



THE CABIN

TEST DRIVE

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The night at the end of my first week at the cabin was filled with the now usual routine. I ate my dinner of Spaghetti-O's down at the dock. I even whipped out the evil TV tray and brought it with me. As dusk crept in I headed back in to beat the skin-chewing insects that came along with the lessening light. I kept all of the windows around the cabin opened partially, it had been warmer than usual in the Lake Asimmia area the past few days. I played some music on my laptop while trying my best to write a sophisticated journal entry. I cracked open a pair of Sam Adams bottles as a sort of celebration of my first week, and also to drown my sorrows that from this point on I was closer to my vacation being over.

Bedtime was 10:00pm as had become routine as well. I felt a small buzz as I brushed my teeth in front of the rustic looking square vanity in the bathroom. Before heading into the bedroom I made a tour of the cabin to make sure that doors were locked and windows were closed; despite my feeling very comfortable with my surroundings I was still wary of bears or other large animals which might come looking for food or trouble. I left the windows in my bedroom open as per usual as I had grown accustomed to the calls of birds and animals, and also the occasional kiss of the Canadian winds to help me sleep.

I had no trouble falling asleep, the beer helped greatly with that. I know I had fallen asleep because I was startled out of it at some point during the night. There was a sound infiltrating the room that I had not heard during my first week at the cabin. It was far away, but had been piercing enough that it pulled me from my sound sleep. A little disoriented and still a little buzzed, I found myself sitting up in bed staring straight ahead at the closed bedroom door. What had I just heard? I turned my head to listen but there was nothing. I began to think that it had been something out of a vivid dream I was having that had sounded so real that it had awakened me. I let out a hard yawn and lay my head back down onto the stack of two down pillows I slept on. My eyes began to close. Then, I heard it again.

This time I sat up sharply in bed. It sounded like the call of some kind of wounded animal. It was a painful yelp, a blood curdling scream in the far off woods. I knew now that this was definitely real and not part of a dream. The wounded animal screamed again, it seemed to carry on the wind right to my ears, echoing across the clear, crisp July night. It sounded so horrific that I began to feel whatever pain this animal was feeling. In my tired mind I began to process the sounds, trying desperately to link the sound to a mental photo of an appropriate animal. I began to think it might be a timber wolf like Sal had said occasionally roamed the area. He had said nothing about coyotes which this animal sounded like also.

The animal screamed again snapping me from my mental Rolodex of animals. This time I threw the quilt off of my body and stepped onto the cold wood floor. Even though the noises were far away from the cabin itself I still found myself creeping quietly toward the opened bedroom window as if this animal might appear before me at any moment. I knelt down beside the window which allowed only my head and tops of my shoulders to be seen. I cupped my hand over my eyes and leaned in until my forehead rested against the mesh screen. The bright moonlight overhead did little to aide my eyes as I stared past the other cabin off toward where I thought the animal's cries were coming from. I saw nothing. Still I found myself hypnotized, unable to move from my spot. Part of me hoped I would not hear that awful sound again, yet part of me felt this obsession, a need to know what was making those sounds.

It had been nearly ten minutes and I had not heard anything. The overwhelming quiet of

the night began to pull me back into my sleep. My head began to bob forward; I was fading. The animal screeched again just as my forehead came into contact with the window sill with a thud. The sound had faded into my ears as I was drifting off to sleep. That sound, coupled with the blow to my forehead, combined to create a sort of electric jolt through my body. I leaped up and smacked my head on the bottom of the window pane. Now I was afraid, curious, and in blinding pain. Groggy I stumbled backward. My interest in the wounded animal faded with the second bump on my head. I closed both windows in the bedroom and stumbled back over to the bed where I slipped back underneath the thick comforter. Despite the fact that the noises had been coming from far away, who knows how long of a distance the screams could have been carried on a clear night, I still slept on my left side. I faced the wall and slept with my head in between the two down pillows; I did not want to see anything that might appear at the window. I hoped for sleep to reclaim me fast, I did not want to hear that horrific noise again. As I drifted away my own mind continuously deceived me, I could hear those wounded cries bouncing around my head until finally I was asleep.

I awakened with the sunrise as had become the custom on my vacation. Despite having some lingering pain in my head from the previous night, the morning was bright and full of promise, but my mind kept harkening back to the strange noises I had heard the night before. What kind of animal was making those sounds? Was it injured?

I got up and got dressed but did my morning routine a little bit slower than normal. I was deep in thought. While eating my morning cereal, I made up my mind. I would hike off in the direction of Cold Hill which was where the horrible noises sounded like they were coming from last night in order to see if I could find the animal that was making them. Obviously I was not planning on finding a perfectly healthy wild animal. What I was thinking was that I might find a carcass a few miles away that would solve the mystery.

I packed a couple of granola bars and my refilled water bottle. I figured that I could basically hike back up the path toward Cold Hill. It would be important to keep my eyes open for any different pathways which might lead me to a dead animal, or worse, lead me to a wounded animal. If I were to find a wounded animal I would have to make a hasty retreat; wounded animals were far more dangerous than healthy ones.

I locked the front door to the cabin and hit the trails at just after 9:00am. My mind was so focused on finding the answer to this mystery that I did not even stop to peer in the windows of the neighboring cabin.

For the next hour or so I hiked the same trails as I had earlier in the week, scanning the woods on either side for any signs of something out of place. I stopped at the point overlooking Lake Asimmia to take another look around but there was nothing except the usual ducks and geese. I kept on hiking, determined to find something, anything, but not having any idea of what I was looking for, or where to look. For all I knew the animal that made those wailing screams the night before had been ten miles away and a lucky wind had carried the sounds to my window. My legs ached from all of the hiking I had been doing and only got worse as I followed those same paths again. Rather than continue up and down the rolling foothills that led to Cold Hill I took a side route that veered off to the left and followed a steady downward slope. These were the same side paths that I had been too nervous to take before, but I think deep down I was trying to look for the animal in all the wrong places so at least I could say 'I looked.'

I walked the new path for about a half an hour and still saw nothing besides the towering spruce and pine trees. Once I hit a narrow and seemingly shallow stream I realized that my journey was fruitless. I was not going to find anything where I was headed and I was

not willing to go the extra mile, and start crossing waterways, to find what in all likelihood was a wounded and hostile beast. It had been a two plus hour hike and I decided to sit by the stream to enjoy my granola bars and allow my sore legs to recover before returning up the steady slope to the main pathway. The sun faded behind some high clouds and, with it hidden, the woods became a bit chilly. I finished one granola bar and decided to get moving to warm myself back up.

The sun did return but only momentarily when I entered the clearing which surrounded the Twin Sisters Cabins, but it disappeared again soon after and was replaced by mist and light rain. By late afternoon I was bored and once again typing away on my laptop. I had tried to conserve the power just in case and now into my second week of vacation I let loose a little. Just before dinnertime the sun returned again, but I chose to eat inside. There was something unsettling about what I had heard the night before and I felt safer remaining inside as darkness fell.

My evening was spent milking another couple of beers with one eye on my laptop screen and one ear listening for any strange sounds. I kept the windows opened in the living room area while I was awake. Part of me hoped that if I embraced the thought of hearing the horrific cries again it might cause them not to occur. It was the sort of strange reasoning that masked my growing fear.

It passed 10:00pm and I tried valiantly to stay awake. Soon it became painfully obvious that I would have to go to bed or sleep face down on the dining room table. I had actually considered the latter but the hard wood caused a pain in my neck and I gave in and chose the bed over the table. My laptop was packed away and, as I tried to stretch out the kink in my neck, I slowly made my way around the perimeter of the cabin closing the windows and locking the doors. My eyes were so heavy that I did not remember to close the window in the bedroom which faced the neighboring cabin. I collapsed into bed and was fast asleep. It would not last.

I was startled out of a sound sleep for the second night in a row by the horrible wails and cries of a wounded animal. It was much the same as the night before. Like *deja vu*, the sounds seemed to fade into my ears, bouncing and echoing off of the walls in my mind. I rolled to my right toward the night stand and grabbed my watch, it was a little after 1:00am. Still weary, I rolled off of the bed and landed on my knees on the floor just as I heard another, more throaty scream. This noise made my hair stand on end, it was a more menacing sound than a typical wounded animal. I crawled on all fours to the opened window. I was terrified by what I might see as that last scream had sounded closer than the one before. As I had the night before, I rose up by the window just enough so that only the top half of my head would be visible above the window sill. Sadly the clouds had returned and there was no moonlight to aid my vision in the middle of the night. There was nothing but blackness outside of my window. All I could do was crouch and listen.

The next noise was a muffled roar, as if the animal was covering its own mouth while screaming. I tried, as I had the night before, to picture in my mind just what type of creature would be capable of these horrible sounds. Then came the loudest scream of all. I ducked off to one side of the window as that last noise sounded like it had come from just on the other side of the clearing. I knew now for certain that the wounded animal was coming my way! I was terrified, whatever animal this was it sounded like it was in pain and therefore was very dangerous. I thought about closing the window to avoid my scent being picked up by the animal but my curiosity got the better of me. I had already gone this far. I stayed put, hoping to maybe get a glimpse of whatever was making those horrible cries.

Then things took a very different turn. I heard another painful roar but it was followed by the sound of breaking glass. I could not see anything through the blackness but the sounds were amplified in my ears. The animal, whatever it may be, was in the process of breaking its way into the neighboring cabin. I could tell that it had made its way inside by the way that the roars and screams became dulled by the walls of the cabin. I could only squat by my bedroom window completely entranced by the events unfolding some fifty feet away.

It began to feel like a movie, like the mesh window screen was a buffer between myself and the immense danger outside. From where I was I could hear the sounds of the animal breaking furniture inside the cabin. Muffled thuds and crashes sounding like rumbles of thunder emanated from the wooden structure. For fifteen minutes the animal rampaged through the cabin eventually shattering several of the other windows. The roars, which sounded even more terrifying by this point, became loud again as they squeezed their way out of the broken windows facing my bedroom. Still, I did not move from my perch, it was as if that faux buffer had me fooled into thinking that this was either not real, or that I was completely safe.

The animal growled and snarled as it beat on the walls of the cabin from the inside as if it were trying to break the cabin wide open. That was when I started to get an uneasy feeling. Suddenly my buffer zone did not seem as impenetrable. Throughout the night before and during this current event I had been racking my brain trying to come up with some sort of culprit, some kind of logical explanation for what was happening. I could not think of any animal which made those types of noises, or any animal that was so intelligent and thorough in its destruction as this animal seemed to be. It was as if it knew what furniture and windows were and it knew how to break them. I began to wonder what was I dealing with? Despite my fear growing by the second I remained vigilant. I listened intently as the animal continued its ambush on the contents of the cabin, I had to be ready in case the animal burst through the front door and headed for my cabin.

In my mind I had begun to eliminate animals native to the area which could make those horrible screams and also had some sort of coordination enough to break into a building and totally trash it. Sure I had gone through this song and dance over and over with no success, but I kept on believing that there was some animal just escaping my memory and if I thought about it long enough it would suddenly burst to the front of my mind. I had almost immediately eliminated a moose or wolf when I had begun. The only animal that could feasibly do it was a bear and I had never heard of a bear going on a rampage like this. I was a big fan of nature shows and had watched endless hours of 'animal biographies.' Normally bears look, and if they don't find what they are looking for, they leave. This animal, whatever it was, had been destroying the neighboring cabin for almost a half hour. It was as if the whole purpose was just to cause damage and destruction which was even more frightening.

I began to hear a low snarling growl which had not been audible before. It was at this point that I realized that the animal must have been standing at the opening of one of the broken windows facing me. I could not see it through the blackness but I could almost feel its eyes upon me. My blood went cold and my heart began to race. I was too afraid to move as I did not know how well this creature could see in the dark. For a few moments the air was deadly silent. What was the animal doing? Was it staring at me? Did it know I was there? In my mind I knew the terrible truth: There was nothing I could do. I was alone in the woods with some sort of angry, wounded animal or monster only a few feet away and there was nothing I could do. If it wanted to traverse the clearing and kill me there would be no way to stop it. I could do nothing but hide and pray, so that's exactly what I did.

When the silence in the air had reached several minutes, I decided to make a move. Taking my life in my own hands I stood up in front of the opened window and, as quietly as

possible, slid it closed. I then slid the shade down as well. I decided that it would be in my best interest to sleep in the closet. In the total darkness I felt around the bed and grabbed hold of the two down pillows I liked to sleep with. I cradled them close to my chest and deposited them on the floor of the closet. With the floor being so cold I slid on a pair of sweat pants with pockets and dropped my simple digital watch into one of those pockets. I also wore a t-shirt as I did not want to roll and slide on the floor and get a splinter. Who knew how well this cabin had been maintained? Next I grabbed the thick gray quilt with two hands and untucked it from in between the mattresses. When it gave way, I ended up falling on my butt on the wood floor. It hurt, but I was more afraid of the vibrations my body had caused alerting the creature across the clearing to my presence. I sat motionless on the floor as I listened for an approaching beast. When it seemed to me that the coast was clear I wrapped the warm quilt around my body and again crawled on all fours.

The closet floor was very small, maybe two feet wide by five feet long. I had to curl up in the fetal position just to fit. I put my two pieces of luggage against the sliding closet door to try to mask my presence as best I could. I slept with my body pressed against the wall that night, constantly telling myself it would be alright and that the monster would go away once the sun rose. As I curled on my left side I heard a computerized beeping. I yanked my watch from my pocket; it was only 2:00am. I had four hours until the sun rose. I closed my eyes and pulled the quilt up over my head.