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A DARK PLACE

Three stories of
Terror and Madness

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DIGGER

CHAPTER 1

August brought its usual wave of murky heat. Summer was just starting its downward spiral into the school year. But, Lake Sebago was still humming with activity as people from Portland, and of the surrounding areas continued to flock toward of Southern Maine's favorite hot spots. And while the days were hot and humid, the nights were clear and tolerably warm. Five teenagers, most recent graduates of Portland high school and well on their way to various colleges, sat around a blazing campfire needs a clear night sky. It's roaring flames effectively blotted out the night's starry luster. And in the presence of a new moon, the night appeared as a blanket of ink, thrown over Lake Sebago, cold and impenetrable.

They had graduated in the top ten percent of the class, save for one. Becky was sixteen years old. She had told her parents she'd be spending the weekend at a friend's house. In truth, she wanted to spend as much time away from her parents as possible. So, she sat at the fire as the fifth wheel, among those who were actively moving on with their lives.

Jake was the athlete. He spent, at least, the last four years training at the Portland Fencing Center. He'd won more than a few tournaments and had even attended nationals. He had been accepted to Notre Dame on a full fencing scholarship, where according to plan, he would study finance. Kyle, however, was something of a class clown and always in search of any opportunity when it came to girls. He was the kind of guy who could sweet talk the panties off the most religious 'good girl' in school and hoped this particular talent would be as effective in college. In spite of this, it was his sharp mind that would soon take him to Texas A & M University. He would eventually live the life of a corporate attorney.

Mark was the serious one. A straight 'A' student, he took his studies very seriously, but seemed to be lacking in the way of a sense of humor. His talent lay in writing and he would shortly be off to Columbia University, where he would study English and creative writing. Many of his high

school teachers saw him as a promising writer. Then, there was Samantha. Everyone who knew her called her ‘Sam’. She didn’t mind the nickname and, in fact, came to see it as a way of standing out from the crowd. Her teachers thought of her not only as intelligent, but wise beyond her years. She was not one to follow the herd or join the school clubs and she loathed the cliquish mentality common among others her age. But, those days were over, replaced by the real world, where life was cold and cruel. However, Samantha had a plan. And it was about to take her college career to New York City, where she would spend the next four years in a focused program, emerging as a Doctor of Psychology.

At some point during the night, Becky began asking for beer. They were renting a cabin on the edge of the lake and managed to procure a few sixpacks. They were all underage, but this was likely the last time they would see each other. At least, until summer break. So, even though they were saying goodbye to each other, it was also a time of celebration. One last hurrah before taking the plunge into the whirlpool of reality.

“Guys, where’s the beer?” Becky asked.

“Beer?” Kyle replied.

“Becky,” Samantha began. “We talked about this. You’re too young to drink.”

“Oh, right,” Becky replied. “Like any of you are twenty one.”

Becky was along for the ride. She begged Samantha to take her once she found out they were going to Sebago for the weekend.

Becky was a relatively short girl with a slightly heavy build and brown hair down to the middle of her shoulder blades. She wore glasses and was quick to complain about anything that even remotely reminded her of how miserable she was. This would usually trigger a silent tantrum, typified by breaking eye contact and tightly folding her arms. Among those she assumed were her friends, Becky was seen as possessing something of a ‘bratty’ attitude. In the end, the only reason Becky was there was because Samantha felt

sorry for her.

“Come on, just one beer,” she continued.

Kyle raised his head with a sarcastic grin.

“Tell you what,” he began. “I’ll give you a beer, if you give me a blow job.”

Samantha turned to him with an angry voice.

“Really? Seriously?”

He responded have taunting, have serious.

“Hey,” he replied. “She wants a beer, I want a blow job. That sounds fair to me.”

He got up from in front of the fire and started toward the cabin. And looking back at Becky said, “I’ll be waiting.”

Becky sat fuming. She desperately wanted to fit in and moments later, got up and followed Kyle into the cabin.

“Becky!”

Samantha turned and reached out to grab her wrist in an attempt to hold her back, but Becky was determined and continued toward the cabin while ignoring her. Jake and Mark sat grinning at each other, knowing that Kyle was certainly capable of that level of manipulation and 15 minutes later, Becky returned with an open bottle of beer. She took her previous place in front of the fire, looking angry and embarrassed. But, she was mostly angry at herself, considering what she had just paid for the beer. Becky sat fuming. She desperately wanted to fit in and moments later, got up I felt Kyle into the cabin.

Kyle arrived soon after. He stood in front of the fire and zipped up his pants with a teasing grin. Sitting down, he felt Samantha glaring at him.

“What?” he asked with a degree of sarcasm.

“Tell me you didn’t,” Samantha demanded. She paused to read Kyle’s expression. This was a skill that came naturally to her and she was very good at spotting a lie.

“God dammit. Kyle! You’re such an asshole!”

Kyle shrugged off her words as Becky took a deep swallow of what he thought to be a well deserved beer.

“Hey,” he replied. “A deal’s a deal. Right Becky?”

Becky turned away in anger and self-loathing.

“Fuck you.” she reacted.

Jake now saw it necessary to step in and break things up.

“Alright, you two,” he began. “This isn’t what we’re here for.”

Samantha suddenly interrupted with a suggestion.

“I know,” she began. “How about a ghost story?” Kyle rolled his eyes in boredom.

“A ghost story?” he said. “That is so lame.”

“Hey, come on, Kyle,” Jake interrupted. “This is it until next year, got it?”

“Alright. You’re right,” Kyle relinquished. “Let’s hear a ghost story.”

Samantha leaned forward into the light of the fire as she did her best to begin the story with a dark and foreboding tone. After a dramatic pause, she began telling the story of the haunting of Owls Head. Owls head was the location of one of Maine’s many lighthouses. This one, however, had a rather odd history that many of its visitors found frightening. But, during the telling of what she believed was a truly harrowing tale, Samantha was interrupted by an ancient voice this seemed to erupt from the darkness, just beyond the firelight’s reach.

“You call that a ghost story?” the voice said.

The voice took material form as an old man hobbled out of the darkness. Using an old wooden cane, he limped out into the light of the fire. He was thin and bore the appearance of someone who’d spent years living in the mountains. Shuffling over to the fire, he slowly sat on an unoccupied log. His sudden appearance startled the teens with such intensity that each seemed to leap out of their skin.

Leaning forward slightly, he put his hands out, warming them against the radiant heat of the fire as the teens sat speechless.

“Kid,” he began. “You ain’t got shit for ghost stories. For fucks sake, any grade school kid knows that story.”

Samantha hesitantly spoke up.

“Excuse me, but who are...”

The man’s head whipped around toward her as he quickly

became impatient and frustrated.

“Hey! Girly! I’m talking. Now, do you want to hear a ghost story or not?”

All remained silent as the old man continued speaking.

“That’s better,” he said. “Now, this goes back about twenty years and according to the cops and the papers, most of it happened right here.”

He raised his cane and pointed out across the lake.

“Way back in them woods.”

Everyone sat in rapt attention as the old man spoke. The dancing light of the fire twisted his face into a hideous, nightmarish knot as a gentle breeze pushed his long grayish white hair back from his shoulders. Their fear of the old man’s sudden presence was barely overtaken by their curiosity of the story he insisted on telling. Uninterrupted, the old man continued to tell his tale. But with a cautionary note, warned the teenagers that the best fiction doesn’t hold a candle to the horrors of real life.