

THE SILENT WOODS
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DAMN, LOOK AT THOSE BASTARDS FIGHT,” says Frank. We watch two Magpie males battle for a lone female in these silent woods outside Parker, New Hampshire, our small rural town.

“Folks, what ya’ll is seein’ is male-male aggression,” says Frank, “and they’s fightin’ fer sexual superiority.”

The recent rain has created a cool spring breeze that invigorates us and carries the smell of lilac that reminds us of the scent of women. We feel alive and virile like these birds.

“Shut up Frank,” says Rick who’s the gang’s alpha and who insists on being called the gang’s sword.

I’m sick of Frank always talking like a genius about sex. We know he knows a lot about the sex, but that doesn’t mean he is educated or smart; it just means that he is fixated on sex like the rest of us. He has flunked every high school class except biology. His real education comes from the Playboy magazine that he steals from his Dad and devours each month. I mean devour literally. I’ve seen the shredded magazine afterwards. He brags that he drools on the photographs, ejaculates in them, rips them out, and eats each one after first licking each clean. He is one sick puke and a really scary dude. Frank is the gang’s dagger.

Frank’s not the worst of it. Peter is our gang’s dumb-brute. He copies Frank and now obsessively eats his copy of Playboy after wallowing in it. Yes, he tears the pages from the magazine and spreads them on the floor, covers his private with vaseline, and rolls around on the photographs. Fucking dumb ass, Peter is mental.

Peter is the size of a great ape, looks like a great ape, smells like a great ape, and sweats like one. We like him because he is strong, dangerous, has no conscience, morals, ethics, and doesn’t ask questions. That’s good. We laugh at Peter because he’d castrate himself to please us. Peter is the gang’s dumb snowplow.

“Listen to asshole Frank; he thinks he’s ‘n better’n us.” Peter laughs but his laugh is a snort like a pig. I mean it. When he laughs, he snorts.

“Don’t try to be smart, Peter, when ya ain’t,” I say.

I am the gang’s arrow: straight, clear, cool, and smart. I’m an outsider because I recently moved to this town in March with my Mom Lucille. My friends are outcasts like me.

Here we are, loners in these silent woods trying to create an identity: Rick the sword, Frank the dagger, Peter the dumb snowplow, and me the smart arrow. Their parent’s don’t know we’re here and don’t care.

We watch the Magpies intently, and finally, one male beats the hell out of the other and mates with the female. We gawk in wonder that nature is so violent and favors the fittest.

“I’m like the bastard that just won,” says Rick.

“No ya ain’t, pretty boy is,” says Peter the dumb snowplow.

Yes, I’m pretty boy, the arrow, the outsider, and I date Samantha. I won Samantha’s heart over Rick, and he is jealous of us. Rick can be problematic, but he is not my only problem; my Mom’s boyfriends are a constant problem too.

My Mom came here with an alcoholic that she met in Massachusetts while working as a waitress at a truck stop. That’s the story of my Mom’s life: new lover, move, fight, break up, new lover, move, fight, break up. I tell my Mom to date a good man, but because of her handicap and loneliness, she can find only lonely losers, and they are the ones that abuse her for sex and abuse me when I speak up for her.

“Hey, Samantha wasn’t ever Rick’s gal,” says Frank.

Rick the sword, the alpha says, “Hey, hey, Dude, it’s cool that pretty boy here digs Samantha.”

“Hey guys, look over there. Here comes Dillon running.”

We all look through the trees towards the meadow with brilliant green grass. Dillon has seen us and is running towards us through the grass, the trees, and the bushes waving friendly.

“Dillon, you run like a camel—kallop, kallop, kallop,” yells Rick.

Everyone laughs at Dillon kalloping. I do too, but I feel a pang of guilt because I know that there are people, like my Mom and Dillon that have disadvantages, who just don’t have the same fortune as everyone else. They were born that way without any choice in the matter. It seems unfair and a shame.

“Hurry Dillon,” yells Peter the dumb ass, the snowplow.

Dillon reaches us panting and sweating as he pushes his way through the brush. He is girly. Several of his buttons have popped open, and his thin, pale hairless chest contrasts with our muscular chests. He smells sweaty, and his breath smells of fried eggs from breakfast. The smells disgust us. The bushes have scratched his body. Dillon seems proud that he has run up the slope and proven himself worthy of us.

I stare at Dillon’s pants that misfit his skinny, tall body. His older brother who is fatter and shorter gave Dillon his pants. To hold up these god-awful pants, Dillon wears stupid, yellow, stained suspenders. Dillon doesn’t understand how strange he looks in these suspenders.

I comb my hair back.

The suspenders pull Dillon's pants high and expose his thin legs and his dirty white socks. His white shins and calves are covered with spidery black hairs. I stare at him in disgust.

Dillon stands alongside Rick gasping for air and wanting to vomit. His greasy, thick glasses—bent and crooked—make his eyes appear bulbous like a squids. I hate when someone's eyes appear like that. We all snicker because we think he must be an alien. He looks at us hoping for acceptance. Our friendless faces stare back at him.

Frank the dagger says, "What ya got to say, Dillon? Are ya hard yet?" We all laugh.

"Hi everyone, it is nice of you to invite me here." His politeness doesn't disguise his anxiety.

"Didn't you hear the man?" asks Peter, "He said do ya have an erection for Samantha?" He winks in my direction.

I always hate the sexual insults that come from the dumb snowplow Peter. Samantha is my love, and I put up with this shit to be one of the gang. When they insult her, I feel weak just like I feel when I want to defend my Mom against her dumb ox boyfriends. Someday I'll show everyone that I'm somebody that they should respect, and at the same time, Samantha will be proud of me.

Samantha and I fell in love the minute I walked in the diner where she waits on tables. When our eyes met, we fell in love, and my life lit up.

She lives on a farm near town. Each weekend, I enjoy helping her Dad with chores and her Mom with gardening. They remind me of my Grandparents who raised me until they died a few years ago. She has the family I dream, and I want to grow up proud and strong like her father.

"I don't have an erection for Samantha."

"Let's beat Dillon," says Frank, "because he ain't hard for Samantha."

Dillon looks around at everyone with those worried, inquisitive, stupid squid eyes. I feel a fire of conflicting emotions burn through me. I both hate and pity people like him. It freakin' confuses me. I want to hurt him, kick him, destroy him, so I tell everyone about my disgust for him. This impresses them, and Rick glances at me admiringly. I feel important, so I spit on him. He looks at me, and tears fill his eyes.

"Why'd ya do that?"

This is what my Mom always asks men when they mistreat her, and I hate when they do that and laugh at her for asking. It isn't fair. My Grandma drank alcohol while pregnant with my Mom, so Mom is disfigured and not too smart. After she was born this way, Grandma left her with relatives and never came back. Mom has this peculiar beauty and a willingness to please that attracts men. That sounds good but it's not. Life has been harsh to her.

Rick the sword says, "Hey, hey, pretty boy, relax. Don't spit on Dillon. He's our friend."

Dillon relaxes.

I feel so ridiculous spitting on him and being scolded by Rick, but he's the gang's alpha male so I obey. I know I should protect Dillon just like I should protect my Mom from jerks, but I don't because I've been beaten by thugs and they scare me.

"Apologize to Dillon ya jerk," Rick says me.

Stunned by this, I apologize. Dillon relaxes and removes his glasses and cleans them. They smear more. He puts them back on and his eyes bulge more. I feel the urge to punch him in his squid eyeball and watch it wobble. I'd do it but Rick is the alpha male and would kick my ass.

"What are you guys doing?"

"Well dude, we are going to knock off Samantha because she wants us," says Rick.

Everyone laughs, and I laugh too like an ass.

Yet, I want to reach over and strangle Rick, the bastard. Rick notices that my laugh is false, so he stares at me with his eagle eyes until I look away. The sword slices through and crushes the arrow.

"Sammy's the one with the big boobs," says Frank.

"She's so kind."

"No Dillon, she's the sexy waitress who shows off her pussy every time she bends over to take an order."

"dillon, ya wanna squeeze and suck her boobs, don't ya?" Rick asks but looks at me sternly.

I feel like reaching across and pounding Rick and Peter in their noses for insulting Samantha. I can imagine their noses bleeding profusely while Samantha hugs and congratulates me for defending her honor. I stare Rick directly in the eye again, and I'll not look away this time.

"I don't want to hurt Samantha," says Dillon.

These words pierce my heart because he has more courage than me. I look at him impressed.

"Hey pretty boy, you also got Samantha on your mind, don't ya?" says Rick.

I love her, but I am afraid to admit it again.

"No, I'm not thinking of her."

I wish I could tell him about her rocking on me, her hair cascading down over her shoulders swinging, her moaning, her biting her bottom lip tight, her thrusting, her breasts swaying, her sweating. I want to tell him she never thinks of him when she sends me into ecstasy rocking on my staff. In truth, I can't because she insists on avoiding a sexual relationship even though I crave it. When he asks me about her, I say she is a nympho with me. He laughs, but it upsets him. This perversely pleases me.

"Dillon, where's Sammy?" asks Peter the dumb snowplow.

"She's at the pharmacy."

"How'd ya know that ya creep?" asks Rick.

"He's stalkin' her," says Peter.

"I'm not stalkin' her, honest, I like her."

"You creep. We castrate stalkers."

"Look at my knife, Dillon," I say as I pull my jackknife from my pocket and open a blade large enough to castrate an elephant.

"Hey, hey, Dillon, look at that knife," says Peter smirking.

"Grab Dillon, guys," says Rick.

Peter and Frank throw Dillon on the ground, remove his pants, and tear off his underwear. He flails like a snake with its head in a trap. I stand holding the knife blade, but all of a sudden, I hate the situation I'm in because I don't want to hurt Dillon. He is innocent like my Mom, and I cannot bear to imagine him or anyone experiencing the pain, humiliation, and consequences of castration.

"Castrate Dillon," Rick says to me.

I hesitate. I look at Dillon with grief and throw the knife away to demonstrate my resolve. I look Rick in his eyes. They sparkle, I suspect, because I am now unarmed. I instantly regret throwing it away.

"If you don't castrate Dillon," says Rick, "then we're gonna castrate you."

"I won't castrate Dillon." For once, I feel pride and strength.

"Take down pretty boy," Rick says to his thugs.

Peter and Frank approach me with their arms hanging to their knees and their fists clinched as hard as irons. I throw punches and kick, and they charge. I smash Peter's nose with my fist, but Peter and Frank are stronger. They subdue me and throw me against a tree. I can only spit at them and wish I had my knife so I could stab them. Peter's nose bleeds and I don't care.

Rick pulls my pants off. I kick at him but to no avail, and Dillon does nothing but lie on the ground in total shock. Rick fondles my balls while looking

me in the eyes strangely. I realize he finds me sexually attractive, and I turn away terrified. Peter grabs my scalp, slams it into the tree, and yells that he did it because I bloodied his nose. I curse back.

Rick grabs my face and forces me to look him in his eye. I spit in his face. He snarls, spits back at me, and pulls his hunting knife from his belt case. He forces the blade into my cheek and pulls the sharp edge down through flesh. Pain sears through my cheek, eyes, gums, and head. Hot, sticky, blood floods my mouth and pours down my cheek. It infuriates me, and I would stab him with my knife, if I could. Rick smiles and pulls the knife out slowly and shows me the dripping blade. He has scared me, and he reminds me of his drunken father, someone I can't stand.

"Throw pretty boy on Dillon," he says.

Peter says, "Ya, let's castrate them both."

They throw me on Dillon and start to thrust my pelvis into Dillon.

"Now castrate him," says Rick.

Frank pushes my pelvis harder into Dillon, and Peter, still angry about his bloody face, fondles my balls. My face is pressed into the grass my nose on the ground, and I can smell the rich earth full of life. Clotting blood drips slowly off my chin onto the soil. Rick squats down holding the bloody knife near my face and encourages Peter to fondle my balls.

"Should we pull them out," asks Rick, "just like we rip them out when we castrate a bull?"

The thought of them pulling my balls out makes me reptilian angry. I push Peter off of me with all my strength, and he falls back. I sit up and stare at Rick with cobra's eyes ready to strike him dead.

"Pretty boy just fucked Dillon?" says Peter.

I, like a cobra, want to strike these creeps just like I want to strike my Mom's creepy lovers. I realize I can't, so I feel hopeless and want to cry from humiliation.

"What's the matter pretty boy?" Rick says.

Frank and Peter laugh at me for being shamed. Peter smiling stands and slaps his hands clean. He and Frank then run down the hill whooping. Rick, however, stays behind like a mongoose ready to kill me, the cobra, and says, "I'm gonna kill ya someday, ya homo." He kicks dirt in my face, and the gravel sticks to the bloody gash in my cheek. "Take that." He then runs after his thugs shouting victory. I vainly throw a fistful of dirt after him. I don't need these bastards ever again as my friends.

I turn and look at Dillon who is alone with me in these silent woods. I spit on him again to vent my anger and to reprove my manhood that has just been

shattered. Dillon blinks, wipes my bloody spit off his pale face, and looks at me with deer's eyes. He asks, "Are you ok?" as he points at my sliced, bloody cheek, obviously forgiving me.

His eyes seem very confused and terrified by this situation, and I feel horribly sorry for him. My reptilian anger slithers away into the grass. I place my arm around his shoulders to comfort him, and I feel him shaking from fear. I'm shocked because it reminds me of my Mom when she sits home shaking with fear while waiting for her drunken boyfriends to return home to beat her over a slight. I hug Dillon tight, like I do my Mom, to calm his shaking nerves, and in turn, I feel strong like Samantha's dad whose quiet strength shields and protects his family.

Suddenly, I really feel the gentle breeze that has been blowing through the trees, tickling the grass, and dancing over the waters carrying with it the rich odors of lilacs, of soil, of grass, and of spring rain. It overwhelms me, and my heart bursts wide open. I let go of Dillon and fall backwards facing the sky while the world spins about me. I begin crying uncontrollably because these silent woods have brought Dillon and me together, unintentionally, for this horrific moment.

