

No sign of my boys, or of Carver. Not yet.

It's been slow going in the dark, but I must have traveled at least a few miles north. In the morning, I'll head deeper. For now, Tank and I have made camp. If Hudd could see me struggle to set up his old tent, I'd never hear the end of it.

Tank is in his element out here. It always surprises me how quickly he takes to these woods. Never had a dog before that didn't overreact to every creak in the distance. He almost seems like he's keeping watch for me. Even when I'm not holding his leash, he just sticks by my side.

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It started around 3 am. Distant first. Voices. Whispering. They sounded so young, I thought of Tristan. But none of the voices were his.

How many children are out here?

I tried to call out to them, but it came out as a croak.

My voice felt trapped far back in my throat. When I was finally able to ask who was there, the voices didn't answer. Maybe they couldn't hear me. They sounded so close, though, like they were just outside my tent.

When I unzipped the tent, the whispering faded to silence. I shined my flashlight out, but there was nothing.

That's when I noticed Tank was sitting alert. He's usually such a deep sleeper, but he must have heard something too. I only just managed to get him calmed down. Going to try to sleep a little more and leave at sunrise.

Just woke up and went outside to find Liam's hat placed neatly by front of the entrance to my tent. Even though I know with total certainty that it's just Carver mocking me, I'm still holding onto it like a totem.

I can feel my blood boiling inside of me. Don't know how much sleep I've gotten because the sun still hasn't come up. The clock on my phone must be wrong, it says it's one in the afternoon.

Doesn't make any sense. Either way, I don't want to sleep anymore.

Time to get moving.

He's trying to scare me.

After I packed up camp, Tank and I walked for hours and hours. The deeper we walked into the woods, the less I could see the sky through the canopy of leaves above me. I couldn't even hear the wind.

That's when we found a clearing surrounded by tall, thin trees whose trunks were engraved like headstones. I didn't understand what all of the carvings on them said, but the messages on a few of those trees couldn't be clearer. I took some rubbings of the carvings just to prove to myself that I wasn't seeing things. It's a good thing that I did, because they disappeared the moment I looked away from them.

I think he's trying to make me turn back.

It's not going to happen. What would I be going back to?

There's nothing there. Not anymore.

Tank is exhausted. We're stopping more for his benefit than mine, though I admit it's getting to me.

First Hudson. Then Liam and Tristan. All my boys. Gone.

When I get our sons back, I'll never take my eyes off them again, Hudd. I promise.

Just a little farther. I know it.

The voices are back. They sound closer.

The sun isn't going to rise again. I thought it was almost dawn again. I was wrong.

It's just dark now. It's just dark.

Something just tried to get in. I woke up to the sound of Tank barking and realized that something was dragging against the tent, scraping against the plastic. I kicked at it, but I just felt air where my boot should have connected with flesh. It stopped the scratching, though.

Sometimes I can see my phone catch a signal for a moment. Like the outside world is reaching in to pull me back, but inevitably the bars disappear and the outside world is pushed away again.

By the woods. By him. Or by her?

Whoever or whatever he is. I don't care.

I can't do this anymore. It's like my mind is playing tricks on me.

I think something is out here with me. Something besides Carver. Watching me. It's coming closer day by day. I can hear it breathing. I don't know what it's waiting for.

There are times when I can see a light through the trees. Flickering. Fire. Each time, I've run toward it, hoping it was Carver's campfire. I lower my head and bolt. But the light always burns out just before I can reach it. Like a cruel joke.

It's the only light I ever see besides my own flashlight.
There's no more sun anymore.

No more daytime.

I can't do this.

No. That's enough feeling sorry for myself.

I'd better get moving.

Tank started growling at a bush, and when I pointed my flashlight I saw a pale white hand with only two fingers, covered in blood. It looked like the hand of a drowned person. Like something that hasn't seen sunlight in years. As soon as the beam of my flashlight hit that hand, it flinched away as it made this terrible groaning noise, like an angry animal and a wounded man at the same time. I ran in the opposite direction, and Tank followed.

That's when I found this building. It looks abandoned. I'm hunkered down in the entryway for now. The door won't open, but I think there's a window I might be able to get through.

Well, I got Tank and myself in. But I managed to cut my leg on a piece of glass that was sticking out of the windowpane in the process. Thankfully, I was smart enough to bring a first aid kit. The bleeding hasn't completely stopped yet, and it hurts like hell, but I think it might be okay. I think I'll be able to walk on it. I'm going to try to explore a little in a few minutes.

It looks like this place used to be a logging company.

There's an axe embedded in the wall, and most of the furniture has been flipped. Scorch marks on the walls and floors. I found records amongst all of the carnage. They paint a pretty, vivid picture of what happened here before all of this. I suppose the woods retook this place after it was abandoned, although I do feel relatively safe in here compared to outside. But I'm going to need to move on soon. No time to waste.

I managed to limp up the half-rotted stairs to the rooftop to try to get the lay of the land. At first, I saw nothing on the horizon but trees. But then I noticed it. The light again. The flickering light of a campfire. I know where I have to go from here. Toward that fire. If Tristan and Liam aren't there, they aren't anywhere.

I noticed something else on that rooftop, though. It was the groaning sound of that creature somewhere on the building's perimeter. And then there was the sound of another, and another. I think the building is surrounded. The only way forward is going to be through them.

They're scratching at the front door and at the windows, and it's making Tank go absolutely ballistic.

My leg hurts. God, I wish I had a cigarette right now.

They hate the light. The hand that I saw in the woods, and now these things outside. When I shine my flashlight at an area where they're scratching, they all back away from the light, and even Tank calms down a little, like he senses they're a little farther away.

I saw a mention of a breaker room in some of the reports, so I tracked it down. If I can manage to get inside, I'm going to flood this place with light. It might clear enough of a path for me to run straight to Carver's campfire.

Thing is, the door's been outfitted with a hefty combination lock. Nothing can ever be easy, can it? To add insult to injury, I thought I'd managed to find a pack of cigarettes right outside the breaker room, but the second I picked it up I could tell it was empty.

Five digits. With any luck, it's hidden around here somewhere.

I'd better get started