

Down By the River by Clover Leverett

"Ug..." I grumble & groggily walk down the stairs. The moment I reach the bottom I'm met with Lily, my younger sister; smiling in only the way a 6 year old girl could.

"Max!" She runs up to me, & grabs my arm. "Come play? Pleaseeeeeee"

Despite how tired I was, I smiled. "Sure, Lils."

"Let's go!" She led me out of our house.

"Where are we going anyways, Lils?"

"That's a surprise." She chirped, & continued on skipping down the trail.

I smile at her excitement, & don't ask anymore questions.

We walk for a while longer, & I relish in the peace the forest brings. Until I realized. The forest is silent.

"That's strange..." I mumble to myself. But before I can dwell on it, Lily booms

"We're here!"

I looked at her, then where she took me. I frown "Lily! You know we're not supposed to be by the river! Dad's rule!"

"But...Max! pleaseeeee. Dad won't know!" She pulled my arm.

I was about to protest, when my eyes traveled to the river. I thought for a long minute.

"Fine... but you have to listen to me!"

Her face immediately lit up when she heard that. "Thanks!" She let go of my arm, & started bounding down the bank.

As the hours passed we played relentlessly; Until the shadows grew long; & the sun dipped below the treeline.

I turn to Lily, who had scampered up a tree to escape me in a game of tag.

"Hey, Lil, I think it's time for us to get going. How about you get down from there?" I asked, and raised my arms up to help her get down.

She looked at me, her eyes droopy. But she was still smiling.

"Sure." She grabbed my hand, and slowly climbed from the tree.

Once she was on the ground, she attached herself to my arm, & we started walking on the path back to our home.

The walk back was peaceful, & silent. Just like before. But then, all at once the silence was shattered. A low whimper shot through the night like a bullet. It sounded like an injured animal. My eyes scanned the darkening wood. Another whimper. My eyes finally snap to a large shape, maybe 100 yards off the trail. A barn.

The barn itself looked large, old, & abandoned. A million thoughts raced through my mind in a matter of seconds.

I looked down at my sister, who was using my legs as a shield.

We should go home. But... I looked up at the barn again. The worst that could be in there is a coyote. I grope for my sister's hand, then squeeze it reassuringly.

"Stay here." I cautiously walk up to the barn.

A few more whimpers escape from the barn.

I reach the barn door, & hesitate. I stand there a moment, listening to the noises from inside. I finally mustered up the courage to slowly turn the knob. The door swings open. I freeze in fear. But, I'm met with nothing. The Barn is a void of darkness, where even the nose from the creature crying is drowned out.

"Hey, Puppy." I try to call out. But my voice just comes as a small cry. I wait for something. But still nothing. Despite all my instincts screaming at me to leave, I don't. I go further into the abyss. I call out again, & this time I'm rewarded with the sound of something moving. The shuffling sound is towards the far end of the barn, & is definitely from something large. I call once more.

More movement, this time in my direction.

I backed up.

It followed.

I Move all the way back to the door. My eyes widen, & I have to stifle a scream as the creature walks into the light from the doorway.

The creature looked almost human; but whatever humanity it had left buried deep.

It stopped moving, as if hesitating to attack me. Its large yellow eyes stare at me, studying me. It seemed we were at a stalemate. Until the creature stepped forward. Its pasty white skin seemed to glow in the moonlight. It reached out to me with its grime-encrusted hand.

The scream came.

I ran, bolting out the door, and through the woods.

I heard it follow.

The creature moved at impossible speeds for something that looked so frail.

The moment I hit the path, I ran to Lily.

"Max what's goin-" I grabbed her arm, and she cried out in pain from my grip.

I didn't stop running.

At one point in the chase, the creature gave up; but I didn't stop. Not until I was on my porch.

I ran Inside, and slammed the door hard, Locking it.

"What the?-" Dad asked as he walked downstairs. He sounded annoyed; because I'd slammed the door.

But the moment he saw us, his expression melted to one of concern.

He ran up to us.

"Are you two okay?! What were you doing??" He demanded, & grabbed Lily to check for wounds.

I looked up at my father. Tears started to well in my eyes.

"Dad... We went down to the river-" I stopped, and let out a sob "& there was this... this thing!"

My father stared blankly at me for a moment.

"You went down to the river?" His tone turned harsh again. "How many times have I told you not to go there?!"

I started sobbing.

"Dad! I'm so sorry! I know, we should have listened..."

"Did you see him?"

"Him?" I asked through tears, now confused. "D-Do you mean the monster?" I ask weakly, hoping he wouldn't think me crazy.

But instead of looking confused, or concerned; his expression turned angry.

"DON'T CALL HIM A MONSTER!" He practically yelled.

Lily cowered back from him.

Dad noticed her, and let out a sigh. He turned away, & when he turned back his tone was calmer, but harsh.

"Don't call your uncle a monster, Max."