

Lost

An ache in my back throbs and causes me to slowly awaken. My body feels numb with a dull chill covering most of my body like an unwelcome icy blanket. I wiggle my fingers, the numbness residing in the tips, and feel dewy strands of grass brush against them. The numbness starts to fade, starting at my hands then moving up my arms and down my back to my toes. I start to feel cold dampness covering my back and a chill makes me start shivering. My other senses start spilling in one after another, I hear a chirp of a bird and the rustle of leaves from a cool draft overhead. Then I start to smell the nature that I am surrounded by, the smell of freshly fallen rain and sweetly blooming flowers wafting in the air around me. A drop of rain startles me fully awake, I swiftly sit up and open my eyes getting the full view of what is around me. I take a moment to look around as I stretch the drowsiness away. I am sitting on a forest floor made of grass and moss surrounded by trees tall and broad enough to keep most of the rain that is drizzling from the cloud thick sky above me off me. Ferns are scattered along the ground and ivy encases some of the tree's bases.

I look down at my hands that I know are mine but somehow feel unfamiliar. The clothes I wear are simple and give me no further information about who I am or what I'm doing here. I continue to look around for any more clues but there's nothing but thick forest in every direction.

I stand after taking a moment to find my legs and wrap my arms around myself when another frigid breeze whips through the woods. I rub my arms trying to create

warmth from the friction and notice something I didn't see while I was on the ground. A small dirt path barely noticeable in the brush to my right. After one last look around I head towards it. After taking a moment to look at it and decide to follow it, patches of mud stick to my shoes like glue picking up leaves and dirt as I trudge up the path. The path seems to go on for miles as I pass rapidly running rivers and lakes as I follow it, stopping to look at each one closely to find any signs of human life but there is nothing. Time passes and the sun starts to set and casts a magnificent glow through the trees and, tired and hungry, I begin to worry.

Where will I sleep? I will need food and water eventually, can I survive out here on my own? I think as great uneasiness washes over me.

My feet are slow as I continue along, they hurt from walking all day and I take a moment to stop against a tree and catch my breath. As the sun continues to set, the little warmth it brought disappears with it and the chill I felt all day starts to feel more dangerous. But while I'm stopped I smell something brought on by another piercing breeze.

Smoke? I wonder and stand fully back up. Another quick sniff and it confirms the smell of smoke. I continue down the trail with a new motivation brought on by curiosity and hope. The forest's growth thickens to the point where I can't see more than a few feet in any direction. I stumble and trip over various vines and thorny bushes as the path becomes harder to see with the waning light. After one last push through the brush, it expands into a grassy clearing. My hope blossoms as I find the reason for the smell, a

wooden cabin nestled in the fields of overgrown greenery with smoke rising out of its chimney. I relax a bit and a sense of safety rolls over me.

People, there wouldn't be a fire if there weren't people. I take quick strides towards the lit-up cabin excited for warmth, food, and a good place to sleep. The steps to the cabin's porch groan as I walk up them and onto the deck. I looked through the windows and realized they were too foggy to see much more than the light shining through. I knock on the thick oak door and after the second knock, I realize it's unlocked when the door creaks open. I take a step inside and after looking around for a moment realize there is no one else here. But after I feel the warmth coming from inside I quickly walk the rest of the way in and shut the door. There isn't a lock on the door but to the left of the door, there's a sturdy-looking stick. I stick the branch through the door handle and hope that keeps out whatever may be lurking outside in the night. After feeling secure I turn and get a better look at the cabin. It's not much bigger than a normal bedroom with tall ceilings and a loft with a ladder. The fireplace sits in the middle of the back wall and is made out of dark colored brick. The wooden floors are covered with rugs and animal furs but the thing that stands out most are the photos that cover the walls. I walk up to them and see that most of them are of the same man. he wears the same straw hat in every photo. the further to the left my eyes wander the older the man seems to become. The photos are from all over the world, some of beaches where the man is laid out in the sun and others of mountains as far as the eye can see. Some of them include other people of all different shapes, sizes, ages, and ethnicities. All of them seem happy in the photos, some hugging the man with the straw hat, others

laughing or smiling along with him. I laugh at a photo of the man with the straw hat waddling along with a pair of penguins, his signature hat loosely placed on his head because of the layers of warm clothes he has on.

“This man has been everywhere” I whisper to myself. The rumble of my stomach snaps me out of my viewing party and I look around for some food. I find plenty in some cabinets in the right corner of the cabin, mostly just canned goods. I pop a can of peaches open with a can opener I find lying on the counter and dig in while I continue exploring. There is a wooden desk wedged to the right of the fireplace with a stool pushed underneath. There are stacks and stacks of journals on top of and beside the desk. I set my peaches down and pick up the journal set in the middle of the desk, Its leather spine stiff as I open it. I was hoping for a bit of information on what was going on and why I couldn't seem to remember anything about myself but I'm met with mostly blank pages and a language that I can't understand. I sigh, put the journal down, continue eating my peaches and glance up at the loft. I finish my food, tend to the fire, and warm up a bit before climbing up the wooden ladder to the loft. The loft is only 5 feet tall in the tallest part and dips down with the angle of the roof. There is a mattress laid in the loft and it is piled high with various blankets and comforters. I slip off my muddy shoes and crawl in and for the first time, I'm truly warm amongst the velvety blankets. My eyes start to droop and I dread having to ever go out to that cold forest again.

I dream that night of being at the warm sunny beach where the man with the straw hat relaxed in the photo. The sun bathed sand covering my toes and the sound of the ocean made it feel like a fairy tale. I spend all my time there soaking up the sun's rays and splashing in the perfectly clear blue water.

I wake from my sleep feeling just as warm as I felt in my dream, almost sweating under the layers of blankets I slept under the night before. I wiggle out of the blankets and climb down the ladder walking over to the cabinets and grabbing a can of assorted fruit. I walk over to the fire ready to put it out. The inside of the cabin is so hot it feels suffocating but I find that the fire is already out. Confused where the heat is coming from I look towards the single window in the cabin and find that it is still fogged over making it impossible to see the outside beside the sun blaring through it. So I walk towards the door, pull the branch from the door handle, and open the door.

I gasp at the sight before me dropping my can of fruit as a warm salty wind blows into the cabin whipping my hair over my face. I step onto the porch, walk down the stairs, and gape at the beautiful sunny beach, a replica of the one in my dream and the one the man relaxed in in his photo. Birds of paradise called in the nearby palm trees and the water is a color of aqua I've never seen before. I quickly stumble down the stairs and feel my feet touch the golden grains of sand as they engulf them in a warm blanket. I laugh and lay in the sand feeling the chill from the day before completely leaving me.

Water dripped down my body and I enjoyed the evening breeze. The sun sets in front of me and the sky drips with sunny essence. I've had a long day of warmth,

sunburns, swimming and enjoying tropical fruits with chuckling monkeys. I wipe my face from prickling sand kernels and look back at the cabin behind me. Its echoing old wood creaks and groans. It had nestled itself deeply in the sand, its worn steps buried within the grains. I look at my hands, no freckles, no scars, just dimples of sand under my nails and tan lines smudging the creases in my palms. My clothes are now rolled up because of the heat, weather and wetness due to my full day of swimming. My body feels memories attached to it from the day, though as small and removable as the flakes of sand and as fresh as my forming tan lines. The darkness has begun to overtake the warmth of the day and I stand opening the door to the cabin, looking back at my warm oasis one last time before shutting the door behind me wondering what I will dream of tonight.