

Journal Found In The Northfield Woods

*Get out! Leave here while you can! **RUN!** Don't you understand?!*

I hear them . . . that sick, horrible, wet-gurgling, sucking sound in the woods.

-- Oh my God! They're here!

These trees bear testimony to this final warning. I've carved into their bark by letter the word B-E-W-A-R-E.

I know the truth! They were summoned from the dark spaces between the stars. Under the cover of night, they stalk on the winds. By day they burrow to subterranean caverns where they are worshipped by things long dead.

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In grotesque fascination, Alden Fisher closed the journal discovered in the Northfield Woods. The carvings were eerie. . . ominous. Standing amidst the circle of trees screaming out their deterrent message, he systematically gauged their merit while moving on a turnstile of madness frantically begging, hoping, praying for something – *anything* to tell him that this was all. . . unreal.

With a sneakered foot, he prodded the mulch where the accursed volume was found. Frantic handfuls of dead foliage and top soil were clawed out. The journal, then, hastily pushed into the soft earth with leaves strewn to conceal it, but barely. Whoever did this clearly wanted it found.

Moving from tree to tree he gingerly poked, feeling each carving along their jagged edges. There was no artistry to the hastily chiseled letters, only desperation.

Timmy! My boy! What if he really did see. . .

"Daddy! I don't like it here! I'm scared! There's something in the woods that's very bad! I wanna go home!" Wracking sobs of terror shook him despite Alden's comforting embrace.

Initially puzzled – *he's only an eight-year-old boy prone to imagination* -- Alden fought against the growing root of dread entwining systemically through him. *He saw a bear or a deer. Something familiar startled him. His fertile imagination transformed it into an unspeakable horror. THAT has to be it. . . it has to be. . . dear God, it has to be!* – incrementally it gnawed his sanity to shreds.

That happened days ago. Fear methodically moved its ravenous army in a death march toward a concerned father's heart.

He vowed to scout the Northfield Woods. Irrational fears had to be quelled. Lack of tangible proof would be obvious and conclusive; the claim itself demanded corroborating evidence that nothing or something sinister stalked the woodlands.

Through the preponderance of evidence, a macabre puzzle with interlocking pieces came together. Reluctance tapped at reason's door, before long, it hammered with sufficient force to splinter the weakened barrier holding *things* at bay. Timmy's wild rantings, the word B-E-W-A-R-E maniacally carved into the trees, the undeniable subtle, disquieting, lurking presence permeating the woods, and now that damned journal.

The journal – random gibberish, jumbled, distorted thoughts, and hastily drawn images leapt from the pages. From the swirling nightmare, twisting his mind into knots, he untangled strands. Thumbing its nefarious contents, he searched --

* * *

Fear the night. That's when they move. Feel their presence here, even by day. Death rides the winds with them.

Horrible! Horrible! They're dead! ALL dead! NOT human! – they NEVER were. . . My God! I can't bear to look upon them! Madness resides here! It clings to the forest, a diseased miasma. The Earth belches their essence into the air.

Listen! When the shadows deepen to nightfall, they stir. MOVE! --

* * *

Enough! Alden snapped the journal closed. He spun around. Shadows encroached. Creation was stilled.

*Get out! Leave here while you can! **RUN!** Don't you understand?!*

Fight or flight. He pocketed the journal while moving urgently toward the vicinity of the SUV.

Something moved in the deepening shadows out of sight.

Dear God! Let me get out of here alive! My family!

His pace hastened.

Whatever stalked through the forest remained obscure. Predator to prey.

The clearing -- An elongated shadow of impossible, unnatural proportions from something overhead darkened the land. Snapping his head skyward – *no!* A hint of wings, appendages defying known biological description moved rapidly through the oppressive air carrying a portion of his mind with it.

The semi-automatic in the SUV – *damn!* The product of a child's overactive imagination couldn't be slain with firearms.

My family . . . must return. The automatic would take care of them. The Northfield Woods fell silent.

The SUV. A few sprints away.

Relief. He jumped in, gunned the engine and sped away from the accursed woods. In his mind's fractured portion, a final sound beckoned. Maniacal laughter emanating from some place unknown.