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Longer Story

Content Warnings: mentions of blood

Writers Memo: This story is fiction and kind of horror/thriller. When I started writing this piece, I had an original ending planned and how I wanted it to play out, but then I wrote the beginning part and realized that I couldn't make it happen, so then I ran with the story in whatever direction it took me, with no idea of what course it would take. I didn't plan to make it this genre of horror, so my questions consist of is the pacing okay? Does the story make sense? Was it intriguing?

Crockpot

Somewhere in the northern Midwest sits a small cabin, usually unoccupied. The cabin has two stories, metaphorically and physically speaking. The first story is littered with cozy furniture patterned with black bears, buffalo plaid, and family photos that all share the same four smiles, grinning ear to ear. These pictures tell the tale of the first story of the small cabin in the woods. The Palmers. Mr. and Mrs. met in high school but didn't start noticing the other until they were in Graduate school for chiropractic. They kindled a small flame and started a family, expanding with the addition of their two little boys; fire red hair and freckles littered their little faces, taking after their father. The Palmers bought this small little cabin in the summer of '89 while the sun was high, and the mosquitoes were buzzing. They traveled up to the cabin every weekend and swam in the nearby pond, climbed the tall pine trees, and set up food plots to prepare for the upcoming deer hunting season. They nicknamed the cabin "Crockpot", to say that whatever happened inside the cabin, it always ended up working out okay.

Crockpot was used for many years and many faces have come to and from it. It migrated from summer use and expanded into winter use for Mr. and Mrs. to visit after a long week of work. During the Fall of 2034, the Palmer's retired Crockpot, so that they could spend more time with

their friends and family that lived closer to where Mrs. grew up. Crockpot was left empty and gathering dust for some time before it became part of the world around it.

A tornado came and ripped through the northern Midwest, leaving a path of destruction in its wake. Crockpot was just one of many victims in this catastrophe and its skeleton was left to rot. Since the Palmers were so far away, they left it there but didn't sell it in hopes that one of their boys would come and fix it up when they got the time. Season and season rolled by and still Crockpot was left, unoccupied and worn through. Although the ground floor of this residence was full of laughter, the upstairs was another story. The second story of this small cabin is splattered with dark closets, shadows, and ghost stories that could make your bones freeze.

Sansa Miggins is a young girl with dusty red hair that falls just above her shoulders, round glasses, and a bookbag that had seen much better days. She is a freelance writer that will do and go anywhere for an opportunity to write something big, something meaningful. Sansa was ambitious and sometimes let it get the best of her, so when she got an email that asked her to go and investigate a disturbance in the Northern Midwest for a report, she, of course, responded yes. The email consisted of the location of a small cabin where she would be staying, directions on how to get there, and target points for the story. She packed her bags and set off quickly for the airport, hopping on the next flight out to the Midwest.

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The smell of pinecones and wood smoke wafted through the window of the small cabin. It hit Sansa's nose with a sour sting and almost caused her to sneeze. Her first night in the cabin was filled with itchy legs and restless sleep. She woke up once or twice to the sound of wood creaking, but it was ruled to just be because it was an old cabin. A small draft swept through

under the door to the backyard, which lay thick with the sleet of snow, even though it was only October.

She put on her boots and went outside to take some analytics of the place. What color were the pine needles? What makes this place seem so eerie? What was caught in the spider's web that lay across the branches? What animals could have stepped on the nearby branch that made her jump out of her skin?

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Night two was when Sansa realized that she should have packed more pairs of underwear and was bold to assume that there would be laundry at the small cabin. The nearest town was 50 miles away and had a population of 83. A small butcher shop, church, funeral home, and gunsmith were the businesses that made up the three most prominent buildings in this town; the church and funeral home sharing one roof. None of which would hold what was needed for Sansa to fix her problem of no washer. Night two was also the night she heard more than the wood creak from the cabin. The sound of metal clattering from downstairs woke Sansa up.

She voiced a meek "*hello?*" from her throat and when no response was given, she got up, put on her robe, and made her way down the stairs to the ground floor to use the bathroom. As she walked by the kitchenette, she noticed a spoon lying on the floor. Frozen with fear, she was planning on how to tell her boss she must come home at once. Sansa, on the verge of a breakdown, then noticed the window above the sink open and a slight howl of the wind was leaking through, strong enough to push the spoon off the counter where she had left it after eating dinner. Relieved, she scuttled to the bathroom and left the spoon lay on the tile.

Come morning, Sansa got up and got dressed in now the same pants she had worn yesterday and made her way downstairs to make herself some much-needed coffee. As it was brewing, she took the time to gander outside the window above the sink that overlooked the backyard, which was littered with disturbed sleet from the deer and bunnies playing tag in the nighttime. She giggled and turned on the sink to wash her hands but dropped the soap into the sink with a gasp. A single spoon glistens up at her. It was clean enough where she could see her own distorted reflection in it. Maybe she misremembered what happened the night prior. Sansa sobers up after getting caffeine and remembers that after the bathroom, she walked over and picked the spoon up and rinsed it off, placing it into the sink. She had to have done this because she was the only one there.

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Day three. The day that Sansa got a phone call in a place with no cell reception. The ring of the phone pierced through the hallways and rang through Sansa's ears, bouncing around inside her head. It was strange enough where she thought she had imagined it, so she didn't answer it, until it rang for a second time. Looking at her cell phone, pasted on the cover read *Unknown Caller*, Sansa slid her finger across the screen and brought the phone up to her ear. She sat in silence with the unknown caller for what seemed like minutes until she let out a breathy "*hello?*" Nothing was given in return as an answer. Sansa sat in the uncomfortable radio silence for a second and then brought the phone down from her ear. She reached for the red button, but moments before she ended the call, she heard the rustling breath of another, like a deep exhale through the nostrils. Sansa stood in shock, trying to figure out if she had really heard anything at all.

Unknown Caller

Sansa answers the call.

“Hello? Who is this?”

Silence is given from the other end of the line.

“Hello? Is anyone there?” Sansa says firmly this time. Her hand gripping tightly onto her cell to prevent it from falling out of her hand and clattering onto the ground.

This time there is clutter coming through the other side. It could be the sound of static or the rustling of what could be running through the dense tree branches of the nearby woods. One thing was for sure, she heard a deep voice hiss the word “Sansa” before ending the call and dropping her phone, shattering immediately.

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On night four, Sansa had packed her bags and had everything placed in the corner of the room. She was leaving first thing in the morning. Back to her single apartment in the cities where she could see the Gateway Arch from her window. Back to her waitressing at the Drury Inn and tending to rich businessman all while writing on the side, trying to make it big and catch a big break. This was supposed to be just that. The small cabin in the middle of nowhere with the small hint of haunted that kept her there, but it also that was slowly driving her away. Once she hit that plane, she would never follow an email offer even if it offered her 10,000 dollars. It’s funny to think that Sansa got on the plane to fly all the way to the Northern Midwest and didn’t even wait to hear about an inquiry about money. Little did she know that when she asked follow up questions about payment and other things, the email bounced, saying that there was no account associated with that email any longer.

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At 11:57 pm, the window voices a loud howl that comes screaming through the window and lets in a chilled draft. Sansa wakes up and that was the thing that got her out of bed. Sansa got up to shut the window and was turning around to make her way back to her bed when something caught her eye. Standing in the middle of the yard was a tall, dark figure that was illuminated by the ambiance of the waning gibbous moon that peered overhead. The figure seemed to give a lingering glance up at her, as if to say *I see you*. She rubbed her eyes as if to wipe away the sight, and when she looked again, it was gone. Since the sleeted yard was already littered with footprints from the animals, it was hard to tell if anything was new. She pressed her hands and face on the cold window and tried to make the best out of her vision by seeing as far left and right as she could take in. She rushed to the bedroom door and slid the nearby desk slightly in front of it, obstructing the hinges from being opened, for safe measures. She slid back into bed and fell back asleep, impatiently awaiting the morning.

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2:02 the clock flashed back at her when Sansa opened her eyes. The electric red almost melted on the screen, making the numbers seem like they were tripling. A bang from the bedroom door made her jump up and grab a vase that was placed on the bedside table, coated with dust. The banging continued, but the more Sansa woke up, the more it sounded like a knocking, like someone wanted in. Inside her room, inside her head, what was real, or was this all a twisted dream? The knocking only got louder and louder until Sansa yelled at the door. A scream of pleading and of fear. All went silent from the other side of the door, but all was not silent in her head. It was running a marathon with the number of possibilities that could be taking place in the small cabin in the woods.

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2:09 is when Sansa decided to go downstairs to see if anything was down there, out there, lurking, and waiting for her. Grabbing the vase with one hand, she moved the desk away from the door with the other. She exits the room and does recon of the longer hallway like in the detective shows, back against the wall and head on a swivel. Sansa reaches the tall staircase and looks down at the base. She takes the first step down and the stairs make a creak. A dark figure dashes across the bottom of the stairs, in and out of sight in a blink. Sansa tries to yell but her own hand covers her mouth, trying to muffle the fear coursing through her blood. She takes another couple steps down the stairs and then makes a full sprint for the base of the ground floor. The sound of heart beating is pulsing in her head and making it hard to see the dark figure that is standing in the corner of the room, waiting for her to notice them.

She sweeps the kitchen and turns to the living room. Her eyes met its' gaze which ran shivers down her spine. It was standing, almost hovering on the carpet, and slowly inching its way towards her. The only light in the room was pooling in from the moon, allowing Sansa to see nothing identifiable about the figure, except that she was scared and haunted by it.

Without thinking she ran back towards the stairs but was caught in a limbo with the figure. It seemed to mirror her moves, she went left and so did it, following her, stalking her every move. It was swift and seamless; she was jumpy and jostled. She lunged for the stairs up, back to the safety of the bedroom. The figure moved just as fast as she did, just a little faster. It intercepted the pathway up and blocked the doorway. For the first time, Sansa could make out part of its face. The white plastic mask that covered it was square and scuffed, like it had seen better days, and for all she knew, it had. Sansa screamed and threw the vase that she was holding at the figure, causing it to duck out of the way. It crashed and broke on the stairs, littering shards of

ceramic everywhere. Sansa made a run for upstairs again, but before reaching the top, was caught by the figure who had grabbed onto her foot and was pulling her down. She clawed and grabbed at anything that she could find to prevent being pulled. Her legs were cut open by the ceramic pieces and her arms were littered with the same treatment. She kicked her legs and managed to get free from the grasp of the figure and made a run for the bedroom once again. Sansa gets back to the bedroom and moves the desk fully in front of the door, obstructing the entire entrance. Tears are steadily running down her face, and as she wipes them away with her arm, a streak of blood trails with it. A loud bang hits the door from the hallway side and makes Sansa yell and cry out for help. The pounding continues and seems to get louder and louder, even though she is backing slowly further and further away from the door. With her back against the wall, she slumps down to the ground and cries into her hands. The pounding on the door turns to scrapping and there is a low hiss that is audible through the door. *Sansa.*

Sansa screams back at the door, letting out heaving sobs. She looks up from her hands that are coated in snot and tears to see the closet door opening slowly and a dark figure pouring out of it, its shadow seeping onto the carpet. The second figure reveals a mask similar to the one that the first was wearing, only newer, less scuffed. It glanced over at Sansa who was weeping on the floor before turning to the door and moving the desk away from it. Its hinges creaked as the first figure turned the knob and pushed it open in one swoop. It was standing broadly in the doorframe, leaving no room for even the idea of escape. Sansa was left petrified with fear as the two figures slowly walked closer and closer to her, one step at a time, as if moving on the clock tick. She tried to fight them as they both grabbed her by the arms and pulled her up off the ground and over their shoulders. She kicked and screamed as they brought her down the stairs, clawing at the wallpaper on her way down, which was now visible that there were more sets of

claw marks that decorated these walls. Hers were the freshest, but there were marks that looked like they had been there for decades, withering away and peeling brown and tarnished. They three reached the ground floor and made their way towards the back door that leads to the yard where Sansa had first spotted the figure over two hours ago. She should have left then, her stuff sat packed in the little corner of the bedroom waiting for morning to come, but morning was just out of reach. Sansa gripped at the doorframe on the way out, in one last attempt to break free, but the masked figures boded strong and held their grip on Sansa, pulling her through seamlessly. She cried out for help, only disturbing the local wildlife because there wasn't another person around for 20 miles.

As the pair carry her into the woods, all that Sansa can think about is how she got into this mess. An email that sent instructions on how to get to a place she had never heard of, and yet was so eager to hop on a plane and fly to write a story. The life that she left behind wasn't worth the story, and she had realized that now as her eyelids got heavy and she passed out slumped over its shoulders. The pair took her to a little hut about a mile north of the small cabin. Inside there was dim overhead lighting, the ground was stained with scratch marks and deep crimson, a chair sat in the middle of the room. The rest was just part of the routine that the two had been doing for some time now. Sansa opened her eyes to her sitting in the middle of the room with two boys, men, standing over her. Their masks were off, revealing hair that was fire red and freckles that coated their faces. Sansa didn't recognize them and why would she? The Palmer brothers hadn't been seen by anyone since their parents moved away, and even before then, they were absent in this neck of the woods. It took their mother dying and their father being so riddled with grief for them to realize that they needed an out. A way to get out, a hobby. The older brother was a

traveling publisher with access to over eager freelance writers that would do and go anywhere for a story, this is where it all came together.

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11:57 am is when the timer went off in the kitchenette. Two brothers sit at the table chatting with one another while enjoying their lunch; big hearty bowls of broth, mixed vegetables, and meat; a classic meal after a long hard day of work, one that comes out of a crockpot. It's one of those things where you can throw whatever you want into it, and it'll end up working out okay. After they finish their lunch, they take their bowl to the sink and the younger of the two starts to wash the dishes. The oldest of the two closes their laptop that they were just working on, but not before hitting send on a very important email inquiring about a freelance writer to come and do a story on a disturbance in the Northern Midwest.