

Beware

Kyle had no idea he was holding death in his hands. Jeremy shoved him from behind and said, "What is it?"

The boys were weaving in and out of downtown foot traffic with Kyle leading the way. They had a two-hour gap in classes and wanted to try the new soul food place.

"I dunno. Some rando gave me a flyer." Kyle pushed the paper into Jeremy's hands and kept walking, searching for Aunt Momo's. Suddenly he shouted, "There it is!" The shop was tucked away, with only a small sign in the window to identify it. "We passed it, like, twice." He turned to find Jeremy immobile, staring at the paper.

"Dude! Check this out!" Jeremy waved the flyer at Kyle. "It's a forest rave. It's tonight, and this one promises to be the best party of the year." He read from the flyer, "Take the Bear Creek Trail until you see a sign pointing you in the right direction."

Kyle snatched the paper out of Jeremy's hands. It showed college kids wrapped in glow lights, dancing in smoke. "Sounds fun. Let's do it. But right now, let's eat."

That evening they hiked through the trees, looking for the party. The sun hadn't gone down yet, and they hoped to find the gathering before it did.

"I still think invisibility."

"No way. Flying would be way better."

They had filled their time rating girls from the dorm, discussing the chances of their team going to the NAAs, and were now on the topic of which superpower would be the best to have. The conversation stopped when they saw letters painted on the trees.

B - E - W - A - R - E

"Is this the sign?" Jeremy asked.

"I don't think so." A feeling of dread settled into Kyle's gut. He suddenly longed for a quiet night in his dorm room.

"But they said a sign would point the way, and these letters more or less point us that way. Besides, it would keep people away who don't know about the party," Jeremy reasoned.

Kyle knew Jeremy had a point but he couldn't shake his gut feeling. "Maybe we should just follow its instruction and go back."

"Wussy," Jeremy taunted him. "I'm not going back."

Behind them on the trail, flashlights bobbed in the growing darkness. Two girls, one with long brunette hair, and the other with short spikey blond hair joined them.

“Are you guys here for the rave?” the blond asked.

“Yep,” Jeremy answered with a grin.

“What are you waiting for?” the brunette winked. She pointed to her flyer, where in small letters it said, “Beware or you’ll miss it.”

The girls pushed past them and headed into the trees. The boys followed their swaying hips, as if led by a leash. Just over the next ridge they found a clearing packed with kids, jumping and spinning in silence.

“What the . . . ?” Kyle stared in confusion.

“Headphones,” Jeremy explained. “No noise means no noise complaints, and they don’t get caught.”

Generators hummed, powering the pulsing lights. An older guy in his 30s handed them each a pair of wireless headphones and a bottle of some blueish water. He smiled at them with a tight-lipped smile that was more of a grimace.

Slipping on their headphones, they were immediately enveloped in a throbbing dance beat. Kyle held up his bottle to the light, examining the contents. Jeremy reached out to tap bottles. “Cheers, dude! Let’s party!”

They both downed the liquid and released a primal howl. As they danced, whatever was in the water began to kick in. There was nothing but twisting bodies, an unrelenting beat, and flashing lights. They couldn’t have stopped dancing if they had wanted to, and they did not want to. They just kept dancing, even as people began to float down out of the trees with glimmering sharp teeth. It seemed like a beautiful, marvelous dream, as bodies crumpled to the ground.

The headphone guy approached Kyle and finally smiled open-lipped, revealing jagged teeth. As he bit down on Kyle’s carotid artery, it all felt so peaceful; so right. He slid to the ground; the insistent dance beat finally beginning to fade away, as a shimmering pool of red gathered around him. Only then did he realize what was happening. He reached out, dipping his finger in the red pool, and wrote a final word on his forearm, one he wished he had heeded – *beware*.