunteering for being at the front, not that I would expect you to. There’ll be two lines, so...”

Jim spins around, thrusting his arm out, pointing his finger at Christina.

Christina yelps in surprise. Jim smiles at her reaction. “Good! So eager to please.”

Jim slowly walks down the aisles, looking out the window, seeing the lake, seemingly oblivious of the tables and kids as he walks. He gets closer to the window, almost not seeing the window as he gets closer, threatening to go through it if he should fall, or fail to stop.

He does stop, right at the edge. The tip of his nose touches the glass. A few

of the kids in the back snicker and laugh to themselves, stifling their laughs. The kids at the table right next to him look down, hoping against all odds that he won't notice them, or choose them.

Nobody noticed Jim turning around, snapping his arm out, pointing a stern finger at Gerry. Gerry looks up at Jim, and so does Audrey and Karen, more on their toes on the inside, sure that Jim can hear their hearts beat just as much as they can feel them.

With a big smile, Jim looks down at Gerry, who does his best to look proud and eager, trying to fool himself that what he has to look forward to will be fun.

“You just won the jackpot, too.”

As Jim walks away, Gerry smiles a little more, apprehensively.

“Great.”, Gerry thinks to himself.

Chapter Seven

Fierce sunlight cracks through the thick, tall trees, streaking down in sheets and lines. The heat of the light is barely felt, as the kids jog into the forest. Two by two, steady as they go, they keep up a pace as they see an endless mass of trees, leaves, and bushes. From high up, a birdsong echoes. From below, a squirrel chirps as it hangs on a tree. A raccoon watches them from the right, curiously.

In the midst of the sunlight, dust acts as spun gold as it hangs in the air. They are all taken back, to their childhood, as the sights and sounds dissolve the years. They remember all those fantasies they grew up with, and wanted to be a part of. Though they do their best to resist it, even Jim and Greg feel that sense of wonderment, if only slightly.

The minutes pass quickly. They feel so good inside, feeling their long-buried past, the concept of being tired does not enter into their minds. More and more minutes pass as they lose themselves, each feeling a thin sheen of sweat form all over, but not caring. Each let their dreams come back as each sight evokes something old and new. A

flight of fancy, a spreading of wings, a handling of magic, or an extension of power.

Each one has a taste all its own, whether sweet, rich, or seasoned, they are all distilled.

Jim, along with Greg, jogs right behind them. They both shake away their daydreams, and notice the task at hand. The sounds of their heavy breathing mixes with each other, almost drowning out birds flapping, and feet pounding on a wide, dirt path as they go on, alone in their hearts and minds.

Before they know it, they are flying again. On and on they go, one mile, then another, and another. The wonderment of the forest holds onto their minds for dear life, drowning out any potential pain or fatigue as much as possible. They do their best to keep up their paces, concentrating on their breaths, their own heartbeats, as each sound pushes them more.

The sound of breathing becomes heavier than everyone else. It sounds like an old, rusty engine trying to stay alive. Nobody has to look to see whom the sound belongs to. It's Frank.

“Come on, Frankie! Move it! Let's go! Hustle!”

Little by little, Frank slows down as his breathing becomes heavier and coarser, more sluggish. They move around him, passing him by, until they become smaller to the eyes. Jim follows them, but Greg stays behind with Frank, watching him with disgust as he bends over with overwhelming fatigue, coughing and spitting up large, thin strands of mucus.

“Now this is pathetic. I wouldn't hire you to take down a paper castle! What's the matter with you?! What would your friends think? I'll bet they're laughing right now!”

Frank puts a finger to one of his nostrils, and gets rid of the other nostril's snot by blowing air out of it, as he's still bent over. Slowly rising to his full height of five

feet, nine inches, he looks at Greg, eyes squinting, mouth open.

He bends over again, only slightly, to put a hand on his knee. “They’re not my friends.”

Greg looks at him, squinting a little more, looking a little surprised. “Oh, you mean it’s not just your buddy that kisses your ass?”

Frank breathes more, wanting to give some kind of rebuttal. Words float and fly around in his mind, but he just can’t get a hold of the right ones, or the ones that matter.

Greg continues to stand over him, holding back the urge to push him along, even grab the boy by his shirt, and shake the fat out of this body that is breaking down before him. As he feels his hands start to tingle with silent anger rippling through his body, Frank finds enough strength to stand up fully, with enough breath. Greg shakes it out of his system as Frank jogs along again.

Greg follows him closely behind. “Good. That’s good! You’re not worthless after all!”

The rest of the kids, and Jim, for the most part, have forgotten about Frank. Except for Keith, deep down, most of them wouldn’t care if he never existed. Only if his existence effected theirs directly would they care. Jim ignores his gut telling him to turn around and wait for Greg and Frank, knowing that if he were to do so, the other kids would get out of his control.

Though gradually becoming more tired, Christina and Gerry maintain themselves. A soft, cool air brushes their damp skin, but the two do their best to focus on the path in front of them, and nothing else.

Sounds of animals, and insects, snap, rustle, buzz, and echo all around. Light and shadow, as they move deeper into the forest, clash with each other, rise and shoot

out, playing with all their eyes. They all imagine some different, but Christina imagines she is surrounded by creatures from her imagination, passing them by, and saying to herself that they are not real, content with those words.

The path becomes a slight slope curving downward, and as they head down it, they all pick up speed. Christina smiles again, proud that she's at the front. The rest of the time may be different, but she feels this is her moment. The wind in her face brushes her face and her blond hair put into a ponytail. Leading them along, side by side with Gerry, she feels she can do no wrong.

They reach the bottom of the slope in the path. As it becomes level again, it curves to the left not too far ahead of the slope. Along it, Christina sets her eyes on the path. Somehow, though she cannot help it, she quickly glances to her left, seeing the occasional bird, rodent, or make-believe shape that the shadows and light conjure up. Among this, higher than her eyes are, are a pair of eyes, clear as day, and blue. These eyes stare at her, into her, with an intensity and passion, that draws her in.

In the space of a few seconds, those eyes covet all that she is, doing their best to understand her, and only her. They seem to peel away the years that make up her life, reaching into the heart of her, and feeling what makes her what she is, deep down. With, and in-between the beats of their hearts, though those eyes are covered by thick bushes, trees and leaves, it is though they are not just next to her, but right in front of her, staring her down.

She sees into those eyes, too. Past them, she can feel the spark of intent that they show. A quiet intent, just waiting to be stoked into a blazing rage that can never be sated.

If it were anyone else, with any other eyes, she would instantly ignore them,

and put them out of her mind. But, she knows instantly, in these seconds, that those eyes are human. She can't help but feel that murderous lust sizzling through the air, burning her slowly inside.

At long last, logic takes her fully all at once. Her heart lurches and skips a beat. Her breath is taken. Her muscles lose their consistency, becoming not just frozen jell-o that instantly thaws in the heat, but quicksand. In the next second, she panics as she starts to fall, grabbing Gerry by the arm, who is surprised by what she is doing.

Unable to do anything, he tumbles along with her, crashing to the ground. Unable to stop in time, those behind trip and bump into Gerry and Christina, with some sailing into the air before hitting the ground, rolling along the path. Other pile up on top of each other, either moaning in discomfort and the awkwardness, and the pain they notice.

Jim turns himself over, and feels a stinging feeling on his right knee. He can guess at how bad it is before he looks or stands up, but as he does look, he sees a red spot of blood pooling in the knee area of his gray sweatpants. Pushing himself up, he sees the kids sprawled out and over each other. He doesn't care, for he's seen much worse.

“Get up.”

The kids look up at him, in disgusted surprise. He grabs one, then another, pushing them to the side, to find Christina at the bottom of the pile. Not caring if she's hurt or not, he grabs her by the armpits, and lifts her up.

“What the hell happened to you? Huh? Answer me!” He shakes her like a rag doll, more so to punish her than to expect a response.

“You won't make it out of here if you can't take it!”

Finding her breath, and angry at his lack of empathy, she finds her voice.

“There's someone out there!”

Jim lets go of her, stepping back slightly. Though never impossible, the odds of anyone trespassing onto this property of his, though clashing with his ego, seems unlikely to him. Most people are unaware of it, and less even know they are there. In essence, they are all alone.

“What?! This is private property! There can’t be other people here. It was probably your imagination!”

Christina looks at Jim with cold, stony eyes, not caring if he believes her or not. “Bullshit. I saw a pair of eyes...”

“It was an animal!”

“No! These were human eyes, and they were staring at me. I’m telling you, there’s someone out there, watching us.”

“Where did you see these eyes?”

Christina points towards the thick bushes and leaves that are nestled together among the trees. Stepping carefully, looking as he does so, he does his best to scan the surface of the leaves and bushes. He then looks in-between them, through the cracks, for anything out of place. Finding an opening off the path, he cuts a swath with his arm, pushing a branch away.

As Jim gets in close, she wishes that nothing would happen, but at the same time, she wishes that he would find this person that looked into her. Something, anything, to prove what she saw really happened.

A minute goes by. Leaves rustling, and an occasional twig snapping with light footsteps on the dirt, grass, or moss, are the only signs of life. The other kids watch on from behind, and next to her, careful not to touch her, for fear of making her scream.

Another minute goes by. It feels like so much more, with the absence of any more sounds coming from where Jim went. Even their breathing becomes less labored,

until nobody can hear even that.

“Shouldn’t we do something?” a whispered voice speaks among them.

They turn, including Christina, to find that it was Audrey. They look at her in amazement, as if she expects everyone to leap to action. On the surface, they don’t believe that Christina saw what she did. But, deep down, though they would not admit it now, they feel there is some possibility that there could be someone else out there with them. Whatever they may want, they do not want to chance finding out.

Finally, the sounds of footsteps come closer from where they all look. Leaves and branches move, seemingly on their own, until they see Jim’s outline, then his features more fully. They are happy that he is back, almost eager to take more of his abuse, even Christina, until she sees his eyes.

With an angry look in his eyes, he slowly walks up to her, until he is right in front of her, standing over her, just a half-foot taller. She can smell and feel his breath on her. She does her best to stand her ground, for she knows she can’t run from him.

“You may have seen something. I checked for about a hundred feet in the direction you gave me. There was no trace of any person. I’m sorry, there’s just nothing there. Maybe you did imagine it. Fatigue can play crazy tricks with you mind. If you’re gonna lead the group when we go on a run, I expect you to handle it., and not crack up at every shadow. Is that understood?”

So many things run through her mind. She wants to tear into him in every way she can, but she knows no matter what she says, no matter what evidence may come to the surface, he would never budge.

“Yes.”

“I can’t hear you!”

“Yes, sir!”

She is sure that the person in the wood heard that. She doesn't care now. As Jim lines everyone up, she pretends those eyes belong to some man, some kind of prince, who will take her away from her life, so she can live out her dreams, and be more than she ever could be.

Just as they are about to start running again, the sound of heavy footsteps in a jogging pattern come up from behind them. They turn around to see that it's Frank, tired, but better than before. As he stops, catching his breath, he looks at them, wondering why they have stopped.

Greg comes up from behind him, a little sweaty, but not out of breath. "What happened here?"

With an underlying smirk in his voice, staring into space, Jim says, "Oh, our star pupil here, Christina, thought she saw a man out there. I couldn't find anything."

She wants so much to tear into him, to shove his words into him, and remove his arrogant ego forever from his psyche. She does her best to bury her fantasies of ripping into him, giving him a real scar, something he couldn't just shrug off, or sweep under a rug.

Frank chuckles to himself. "Maybe it was a case of hot flashes."

Christina quickly spins around on her heels, looking into Frank's eyes, with a cold, underlying anger, building with each second.

Keith laughs, not even bothering to stifle himself. Before he realizes what he is doing, Gerry is rushing at him at lightning speed, tackling him to the ground. This allows all the barriers to break down in Christina, for in one fluid motion, her hand curls itself into a fist as she seems to fly in one step. Her punch connects with the side of Frank's face, which knocks him to the ground. With the force of the punch, and the velocity of his body hitting the ground, he's is still conscious.

She is on top of him, like a hungry dog. Though he tries to struggle and scream, she knees him in the groin. She doesn't even try to imagine the size of his private parts, or how her knee is making him squeal due to the apparent size, but deep down, she is loving every second. Every second seems to last even more, though forever, as she swiftly punches him in his flabby, doughy gut.

She knows the other kids are cheering her on. The sound of her heart pumping cheers her on even more, which is the only thing that matters. She is loving this all the more as it goes on, but for the few seconds that it has gone on, it is cut short.

Jim pulls her off of Frank, lifting her up into the air, standing her upright. She tries to break his hold, reaching for him, but Jim just pulls back on the hood of her sweatshirt, and smacks her hard across the face. The sudden blow takes the fight out of her, stunning her.

Greg is holding Gerry by the arm. His hair is messy from fighting. He stares uncaring into the forest, not caring of what may come next. He knows he did the right thing.

As Jim shakes Christina in anger, and the grip tightens on Gerry's arm, the feeling of their words sink in more than anything. As they hear, deep down, they feel proud. Their pride is their own private, arctic cave that nobody can shake, not even in death. Though the two of them face another hurdle, for the rest of their lives, they will remember this always.

Chapter Eight

Gerry and Christina run from the sound of Jim's mad, howling voice as his fury chase them back into the forest, while Keith and Frank follow close behind. They run at their top speed, with their terror giving them newfound energy. They can easily imagine what would happen if Jim were to catch them, if he were to chase them, with

unhinged rage.

They run even past the point of not hearing his voice anymore. They have already forgotten how Jim wanted them to get the hostility out of their systems, so now they have to come back ragged, raw, and whipped. He could be right behind them, following their every step, making sure they take their punishment. The thought of that, though unable to do anything about it, pushes them further.

Frank is the first to fall from exhaustion. He is surprised and proud of his previously unfounded energy and athletic ability. Keith, though with a little more energy, and sure that he can last for a minute or two, stops to make sure that his friend is ok.

He notices that Christina and Gerry are about to drop out of sight along the winding path. "Hey! Wait up!"

They don't know why that they stop. They want to ignore them and keep going, but for some reason, they feel that they're in this together, for the moment. Slowing to a stop, they turn around and walk back to where Frank is sitting on the ground, along with Keith.

They stand over them, with a mixture of disgust, while sympathy underlines their surfaces.

Frank looks up at them, staring at Christina. "We're only out here again because of you."

"I reacted the way I did, because nobody believed I saw someone hiding in the forest, and that asshole Jim was rubbing my face in it. And you came along, and you had to joke about it. God dammit, it's not funny! You weren't even there!"

Keith sighs heavily in disgust and disbelief. "Oh, come on, Christina! I didn't see anything. Gerry didn't see anything. How could you see a person hiding in the bushes, right off the path, and nobody else did?"

Christina tries to imagine herself in the place of those eyes that she saw, in the mind that is behind them. The intensity of them comes back to her, taking her words that goes with the emotions, the details. They all see the slow dread that forms on her face. Why it was only her that she saw what she did, she finds herself unable to understand.

She stares into seemingly nothing, though looking at the ground, shaking her head while struggling for any words. "I... I don't know!"

Gerry can't help but believe her. With the amount and level of sincerity she has shown, he's able to easily put himself instantly in her place. "Would you two shut up for just one minute?! Now, I admit I didn't see anything, either. I don't know how that is. I mean, I was right next to her. But, I wasn't looking where she was. And, you don't claim that you saw someone, and back that up as much as she has, if she actually didn't. So, if she says someone's out there, then there is."

Keith throws up his hands. "Fine! There's someone else here."

Keith pushes himself up a step at a time, until he stands almost upright, still leaning over to help Frank up, who is still fatigued from earlier. As they manage to stand, Frank stumbles, and starts to fall, but Keith catches him, holding him upright by the shoulders.

Keith regains his composure, looking at Gerry intently. "You know, we wouldn't even be here if someone knew how to get rid of evidence."

"That doesn't matter. They caught us at the scene! Maybe if some people were able to run, and keep a secret..."

Gerry can still feel the bright lights, and the air-conditioned police station, freezing and burning at different points for hours on end. Not just feeling that way in each moment, but feeling that his future could be slipping away, and unable to imagine a

future that's colder than any empty future imaginable, he felt himself melting away. He knows that each of them told their own stories, and though he told all he knew, he knows he was just as guilty: Then, but not forever.

Christina finds herself unable to keep quiet any longer. "Fuck you! We all squealed! They caught all of us. It's not like we were gonna get away with it. And, besides, you found the empty house. It was your job to know how long they were gonna be gone."

Gerry pictures more of the past events in his head. "Yeah, man. How was it that they came home early? They were supposed to be gone for the whole weekend."

Keith remembers the moment when headlights, along with red and blue lights, lit up the night during their weekend-long party. In that first second, his heart sank, but rose fast as the momentum of him running along with everyone else took him as far as he could, until he was caught. Handcuffed, and being led into a squad car, he was scared, but as he continued to sit in the back seat, he kept thinking of how it all could go wrong.

"One of us must've tipped off the cops."

Frank looks dumbfounded at Keith. "What?! Why would any of us do that?"

"I don't know. It's the only idea I can think of as to how we were caught. Unless someone else knew of our party after swearing not to tell? Someone with a big mouth?"

Keith takes a step forward, looking at Christina. "I seem to recall overhearing you talking about people when they're not around. Some nerve, considering what I've heard what your mouth can really do."

Christina brings her hand up in one swift motion. Just before it connects, Keith catches it, inches from his face, surprising all but himself.

Gerry takes a step towards him, but Keith puts his other hand to Gerry's face and pushes him away, knocking him off his balance, sending him tumbling to the ground. Keith presses into Christina's wrist with his thumb as she tries to struggle. She yells out, but smacks her with his other hand, making her cower back and away in pain.

Not wanting to get into another fight with them, Gerry picks himself up and leads Christina away, who's is getting more of her bearing with each second. She doesn't bother to turn around when she yells out "Asshole!"

Instead of continuing onto the path, they go off of it, and amongst the trees and bushes. Gerry can feel the hostility behind him, as well as it growing. Frank and Keith laugh at what has just happened, barking at them as they try to lose them, making themselves laugh more and harder as they hear sounds of running away.

Keith looks down and finds a branch with a sharp piece of wood sticking out on the end of it. Picking it up, he smiles at the sharp branch, but frowns as Frank stops him from heading after them.

"What about me?"

Keith takes the branch and sets it against a tree. Kicking it in half, he twists it apart, seeing that the part he hands to Frank has a sharp point to it. Smiling as they chuckle to themselves, they push away leaves and branches, following the diminishing sounds of running.

Leaping and running over logs, stones, rocks, and their hearts, Gerry and Christina run, zigzagging, not caring where they go. In the back of their minds, they keep track of where the path is, but they have no idea exactly where they are. Not wanting to use up all their energy, Gerry slows down.

He leans up against a tree, catching his breath. "Wait!" His voice is a loud, yet soft, hoarse, tired whisper, but Christina hears him just fine.

She stops and turns around, catching her breath as she bends over.

He looks in the direction of where they came, seeing the calm, tranquil nature of the forest, and seeing nothing moving, except the occasional bird. "I think we lost them."

Christina looks back, seeing the same quiet trees that they didn't have time to see the detail of moments before. She gasps, getting her breath back, but not as heavily as earlier.

"Don't be too sure. They think we tipped off the cops. They're not gonna give up."

A soft snapping of a twig echoes all around them, though it comes from where they came. They look, seeing no movement at all, but after about fifteen seconds, they see a raccoon crawl out from behind a thick tree. It looks at them with innocent eyes, and as they look at it, they smile, almost laughing at the simple creature that surprised them.

They look at each other with a smile, but much further behind the raccoon, about a hundred yards back, the sound of soft footsteps echo onto the ground, breaking more of the silence. They keep moving at the sound, slowly at first, then faster, careful not to split up.

With Frank trailing right behind Keith, they stop running past and in-between trees and listen. Keith puts his arm behind him to block Frank, looking at the wide, deep expanse of the forest. Every sound is amplified as it ripples along in its own unique echo. Their heads dart around, trying to see the origin of the sounds. Leaning forward slightly as they hear the far-off sound of running, Keith points in the direction of where he hears it.

"Let's split up. I'll follow from behind on the left, and you on the right."

Keith treads eagerly ahead as Frank grins devilishly.

As Frank watches Keith head off to the left, and soon becoming out of his point of view, he moves off more and more to the right. Past each tree, he feels himself able to dodge with balanced, unthinking ease as he picks up speed. Minute after minute goes by until he completely loses himself in the thick of the trees, until all he can feel and hear is himself, and the forest.

A birdsong echoes up, down, and around as he runs even faster. He can imagine what he will do when he catches up to them. The thought keeps him going as with each step, each heartbeat, he can feel his body connecting his desired hits, and sweet, calculated stabs, and all the lasting scares.

He's certain it's no imagination of his that in the corner of his left eye, he spies movement. Not merely a small, insignificant speck of an animal, but a substantial shape of a person, blurring among the trees and leaves. Looking closer, he sees that there are two of them, and even closer than before, he sees that it is them he is chasing.

His chest swells with pride as he doesn't bother to feel tired or out of breath as he breathes clearer than he thought possible. Every step they make as they run, he seems to match with his. All the clumsiness that he had to suffer with in childhood, and lack of grace, is gone. Only a few yards away, and only he knows he is there.

They're so close to his heart's desire, he feels he can touch them. He wishes for more energy to know what to do with, but it just will not come. His mind's eye knows to stay out of sight, until the time is right.

They stop, and as they do, he anticipates them turning around and every which way. His heart dive-bombing in his chest is like a cold splash of water in his sweaty face as his heart skips a beat. As with an old friend, he turns and tucks himself

behind a thick, redwood tree. He can feel them looking around as he hears their footsteps sounding off, cracking, hoofing, and snapping all around, getting closer, a step at a time.

Sweat flows down his face, streaming down, and as his heart beats quicker, he is unable to know if tears are mixed in with them. He stares off the way he came, seeing only the tunnel of darkness the further he looks, and not caring about the streaks of sunlight fighting to cut through, brushing his face.

The footsteps move away from where he is. As they turn around, and pick up speed, he waits a few seconds to peek from behind the tree. The two of them run past and in-between trees, though not fast enough. Stepping out fully from behind the tree, he grips the thick piece of pointed stick, and grinning with relish, he tenses up with the purest feeling of any sugary high.

In those first few inches that he runs, he does not even see the noose that wraps around his neck, nor is he able to cry out or make any sound. Instantly tightening around his neck, the entire bulk of his body is raised into the air. Silently shooting up into the trees, his hands instinctively reach for the thin, plastic-encased steel cord, for there's no time for him to be scared.

Soaring further and further up, forgetting about solid ground, the motion of his body being pulled suddenly stops. All he can see are thick, massive branches, clashes of darkness and light at the roof of the forest. The air that was in his lungs from before is still there, and as he struggles to remove the noose that has bypassed crushing his throat, in his newfound motion of kicking and scrabbling in the air, his body slowly turns.

From the darkness at the beginning of a thick, sturdy tree branch, the shape of a man comes into the view of Frank's eyes. It seems to take forever for him to step forward, and though what Frank sees now will last forever, as the shape comes into the light more and more, recognition sets in.

Never mind that he cannot breathe, though he tries as hard as he can, reaching for any breath, trying to remember what breathing used to feel like, seemingly a lifetime ago. A familiar shape in front of him floods all sorts of memories from only a few years, and only now, as this person is a mere handful of feet away, does he become scared.

A tall, muscular man wearing black shoes, green jeans, and a green, long-sleeved shirt stands there, in perfect balance. His head is shaved bald, and his face is covered by a hockey mask, adorned with red triangles. His eyes stare at his prey with equal parts serenity and intensity, squinting at him.

A second goes by, and the hockey mask takes him back. Hearing all the stories about the mysterious killer amidst the wilderness named Jason. How he would refuse to die, after stalking those in his way. Somehow, for all his tenacity, a young boy named Tommy Jarvis had the ingenuity to take him down for good. Only a few months ago did he hear of a copycat killer, taking on the same persona.

He tries to pull away from the noose, desperate to get away from this man at all costs. He looks down, and though he can't see the ground he can barely remember, it is the sweetest thing. If he could pull away, he knows he would most likely fall, but anything to get away from that cold stare that is freezing all the tears inside him, all around his heart.

The remaining air in Frank's body is fast becoming thin, and toxic. He tries to reach for this man, clawing through the air, stretching his fingers out, mere inches away as he steps closer. He can see the man's childlike fascination as he sees past the mask's eyeholes. Past even that, he can see the delight in those eyes, wanting to do more.

Every draining ounce of remaining strength, he uses to try to pull the cord away from his neck. He tries to get a handhold on the cord, but he finds his hands slipping away from the plastic coating of the steel cord. His blood, organs one, then two,

then flooding through, and finally his brain, become sharp with a burning, sour toxicity. His fingers fall away limply, along with the rest of his body, hanging, swaying in the air.

Chapter Nine

Past the cabins, off to the left, in-between them and an obstacle course, the kids stand in a circle on the beach. They are all wearing protective gear: gloves, helmets, chest guards, elbow and knee pads, but they are all barefoot. In their hands, is a “pugil” stick, made for combat, but padded with foam at each end.

The two prime alpha males of the group, Kevin, and Mike, are in the circle. If it were any other place and time, the others would be cheering them on, placing bets, talking trash. But all they do is watch, watching and analyzing every move, gauging what to do, and what not to.

As they circle each other, each of them tries to outguess the next move. Kevin thrusts one end of his stick at Mike’s head, which he promptly blocks. A quick sweep of the stick to Mike’s side, and he easily blocks that, too. Moving faster than thought, Kevin brings his stick low, thrusting it at Mike’s legs. Instinctively, he leaps up and back, and using Kevin’s momentum to his advantage, Mike thrusts his stick at Kevin’s chest hard.

A forceful knock to the chest, and he goes back a few steps. Another thrust of the stick to Kevin’s head, and he is pushed back further, stumbling in his unraveling gait. In a newfound pattern, happening all on its own, Mike takes his stick and crashes it into both of Kevin’s legs, taking his balance away.

As his back hits the hard, compacted surface of the soft sand, and as Mike stares at Kevin, nobody says a word. Nobody claps, not even Jim, who is surprised and proud as he looks on, open-mouthed.

Pushing past Ben and Greg, Jim walks over to Mike, clapping him on the

shoulder. Kevin grunts a little as he struggles to sit up, but as he does so, looking up, expecting an extending hand to stand up, he doesn't get it.

Jim turns his back on both of them, ignoring Kevin's pain as he makes his way back to standing fully. "Obviously, these two have had some training. But, in the real world, fairness only goes so far. To win, you have to do whatever it takes to bring your opponent down, even if it means you have to fight dirty. I think that's something you all can relate to."

A few of the kids look at each other and smile through their helmets.

"Now, who here thinks that can take on our current champion? Come on. Don't be shy. Who's man enough..."

"I am."

Jim turns around at the female voice, belonging to Audrey. "Audrey! Really?! Well, ok! Just don't come crying to me if you get hurt!"

She walks past him with a calm expression, ignoring his words as she feels them give her comfort. As her eyes meet Mike's eyes, he lets out a little laugh. Audrey smiles, more to herself, as they both tense up, bending their knees, ready to clash.

Mike makes the first move, stepping to the left, forcing Audrey to move, circling each other. He brings the end of his staff down on her head, and she easily blocks it. Continuing to circle, he quickly sidesteps to the right, and she meets his move by sidestepping to the left.

Blaring his eyes out wide from his helmet, Mike does his best to psyche out Audrey as he pretends to lunge at her, just stopping short of crossing into her personal space. Each time he tries to fake her out, her pulse skips a beat, coming back harder.

She can see his moves clearer and clearer, seeing him move slower in her mind's eye. She tenses more, the way a cat would, anticipating his next move, feeling it

in the air.

From out of nowhere for all but her, he leaps at her in less than a second. Quicker than that, she steps to the side, watching him land. As he does, turning to her, he does not act tired, though the sound of his breathing is hard not to notice in the circle.

A quick thrust at her head, and she shifts her head left. Another thrust at her head, which is with more force, causes her to shift her head right in disgust. Not even waiting for Mike to bring his staff fully back into his balance, she puts all her strength into thrusting her staff between his legs.

Even though each end of the staff is padded, the force of the impact brings sharp, searing, blinding, crippling pain to Mike's body. Immediately, a high-pitched whine shoots out of his mouth, making his voice crack. If he wasn't in such pain, he would take the time to laugh at himself.

A piece at a time, all the power, the cohesion holding his body together comes apart. He begins to sink in rapid succession, but for Audrey's eyes, he is falling forever, and will do so always, whenever she thinks back on this, frame by frame.

She knows he's beaten, and that she should let him simply drop, in defeat and humiliation, but something in her stirs, pulling at her, clawing, wanting to get out.

All the feelings of the past few weeks, having her sense of joy, of wild, reckless abandon, and just cutting loose, being taken from her for seemingly no reason, burns inside her. Wanting so much to direct her buried feelings at something, anything, no matter who is in the way. And if someone deserving happens to be in the way, all the better for it.

Not just without, but more from within, she yells in triumph as she brings the end of her stick at the head of Mike's falling body. As it connects with his chin, his body is sent up a few feet. Being pushed back, the others in the circle behind him quickly

spread out, moving out of the way, in shock.

The body bounces and slides as it hits the sand. His helmet spins and rolls off down to the beginning of the lake. They all stand there, watching him, shocked, not thinking if he's unconscious, or dead. None of them look at Audrey, who looks at Mike's limp body with angry, tear-filled eyes, breathing heavily.

Greg is the first to come out of his stunned, silent shock. He quickly crouches over Mike, putting a finger to his neck, checking for a pulse. When he finds the familiar beat that tickles the ridges of his fingertips, he sighs in exasperated relief.

Turning over to look at Jim, his heart relaxes, calming the rest of his body, dissolving his anticipated dread. "He's still alive."

Jim looks on curiously. "Will he wake up in time for lunch?"

Jack shouts, cutting through the tension. "Hey! When can I tangle with the new champion?"

Greg and Jim smile at each other. Jim turns to Jack, recognizing his voice. "How about now?!"

The minutes have slipped away from him, more than those he is chasing. Keith swears in his head, certain that he has been following the right path, the right sounds. Every minute or so, swift footsteps have been sounding out, leading him further away from where and what he knows.

Now, the sounds have localized in heavy, thick bushes. About fifty feet away, he tries to see who or what is behind it. Eager, hungry anticipation flows through him, pushing him more. With every careful, soft step, he can taste his rich reward. The taste in his mouth pushes away any fear he would previously feel, drowning out who he used to be, before who he came to be now.

He stops. Looking to his right, he waits for Frank to show up. For the past couple of miles, he has occasionally stopped to watch for him. He has even waited a

little for him to catch up if needed. He expects his footsteps to come up from behind, and Frank to arrive from the corner of his eye.

There is nothing moving there, except the trees. Keith mutters to himself, fooling himself that there's no anxiety creeping in.

A step here and there on the dry dirt, breathing softly, he hears only the rustling sounds from behind the bushes, certain the shape he sees through it is human enough. Though the light is dim, sheets and streaks of light break and peek through, acting as mystical lamps. One streak of warm light brushes against his face amidst the cool, dim light.

As he gets closer, he can feel his heartbeat pick up, slowly, gradually building to a steady rhythm he can feel, flowing out from his chest.

The thick, sharp stick in his hand has a rich, grainy texture to it. He can feel now the stick drawing blood. If they would be slashes, or stabs, even he isn't fully sure. He will never know, when the moment does come to him, if he could ever stop, or if the desire would ever scare him.

His breathing slows to a hush, keeping his heart from running. He wants to do this, to do anything, to justify the reason why. Why they are there, why he wanted have that party, at that house. Why he's lived the life he has. Why, deep down, he did want to be caught.

The steps he's taking now leads him, he guesses, to about twenty feet away from this thick bushes that are as tall as him. Careful not to make any noise, he circles a bit along to the right, and even now, he is unable to get a clear view of anything behind, due to the dim light, the thickness of the bushes, and a thick oak tree to the right of the bushes.

That still, elusive silhouette still moves enough for him, staying there as he stops inches from the bushes. He does not care about anything now, not even why they

would be behind these bushes, or the incredible luck that has occurred for him here. As his legs tense along with the rest of his body, curling into a crouching stance, pride swells up, making his mouth water, imagining what he can only guess.

A spring from his feet, hitting his knees, and which shoots from his legs, propels him with an unknown strength. It is not merely a dive that sends him through, but a soaring leap, for all the distance that is needed. A flurry of movement shoots up and out from behind the bushes, and as he crashes through, he hits the empty ground.

The impact causes temporary dizziness. He picks up his head, and in the seconds that his vision clears, he sees a deer prance and scamper away. In the next few seconds, it is forever lost in the trees.

The path of the deer is still clear in his mind's eye, hanging in his recent vision. He wants to swear out loud, too loud for anyone, but only for himself. Feeling the dirt on his hands, he knows he should pound the ground with his fists. But, as the seconds go by as the dirt crumbles away as he picks it up, the anger becomes a thing of the past.

Laughter wells up from within him. Not a devious, lustful laugh that he has come to know of recent years. A playful, innocent, childlike laughter bursts through the cracks of his tough veneer; that tough armor, that most people would see at face value. As he smiles in his laughter, he almost cries from within as well as on the outside. His memory searches down the years for any moment when he could truly laugh at himself, and hold onto it.

Past any memory, he searches his feelings desperately, for any touch of true, unblemished innocence of when he was a little boy, before he could remember. He imagines himself playing with toys, being in awe of the simplicity of the world, and not having any cares.

With one hand and step at a time, he pushes himself up. He stands fully upright, and as he looks down, he notices moist dirt caked on his sweatpants and sweatshirt. Huffing more in disappointment and mere inconvenience, he brushes away the dirt, taking the time to get rid of every piece and spot, or as much of it as he can.

The sound of a bird's wings flutters and echoes high up above him in the trees. The way it flows, and the pitch, makes it feel as though the bird is right next to him, perched on his shoulder, as if it were an old friend.

He turns around, and looks up to see if he can find the bird. The silhouette of a familiar shape blinds his vision from on high, freezing his senses. The shape does not fully register into his mind until the next fraction of a second, as the shape slams into his chest, knocking him off his feet, and onto the ground.

He fights for the air that has been knocked out of him. Picking his head up, he notices the heavy weight of what is on top of him. He pushes it up. It is a body. He grabs hold of the head, and turns the face to see who it is. His heart fills him with hot, churning terror as he recognizes who it is.

It is the body of his best friend, Frank. Frank, who he has known since the first grade, who he would happily bully other people with; who he would plan pranks and other misdemeanors that would evolve into felonies. Frank, who he could laugh with at the misfortune of others, was a surrogate brother to him.

Frank's eyes stare into nothing, and as Keith sees that dead look in Frank's head, he frantically tries to push the heavy, dead weight off of him. It budes an inch at a time, but it cannot move fast enough. The pace of it all feels like quicksand to his mind, as well as his muscles, drowning in the fear and uncertainty.

Another motion quickly comes into view, though in his panicking mind, each frame takes forever. He feels the presence before he sees it, and as he forces himself to

look up again, a person with a presence of lustful hostility comes down from the trees.

The sound of a hiss of a leather glove sliding down on a rope forces Keith to look up on instinct. All at once, a sheen of sunlight that has found its way through the trees blinds him. From on high, a new presence blocks it out, and as it comes into view fully, all the strength and panache that he has built up over the years melts away, leaving that beaten, battered child that he has hid so well.

In that second that this presence looks down at him, seeming to hover, tower over him, Keith sees the hockey mask, remembering all the stories that went with it over the years. Trying to look into where the eyes would be, and finding nothing but dark, empty spaces, he can feel the burning rage coming from this man. He doesn't even think that this could be Jim, pulling a stunt to scare him out of his wits, and be the person he should be.

He doesn't think if this is really the infamous Jason Voorhees or not. His heart tells him that this is the same essence, the same drive, the need to kill, in this man. That essence has a weight all its own, heavier than the body on top of him. It is something that this man must lord over all that he chooses, and in this second, Keith is lost in that kingdom, forever a prisoner.

Somehow, his strength comes back to him, a desperate need to stay alive, though deep down, he feels that no matter what he does now, it will not be enough. He also feels that everything he has ever done, has led to this, as he pushes the body off of him, sending it tumbling away.

In one fluid motion, he turns, finding his footing, and sprints up and off the ground, hitting it again running faster than he would ever think humanly possible.

Brushing and dodging in-between, past the trees that manage to scratch him

here and there, he wants to cry. Everything about him lurches and swells, from his heart to his soul, feeling the guilt push on his desperate need to run.

There is no pain in what his body feels now. The way he moves, and the speed in which he runs, if there were an audience watching, they would cheer him on. He would certainly win some kind of contest back at school in the fall, or at least get the attention of the coaches.

His speed takes him further, faster than he could ever believe. Not missing a beat, he's certain he is outracing his own heartbeat.

All the while, though he is unable to see, he can feel the presence of Jason behind him. Not just behind him, but all around him. Even inside him, not just haunting his own thoughts, but he can imagine his essence chasing him not just into death, but past it, hounding him for all time.

Gradually, then more and more until it seems to appear all at once, the massive trees, snaking braches, and thick billowing clear, becoming more spaced apart. Still formidable in their appearance, the path before him seems to spread out for him. The land slopes upward, forcing Keith to run harder, daring him to dream the impossible dreams.

Reaching the top of the slope, the sound of his breathing, his motions going faster than the beat of his heart, drown out everything. If he goes any faster, he wonders if he can outrun his fear, but he knows that can never be, even if he would never admit it to himself.

About fifty yards away, and fast approaching, the trees are thickly bunched together. Darkness weaves in-between them, and to Keith, it is the most inviting piece of scenery he has ever seen.

The faster he goes, he sees the trees get taller, and taller. He realizes that it's

not the trees that are getting taller. There's a steep slope in the ground.

If he runs faster than he knows he can, and leaps down, without falling, there is a chance that he can lose Jason, and hide. For who knows how long, but he can hide. The chance ignites a passionate fire in him that threatens to burn every part of him alive, and forever. All the people he's terrorized, all the times he's relished every word, every blow, puts a smile in his heart as he goes faster and faster, not feeling the burning in his shoes.

He can feel himself running and jumping down the slope as it comes into view. He can see the drop-off point in mere feet. There's no point in stopping his momentum, of this momentum, or his life. He couldn't if he tried.

All at once, the figure of Jason slides into view in front of him. There's no time to react as Jason cuts across him. With each frame of movement, he swings a machete, cutting into Keith's head, going all the way through. All the feeling is gone as the top of his head spins, sailing behind his still-running body. The muscles instantly lose their signals as the body's equilibrium falls away.

Blood flows up, down Keith's face, shooting out into the air, as his body tumbles down, crashing down the slope. His arms and legs bump along lifelessly like a rag doll as rolls further down, picking up speed.

The body leaves a streak of red blood in its wake, as it bounces while tumbling quicker. As it goes, it gets dirtier as the blood and dirt smears on the clothes and skin.

It hits the end of the slope, rolling a few feet, and stopping. His dead, lifeless eyes stare into the endless forest as head and brains lay cut and exposed, bleeding down his scared, blank face.

Chapter Ten

The sounds of cheering, laughing and yelling are far off for Christina and Gerry, as they slowly walk along the gravel road, leading up to the main campgrounds. They have no idea how they found the paved road that seemed to magically appear, nor do they know what happened to Keith and Frank, or how they managed to lose them in the ever-encompassing forest.

Their steps are slow, labored, and steady, along with their breathing. They walk, side by side, with tired, solemn looks on what looks to be worn faces. Whatever thoughts or feelings that would need to be said as they get closer, hearing all the familiar voices, are equally shared, keeping in time.

The scene of the other kids in combat with padded sticks on the beach greets them as they pass onto the makeshift parking lot, with Jack's red Pontiac off to the side. Enough strength resides in them, especially their leg muscles, for them not to fall, as they walk further along the ground that curves down slightly.

A fleeting hope comes into their minds, of nobody noticing them, at least at first. They pray for luck to give them just a few minutes of respite, so they can stand there, taking in the air, letting the breeze brush against them, and watch.

For a time, their wish is granted, as they stop many feet away, appearing to blend into the background, almost not noticing themselves as they watch without feeling. They watch two of them in the circle dance and tussle, studying the moves, and not guessing.

From their distance, their tired, numb feelings from before fall away, as they get caught up in the moment. Fascination takes them over as they smile as the other kids do, laughing right along, but softly, to themselves.

A sudden smack to the head, and a thrust to the stomach, by one of them in

the circle brings the kids that form the circle cheering. The sounds of whistling, slapping each other's hands, and shouts, along with some of them talking trash, become mixed. The figures of Jim and Greg standing next to each other, facing the beach and the fallen combatant, are apparent. Though Christina and Gerry have noticed them, the sight of them does not fully hit them until Jim turns around.

Jim's eyes instantly find them, but even from their distance, Gerry is certain that Jim is looking directly into his eyes. Gerry expected Jim to be fully angry at the sight of him for all the recent aggravation, but he noticed the confusion, and concern, on his face, which downplays any anger Jim should feel now.

Jim says something to Greg, while they talk to each other for a few seconds, as Greg looks at them, too. Jim cuts off their conversation, and runs up to them, stopping a few feet away.

He looks at both of them, but looks at Gerry as he speaks to them. "I was beginning to think you wouldn't make it back."

"Neither did we.", Christina says to no one in particular.

"How long were we gone?"

Jim looks at his watch, sighing as he takes a long, hard look. "Judging by my watch, it's been almost two hours."

Jim doesn't even bother to notice the red mark on Christina's face as he looks at the both of them again. "What have you been doing out there all this time?"

Christina starts to open her mouth, trying to speak. She almost gets a syllable out before Jim speaks again, waving a hand at them, as if to dismiss their potential words.

"No, no. Don't tell me. You kids were probably having sex for all I know."

Gerry and Christina both look at each other at the same time, in surprise.

"Or maybe you weren't. I wasn't there. I don't know."

He looks down, shaking his head, not bothering to look up.

“Go join the others. Greg will tell you what to do.”

The both of them walk past him, and he watches them go for a few seconds, before another realization hits him.

“Oh! I almost forgot! You haven’t seen Frank or Keith recently, have you?”

For the last few minutes, even they have forgotten about them, and why they were pushing through the thick parts of the forest, being swallowed up by fatigue.

Hearing those names freezes them in their tracks.

Gerry finds his voice first, as he turns around. “What? No. Why?”

“They’re not back yet.”

Christina cuts in. “Good!”

Jim looks at here, perplexed. “That’s nice, dear, but do you think you can help me figure out why they’re not here?”

“Sure. I think I can do that. We stopped when Frank became tired. We talked, and after arguing about why we’re all here, they attacked us. We went off the path to get away from them, and they followed us. Now, here we are. Does that help?”

Jim stares at her with a blank, yet disgusted look on his face. “How do you expect me to believe all this?”

Christina takes a step towards Jim. “Why don’t you look at this? You think I did this to myself?!”

She points to the red handprint on her cheek as she looks angrily at Jim. He looks at the mark on her face, looking closer as he takes hold of her chin, turning her face to the side.

He lets go of her chin. He looks at Gerry, then back at Christina. “Ok. So, maybe you’re not all pulling some prank. But, what are Frank and Keith still doing out

there?”

“They probably got lost, and are crying about it. Next thing you know, they’ll be making out to comfort each other.”

Jim raises his eyebrows. “And what do you base that on?”

“Oh please. From the time they got here, they’ve been together. And, as long as I’ve known them, they’ve been inseparable. There’s gotta be something going on there, don’t you think?”

Jim looks down at her, smiling. “Cute. I suppose you’d like to thank the academy, too. Why don’t you take that perception and go join the others.”

Gerry starts in, “But...”

“Go! I’ll worry about Keith and Frank.”

Christina turns around first, walking away, then Gerry follows her.

Gerry catches up to her, and they walk together. “Why do you have to keep provoking him like that?”

“Because he’s being stupid. Us showing up late, me with a red handprint on my face, and those two asshats stuck in the woods... Anyone can figure out that remedial math.”

Gerry smirks, smiling to himself, as well as the scene of combat, as they continue walking. “You got me there.

The two of them walk up to the crowd. Greg notices them. “It’s about time you two showed up. Put your gear on over there. You just made it in time to get your asses beat, or beat some ass.”

As Gerry follows Christina, who goes to where Greg is pointing to a few feet away, they put their helmets on, while they slip their shoes off, and grab their padded sticks.

Gerry sits down in an empty spot in-between two of the kids. The one to his right takes their attention off of the fight, and looks at him.

“It’s too bad you weren’t here earlier. You missed a lot.”

Gerry recognizes the voice belonging to Karen. “Oh?”

Another one of the kids leans over past Karen to peer at Gerry. “Oh yeah, man. Your girl, Audrey, beat the hell out of the first reigning champ, and then suckered me into it.”

Gerry looks at Jack. “Really?!” He then looks at the two kids fighting in the circle. He says to himself, “Wow.”

Seeing the small figure of Audrey hold her own in the ring against one of the boys, takes away any expectations that he has built up in his mind about her, and crumbles them to dust. In his dreams, he has always known that she was always more than what people saw. In the time that they have known each other, he has wondered what was really behind her exterior, and when she would come out of her shell.

As she gets jabbed hard in the stomach, she grunts and backing up. Their padded stick is thrust at her head, but she manages to ignore the pain, and sidestep him, and swing her swing as hard as she can. It smacks him in the back of the head, sending him crashing and tumbling to the sandy beach.

Gerry can tell by the groans coming from the helmeted body that it’s Mike that just had his ass handed to him. Amidst the cheering, clapping, and whistling, Jim walks in-between Mike and Audrey, who thrusts her stick into the air triumphantly.

“I warned you not to try to take her on again.”

Jim stands over Mike, leaning over him. “You gonna take this abuse, aren’tcha?!”

Mike tried to focus his eyes for the next few seconds. Jim gets frustrated as

Mike stays dizzy.

“Mike! Hey, Mike! I’m over here! I asked you a question.”

Mike looks at Jim through the helmet with a faraway, dreamy look in his eyes. He answers with a tired voice.

“Um, yeah.”

Jim smiles at Mike as he slowly picks himself up, pushing up off the ground.

Jim doesn’t bother to wait for Mike to stand up and walk away as he continues. “Ok. We only have time for one more bout. So, since most of you have already faced Audrey here at least once, I think it’s fair that one of our newcomers have a taste of her medicine, too.”

Jim looks in the direction of Gerry, finding him, then looking for Christina, finding her, too. He stares at her, expecting her to say something, to react somehow.

She brings her head back slightly, in agitated defiance. “Oh, no. The way I feel, I feel like I already was beaten up. I don’t think I can feel her hit me, anyway.”

Jim just smiles what looks to be the biggest smile Christina has ever seen on anyone. He reaches down, and grabs her firmly by the arm.

“Perfect! You got the right attitude for this. Let’s go.”

“Ow! Let go of me! That hurts!”

Jim brings her up for her to stand on both her feet. He leads her more into the middle of the circle. She has a hurt look on her face, which Gerry can’t help but noticing.

“Um, Jim? Why don’t I do this?”

Jim turns to look at him. “You stay out of this. She needs this.”

“But, what if there’s enough time? How much time is left, anyway?”

Jim stops moving. Without even turning his head to look at Greg, Greg calls over.

“About ten minutes.”

Jim thinks for a few seconds, then looks back at Gerry. “Ok. If she gets beat quick enough, then you can have a shot.”

Greg hands Jim a padded stick, which he puts in Christina’s hands. He shoves her towards Audrey, who immediately swings her stick at Christina. Her instincts kick in faster than she realizes, and her hands move the stick, blocking the stick from hitting her head.

Christina jumps back, and Audrey follows her. She slowly chases her as Christina backs up in careful steps. Each of them tries to gauge each other’s possible moves, their thoughts. Each thinking they can see into each other as they look at the others’ eyes, knowing not only their moves before they make them, but any move they have ever made.

Christina knows exactly what Audrey is trying to do, pushing her back to the edge of the circle. She runs two steps, and jumps with all her speed, heading past Audrey. Audrey almost misses this, and tries to sweep out her legs from under her. Instead, she sweeps empty air, but both girls turn around to face each other again.

Seeming to move all on their own, Christina’s hands thrust the padded stick as hard as she can into Audrey’s chest, making her cry out.

Gerry cries out. “Hey!”

She is unable to stop herself, even as Audrey stumbles back, clutching her chest in pain. She doesn’t notice the tears, or the heavy, labored breathing from Audrey. Even she has forgotten why she has reacted this way. She just knows that she has.

Christina takes another step forward, and Audrey stumbles back further. She loses her balance, and she falls flat on her ass with a resounding “fump!” sound. Gerry doesn’t bother to wait for anyone to say or do anything as he gets up. He takes hold of

Audrey's stick, and, looking at Audrey, tosses the stick back to Jim.

Nobody says a word as Gerry bends down to Audrey's level. He takes her helmet off her head, and seeing the tears streaming down her face, he embraces her, helping her up as they rise together.

She softly whimpers in-between her sniffles as they walk together, back towards the cabin she is using. The kids in the circle in front of them move to the side, parting to let them pass. All that the two of them can hear is their own footsteps, and their breathing. It quickly changes as Ben rushes to find Audrey's shoes, and with them in one hand, and a blanket in the other hand, joins them, wrapping the blanket around her. They walk together, as Gerry and Ben each have an arm around her, safe as can be.

As they walk, Jim calls to them. "Hey! You still have a few minutes left! Hey! Hey! What's they matter with you?!"

They ignore him as they walk on.

Chapter Eleven

Slender fingers caress the soft, rubbery texture of a mask. They play over the skin, slowly kneading it, twisting it in the tips of the fingers. Every bump and groove, and all the fine touches, tell a story in themselves. The fingers feel all that has gone into this mask, and its maker.

The face of it, of what looks to be some kind of fish-type alien, with big lips and large, dark eyes, sits in the lap of Pam Roberts. She is lost in thought of where the young man that is Tommy Jarvis is going in his heart, and what happened to the boy that he was.

She does not hear the rush of the air and the engines of the small plane she sits in, nor does she notice those that sit around her as she stares straight ahead. The rush of the plane is nothing compared to the speed that she took to find the most likely place

that Tommy would go, to find just the right prey. Of course, convincing the powers that be that he would go to a little boot camp in Northern California was nothing short of miraculous.

Though she does not doubt the threat, the real icing on the cake was being given a gun for protection. Those that are with her, aside from David Tucker, were skeptical at first, but then as they looked at the facts, they quickly understood the situation and were eager to help.

She only hopes she is not too late to save everyone where she is going.

“Do you really think that will help?”

Pam looks at the young man, Josh, dressed in casual clothes who sits across from her. He has short blond hair and brown eyes, and from his energy, anyone would guess that he’s a rookie, but given the fact that he caught on quickly, and finished Pam’s sentences as well as gave new theories, she guessed that he’s been a FBI agent for at least a few years.

His partner, George, a dark-haired, blue-eyed Hispanic man of about the same age, sits next to him in another chair. “We both know you’re not keeping those masks around because you’re sentimental.”

David, who’s looking out the window, looks at them. “No, I’m the sentimental one. Wait a few minutes, and those masks will increase in value.”

Pam ignores David as she leans over in her seat. “Joshua, we’ll be lucky if he’s still there. He may not have gotten to there yet, though I doubt that. It’s already been a week, and given how long it takes to travel on the road, he’s probably still there.”

David clears his throat loudly, and they all turn to look at him. “He’s right, honey. Tommy’s turned the corner, and he’s not coming back. What do you expect the odds that these will do any good?”

He holds up a large paper bag with what they know to be the rest of the masks that Tommy originally made. The pungent, rubbery, candy-like smell sifts from the paper bag, which David can't help but notice.

Pam thinks of what she has in mind: Her plan that has formulated over the past few days. She doesn't expect it to work fully, or come away unscathed. All she can do now, as she has since Tommy came back into her consciousness, is pray.

"I don't know. You just be ready to drag them out of there."

In the first and largest cabin, Greg comes walking down the stairs from the second floor bedrooms. Holding an empty Coke can that he just finished drinking from, he goes from the front room, and back towards the den. Light creeps out from behind the door, along with the a hard, clacking sound.

Greg opens the door to find Jim standing up from just braking in a game of pool. Ben is leaning against the wall, holding a pool stick, while Jim twirls his slowly in his hands.

Jim watches the balls slowly, softly roll to a halt, kicking himself for all the shots he's certain he will miss. "You missed your shot."

Greg walks past the table, also not looking at where Jim is at the other end of the table. He goes to where a mini-fridge is in the corner of the room, and gets another can of Coke. "You know, Ben, you gotta stop being so easy on these kids."

Ben looks at Greg with surprise and disgust. "I hardly think comforting one of them after they were clearly hurt was being easy. Hey, I didn't say anything when that girl, Audrey, was beating up the other kids."

Greg effortlessly opens his Coke can, takes a swig of it, and reaching for a pool stick off a rack from the wall, he goes over to the table, eyeing the angles of the balls. "You're not paid to spoil these kids. You're here to cook."

“And if those two other kids don’t show up any time soon? Do I get paid any less?”

Jim glares at him angrily. Greg looks up in surprise, first at Jim, then at Ben.

“Any time you want to go outside so I can kick your ass, just let me know.”

“Don’t get me started.”

Jim walks over to Ben and pushes him hard on the shoulder, pushing him back a step. Ben forces himself to hold back.

“You think this is easy? You want to keep messing things up for me and these kids? You better watch it, or you’ll be out of here so fast, no one will miss you. Just try to get another cooking job with your background, and see how easy that is.”

Ben remembers the sheer luck of when he got the position he has now, given the luck he would have. Employers looking at his history, and not having anything to do with him. Try as he might, putting the best face forward, it never worked.

Ben did not believe that someone like Jim would take pity on him. He knows that most people, if not anyone else, would not.

He sighs as he looks down, choosing his words carefully. “What if those two kids that are lost in the woods don’t come back by tomorrow? Then what?”

“Then we radio for the proper authorities. I’m sure they wouldn’t mind a good scavenger hunt. Don’t worry. I’m sure they wouldn’t interfere with what we’re doing.”

In the next cabin, while the others sleep soundlessly and unmoving, feet covered in socks and fuzzy slippers tiptoe along the outside. No one moves as the cabin’s door opens with a creak, or when it closes. The feet walk past each of the beds, slowly, until they stop in front of one of them. The legs of the feet, covered in flannel pajamas, stand there, still as the rest of their body.

An untucked flannel shirt with the top button unbuttoned belies the blond hair and calm face that belongs to Christina. She looks at the outline of a body that is mostly covered by a thick, brown, wool blanket. The colorful hair that was originally blond, and the steadily-breathing, unconscious form of Audrey lies on a bed.

Slowly, Christina reaches out with her hand, reaching for the top of the covers that touch Audrey's face. Her hand gets closer and closer, and as it's about to touch the covers, it stops. She watches Audrey breathing, making sure that she's asleep.

Another hand reaches out, grabbing hold of Christina's wrist. She's unable to move or speak. Audrey slowly turns her head, and opens her tired eyes at Christina.

"Don't tell me you're here to gloat, or ask me to forgive you."

Audrey looks at Christina's wide-eyed, stunned expression. She takes hold of her hand, and shakes it. "Ok, you're forgiven. We're even now. Happy? Good. Now, go to sleep."

Audrey closes her eyes as she turns over in the bed, expecting Christina to leave. Instead, Christina sits down on the bed, narrowly missing sitting on Audrey.

"I can't."

Audrey throws back the covers, and sits up to look at her. "Why?"

Christina hangs her head. "I've had enough."

"Don't tell me you're thinking of running. Because then, you'll really be fucked."

Christina shakes her head. "No, it's not that. It's because of why we're here. I swear, when we get out of here, I'm not doing any more parties. No more staying up all hours of the night, no more going where I'm not supposed to be. And if that costs me my popularity? Well, then that's their problem. Not mine."

Audrey scratches her head, then rubs her face. “Ugh! You know, I’ve never been one to shoot for being prom queen or valedictorian, but you’re right. I’d rather still be alive and able to hold onto my brain and not be in some women’s prison, having to put out every night.”

Audrey lies back down. Christina gets up off the bed and turns to her. “But what about now? I don’t know if I can go to sleep every night feeling sore much longer.”

“Just keep thinking that it could be worse.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of. Whenever I think it can get worse, it usually does.”

“Cat?”

“What?”

Audrey moans as she pulls the covers over her head. “Go to sleep already!”

Christina turns around, heads for the door, not caring who’s around, or who hears her. “Fine! I’ll go sulk by myself. See if I care!”

As Christina finishes talking as she walks out the door, and as Audrey throws off the covers while feeling a draft, she walks over to the door and shuts it with a soft, audible click. Audrey pays no attention to anything outside as she goes back to bed: the soft, misty glow of the moonlight, the hiss of the insects in the woods, or where Christina is heading.

She kicks little rocks and pebbles around as she walks down the slope, past the cabins on her left, past the trees on her right, being lead to the lake. The moonlight shining on, and in the water, and the rhythm of the bugs chirping and buzzing, calls to her, enveloping her as she continues to walk with a smile.

Reaching the sand, she slips off her slippers and pulls off her socks, putting them in the heels of the slippers. She does not hesitate at all as she drops the slippers in

the sand, and takes one step, then another, into the edge of the water. She lets the cold feeling of the water sweep her away, forgetting not just why she is here now, but all the years of her life leading up to now.

Being on the cheerleading squad, outgoing in school, always hiding the fact that she's a bad girl and being popular for it, never getting caught until now. She imagines the upcoming senior year being full of expectations, and her shattering them. Being with her friends at parties, they would offer her alcohol, drugs, and wild, elaborate vacations to go with them.

She cringes as she sees herself walking away from friends who would let her get raped after a one-night-stand, which would get swept under the rug, while the man's eventual bride would never know. She knows they would hide their vices and addictions, guessing how long they would each fall.

She can imagine all the days and nights piling up without a familiar friend, or a regular date, but she knows now that it would be hollow with them, just as it always was. All the avoiding looks would prove her point as she would walk tall with these new friends with her. She feels all the real happiness that she knows she will feel then, making her spin and twirl in the water.

Among the vast woods behind her, a snap of a twig echoes and reverberates in the near, soft silence. She spins around, ignoring the sound her feet make in the water, as well as the motion they make. The instinct that would make her want to know who, or what, made the noise, stops halfway in her chest. If it was any other time or place, she would think an animal would be among those trees, hiding, watching her, curious.

Then she remembers. Those eyes watching her, and the man they belong to. Another snap, and it's heavier this time. It's closer now, probably a branch. She wants to run, anywhere, not just from what she saw, but from what she can imagine. She may

only try to get away, but one look at those eyes told her that she never could, as she knows now.

Looking around, finding no movement, she carefully steps out of the water, in the hopes that it's not the man, that nobody has seen her. Still watching the woods, not daring to take her eyes away, she feels around with her hands with her peripheral vision, slipping on her socks one at a time, then her slippers.

As she starts to turn away, she takes one last look in the direction that the noises came from, she smiles as she laughs to herself, finding nothing but stillness.

She laughs at the absurdity of her imagination and the situation. The idea that that man is a drifter comes into her mind, or some hunter. Maybe someone who is just homeless, and has little to no people skills.

As she starts to walk back, strong hands wrap around her mouth and stomach, pulling her away, taking her scream.

Chapter Twelve

From a firm hand holding her back, she screams so loud, she tries to break through and be heard. She does not care about any pain she could feel in the next few seconds if she runs her voice ragged and raw. In her mind, it is this man from before dragging her, keeping her back, so far away from help.

Her feet kick up and out, sending her legs up into the air, threatening to topple them both. Her heart races, wanting to burst, to take her away from what is happening.

And it does. She feels herself panicking even more, becoming dizzy, sleepy: something deep inside tells her to sleep. Sleep will be the answer to all this. Just relax, and it will all be ok.

No! Another part of her screams out from within, fights that expectation to bury her head in the sand. She claws her way up and out, into the night air, reaching for

the shape of the cabins she can see in the moonlight.

With every second, and every reach, she can feel herself moving back, closer, with every inch. Her feet dig into the sand, and with each breath, she can feel the weight of the man holding her back give just a little, if only enough.

Part of her wants to not run away, but face this person. Meet him on fair, equal ground, and use whatever she knows she has, or be surprised by what she can bring out in herself. The need to stare this specter of death down threatens to pull her right back, to be dragged away into mystery.

The hands that hold her back suddenly caress her.

“Shhhhhhhh! Hush! Hey, it’s ok! It’s me!”

She tries to place the voice. As recognition hits her, all the fear and desperation that flooded her drains out all at once. She wants to be angrier than she is, but all she can do is relax and bide her time as the man behind her rocks her gently, swaying her in his arms.

The arms let go of her. She turns around, and sees the smug, proud, and arrogant face of Mike, glowing softly in the moonlight.

Her hands seem to move on their own as she smacks him in the face at first, but she quickly throws punches at him. Backing away, he tries to avoid her, backing away.

“You asshole! What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

She claws at the air, trying to claw a pound of flesh out of him, not caring which part of the body it comes from.

Continuing to dodge and back away, he puts up hands. “Hey! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

Instincts take over as he doesn’t see her stopping anytime soon. He sees an

opportunity, and grabbing one of her arms, then the other by the wrist, he shakes her.

“I said I was sorry! Now, stop it, already!”

Her head hangs down as her breathing slows, from labored breaths, to finally cool whispers.

He looks at her with shock and fascination. “My god. Why were you trying to get away from me so badly? Who did you think I was?”

She almost whispers. “Nobody.”

He looks at her, tilting his head back. “Hell of a lot for nobody. Now, let’s see if I can guess who you thought it was.”

Mike puts his right hand to his chin, tapping his lips with his fingers as he looks up at the stars for inspiration. “It couldn’t have been me, because you’d never react that way if you knew it was me.”

Christina looks at him with one eyebrow raised as much the eye below is opened.

Mike notices this, unfazed. “Let me finish. It may have been our resident nazi-in-charge, Jim, but somehow I don’t think he’s the type to scare girls for kicks.”

She looks into the lake, clearing her mind, hoping any other possibilities won’t come into either of their minds.

Realization dawns on him as he looks down at her, smiling as he snaps his fingers, holding his index finger in the air. He quickly drops his hand and frowns. “Oh, come on. Not that shit again. Are you still thinking there’s some guy out there? Chris, he was looking at you because he wants you. He just thinks you’re hot.”

All the dread felt from earlier gets pushed to the side as she thinks of all the times she remembers of guys falling over themselves just to be able to talk to her. For some, that was enough. For others, they would propose to be her slave for just one date.

After that would be anybody's guess.

She looks at him with a devious, devilish grin. "Really?"

He grips her with a sudden desperation. She doesn't resist. All the concerns of the future can wait for a few, fleeting minutes more. This moment can be hers if she plays it right, and damned right she can.

His fingers caress her back as he presses her to his body, feeling the supple, sensual nature of her breasts. She embraces him just the same, slipping her fingers past his dark blue shirt, and feeling his bare muscular back.

Lifting his arms, she pulls the shirt up over his head and off his body, tossing it to the side. Feeling past her flannel pajama shirt for her bare skin, and smiling as he finds no bra as he caresses every curve of her breasts, he pushes her arms up, sliding her shirt up over her head, and landing on his shirt on the sand.

As he kisses her deeply, she drinks in the passion exploding, flowing within. It's been so long for her since she has felt any kind of tenderness from him, or from anyone. So long, desperate, and sobering, that at one point, she felt she would not feel any again, or the same way. Feeling and tasting his lips on hers, and letting his tongue making her bow down to him, the days and weeks of the past push against her too, making her kiss more deeply, as if feeling it for the first time.

The momentum pushes her along, easing him back, down, down onto the soft, grainy gold of the sand. With no effort, he slips her pajama bottoms down her legs, while he starts to push his off of him. She finishes as he moves his hands down her body, finding no panties. Whether any were there a second ago or not, he doesn't care as she slips his briefs down. Kicking them off of his legs, they grind against each other, drowning inescapably in each other.

Sliding into each other, they fall even further as they look into each other's eyes. The slow, simmering tension lets them feel what they had from before, as if they never stopped making love, but only for a second. The past few days, and the knowledge of the grueling hardships coming the day after, seemingly never-ending, pushes her ever harder, thrusting into him with wild abandon.

The seconds and minutes fall away into nothing, as much as the surroundings that they fail to notice. They are boiling now, forgetting where they are, and who they are. Their bodies tingle with an electric fire, making them back into nothing, nothing but nerves, slowly exploding.

Passions mix as their sweat flows, covering their bodies. With the brisk, cool air brushing against them, it makes the overlaying layers of sweat harden a bit. If she was not at the point she is now, if she was at any other time, she would be much more aware. For all those trickles of sweat seem to form patterns of their own cognition.

As she pushes herself further along, the air and soft wind pushes along her skin. She will not stop now. She can feel herself racing up that steep hill in her mind's eye, burning with white-hot fury, feeling a grin slowly start to build on her lips.

The skin on her back pricks up with tension. The shape of hands imprints themselves for maybe half a second, but even now, the feeling is fleeting, just as much as the wind. It seems to heighten everything for her, the knowledge of risk pushing her up that hill, steadily thrusting into him.

She can feel the need to scream, to cry out as the exploding feeling of orgasm is seconds away. She wants to yell out in the quiet of the night, to declare all of herself, so much, but she can only scream the way she can another way. The screams come from within and flow into her, reverberating inside, as her deep, heavy breaths shoot out and high up in the air.

As her head rises more and more, her essence is freefalling. The tears that flow from her eyes go unnoticed. All the deep sorrow that she refused to acknowledge over the years is being burned away. All the bad memories and expectations from before are gone. Her arms sway up to her sides of their own accord, jerking and shaking, as if being jumpstarted into a new life.

The top of her body collapses onto him in a heap of sweat, unknown tears, and new flesh. They feel no pain as each body smacks into each other, or at least do not react to it. It is quite some time before they open their eyes for within seconds, they fall asleep, wrapped up, holding each other, as if in a womb.

Her eyelids flutter open. She looks up at the stars in the sky, and though she would not normally lie down, nude, on a beach, with cool, gritty sand pressing into her skin, she feels at peace. The warmth of his chest being gently pressed into hers with his arms, resting her head on his shoulders, reassures her that she can do it. All the exercises, being pushed to the limit in the rest of her time here, will be done with an insatiable hunger that will refuse to quit.

That smile at the end of it, stretches so far, she can feel it now.

A soft pat on her back stirs her a little. Christina turns her head to face Mike.

“What is it?”

“Oh, nothing. I was thinking we could go again. If you’re up for it.”

She doesn’t even have to think about it. “Sure. It just means I’ll be hungrier in the morning.”

“Uh, yeah, and so will I.”

“You think anyone will catch on at breakfast tomorrow?”

“Fuck no! Tired is tired, which makes for wanting more food. If they ask, we can say that we like our punishment, and may we have another.”

“Oh yeah!”

“That’s right. Now, get on all fours, you sexy beast.”

“Mmm hmmm!”

Unclenching herself from Mike’s body, she rolls off of him. Stretching, she moans a little, as she struggles to sit up. As she does so, she shakes and brushes some of the sand.

She starts to turn her body over, but Mike’s firm hand stops her.

“Do you have protection?”

“I’m on the pill. Remember?”

Mike thinks of all the experience that Christina has had, and all the words that has he ever thought of try to come to the surface. He quickly forgets them, not wanting to ruin the mood of the moment.

He stands over her as she slowly turns herself over, until both her hands and knees are on the surface of the sand, ready to dig into that surface. As she looks into the far expanse of the beach’s shore, and the forest to her right, she can feel the anticipation of Mike slowly sinking down to her level.

Touching down onto the sand, he caresses the skin on her back as his hands move up. They firmly take hold of her shoulders, and as he is erect again, he slides into her this time. She breathes a sigh of relief and slow ecstasy, while he grins as he softly growls hungrily.

In no time at all, they are at it again, but now, as he builds a steady momentum, he is dominating her completely. Sweat slowly begins to form again, on his forehead, then other parts of his face, as they congeal and stick for fleeting seconds, then form those familiar lines.

Mike remembers all those times that he tried to get a nice girl, wasting time

fooling himself, when all he had to do was go with the right type of girl. Who cares what some people would say? His real friends would, and did, approve of him having the guts to get what he really wanted. All the times that he would try and get past first base with a so-called “good” girl would lead to disappointment for him, and cringing in retrospect.

Not with girls like Christina. They would go anywhere with him, get drunk, lose track of time as they would party so hard, they would forget everything as they slept it off. They would not care if they were caught doing anything illicit or illegal. They would dare each other to have sex in the most daring places: in the woods, in the bushes, or in someone’s backyard during the night.

They would laugh as they would run, nude or partially clothed, while being chased away by homeowners on occasion. Ducking out of sight in his car as they would get dressed, they would laugh to themselves as they would get a late-night snack at a diner, lost in the moment.

All the times that he would take this legendary girl among the girls, Christina, in-between the others he would go with, he would feel fully alive, and on top. Even when he was the one being used, he felt in charge. Even now, as he continues to thrust into her, he feels that he’s made it.

Their time together may not last. He doesn’t expect it to, nor does he care. Couples such as them don’t always last, and those that do, tend to end badly. Those thoughts of the past, and the speculative future, boils within him, pushing himself further along.

His breaths come heavier and heavier, threatening to slip away from him, but as he gets a hold of them, he takes charge of them, racing with them, feeling their pulse. In his mind, he is racing, yet only he is the only audience, watching. It is not as he is now, but as he was, as a young boy, watching him, in the middle of a field of tall grass.

That boy ages years in seconds, from a boy, to his present self, to a refined middle-age, to finally a ripe old age, who sees him with a powerful clarity.

No words are spoken, nor does there need to be. Mike seems to know why this person, this image, is there, and what he wants to say. They want him to stop, now, before it's too late to change. As Mike goes faster and faster, feeling himself burning up, he does not care as the old man floats in front of him, with stern eyes that burn into him.

His breaths come more rapidly, deeply. The finish line is within reach, and as that primal sensation that hurts so good, he cocks his head up, slowly, shaking his head, until, finally, as his head rises fully to softly cry out, the orgasmic fury is blended with white-hot pain as a pool stick is shoved into his ass, with the tip sticking out of the mouth.

Chapter Thirteen

Christina fails to notice that Mike rests limply on top of her. She is still coming down from her freefall of sexual ecstasy, waiting to touch back down to the ground at any second. That primal high mixed with a bit of numbness begins to burn away as she exhales more and more.

She is unable to hold herself up any longer. The exhaustion shifts and shakes her makeshift house of cards that her body holds up, forcing her off her hands, to allow her elbows to dig into the sand. She would say something, anything, to break the monotony of the silence, if she wasn't so tired.

Her head hangs, and as she feels Mike's arms limply brush and bump against her, she laughs to herself, wanting to laugh out loud. All she can do is smile.

Soft tapping lands on her hair, seeping through to her scalp. It is a slow trickling patter, but the very thought of Mike drooling onto her makes her cringe.

“Mike? You can close your mouth already.”

No answer. No movement, not even a breath.

“God, Mike, you picked a hell of a time to fall asleep. Again. Hell of a position to do it, too.”

The wind picks up again, cutting into her, sweeping away what has just gone before. The thought of her going back to her bed, staying warm under the covers, in her own cocoon, is simply priceless for her. She doesn't care if the other kids see her. She is certain they can keep a secret.

Christina shifts her body again, and is annoyed that Mike still does not move. His body, lying limply on top of her, has become heavier, threatening to snap her temper away as its remaining grains drain with the seconds.

“Damn it, Mike! Wake up already! I want to go to bed, but not out here!”

A feeling of a wet liquid drops onto her forehead just as she looks up. She thinks it's Mike drooling on her again, but as this liquid runs down her face, she can feel a warmth to it.

It forms a line, traveling next to and past her nose. She catches a hint of a sweet, salty, pungent scent. Disbelief instantly sets in again from before, dancing with her gut feeling of dread from earlier in the day. They bubble and mingle, stopping as that bead of liquid stops, trembling at her top lip.

She can't help but lick it up, and taste it. The flavor of blood confuses her. She knows that Mike has thrown up from hangovers, and seen blood even when he did his best to cover it up. That memory pushes her over the edge.

“Cut it out, you ass! You're gonna ruin my hair!”

As she leans to one side, she pushes him off and out of her. He tumbles, rolls a few feet. She crawls to her feet, looking for her clothes. They lay a few feet away, covered in sand.

“No point in crying over it now.”

Picking up one piece of her clothes at a time, shaking the sand out, she carefully gets dressed, balancing herself on one foot as she puts her pajama bottoms on. Shaking her hair, she want to leave Mike out here, alone, passed out, just like all those times before. She knows that she can't, because odds are, someone, meaning her, will be blamed if he's found sleeping on the beach tomorrow morning.

In the dim moonlight, all she can see of him is his blank silhouette, with his back to her. She steps carefully to him, thinking of any number of ways to wake him up, to piss him off so much, that he will chase her back into bed.

She settles for a more subtle approach.

Kneeling down slowly, almost not wanting to wake him, she reaches out to him, grabbing hold of his left shoulder. Shaking him a little, she notices that his skin has become cold to the touch. Not merely cool, the way he should be, but cold. The idea of a sudden sickness makes her want to care for him as she forgets the way he scared her earlier.

“Mike, wake up.”

Turning him over to face her completely, she backs away on the sand with her hands and feet with the split second image, though burning into her mind, it forces her to look. She covers her mouth, though her breath has been taken, she preys she doesn't lose any more.

From what light there is, though her eyes have adjusted to the dark, she can see Mike. The young, lively, jovial face has been replaced with a dead one, with shocked, terrified eyes staring blankly out. The mouth, still dripping blood, but having more of it caked and dried around the edges, is set and frozen in a hideous, rictus grin, as if at the moment of his death, against all odds, he may try to leap out of his skin.

With a longer, closer look, what appears to be part of a thin, shiny stick sticking out of Mike's mouth gives recognition of a pool stick. Dread spreads out from within, making her muscles weak and useless, as she hyperventilates. She can't help but try not to panic, but the certainty that she has been right all along, ever since looking into, and past those eyes, grips her with a firm caress. It is as if the stranger's hands have reached into her, taken hold of her heart with one hand, and with the other hand, walking its way down the organs, cups and holds the slick, rubbery texture of her stomach.

Though he may be watching her now, being anywhere, she manages to take hold of her senses in a few quick, deep breaths. In one fluid motion, she pushes herself up off the ground, and takes off on a run. Sprinting all the way until she can see the shapes of the cabins, she is unaware of another feeling that is of a more primal nature. Closer and closer, as she can see herself running so fast, she may crash through the door of her cabin.

The gloom of the dark hides the door in deeper shadows, but as the windows and front porch become closer to her view, a wave of unheard of energy sweeps over her. The door may be nothing to her, but heaven help anyone who does not believe her, let alone notice how she is now.

With her chest heaving, but not feeling the pain, she slams into the door. She turns the knob and pushes open the door, past the knowledge that the sound she just made has woken up some of the people here. As she shuts the door, she frantically touches the knob for any sign that she can lock the door. Part of her knows that it would do no good, but another part of her does it for some sign of reassurance.

Finding a brass latch, she firmly twists it. The soft sound is calming enough in these few seconds, as she catches her breath. It allows her enough of a break as she

presses herself against the door, sliding down the surface of it as her breath hisses out in a long exhalation.

A light flashes on to her right with a click. She yelps and she looks to find Audrey sleepily opening her eyes, starting to push the covers off her. “What’s going on?” Her equally soft, sleepy voice struggles to find its regular ground as she opens more of her eyes in a series of blinks.

Her vision clears in the light. Audrey sees who it is. “Some walk, huh? Do me a favor and tell me all about it, but in the morning. Don’t leave out any detail, ok?”

She pulls back the covers. Her hand almost reaches the small, brass lamp next to her bed, but the sound of Christina’s voice stops her.

“Dead.”

Audrey, with her arm hanging extended in the air, turns to look back at Christina. “What?” She says it with almost disbelief in her voice.

Christina continues to stare out blankly. “He’s dead.”

Her head slowly shakes from side to side. She is unaware and numb that her head does move. Wanting so much to forget every image, every feeling, of the past few minutes that may have been hours, she can’t help but still see it still playing out in her head. All of it, from beginning to end, and all the while, that mysterious stranger’s eyes from before, flashing to her, mixing in, invading her thoughts.

Audrey throws back the covers on her bed fully, and rushes over to her as she sees the streak of blood on Christina’s face, crouching next to her.

Quick images of them running in the forest earlier in the day, and Christina protesting against all hope that she saw a man watching her, rush by. She believed her then, but even more so now. She knows in her gut that it’s not a joke.

Not wanting to keep this to herself, she thinks of someone she can tell. She

doesn't want to, knowing it might makes things worse, but she knows she has no choice.

“Oh, shit. Ok, we gotta tell someone. Let's go.”

“No! No, he's out there!”

“Then we'll go together. Ok?”

Not bothering to wait for an answer, Audrey manages to help Christina off the floor. As they both stand up, and as Christina wipes away tears that flow on their own, Audrey turns back to see Karen in her own bed, looking at them with concern.

“Hey, K?”

“Yeah?”

“Go round up the boys for me. There's gonna be some trouble with the head asshole in a few minutes.”

Karen throws off her covers and hops off her bed. “Will do.”

A soft moaning makes Karen turn just as she starts to walk from her bed.

Turning around, she finds Laurie stirring from sleep.

“What are you still doing up?”

Karen goes over to her bed, and smacks the top of it, shaking it. “Oh, Laurie, we can't forget you, too! Better wake up now, and follow me.”

In a slow, tired voice, Laurie tries in vain to dissuade Karen. “Will there be coffee?”

Grabbing hold of her, she pushes her along, past Audrey and Christina, and out the door. “Yes, and you're making it. Now, shut up and do what I do.”

Audrey has forgotten to laugh, along with Christina. If it were any other time, they would be joining in, fueling the fire, each trying to top each other in the moment. Instead, Audrey helps Christina to walk as they walk out the door, and onto the cement sidewalk that forms the cabin's makeshift porch. It is cold to Audrey's bare feet,

along with the hard, gritty surface of the gravel ground as they head closer to the two-story cabin.

It doesn't matter to her as she crosses that hard gulf as the stones and pebbles dig into her feet with almost every step. Cringing, wanting to cry out, to drop her friend and go back to bed, she keeps on telling herself that it's worth it, because it is.

Limping to Jim's cabin, her feet touches the cement sidewalk, grateful for the cool touch to sooth her sore feet. She doesn't care what Jim may do or say now. She knows she is ready for him.

Still holding up Christina, Audrey lifts up her left hand and is about to knock on the thick, wooden door, but instead curls her hand into a fist. She smiles as she pounds on the door, certain that the loud echo is enough to be heard through a sound sleep.

She stops her number of pounding at ten. She would continue until her hand would bleed, but a few seconds after she has stopped, footsteps are heard, and the soft glow of a light can be seen from the cabin's front window out of the corner of her eye.

The door is swung open inwardly, violently and quickly. Standing there is Jim, wearing nothing but a pair of dark blue pajama bottoms, and though his face is stone blank, Audrey can tell that he is not happy to see the two of them.

"This better be good. We get up at six a.m. if you remember to get your asses kicked..."

Christina mumbles through his words. "He's dead."

Jim takes his expression off of Audrey, and puts it onto Christina. "Who's dead?! Speak up, young lady. I can't hear you!"

Anger bursts just enough through, from the pit of her stomach, and through her throat, remembering how she's been treated here. The fact that she's still being

treated as a faceless, nameless cog, pushes her too much.

“Mike! Mike’s dead! He’s on the beach! Look! I got blood on me!”

Jim looks at Christina’s face as she points to it. In the light coming from behind him, he can see the freshly dried streak of blood. Examining her face closely, he can see no evidence of any wound on her head. Very faintly, some semblance of belief begins to seep through for him, starting to crack through his very private dam.

“What were you doing on the beach?”

Christina opens her mouth to speak, but quick images flash in Jim’s mind quicker than she can speak. “Oh; That again. I knew it would be that. If it’s not drinking and drugs, it’s sex. My god, can’t you kids keep your libidos under lock and key?!”

The sound of heavy footsteps comes closer. Greg appears behind Jim.

Jim doesn’t bother to turn around. “Greg, grab two flashlights and come with me. It seems there’s a dead body on the beach.”

Jim’s words make Christina breathe heavier. Jim pays no notice as Greg runs off to an office and the sound of a drawer opening is heard. Two beams of light announce Greg as he comes back.

As Greg hands Jim a black, metal flashlight, Jim looks at Christina. “Ok, missy, where are we supposed to be looking?”

Christina detaches herself from Audrey’s support. Turning around, she faces the still, quiet beach. She manages to speak in a clear, calm voice. “To the right; about twenty feet. Look for...”

Jim pushes past her. “I know what to look for! Footsteps, blood, and a body: thank you!”

Jim walks down to the beach, and Greg follows him, with their flashlights on,

acting as searchlights. As they go past the cabins, the other kids sneak past them, some walking, creeping and crawling on the cement patios, others walking along the sides of the nearby cabins.

Audrey sees them come closer in the dim mix of light and dark, while Christina keeps watch over the forest. Robert reaches them first. He wraps his arms around Christina, already knowing the situation. She doesn't stop watching though, but she does rest her head against him.

Karen comes along next, along with the rest of them. She turns quickly to see the two beams of light, then back again. "Now that's a man who needs to get laid. If he were any louder, I'd hear him in my sleep."

Gerry is right behind her, already put off by her jokes, given the seriousness of the moment. "Hey, Karen? Not now, ok? But, he's dumber than he looks if he thinks that nothing's wrong. Two of us go missing, and now a third is killed and the body is found by Christina?"

Kevin walks around the huddled group. "There's two people missing? I knew something wasn't right after the combat today. I'm not touching any drugs again if it means waking up in the middle of the night and finding myself on Candid Camera."

Robert turns to Kevin, with Christina still leaning on him. "As you can see, there's no cameras. Oh, wait; there's one!" He points into the dark forest, and Kevin doesn't look, knowing the routine.

They all stand around, hoping that none of this is really happening, that they're all wake up early the next morning, and quickly forget about whatever dream it was they shared, and burn and sweat through the next day that will blur into the next.

A form begins to form in the soft gloom of the main cabin's interior. Christina catches the image, and grabs Robert's body tight, almost digging her nails into

his body. As she does so, he takes hold of her hands, but he turns in the direction in which she is looking.

Light catches more and more of the images features, wrapping itself around the person. As they all now look to see who it is, they relax as Ben stops in the doorway. He's holding a damp towel, and without asking, carefully starts to wipe the streak of blood from Christina's face.

Just as Ben finishes cleaning up her face, the sound of footsteps rushes back up to them. They all turn to see the shadowy figures of Greg and Jim running up towards them from the beach. As the two of them see everybody standing there, they run faster, stopping short of running into them as they stop suddenly.

Jim doesn't bother to wait to cut into them. "What is this standing out here?! Do you know what time it is?! Everybody! Get back to bed! On the double! Now!"

They all start to move, from the sheer force of his voice. From the midst of the little crowd, a firm, male voice yells "No!" They all stop, and stand their ground.

Jim stands their surprised, seemingly unsure what to do. Not many people have defied him. Fewer have gotten away with it. He looks at the faces in the crowd, trying to see who yelled back to him.

"Who said that?!"

They all stand there, silent and unmoving. Some stare at Jim blankly, while others look away, to keep their composure.

He walks closer to them. He stops at Robert. "Was it you?!" He searches out Kevin, finding him. "You. Maybe it was you." He looks at all the eyes who will or will not look back at him. He looks among more of them, searching for something, someone, he knows is missing, but not acknowledging it.

Jim clearly ignoring Gerry makes Gerry snap. "It was me."

He doesn't even bother looking at Gerry. "Who were you looking for? It couldn't have been me. Was it Mike? Frank? Keith? Did you find Mike's body on the beach, or any blood?"

Finding Christina, Jim raises her finger to her, seemingly wanting to strike out at her, blindly. "If you think you can trick me into not doing your exercises, or getting out of here early, you must think I'm dumber than I look. Now, you will go to bed right now, and forget whatever you think you saw, so we can all get up in a few hours. Is that clear, little girl?!"

Primal rage overtakes her as she lets go of Robert, rushing at Jim, with a quick, loud screaming roar. She crashes into him, bringing him to the ground. Landing on him, she shakes him furiously, bumping his head on the ground. She doesn't see him, or anything, while she digs her nails into him, feeling the need to keep going.

Jim manages to break through the dizzying haze and take hold of her wrists. Prying her hands off of him, he pushes her off of him. She comes at him again with another deep roar, but this time, he smacks her across the face. They all hear the impact, lasting as she tumbles along the ground, stopping in a heap.

They all stand there, unmoving, at what they just saw. Jim picks himself off the ground, confident that nobody else will challenge him. He sees only a second of a blur rush at him, and the impact of the punch connecting with his face, knocking him back to the ground, tumbling a little.

Shaking his head, he sees Jack standing over him, with fire in his eyes, wanting to tear him apart. His gut screams at him for him to stay down. This time, he listens.

Jack goes to Christina, and kneeling down, he turns her body over. Picking her up, cradling her in his arms, he walks away from all of them.

Past all of them and the cabin, gasps can be heard from a few of them as they realize where Jack is taking her. As Jack rests her on the ground next to his car, Jim tries to get up, but is still sore from the punch.

“Hey! You can’t do that! You can’t leave!”

As Jack reaches into the interior of his car’s body, just above the left rear wheel, he finds his spare key. Slipping it into the driver’s side lock, he opens the doors, and goes to pick up Christina.

“We’re going to the sheriff! I’m sure he cares more than you do!”

Opening the passenger side door, he helps her into the car. Nobody bothers to stop them as they both get in, as the car starts up with a roar, and peels out and away.

Christina wakes up as she feels the rush of the road under her, the sound of the engine around her. She’s away from there, away from the man called Jim, and away from him, whoever he was. She wants to cry, to be rid of past few days, and be lost in a firm embrace. As she watches each side of the forest pass her by, she holds it in, while she catches her breath.

Jack pats her hand, holding it in a gentle squeeze. “It’s ok. Once we get to the sheriff’s office, things will be straightened out.”

She takes a deep breath, anticipating the moment when they get there, the moment she explains what’s been happening, and the moment she sees the look on Jim’s face when he gets in trouble. She grins to herself, lost in thought as she car goes on.

The car goes around a bend, and as it slows a bit, it picks up speed. A figure in the middle of the road from far off comes into view. They do not move. As Jack starts to hit the breaks, an image from the past, from the dead, stops his heart quicker than he stops the car, screeching to a halt.

Christina looks at Jack, as if to ask why he suddenly stopped the car. A word starts to form on her lips, but as she turns and looks out the windshield, her breath is sucked back, lurching with her heart.

They are timid little children, mice staring at a giant, as a man in dark green clothes stands still, in the middle of the road. In place of his face is a hockey mask, a symbol that is not just famous, but infamous, of a being who was inhuman, and another, who was driven to follow him.

In the midst of their shock, they realize that both of those people are dead, but something tells Christina that this is the one who has been watching her, stalking her, murdered her friend, and caused the fresh chaos.

Twenty feet apart from each other, this man stands still, tall and strong, unmoving, almost daring Jack to make a move. Jack wants to turn back, to face whatever may come, as he fights the child within. It may just be a ghost, a vengeful spirit, but, they have come too far, too fast, for anyone to meet them out here.

As Jack looks at the man in the hockey mask more, examining every part of him, he relaxes somewhat visibly as he sighs, but more to himself, as he can't see any visible weapon on him.

Jack turns to Christina, who is still visibly shaken. "I'm gonna teach this sucker a lesson."

Jack's hand is on the clutch, shifting gear faster than the eye can follow.

Christina is screaming "NOOOOOOOOO!" as the tires screech on the road. The car takes off like a bullet, and as it does so, the man moves out of the way. Jack is relieved, taking his eyes off the man as he is out of the line of his headlights.

"I told you I'd..."

The point of a pickaxe comes crashing through the driver's side window,

puncturing its way through Jack's throat, sticking out the back. Blood spurts up and out, spraying Christina in a warm, salty mess as she screams, running her throat raw as the blood gets her in the face, blinding her.

She scrambles blindly for the wheel, grasping the air. She finds the wheel with one hand, while frantically wiping the blood from her eyes. The car is steady in her grip. She can feel the road under her. She feels something of a chance as she clears more of her vision.

Her vision fully clears. In that second, she sees a giant tree ahead of her, about ten feet away. She sees it, knowing that in that second that slows to a quick flash to her mind, that she can not avoid it. Everything stops, even all the hopes, dreams, and all the key, happy moments of her past. None of them come flooding back as the car crashes full force into the tree.

Not even the realization that there was no thought for her seatbelt to be put on comes to mind as her body goes crashing, head first, through the windshield. The force of the impact sends her body flying through the air, sailing straight along. If she could pick her head up, she would see another thing coming toward her. But she doesn't feel it as her body is impaled by a low, sharp branch.

Chapter Fourteen

Jim lies on the ground, dusty, and shamed, if only for the moment, as Jack's car pulls away. All of them are stunned as to what to do next. They are proud that Christina, above any among them, has been taken away. But, they don't dare show it, not even a hint of a smile.

Crawling on his hands and knees, trying his best not to show any weakness, Jim huffs as he breathes, groaning softly as he pushes himself to his feet. They all stare at him as he aches. He can't hide it now, or maybe ever again. His armor is cracked. It won't be long before it's completely gone, in pieces, unraveled, meaning nothing as he's

come to realize after all his years.

He ignores his pain and wounded pride as he walks over to them. They part, not wanting him to touch them. As he looks down with angry eyes that slowly burn, he turns to Greg, who looks at him with a mix of concern and sadness.

Before he knows it, Greg sees Jim approach him with a newfound strength as he grips his hand with both hands. “We might as well alert the sheriff that he’ll have company soon. Not that it’ll make a difference. Come on.”

Jim leads Greg into the dark inside of the main cabin. The kids listen as footsteps down its main hallway give way to a door opening and a light switch clicking on a bright glow of light in a room to the left. A further series of clicks echo out of the room, then silence again. Jim’s voice cuts through that, too.

“Yeah, Roger, this is Jim Sanders out at the reservation. Be on the lookout for two kids in a red, Pontiac Firebird heading to your station. Over.”

Jim listens for any sound, but nothing comes, not even the static from the radio that shows any sign of life.

“What the hell? Not this too! Greg, check the wires.”

Outside, the kids imagine the scene in the room in their minds as Greg kneels down next to the old, wood desk that the radio rests on. Greg searches on the floor, feeling and gripping the wires in his hands for any abnormalities. He tugs on them to see if any of the have come loose, but instead of pulling on all of them at once, he pulls on each of them, one at a time. The first few are secure, but the fourth wire he tugs on comes loose from its foundation. He finds that the wire has been cut, with the plastic insulation and wires inside neatly cut at the end.

As Greg looks up, Jim is looking at the perfectly cut wire. He tries to piece this together in his mind, but comes up empty. “This just gets better and better.”

Jim leaves the room and Greg follows. The kids outside hear hurried, heavy footsteps as they see the room's light switch off, and the men's figures approach. They move out of the way, thinking Jim will barrel into anyone foolish enough to stand in his way.

“Which one of you did it? Huh? Who?”

Audrey speaks up first. “Did what? What are you talking about?”

Jim wants to intimidate them more, but taking a deep breath for a second, he calms down a little. He collects his thoughts. “It seems one of you doesn't want to make things easier for the rest of us. I tried to radio the sheriff for help, but one of the wires is cut.”

He forgets the fact that the wire was cut with no flaws, which means that it was cut with something sharp. That fact being impossible because each of the kids were searched for weapons, and any knives used for cooking are locked away. Still, he suspects them.

Gerry joins in, walking over to Audrey. “And, naturally, you think one of us did it.”

Jim gives Gerry a calm, smug look. “Who else would have?”

Gerry brushes off Jim's smugness. “That man that Christina said she saw. Remember?”

Jim looks up, thinking at the absurdity of the situation. “Ok. Let's say there is some guy in the woods. It can't be a hunter, because this is private property.”

“Maybe they don't know that. Maybe they don't care!”

Audrey grabs Gerry by the arm. “The point is we didn't cut any wires. We're not trying to sabotage our recovery. Maybe some of us don't want to end up in prison.”

Karen corrects her by shouting “Juvie!”

“Whatever. And, not just two, but now three of us are missing.”

Jim continues to act unfazed. “It means nothing. This has happened before.”

Karen whispers to herself. “I feel safer already.”

Audrey ignores her. “I think they would have come back by now, don’t you?

It’s the middle of the night.”

Jim smiles at Audrey, unwittingly admiring her tenacity, but hating her for it more, behind his thin façade.

“Ok, then. What do you suggest we do?!”

Audrey looks at the dark shadowy shape of the van that carried most of them here, that rests near the main cabin. “We climb into the van there, and head for the sheriff. I don’t think he’d mind us showing up.”

Jim smirks. “I’ll get the keys.”

Greg gets in the passenger seat up front, while Ben follows the rest of the kids as Audrey grabs hold of the door handle, and yanks open the door, sliding it back. Climbing in, the others follow her, and one by one, the others find room to sit. Ben slides the door closed, sitting at the edge of the couch-like seat, watching out the windows.

In the seconds that gather, nobody says anything. They breathe as quietly as they can, listening for anything. Hearing nothing, they don’t think of someone saying something to break the tension.

“Someplace to go, and I forgot to get dressed up!”

Nobody bothers to look to see who it is. By the voice, they know that it’s Karen. They laugh a little, not as hard as they usually would. None of them want to admit that they’re scared. Not just an instinctual part of them lets them know that something is wrong, but they can feel it in the air.

They smile as the ice has cracked and shattered. They picture themselves at the sheriff's office, drinking hot chocolate, the way they used to. Before they tried to grow up too fast.

Almost nobody notices movement outside the van. Only Ben watches, saying nothing, as his eyes follow. The sound of the driver side door opening causes some of the kids to turn their heads quickly, almost jumping in their seats. Jim is now wearing a dark blue shirt, which the kids see in a quick flash as Jim sits down.

Wasting no time, he puts a key in the ignition and turns it. He expects it to start up with the usual, proud roar, but his heart starts to lurch, teetering on the edge, as the sound of rusty, liquid chugging pumps repeatedly.

Jim's face doesn't change as he tries again. The engine tries to catch itself, to spark itself to life. He keeps on turning the key, holding it, wishing it so, to cheat death.

As the sound of the engine struggling makes the van vibrate ever so slightly, Jim breathes along with the engine. "Come on, come on, come on, come on. Come on!"

He stops turning the key, and pops the hood open. Opening the door, stepping outside, and slamming the door in one fluid motion, he lifts the hood up. Without asking, Greg gets a flashlight out of the glove compartment, turns it on, and hands it to Jim.

They all hold their breaths as Jim scans what's under the van's hood with the flashlight's beam of light. Going over everything, he tells himself that he's sure he checked everything thoroughly, and twice, before this batch of kids was scheduled to arrive.

With a stern, concerned look on his face, he studies every aspect of the van's internal organs. As the light keeps moving, he wonders what could be making it stall until he freezes.

He slams the hood shut furiously. Walking fast around the van, he slides open the van's door. They see Jim's burning, angry eyes, not wanting to be near him.

"Out, out! Everybody out!"

He stands aside, pointing at the darkness that goes on forever. Still looking at them, they move from their seats as fast as they can, not looking at him. They break apart as they crawl out of the van, knowing that at any second, he may turn on any of them, for any reason that he justifies.

Following the rest of them, Audrey tries to blend in with the rest of them. Just as she's about to jump from the van, an arm grabs hold of her arm, yanking her from the van. She is dragged off her feet before anyone notices. Her senses, and her breath, are shaken, taken from her.

As she is lifted off the ground by arms of organic steel, Jim's voice bellows in the night, echoing rage. "You did this, didn't you, you bitch?! It was you!"

He doesn't so much as speak as much as he yells, but seemingly throws up his words in a primal, rusty birth. He manages to maintain his stance as a man as he carries Audrey back into the cabin.

Images of being taken up to a room to be beaten flood her mind, and she does her best to struggle out of his arms. "Let me go! I didn't do anything! Let go of me!"

Nobody takes their eyes off of them. They're too scared to do anything, to make the situation any worse than it is. Nobody sees any other kind of movement among them, as they watch in vain Jim carrying Audrey down the cabin's corridor that becomes darker and darker.

Audrey cries as she tries to shake out of his grip. The level of strength Jim is using, and his heavy breath, tells that he is enjoying this underneath his anger. Though

he's moving backwards, and seemingly nowhere, he knows where he's going, and what he intends to do.

He doesn't even hear any other sounds other than his, as the loud "pang!" of a metallic object hitting a solid object reverberates like a shot through the hall and out from the cabin. The sound of bodies hitting the floor, and the frantic breathing of Audrey, as she pushes Jim off of her come easily.

Gerry is relieved as his girl runs to him. Colliding as they hug, they spin as he lifts her from the momentum. If they were anywhere else, in another time, they would dance, and forget themselves. The sound of footsteps coming closer makes them look again down the hallway. They figure it's Jim again, wanting to beat them bloody and ragged. Audrey tenses up, holding Gerry tighter, while the others get into a fighting stance as they see a figure holding a blunt object.

The figure steps into the moonlight outside. As the light shows more of the man, they can all see that he is holding a frying pan. The face of Ben is both upset and proud at the same time. He knows he is risking his future by defying his boss, but he is through caring.

"Help me drag him.", Ben says to nobody in particular. Greg walks up to him and goes past him, turning on a light in the hall. As they go back into the hall, they drag Jim's unconscious body to the end of the hall. Ben opens a door on the left, and they drop Jim's body into the small utility closet. Ben takes the keys off Jim and locks the door.

As Ben walks off down past the cabins, away from them, Greg runs to catch up. Audrey soon follows, and the rest of them follow her. Karen rushes to her side.

"What are we doing?!"

Audrey picks up the pace. Karen does the same. "I don't know."

“But, what about...”

Audrey turns to her with angry eyes. “Not now, Karen!”

Audrey runs from them, and seeing where Ben is leading them, meets him and Greg just as he opens the door to the cafeteria. Ben flicks on the lights, making the cabin come alive with light. Walking past the tables, making their way behind the long counter, Ben takes one of the keys and begins unlocking some of the drawers, and cabinets.

His hands and arms work in practiced precision, as if Ben has dreamed about this moment, about defying his boss. Taking out a tin container of coffee and a coffee maker, Audrey knows she should be relishing any other taste than what she has these past few days. She doesn't think about it as she helps take the Styrofoam cups from Ben, as if he expects her to be behind him the whole time.

The sound of footsteps meets the doorway. Only Greg notices, not caught up in anything, and sees Gerry standing there, with the others behind him. Robert pushes past them all, and sees the coffee items.

“What's with the coffee? Don't tell me we're having a party after all this.”

Without turning to them, Ben turns on the faucet under the cabinets and rinses out the coffee pot. “Come in, and shut the door.”

They pour inside as Ben scoops coffee grounds into a filter. “Lock it.”

As Laurie, being the last one in, locks the door, they congregate at the nearest table. Sitting on the benches, leaning against the table, or sitting on the tabletop, they watch the coffee slowly percolating. Snatching the keys, Ben unlocks one of the more larger drawers, and, as he sees what's inside, his heart becomes heavier and heavier, as his hands seem to move on their own.

Butcher knives, one right after another, are put on the counter, with careful

preparation. Their steel blades shine, mirroring back the light, or any reflection Ben fails to notice. The kids see this and inch back.

Laurie starts to get up from her seat. “Hey! Hey, what’s with the knives?!”

As Ben finishes displaying the butcher knives on the counter next to the coffeemaker, he finally looks at the rest of them.

“Come over here. I have to explain something to you.”

They push themselves from the bench and walk over to Ben, with Greg and Audrey standing a few feet away. One by one, Ben looks at the various faces, and knows all too well the fear behind them.

“Nothing like this has ever happened here before. I know in my gut that the disappearances mean something’s wrong. I know that Christina was right, that there is someone out there, hunting us. I want each of you to take a knife, incase something does happen. I, or Greg, may not be able to help you, so I want each of you to have a chance. Do each of you see how serious this is?”

Nobody says anything as they continue to look at Ben. Ben looks at each of their eyes, and sees their firm concentration. “Good. Now, each of you take a knife. But, hold it pointing down, so you don’t accidentally stab yourself or anyone else.”

As Ben steps away with three knives for himself, Greg, and Audrey, one by one, they approach the counter and take a knife. Robert takes one quickly and walks off, as if he’s found a long lost friend. Karen takes one, and as she looks at the blade shining in front of her face, she smiles.

She turns around to face Gerry. “West side story, anyone?”

Gerry grabs the handle of a knife and goes over to Audrey as Karen goes over to where Robert sits. Kevin grabs a knife and as he walks over to Robert, they high-five each other. Ben sees this and knows they are doing everything they can do to deny that they are scared, so he lets it pass.

Laurie minces toward the counter and sees a few knives before her. Slowly reaching toward one of the handles, she grasps it firmly, with the blade pointing away from her. She looks at it as if she were holding a freshly dead animal, afraid to get any part of it on her, thinking that it will never come off, but knowing there's no choice.

A hand on her left shoulder makes her jump a little, but she does not drop the knife. She turns to see Karen looking disappointingly at the way she's holding the knife.

"That's good, for a start, but only if they manage to walk into you if you hold it like that. Here, let me give you some pointers."

As they walk off together, Gerry hears the coffee bubbling, and sees the pot of coffee being almost ready, just about full. "So, what's the plan?"

Ben doesn't answer right away. He thinks of what to say as he watches the coffee pot becoming more full. To him, he thinks of sands in an hourglass draining away, and if he has a chance, if any of them have a chance. He knows their time will come, and as he sees the seconds drain away, he finds the words.

"We'll have to walk, which is why I'm making coffee, so we don't fall asleep. Greg, how far would you say it is to the sheriff?"

Greg looks up, whispering to himself, doing the math in his head. "About fifteen miles."

Ben puts his hands on the counter. "Ok. Ok, I think we can do this. If we stick together, we should be fine. It's not like whoever's out there can get all of us at once."

A stray idea crosses Audrey's mind. "What if there's more than one person out there?"

Ben hangs his head at the thought. Greg puts his arm around Audrey. "Let's not think about that right now."

Just then, the coffee maker finishes making its bubbling sounds, signaling that coffee is ready. Turning to the other four kids, he yells “Come and get it!”.

As they all approach the coffee, Jim takes a Styrofoam cup for each person and pour a half cup, so that each person gets enough.

The rich, raw smell of coffee cuts through their feelings, heightening the mood. For a quick second, they remember the way they used to be before they came here, but the blackness of the coffee reminds them of the way things are.

Karen looks at her coffee amidst the others and cringes at its blackness. “Uh, Hey! Don’t we get and sugar or cream?”

Kevin turns to her. “Just pretend it’s how you take your men.”

Karen slowly turns her head and glares at Kevin, cocking her head to one side. “Hah hah. You wish.”

Ben hears them, and finishes pouring the coffee for everybody. He pours the last of it in his own cup, takes hold of it, and turns around to face them. “Karen, we don’t have time for this. Just hold your nose and drink it down. The taste will keep you awake, too.”

One by one, each of the kids sip, drink, and chug what little coffee they have. Of what little they do have, it is a feast, flowing into them. Most of them cringe to varying degrees at the taste. Some shake their heads in disgust. Karen grits her teeth as the taste slams into her, and she sticks her tongue out.

“Yuck. Now I’m gonna have raw coffee mouth until something replaces it.”

Robert puts an arm around Karen. “Don’t worry. If you open your mouth, a juicy bug will fly in.”

Karen shrugs Robert’s arm off, backing away from him, as the image and feeling of choking on a thick, bulbous bug disgusts her. She swallows, keeping down the

fear of throwing up.

Ben and Greg look through other cupboards and drawers as the kids put their empty cups on the counter. Audibly scattering items as they go along, they move frantically as they search for something. The kids wait for them to finish. From one of the cupboards, Greg pulls out a long, black, heavy-duty flashlight.

As Ben stands from a low, cavernous cupboard, he, too, is holding an identical flashlight. Turning it on and off, he slaps it in his hand.

Pushing past everyone, he stops at the tables and turns to face them. He sighs as he looks at all the eyes looking back at him.

“Feeling better?”

Before anyone can acknowledge how the black coffee has cut through their fatigue, Karen beats them to it.

“No. Should I?”

Ben looks down with closed eyes, wanting to swear. Breathing heavily, he raises his head back up.

Greg walks over to join him. “Ok. Everybody all set to go?”

At first, nobody says anything. They can’t imagine where else they could go in the middle of nowhere. Laurie asks what they want to know. “Go where?”

Ben looks at Laurie. “The sheriff’s office.”

Robert, wishing he was in charge, wants more details. “How far is that exactly from here?”

“About fifteen miles.”

Seeing the distance in her mind, and feel the way her body is currently feeling, Karen seethes with disgust at this, much more so than the taste of the black coffee.

“Oh, no! I’m not walking that far in the middle of the night. I’ll probably collapse in the road!”

Ben is unfazed at this. “That may happen to me, too. It may happen to all of us. It’s a chance we have to take. Unless, you prefer us to leave you here, and disappear like the others have?”

She cringes as the reality and her other fear gets the best of her, giving her a little shot of courage. “No. No, it’s ok. I’ll go.”

Ben claps his hands together, smiling. “I guess that’s it then, unless there’s no more objections?”

Everyone waits in silence for it to pass, and for Ben to lead them out of there. The sound of him clapping his hands together, but louder this time, makes them jump to attention. They move with careful, yet eager steps as they move along with Ben and Greg. They have no immediate fear to step outside. Ben has no reason to hesitate to open the door, at least on the surface.

He opens the door, and in those first few seconds, the darkness blends and overlaps into itself, appearing to go on forever. They all see the same scene, and yet seeing nothing. Nobody pays attention to each other, especially as Laurie moves along the wall, instinctively reaching for what she thinks is the light switch to the cafeteria.

Her fingers feel the polished, wooden surface of the wall, finding the shape of the switch. As she flicks the switch, she expects the lights in the cafeteria to die away. Instead, lights flash to life with explosive, golden brilliance in the night. They light up the immediate ground outside, and along the cabins. They are blinded, not merely so much by the light, but by the surprise of it all.

More seconds tick by, and with them, the immediate brightness falls away,

little by little, to be seen more clearly. It's still bright, but now, the light mixes with the dark to form wide, expansive spotlights. In one of those spotlights, about twenty feet out, in-between them and freedom, stands a man, dressed in dark green. He is proud and domineering in his stance, owning all he surveys. He appears to be unarmed, though his hands are empty. It's not merely the way he appears to them that makes them freeze.

The hockey mask that covers his face makes them want to run. They want to jump out of their skins from the image that to their eyes, may as well be inches away. Their minds scream for them to do something, anything. Their hearts won't let them.

Chapter Fifteen

None of them move. None of them can. Seconds drag slower than they are, into forever. Though the masked man stands at a distance from them, his very essence makes him seem much closer. To all of them, he may as well be standing right in front of them.

Finally, Ben finds the strength to move, to speak. "It can't be."

Greg doesn't take his eyes off of the man. "It isn't."

Karen peeks through them. "Of course it isn't. Jason's dead. Everybody knows that."

Ben continues to look at the man. He nods, remembering all the news stories on TV he watched along with the newspaper and magazine articles he read, unable to turn away.

"Right. That's right. Then who's this?"

Greg quickly thinks of all the possibilities, racing through them. "Probably some drifter who took a wrong turn."

Audrey can't help but be skeptical. "Some turn. Maybe he lives nearby, and he's walking off a little drinking binge."

Gerry looks at the hockey mask. "Then why the mask?"

Ben hangs his head a little, shaking it, eager to clear things up. “I don’t know. It’s a prank? I don’t know. Look, I’m gonna go talk to him and see if I can get through to him. Greg, come with me.”

Robert says what the rest of them are thinking, at least of the kids. “Um, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

Ben doesn’t take his eyes off of the man, who still does not move. “You have a better one?”

Robert wants to say that they should stay in the cabin, and wait for the man to leave, but he’s afraid that may not do any good. They all know that the way the man stand there, looking at them, would stay there all night. They can tell he’s there for a purpose, and that it isn’t good.

As Robert, or anyone else, doesn’t say anything, Ben takes the first step outside of the cabin. Greg follows, and Ben turns around to face them.

“Lock the door.”

Ben hears the door close and lock along with his heart slowly picking up speed. Greg follows at first, but matches Ben’s steps by walking next to him. One right after another, the kids put their faces in front of the window, watching Ben and Greg slowly approach the masked man with frightened, yet fascinated, uncertain eyes.

Their footsteps making crunching noises on the gravel appear louder than they really are as Ben and Greg making their way up the drive. They hold their knives behind their backs, wanting to give this man a chance, knowing at this point there should not be.

Each step closer makes Ben’s heart beat faster and louder. The man still does not move. Ben wonders if the man can hear his heart’s beat. If so, could he be enjoying it, or not caring?

They stop walking towards him, and stand a few feet away. He looks at Ben, expecting him to do or say something. Both men are not much taller than the other. Sizing him up, Ben is reminded of his brother, so he feels he can talk to him, however strange this may seem.

“Excuse me, sir. We have an emergency. We have to get to the sheriff’s office. Would you mind telling us what you’re doing here? This is private property.”

Ben smiles at the man, expecting some kind of reaction. There is none. He continues to stand there, as if daring him.

“Hey! He asked you a question! Answer him when he talks to you!”

The man swiftly turns his head, clearly more than annoyed. Both Greg and Ben are both more pleased than nervous that they have some reaction from this person. But, as Ben turns to look at Greg, he smiles melts away to dread.

Greg shakes his head in disgust. “That’s it. I’m getting out of here.”

The man, who mere seconds ago, was thought of as a stone statue, comes alive. As Greg takes a step forward, past them both, the man side-steps him, blocking his path.

Greg looks him in the eyes, annoyed. He moves to his right, and as he moves up the hill a little more, the man steps in front of him again.

“What do you think you’re doing?! This isn’t funny! People are missing here!”

The man in the mask cocks his head up slightly, as if to laugh. He then cocks his head a little to the side, as if he’s smiling to himself.

Greg does not want to believe it, despite what he sees and feels. But, the realization washes over him, flooding him from the inside-out. It fills him with a quiet

anger, and a quiet voice.

“It’s you. You’ve been doing this.”

His anger rises along with his voice as he pushes the man with his flashlight. The force of his arm manages to push him back, blinded by his anger that fills him with a happy delight.

“Out of my way, you little...!”

Greg raises his arm, his hand holding the heavy flashlight, thinking it’s quick only for him. As he brings it down, the man’s hand comes out of nowhere, snatches it, and whips it to the ground behind him. Greg wastes no time becoming angrier, and as he brings up his other hand holding the knife, he never raises it fully.

The man moves quicker than Greg in bring up a knife of his own, stabbing Greg in the chin up to the hilt. He seems to take forever to fall, but as he does, the man sees Ben’s shocked and scared reaction.

Greg collapses hard to the ground in a heap of sweat and pooling blood. By instinct, Tommy picks up the knife Greg dropped, and seeing Ben running back towards the cabin he came from, he takes the knife by the blade. His hand and arm move all on their own as he brings the knife back. He’s not himself anymore. He’s watching himself from outside, as his body takes perfect aim, and throws the knife.

He feels he’s traveling along with the knife, becoming the knife as it’s left his body. As it flies, all his past burns away, and as it does, his soul cries out.

The knife pierces the back of Ben’s head. The blade goes through his head, with the tip sticking out of his mouth. As the force of the impact makes his body gasp in a reflex action, spraying blood while being jerked forward, he continues to run a few more feet before losing his balance, crashing to the ground, and rolling to the ground.

Tommy takes his time in walking to Ben’s now lifeless body. Looking down

at his handiwork, at the wide, terrified eyes, fills his with a sense of peace and glee. It is beautiful to him, a piece of art, an extension of not just himself, but what he represents.

“You bastard!”

Tommy looks up at the muffled yell, and sees faces of teenagers looking at him through the window of the cabin in front of him. Some are scared, while others are angry. He can guess who called out to him. He doesn't care. Looking into their eyes, he can feel their emotions, mixing in them as he goes from the scared eyes, to the furious ones. He knows they want to come outside and kill him.

Picking up the knife Ben dropped and putting it in a sheath behind his back, he picks up Ben's body and carries it directly in front of the cabin's window. He holds it for them to see, and just as he's certain they have seen more than can handle, he drops the body, but holds onto the legs.

Taking hold of the legs with both hands, Tommy spins himself, building up a momentum. The body may as well be him, being dead all his life, only now coming to life for the first time. Feeling his real eyes open, and his real heart beating, he imagines the body saying “Throw me!”.

He lets go, and like magic, the body soars from his hands. He does not see the teenagers inside scrambling, falling over each other, to get out of the way. He feels the body crash through the window, sending glass flying. It is he who tumbles and lies dead at their feet, the person he does not recognize.

The kids inside peek out though the massive gash in the window. As they see the masked man, he walks to their left, each party holding its gaze. Tommy looks at them with an intensity that crosses the distance between them. He's not just in the room. He's not merely holding their hearts in his hand. He's holding their future, the remaining sands drifting slowly, steadily from his hands.

Tommy passes from sight, walking to the side of the cabin. The kids slowly stand up, afraid to make any noise. Stepping away from Ben's body, Karen swallows, closing her eyes, refusing to look at it. Turning, she meets Robert face to face.

"I'm going out there. I don't want to hear what you have to say. He can't take all of us on at the same time. If two or more are hunting him, we can bait him into a trap. Who's with me?"

Kevin walks past Robert, and over to the door. "Sure, I've taken guys like this. This guy's a pussy. Ladies?"

Karen looks at Laurie, who looks uncertain. "Hey, look. All you'll have to do is flush him out, and we'll do the rest."

"Ok."

Karen looks over at Gerry and Audrey. "What about you two?"

Gerry holds up his hands, one of them still holding his knife. "Oh no. You're not suckering us into anything. Us being here is enough."

Karen smiles at them sarcastically as she drags Laurie by the arm.

"Fine. Sit this out. See if I care."

Robert takes careful steps towards the locked door and as he reaches it, slowly reaches for the lock. He dreads the man outside being right outside the door. His heart threatening to beat out of his chest as he slowly turns the lock with a soft, audible click.

His arm seems to move on its own as it swiftly opens the door. Knife at the ready, he finds nothing but an empty patio, and quiet wilderness. Peering out, looking from left, then to the right, he steps outside. Kevin casually follows him, with Karen proudly walking, almost strutting, with Laurie hesitantly trailing behind. Audrey walks over to the door as if the whole situation isn't happening. Closing and locking the door,

she follows Gerry, who is walking behind the counters.

She walks over to him, and sees him sitting down behind the counters with his knife on the floor by his right hand. Audrey lowers herself down to the floor, and as she sits down next to him, she places her knife on the floor to her left.

She rests her head on his shoulders, and he wraps an arm around her.

Each of them soon scatter, leaving each of them in the dark. Robert and Kevin head up towards the main cabin, while Karen and Laurie creep along their sleeping quarters. Karen quickly puts the two boys out of her mind as she sees them round a corner, disappearing from sight.

Peeking around a corner, and finding nobody, Karen tip-toes along the side of her cabin. A quick glance behind her, and Laurie gives her a thumbs-up, pushing her forward. With each step she makes, Karen is careful not to make any noise. She doesn't, and neither does Laurie, even as they both stop.

They reach the end of the side of the cabin, and looking in front of her and to the side, finding nothing but darkness and shadows from the angles of light, and no movement, Karen allows herself a quick sigh of relief.

Sticking her head out to see around the corner, the light shows nothing but a clear path, except to the left of her, thick trees, and...

Karen pulls her head back quickly to where she's standing.

Laurie whispers to her. "What is it?"

Karen points behind her, mouthing the words "It's him!" with wide, intense eyes.

Laurie stands back as Karen grips her knife with both hands, keeping it low, eyes closed, breathing deeply. She sees herself acting this desire out in her mind, as if she's done this before, though she hasn't. She's gotten in many fights over the years,

escalating from petty name calling, to vicious pranks, to physical fights which usually left the other person more bloody, cut-up, and battered, inside and out.

Through all that, she's never had to use a knife. Something inside of her has always felt using a weapon, such as a knife, in a fight made the person appear less than they really are. But, Karen knows these are not normal circumstances. She knows she literally has to fight for her life now.

In one fluid motion, she spins around from the corner and disappears from Laurie's sight. The sound of Karen's knife stabbing something hard and firm echoes softly around them.

The sound stops, which is replaced by heavy breathing. Laurie finds her fear falling away as she takes step after step, until, as she peeks her head around the corner, she finds Karen leaning against a thick tree.

Laurie reaches out for her, but stops, and pulls back her hand. "Karen?"

Karen turns away from the tree, and smiles, chuckling more to herself than Laurie. "I thought it was him. It looked enough like a man."

The shed that stands about fifty feet past the tree and nestled next to a few remaining cabins, gives Karen an idea. "Look, he can't be everywhere at once, right? If we see him, you flush him out, ok?"

Laurie glares at her. "Why do I have to be the bait?"

"Because you've never been in a fight, and I have. Follow me."

They walk past another more trees and bushes that appear to swallow darkness and light with every quick glance the two girls give. The wooden shed and pitch black cabins call to them with their darkness. They imagine him being anywhere in any part of the dark, ready to pop up, and drag them down, down into the ground. That thought makes them grip their knives tighter, and sweat a little more.

They pass one cabin, then another. In-between two cabins stands the shed, and they stop in front of the door. Knives at the ready, pointing in front of them, Karen grabs holds of the door handle and swiftly opens it. Instantly, the faint light coming from the outdoor lights show paddles, helmets, padded sticks, tools, canoes, and other assorted equipment that Karen ignores as she quickly shuts the door.

Karen turns around first, and as she does, the shape and image of the man in the hockey mask walks past two cabins. He's on the other side of the cabins, but Karen's heart leaps into her throat, beating furiously. As he walks past, he doesn't turn to them, but Karen is certain in her gut that he can't help but notice them.

Laurie sees him walk past in his fleeting seconds, and as she opens her mouth to gasp, Karen puts her hand over her mouth. A plan comes together, and she points down the side of the cabin, then puts a hand to Laurie's ear.

"We'll flush him out, and then we'll ambush him. I've done this countless times."

Laurie smiles, feeling more confident on the surface and brave than she really is. "Right."

They separate, Laurie going parallel to the cabins, while Karen goes towards where she saw the man. Each step she takes beats in time with her heart. Her footsteps don't make any sound as she takes slow steps along the cabin. A few feet from the corner of the cabin, she stops. The fact that her feet touching the ground make no sound doesn't bother her so much. With her head against the cabin, she preys for some sound, anything, to let her know there's a sign of life.

The edge of the cabin's corner draws near. Karen feels along the side as if she's crawling, feeling along the texture as if she's climbing a mountain, looking for a foothold. Inches away from the other side, an image pops into her head. The man

grabbing her by the hair as she peeks around and quickly killing her. Squatting down on her hands and knees, she crawls over to the corner's edge and sticks her head out at ground level.

At the second to last cabin, Karen sees the man turns the corner. Her breath catches in her throat. She pulls her head back, and with her eyes wide, her heart skips a beat. Struggling to get up, she breathes hard to steady herself as her body has turned to jelly. Shutting her eyes, she imagines all the faces of the people she's ever fought, and the delicious rage she's tasted not just in anticipation, but in the throws of passion of every hit, scratch, and all the blood she's caused them to spill.

She smiles with a proud glee as she remembers all the people who gravitated to her over the years because of her desire to be such a "bad-ass". She smiles so much more on the inside as she thinks of all the people who have been more than afraid and disgusted of her; not just those who have been vocal about their thoughts, but those that are too scared to admit their feeling to themselves.

Those thoughts give her sure footing again. With a happy face, she almost prances as she hops, landing on the balls of her feet, careful not to make any noise as she goes past the cabins. The closer she gets, the images of what she intends to do plays out in her mind, just as all the times she's snuck up on other boys who thought they were tougher and smarter than everybody else.

She slows down, stopping right at the edge of the cabin's corner. She stops moving as she hears the sound of heavy breathing from around the corner. Bending her knees, licking her lips, she grips the handle of the knife tightly. There is a sense of calm that washes over her as her body before her body moves, washing away all thoughts, from her, from them, and all her sins of her past, and her future.

Her body screams on the inside as she rushes around the corner. The knife held high, she thrusts it forward at the first image she sees. She seems to fly as she moves, unable to stop. Still going as she hears and feels the knife pierce flesh, she pushes the body forward, more and more, after the body has stopped moving.

Somehow, Karen's feet slip from under her. The body, and the knife in it, slip from her grasp, and collapse on the ground in front of her. Karen picks her head up, knowing she has saved herself, and the lives of her friends. Blinking, adjusting to the newfound light, she sees exactly what, and who, she has stabbed.

The sight of Laurie lying on the ground with a butcher knife embedded in her chest up to the hilt fills her with a primal terror. Backing up, she tries to scream, but no sound will come out. She wants to run, but her body will not obey her. The need to run not just from this fatal mistake, but from all her mistakes, pushes her repeatedly from within.

Before she can think, her feet turn her body around. Running at full speed, not caring where, or what is in front or around her, she runs what she thinks and feels in her mind is a mile. Only a few feet, as she turns away from her freshly dead friend, Karen turns her face front. She is unable to stop herself as she feels the white-hot impact of a butcher knife embed itself into her chest.

Her breath taken away, she feels life draining, flowing, dripping down, hitting the ground. Fading fast, in the shadowy light, the man has a death shroud as she sees the hockey mask. She looks at him, though there are no eyes to see, and curses him in the dying light of her eyes. Feeling her heart beat slower and slower, he lets go of the knife, letting her body fall away from him, crashing to the ground with an audible thud.

Long strides take him past the body, away from it as if it were never there.

Walking up the slope, behind cabins, the thought of being without a knife does not bother

him as he continues to walk without a care. Expecting another one of them to appear, he listens for any telltale noise as he stops in his tracks.

“Patience, dear Tommy”, he thinks. “They will come to you. They always find you.”

Further into shadow and light, the side of a cabin to the left, and snaking bushes and trees to the far right, narrows his vision. The sound of his breathing, and the reverberating of his heart beating faster, gives him a blinding confidence. With every step, he expects not just the rest, but all those from his past, to come rising from the graveyard of his mind. And all of those that would and could try to bring terror into the little boy that he was. Let them come.

A heavy weight knocks into his back from above, barreling him off his feet. Slamming into the ground, hitting the side of the cabin, Tommy looks frantically for any sign of what happened, of what or who could have surprised him they way, and this much.

Picking his head up, the shape of a man, with light reflecting off the edge of a knife gives Tommy pause. From his height, this man appears to be a giant, ready to beat him to death. If that isn't enough, this giant would grab him by the scruff of his neck and shake his spirit until it would be nothing.

Robert feels nothing but exhilaration as he stands over this man, clearly having the upper hand. His hands held high, they are bringing down the knife faster than he knows what he knows what he is doing. Rushing the knife down, he has a mad, angry glee expression on his face. He is more than eager to teach this person, this pretender, a lesson in fear.

A hand snaps out from nowhere, fiercely grabbing Robert by the wrist. His heart screeches to a halt, slamming in his chest. He does not have time to react further as

the knife is pushed into his own chest. He tries to scream, to yell out, but only short, whispering gasps bubble out of his throat.

Still holding the knife, Tommy pushes the body up as he slowly rises to his feet. Blood drips from Robert's mouth as he feels eyes burn into him. Closer and closer into the darkness of those eyes, his vision fades faster with each second. He tries to fight this death that has taken hold of him, and is dragging him away. Searching for any lasting strength, to move his limbs, to fight back. Only the burning, coldness of the knife sends him falling as Tommy rises further.

Finally standing, Tommy holds Robert's body high up above him, as if it was a trophy. As blood drips, flows onto his hand, memories of the past, and the person he could have been, washes away. He feels he has done this all his life, for thousands of years, for all of creation.

Holding the body effortlessly with one hand, he tosses the body down in front of him. It bounces as it hits the ground, and as it does so, part of him wishes he could take part of the body as a reminder. Only he will know of this, that he's been here, and that he has become more than he was.

Movement from the corner of his left eye makes him turn his head. He barely sees the glint of steel as it barely misses his throat. What feels like a sharp bite hits him in the right shoulder as he backs up. Slash after slash misses him as he dodges them. He knows that he's running out of space, and that he needs to do something fast.

This, and the realization that he has been surprised this easily, almost being killed, infuriates Tommy. He waits for the young man to slash at him again. On his downswing, he grabs him by the wrist and drives the knife into the man's shoulder.

Screaming deep and wet screams that quickly turn rusty and high-pitched, he wobbles on his feet. Starting to fall back, he doesn't care that he is falling. All he cares

about is the knife in his shoulder that feels like a blow-torch.

He still doesn't care as a hand catches him from behind and closes around his neck like a steel vice and squeezes. He is unable to fully react from the pressure in his neck, as he is pushed into the wall of a cabin. His nose is smashed into face, driven down into one of the logs.

As Tommy does this, he can feel the bone being instantly driven into the young man's brain in a symphony of splintering bone and flesh, and squishing, splashing blood. This drives a delight into Tommy as he watches the body slide down, with blood and bone fragments slowly slipping away as they try to stick. He stands there, wanting never to move.

For minutes that seem like hours, he does not move. The occasional animal sounds mean nothing. He is still feeling, over and over, frame by frame, this latest death. Letting it stir in his mind, sit in his stomach, he raises his head and breathes deeply.

The sound of far-off motion brings him back to reality. Tommy snaps his head to the right. The sound of what Tommy perceives to be a car, makes his heart race in no time. It is a chariot from hell, rising up from the dead, and it is coming for him. No time to be scared. There's no room for it. He goes back the way he came.

The faint sound of a car traveling on paved road getting closer flows into the cafeteria where Audrey and Gerry are now hiding. They sit behind the main food counter, which is now, still, and will always be, empty. They are so relieved, they want to cry out, to do something rash, instinctual. They stay put, to make sure, as they smile again in what feels like years.

Faint pinpricks of light that rise up and out from the forest's darkness, act as searchlights. Peeking from behind the counter, Audrey and Gerry see these lights, along with the distinct sound of a car engine. Euphoric relief explodes more in Audrey than

Gerry as she bursts from the floor. He grabs her, trying to hang on for dear life, but she pushes him away, almost ripping the door away as she opens it.

As Audrey runs to the car, not hearing Gerry yell “Wait!”, the dark blue ford rolls to a stop. She can’t run fast enough as it seems miles away, every step a bountiful respite. As Pam quickly gets out of the backseat of the car, she sees this young girl who may have been her in her younger years, had circumstances been different.

Audrey sees Pam, and seeing her features, she wishes this woman was her mother. Her whole life, she has wished her mother was not the way she was. Audrey wants to embrace this woman, to get out of here, and into a new life. “Keep going”, Audrey tells herself. “You’re almost safe!”.

A sharp, instant pain pierces Audrey’s chest, causing her body to whip up in agony. As she falls, her head rises, almost expanding in a rictus along with her arms shot up. She screams a short, ripping scream of a dying lion. In that last second, she wishes she was not as strong as that cry, but more than she, or anyone, could ever know.

The body collapses at Pam’s feet. She instantly covers her mouth with her hands as she sees the arrow sticking out of the back, where the heart is. She picks her head up, to see where the arrow came from. There is no one.

Chapter Sixteen

Josh and George, the two FBI agents, scan the immediate area, with their guns drawn. Their eyes look over every detail, for any sign of movement. They pass by the newly dead girl’s body, as well as the body of a man, as they move down the sloping path.

Footsteps rustle and grind the rocks and pebbles of the ground behind them. They spin around, and find it’s only David and Pam, hesitantly trailing them.

George looks at them disappointingly, the way a parent would when their

child would not measure up to a simple task. “Stay there!”, he whispers, waving them away.

Pam attempts to argue, to try and find the words, but deep down, she knows they must hold back for the moment. David touches the gun he has in the waistband of his pants, making sure it’s still there. For now, all they can do is watch, and they do, as they see the agents move further away from them, until they split up, moving between the cabins.

As David sees them disappear from sight, his heart sinks, skipping a beat.

“Shit.”

Josh sees the newly dead bodies, swallowing his fear as he carefully moves along. He doesn’t want to believe any fear that is trying to make him come to his senses. Anyone with the spirit, the essence, of what Jason Voorhees was, and the will to live and die with it, must not only be killed, but dead already.

His gun drawn, he moves a step at a time, listening for any sound. The wind, soft rustling of animals moving in the woods to his left, and his breathing, are all his can hear. He can’t even hear his partner George. He may even be already dead by now. No, even if that’s true, this Tommy Jarvis can’t be that fast.

Down the slope behind the cabins, he watches his footing as he does hear something far off at the end of the row of cabins. It is a soft, steady rhythm of footsteps that he has been trained to hear. No thoughts now. He cocks the hammer of his gun as slowly, as quietly, as he can.

A shadow moves on the edge of one of the far-off cabins. Changing shape, growing larger, Josh trains his gun on the movement. His breath stops and disappears. His body becomes nothing but waves for which he hears his heart beat faster and faster.

The shadow grows more, becoming the shape of a man. He can do nothing

but wait. He must be sure if it is who Pam and David have said it is. Just the shape and shade of that hockey mask is enough for him to open fire, to empty his clip into him. Let anyone still keep moving after that!

The man's shape comes into view more with every second that passes, with every inch that he moves. Josh focuses with intense, crystal clarity at the image of the man's face, and sees that it is indeed George's face.

He heavily exhales, not realizing that he was holding his breath. He scrambles to catch it again, breathing heavily, sweetly. As George passes from sight again, Josh feels that he is the only one there. He relaxes a little more, smiling as he lowers his gun, releasing the hammer.

There are no thoughts as he takes a breath, turning around as he does so. He sees the image of a hockey mask and the man wearing it in a split second. He tries to yell out, to raise his gun, but there is no time. Shadowy hands shoot out at his head, gripping it like a vise in half a second. In less time than that, these hands turn Josh's head in an unnatural angle, snapping the neck's vertebrae, feeling and hearing the cracking.

George expects to bump into his partner any second now. Walking in-between the cabins, and find more and more dead bodies on the ground, he knows he should have more back-up. Not just more agents, but everything in the county. Researching this Tommy Jarvis on the way over, and realizing how smart and driven he is, deep down, he feels even that may not be enough.

Opening a door to a cabin, quickly turning on a light, he gives it a once-over before shutting the door. He does the same for the rest of the cabins in his area, figuring Josh is doing the same.

As he shuts the door to the last cabin, he imagines Tommy watching him, or hiding somewhere he hadn't thought of. He walks along all the cabins, and seeing the

water to the left, for a second, he stops, thinking of taking his shoes off and cooling his feet off. He puts the thought out of his mind as quickly as it came to him.

The row of the cabins' edge gets closer and closer. Part of him thinks this is just a waste of time, that they will never find him. He knows that isn't true. He knows that this is all a trap, and can't see a way out.

The soft sounds footsteps and breathing begin about twenty feet behind him.

“Josh?”

Starting to turn around, the footsteps break into a run. Barely turning around all the way, from the corner of his eye, he sees him. All he can do is freeze as his mind won't believe what else he sees. A bat is swung through the air, smashing into George's head at a breakneck speed. Its body connects with his forehead, knocking him off the ground with a audible cracking sound.

He lands hard on his back, vision blurring. Reaching for his gun with a shaking hand, trying to sit up, he finds himself unable to as his head has become heavy. In the midst of his diminishing vision, he can barely see the man stand over him, carrying the bat.

Coughing up blood, he tries to push himself up. He makes it a few inches, and miraculously, feels a rush of energy as he begins to sit up.

The bat is smashed into his head again, this time connecting with his nose. He flops and jerks suddenly, even as it is driven into the head again, until there is no more life left in this man.

Tommy looks at the man he has just killed. He replays the reflex action in his mind, seamlessly flowing into the bloody mess that is before him. The seconds ticking by, the lifeless eyes staring into the sky, confirms the man is dead now.

He remembers the car these two men came here in. He thinks of going

someplace no one will ever find him, and nobody will bother him. Disappearing again, but for good this time. It will be as if he was never here.

Peering from the cabins, he sees the car, sitting there at the top of the slope, glowing in the light, as if a prize. He's certain he's won, all alone. He can't remember anyone else, and as all thought of those he has killed fades, he lets go of the bat....

David sees Tommy let go of a bat as he steps around more bodies. He holds his breath as he comes closer, praying Tommy won't turn around. Caring not for what Tommy thinks or feels at this moment, he's thankful he makes not a sound as he carefully takes each step, having his gun drawn on him.

He stops, mere feet behind him. Slowly, he raises his gun. Fully raised, to the back of Tommy's head, he begins to squeeze the trigger. He can do it. He knows he can, but the very act becomes an uphill battle. The trigger, along with the gun and his heart, become heavy. Images of Tommy's past flash through David's mind, and deep down, he knows all this is not entirely Tommy's fault.

The fact that pulling the trigger would be doing Tommy, and potential victims, a favor, come to mind, too. He is mere centimeters away from fully pulling that trigger, but he wonders, years from now, if he will be crushing his heart at this moment.

His heart races as his face tightens, along with his hand, as his finger moves to finish pulling the trigger.

Tommy spins around, grabbing David by the wrist, pushing the gun out of the way, just as it goes off. The shot explodes into the air, making David's heart lurch and leap in desperate need to escape. A quick look at that hockey mask, and blank emptiness for eyes, he can not just see, but feel the anger in that hiding face.

Still holding onto David's wrist, he barrels into him, knocking him to the ground. Crashing along with him, he beats his hand into the ground, trying to make

David let go of the gun.

David tries to push and wiggle out of Tommy's grip, but it is like a steel vise. He tries to push past the pain as Tommy slams his hand into the ground again and again, finally letting go of the gun.

Rocking back and forth, David tries to confuse Tommy as they both roll to the right. Tommy slams his forehead into David's, and as he tries to clear his head and vision, Tommy is gone.

David pushes himself up to a sitting position. He frantically looks all around for Tommy, who appears to have vanished. Attempting to stand as he moves his legs, an arm wraps around his throat. Instantly squeezing his windpipe, pushing all the air down and out, Tommy doesn't think how this person can be here. The rage blinds him to whether this man is a hallucination or not.

Looking down at him, choking the life out of him, part of him wants to smile. He can't. As the man's arms reach up, clawing and beating away at Tommy, losing strength with every few seconds, Tommy thinks of the life he could have had. Making a name for himself with his masks, if he chose. Meeting a girl and building a life with her, which would not be a problem for him. Forgetting the bad memories, and the physical pain to go with them.

Tommy looks down at this man with burning eyes, knowing he is almost dead.

"Tommy!"

A soft, haunting voice flows ahead of him, up the slope. Instantly, he thinks of his mother. She can't be here, can she? She's dead. But, if she is, what would she think of him now?

Tommy looks up to see where the female voice came from. It is a voice from his past. It is a voice he knows, yet now, he can't place it. It is a soothing voice, the way his mother was.

What he sees makes his head cock ever so slightly in disbelief. Instead of seeing his mother's face, he sees a mask. His mask, the one he remembers spending the most time on, to get the detail right. It is of a fish-type alien creature, with white skin, large black eyes, and bulbous red lips.

Tommy does not know what he sees. An angel, perhaps, using the only thing from his childhood that was good. He wants to believe that what he sees is real. He slowly releases his grip on David, finally letting go of him.

David is paralyzed on the ground, choking. He fights back the air into his lungs. Coughing so much, he's certain he is spitting a lot, but not at the point of throwing up. He feels Tommy was choking the life out of him for minutes, as if holding him underwater. He tries to get up, but he can't. He doesn't have the strength yet. As he turns to see what is slowly playing out before him, it is too late.

Pam thinks of where her gun is, and her heart sinks as she remembers it being on the backseat of the car. A careful step at a time reminds her of the large pocketknife David gave to her for emergencies. She steps so lithely; she prays Tommy thinks she is an apparition, just like all the ones she knows he has seen. "Focus on my face, and nothing else.", she thinks to herself. "The rest of the world doesn't exist. It's just the two of us."

"Tommmmmmmmmmyyyyyy....."

Her whispering loudly as she steps again bring her closer to what she needs to do. She wishes that the bad things that happened to this young man never happened. Knowing that he's not only a genius in his mask-making, but anything he so chooses, she

also sees the chance of him overcoming his past: if only the tragedy at the halfway house never occurred.

Another step. As she moves on, she loses track of how many steps she takes as she sees each motion in her mind. As she slowly reaches in her back pocket for her knife, she pictures herself sticking the blade in him. With forceful will, and all of her might, jamming it into his heart.

More steps. They're mere yards away. She doesn't think as she imagines blade piercing flesh, slipping past bone, as she extends the blade from behind. She tries to imagine him dying, falling to the ground. Spattering and oozing blood while shaking and twitching, she knows she has to look past the mask. No, don't think about his real mask, the one of his hardened face, which lies the little boy inside.

They stop. He stands over her, inches taller. For what seems like years in these seconds, he stares at what he thinks is his mother, risen from the grave. Just as before, here to take him away, to let him know that all is right in the world.

He wants to go with her, regardless of her being real or not. To leave all this behind, his life, all that he knows or ever could know. She is here now. She forgives him. She must. She understands. Why wouldn't she? He's her only son. Her dream, her reason to be.

He leans over her, curious. They are close enough to touch. He slowly moves his arms, spreading them out. Her heart races as he moves to smother her.

"Do it! Don't think! Just do it! Kill him!" Her mind screams at her to act. Her gut holds her back, waiting for the right moment.

She moves in closer, close enough so that he can't see her hands. She cups the knife in her hand, hiding the blade.

It is almost time. Seconds, inches away from touching, from embracing for

the first time, and the last, she is ready. Ready to derail it all, and stick the knife in his back. It's easy. It can be done in the dark.

Her hand that holds the knife is behind him. She raises the hand. It seems to move all on its own. As with the knife, it is hungry. Ravenous with a newfound hunger she knows she can control, felling only for this moment.

The hand is fully raised. The knife is gripped as if it's extension of her hand. She wants to kill him. She has to. She must.

"Do it!"

Everything stops. Just as it does, heavy footsteps sound and rebound all around. David is running up from behind. She slips out from Tommy's grasp. As she does so, Tommy turns around to face the rapidly approaching noise.

A bat connects with his mask with full force, cracking the silence. Pam sidesteps just in time to see Tommy jerk back with his head jerking up, staggering back, and collapsing to the ground.

They stand over him, expecting him to get up. Nothing. He does not move, or breathe. It would be so easy for them to kill him now. Just stab him, once in the heart, while he would smash his head in. If she were to remove the hockey mask, what kind of face would she find?

She moves towards Tommy's unconscious body, starting to bend down. David puts his hand on her shoulder, stopping her. Turning around, she sees him slowly shake his head "no" as he looks down.

"Go get the rope from the trunk."

Pam folds the blade back into the handle of her pocketknife. "What about you?"

He still holds the bat in his hand. He has kept his eyes on the body of this

killer for the better part of a minute. For now, he's won the moment. "Don't worry about me. Just go!"

Pam pushes off of the scene for the car they came in, heading up the slope. They have done it. They have found him, they have tricked him, and soon, they will have captured him. She doesn't feel proud or relieved, of now, or what she's certain she has prevented. Just nothing.

Popping the trunk, she opens it up. She searches for the bag that contains the rope she knows she packed. It's not there. Feeling for it further in the trunk, she crawls into the trunk, not thinking of the possibility she could be trapped in there.

Still not finding it, she begins to climb out.

"It's not here!"

"What?!"

With one foot touching the ground, Pam is about to shut the trunk, in furious more at herself than at anything else. A glance to her left inside the trunk makes her stop. Not just her eyes, but her whole body is awash in relief.

"Wait! I found it!"

Another minute, two, then three, finally now four minutes have passed. There is still no movement from Tommy. David is comforted by this and smiles to himself.

He quickly turns around. "Hurry up!"

David sees Pam plant both feet on the ground as she's about to shut the trunk. He turns back to see Tommy standing in front of him, hockey mask greeting him, absence of eyes boring into him.

David swings the bat at Tommy as hard as he can, at the unassuming angle it's at. Tommy effortlessly catching the bat in mid-flight, and easily wrenches in from

David's hands.

In these few seconds, David expects Tommy to use the bat against him. He is confused and relieved when Tommy tosses the bat away, letting it roll down the slope. Instinct takes over for David. He knows Tommy will never stop. He knows he will have to outwit him somehow.

That instinct combines with reflex action as David kicks Tommy in the testicles as hard as he can. Tommy lets out a loud, agonizing cry as he falls to the ground again.

David watches him, surprised that Tommy can still feel anything anymore.

A hand grabs David by the arm from behind. For a second, the thought of another killer flashes across his mind, but it burns away as he sees Pam from behind. She is gripping his arm by the wrist, squeezing it so hard, her fingers are pressing, digging into his flesh. She is leading him away, towards the first, and largest cabin, though David is unaware of what she is thinking.

“Ow! What are you doing? I had him!”

Pam leads David into the cabin, closing the door behind them. In the dim, interior light, she sees a table and chairs off to the side in the cabin's living room. Quickly taking one and using it to block the door, her eyes light up as she sees stairs leading to the cabin's second floor.

“Come on! I've got an idea!”

The closet door is kicked open with a loud bang. The figure of a man collapses to the floor, scratching to see if it's real, and not a dream. He knows it is. The deep, throbbing pain in his head is real. Struggling to his feet, Jim wonders what is left of his castle, his authority, and of himself.

He feels the walls and he makes his way down the hall, and is perplexed as he

sees a chair blocking the front door of the cabin.

“What the hell?”

He stumbles to the chair, and as he grabs it, he throws it out of the way. He is certain at least some of the kids are still here, hiding in the cabin.

“You kids just earned a vacation to prison! Do you hear me?!”

He is smiling at his words, and still is as he opens the door, but his smile melts away as he sees what has been waiting for him.

Jim is shocked and aghast, mouth open wide. Breathing fast, he runs over to the body of Greg, lying with a knife in his head from below the chin. He can't imagine one of the kids being strong or smart enough to be able to do this. Only now, as he leans over the body, and turning around to see the massive gash in the window of the cafeteria, does he believe of someone out to get them.

He knows that fate was saving him for last. As he runs back into the cabin, fighting back fear from now, and from his whole life, he remembers all those times where he fought to be proven right, no matter what, regardless how he hurt.

Running up the stairs two, three at a time, he thinks back on relishing the fact that although he did get in some trouble when was younger, it never stuck. Others would call him a bully, but he was just being himself. He would sweet-talk anyone over to his side, and if he so chose, got under the skin of those deserving.

He's at the top of the stairs. Turning to the left, he goes down the hall to one of the bedrooms. As he touches the doorknob, he instantly remembers when he was old and big enough to not be afraid of his father. He was opening a door just like this one, which was old, worn, lined with scratches, when he heard a loud fight.

The sight of his father standing over his mother, punching her across the face, sent Jim into a terrible frenzy he never knew existed within him. He ran and dove across

the room, tackling his father to the ground. Raining punches down on his own father, the man who taught him how to live, was still teaching him then. He was turning his father face to a bloody pulp. He didn't care. He loved it. He felt like he was living for the first time in his life.

As he opens the door to the dark room, lit only by a soft glow of moonlight coming in from the wide pane of glass on the other side, divided by squares, forming a spider-web throughout the room, those memories disappear, seemingly from another life, another person. He doesn't even think as he runs to the massive safe in the corner of the room, hiding next to the bed.

He trips, catching himself with his hands, tears unnoticeably mixing with sweat. Frantic hands move the dial to and fro, still slow as fast as he is going.

"Come on. Come on. Please!"

He smiles as the door opens for him. Reaching into the dark of the safe, he feels around, and pulls out a .38 pistol. He checks to see if the bullets are still in place, loaded just as before. They are, still shining right back at him.

A footstep softly echoes behind him. He turns around, pointing the gun. He wants there to be someone, something there, to justify his actions. It can't be just him, overreacting to his movements.

The only movement his eyes pretend to see are the hands and fingers of the trees that play shapes with shadows. The only other source of light is the lamp that is resting on a small table on the other side of the bed, opposite the safe. Its shape is barely able to stand out in the moonlight, but the shape of it would remind him of a genie's lamp, if he were not so scared.

Crawling onto the bed, his hand moves slowly for the switch. He prays he is alone, and that the only monsters that were here are gone now. For why would anyone

still be here?

Grasping the lamp's light switch, he turns it. Nothing happens. He turns it again, faster and faster, expecting the light to magically come back. The tiny knob gets away from his hand, and he angrily swats the lamp away, letting it crash to the floor in breaking bulb and ceramic.

"Shit!"

A hand grabs him from behind, taking hold of his right leg. He yelps out in surprise and terror as he's yanked off his balance. His hands try and grab for the bed, for anything, to try and stop this. Any chance gets away from him as he's dragged across the bed.

Jim's hand moves on its own as it brings the gun to the shape he sees in the corner of his eye. Another hand comes out of nowhere, stopping his before he has a chance to fire. He cries out again in sudden shock, and again as he sees now the cause of all this madness.

The moonlight's glow shines off the side of Tommy's hockey mask. The rest of it is outlined in dim light from behind mixed in with the dark. Barely able to see where the eyes would be, Jim can only pretend to know what are behind those eyes now.

Tommy remembers watching this man for the past two days, and thinks of the teachers who have been holy terrors to him, and others, then and now. He imagines how they would be decades from now, lost in forgetfulness, most likely unable to remember how they were, or never seeing it from anyone else's eyes but their own. Shut off, in their own little world, alone but surrounded, or even in a cabin such as this, in the middle of a wasteland of their own.

Trudging through a frozen hell, just to hunt them down, he can see their eyes

the way they would be, old and young at the same time, the way they are now.

The thought of all the people this man has terrorized, and all those who never get their comeuppance, sends a burning fire throughout Tommy from within. Dragging Jim off the bed by the hand, he squeezes his wrist, letting the gun fall away, and bending his hand all the way back, breaking the wrist. As he screams, he tries to hit Tommy with his left hand, but Tommy blocks that with his other hand, catching it.

Tommy appears to study Jim's hand for a couple seconds, noting the structure, wondering how so many can be affected by hands such as this in such a way. Tommy is beyond rage and ravenous, lustful, gleeful vengeance as he bends Jim's fingers back one at a time, breaking them.

Jim is screaming at the top of his lungs as tears stream down his face. Uncontrollably shaking his head, he is lost, drowning in memory of when he was a little boy. Caught for bullying a boy, only because he could. Punished by his father, beaten, held by his hands the way he is now, and dragged across his bedroom. The look of his father's eyes put such terror into his heart, changing him for better and worse.

Certain he forgot that look, that moment comes back as he feels that same piercing feeling as he looked at this man's eyes. As Tommy drops Jim onto the floor, he watches him try to crawl away, slowly, to the door. Inch by inch, he gets closer, crying in heaving sobs as he makes his way across the floor. Just a few feet away, he reaches for the door, scrambling with his elbows and feet.

Barely touching the door, Jim is dragged away again as Tommy takes hold of him by the legs. Tommy takes Jim's body and swings him around in the air, once, twice, building momentum. Certain of the timing that he needs, Jim barely starts to become nauseous as Tommy swings Jim's body into the left point of the long window. In less than a second, Jim's limp body traverses the length of the window, each pane that is

crashed into, cutting into his throat.

As Tommy lets go of Jim's body, he watches as this once proud man twitches and shakes as blood drips and pours out, down each side of the window that creaks and cracks, struggling to hold his weight. Each movement makes the glass cut deeper into Jim's neck. Sounds of gargling mix with Jim's feet tapping on the floor. Each twitch becomes farther and father between as Tommy watches Jim's hand flutter, like a dying bird of prey finally caught after all its years.

A minute passes, then two. Tommy approaches, listening to the breathing slow to a stop. A slight chill overtakes him, surprising him. As the body's movement slows completely, he is suddenly taken back to his own childhood, back before all the pain. As he seems to feel this man's heart stop, he sees his younger self, staring back at himself.

The image of the way he used to be makes him turn away. As he turns around, walking away, the image gets farther and farther away. Each detail gets harder to see in his memory as he takes more steps. Taking hold of the doorknob, the image dissolves away as he opens the door. Without a look back, he walks out of the room, closing the door.

Tommy wastes no time in walking over to the bedroom to the right of the top of the stairs. Not caring what happens, he grabs the doorknobs and throws open the door. Seeing an almost mirror-image of the other bedroom, he goes over to the bed, certain that whoever attacked him before is hiding under there.

Somebody latches onto him from behind, angering more than taking him by surprise. Arms quickly wrap around his throat, attempting to crush his windpipe. With the air remaining in his lungs, he instinctively backs against the wall forcefully, slamming whoever is behind him to the wall.

At the third pounding of their body, a female voice cries out in pain. Tommy instantly realizes that the person wearing his mask was not his mother, and was trying to trick him. This knowledge fuels him with anger, making him flip Pam over his head, off of him. She screams in sudden terror as she goes head over heels, crashing to the floor.

The fish-like alien mask is still on the head of the woman that Tommy wonders who it is. His fists clench in abject, hesitant terror and rage. They shake as along with the rest of him as he fights for calm, reaching behind him. His hands finds a large pocket knife in his back pocket that he almost forget was there.

His mother is dead. He knows that now, without doubt, and with shining, crystal clarity. From behind, he extends the blade from the handle as he looks at the body, that starts to stir.

The blade is brought out in front. Her head turns to see it. She gasps, starting to crawl backwards.

He feels infinitely taller than her, feeling all of himself tower over this woman, this pretender. Before either of them knows it, he leaps at her, his feet landing on either side of her. She does not move, or make a sound. He does not think of that as he grips the knife tightly while bending at the knees, ready to bring it down.

A flicker of movement in the dark of the room that grows makes Tommy stop and look up. The shape of a man from before is seen in the glow of the camp's outside lights in a split second. In the next, the shape of a wooden chair is brought down on Tommy's head and left shoulder. The force of the impact makes him stagger back while dropping the knife.

David steps over the debris of the shattered chair, keeping his eyes on Tommy. Tommy continues to stagger back drunkenly, seemingly unaware of his

surroundings. Stepping over the bed, he waits for Tommy to stop moving. He knows he shouldn't, that he should keep attacking him, unrelenting, giving no chance whatsoever to recover.

They both stop moving at the same time. David doesn't know if Tommy can see him or not until he turns his head slowly toward him. Each of them sees a mirror image of their own private darkness as all they see are dark shadows of each other in the faint light from the window.

David's hands are up, curled into fists at the ready. A sense of apprehensive terror and pride churn from within as Tommy approaches him. A right hook into Tommy's masked face brings pain into David's hand. Clutching it as it stings in throbbing agony, Tommy stands there in confusion.

Tommy clenches his fists, clasping them together. Swiftly bringing them up over David's head, his stance is shattered as David punches him in the stomach. The punch pushes Tommy back a few inches. A left, a right, a left, right: into the stomach. The hits keep knocking Tommy back, as if he were not who and what he is, but a doll, a puppet, being jerked about, on a stage of his own mind.

Surprising strength thought dead causes Tommy to bring his right leg up, kicking David in the face with an audible cracking sound. David tumbles back to the wall, sliding down it. As he hits the ground, he sees Tommy find and pick up the knife he dropped.

David finds his second wind as Tommy approaches him with the knife. A roundhouse kick to Tommy's head makes him drop the knife again, causing him to stumble again. David swiftly brings up his right hand, flinging the hockey mask off Tommy's face and over his head.

A sure right hook to Tommy's face brings the feeling back into David's hand,

and his memories. He ignores the pain as he remembers all the times he's used his fists to do the right thing, especially in his much younger years. He feels himself get stronger with each punch of his that connects. Pummeling Tommy in the solar plexus, he can feel Tommy's body give way with every second.

His fists continue to smash into Tommy's face, from the left and the right. Warm blood streams and splatters onto and over David's fists. He doesn't care whose it is as he sees Tommy stagger in his pitiful stance, barely standing up, mere inches in front of the window.

Backing away, back towards the wall, David disappears into the darkness of the room, the way he knows Tommy has. He can feel the white-hot, passionate fury start, rushing, boiling as he starts to run back.

David seems to fly, almost in place, short of bursting into flame, as he rushes at Tommy. With careful precision, he places a side kick at Tommy's chest. The force of the impact knocks Tommy off his feet. His limp body crashes through the window back first, and hits the ground the same way in a loud thump. His lifeless body bounces as it tumbles down, down the slope, behind the cabins, into the darkness.

It comes to a stop, face down, unmoving in the faint glow of the starry night. Battered, bloodied, it is watched as David looks out of the smashed window. Pam joins his side, her mask now in her hand. They wait for a minute, then turn to go.

A big bulbous shape gets in the way of David's right foot. He looks down, and sees that it's the hockey mask that he knocked off. The featureless, empty, yet full of depth shape appears to look back at him from the floor, almost as if it's alive. David looks at it, and, as if it were a piece of the window itself, kicks the mask out, and away.

Epilogue

The battlefield is quiet, strewn with its dead soldiers. Creaking, thumping

footsteps echo down the cabin's stairs, announcing Pam and David, as they hold each other up. A step at a time, they walk in unison. They were not realizing how tired they were until it was all over, being wired for hours on end.

A soft rustling from outside makes them stop as they reach the bottom of the stairs. A soft, grinding sound that is getting closer gives them a boost of strength as they part, getting on each side of the open doorway. A shadow forms from outside, and as the person comes into view, David grabs them by the arm, pulling them inside.

“Wait! No!”

David unclenches his raised fist as he looks down at the frightened teenager in pajamas.

Pam looks at the boy. “Who are you?”

“Did you get him?”

David stands up. “We sure did. Now, who are you?”

“My name's Gerry. Can we get out of here?”

None of them say a word as they leave the cabin. The sight of Audrey's dead body lying on the ground makes Gerry turn away. He wants to cry, but he does his best to hold it all back, for he knows he has the rest of his life for that.

Pam opens the backseat door for Gerry, and making sure he's inside, she shuts the door. As she seems to collapse in the front seat, her heart freezes as David gets behind the wheel.

Pam turns to David. “Where's the key?”

David is already holding the car keys in his hands with a sly grin. Pam doesn't ask how as he starts the car, not caring as the car swiftly drives away, with each of them looking out into the night.

As Pam looks out, mesmerized by the kaleidoscopic nature of the passing

trees amidst the moonlight, her eyelids become heavier and heavier with every second that goes by. Time dissolves away, ceasing to have any meaning for her. She rests her eyes, feeling the motion of the car.

Minutes go by. She's unsure how many as she opens her eyes again. Her eyes wander of their own accord as she leans her head back. She picks up her head to adjust it. A stray look ahead brings her eyes to the rear-view mirror. As her eyes lock on, she sees the cold, calm eyes, and the bruised, bald, bloody face of Tommy Jarvis, looking back at her.

A butcher knife stabs her from behind before she can react. It goes through the seat and her chest, spraying blood in exploding agony as she screams...

Pam jerks her head up, awakening with a gasping scream.

The End