

UP THE RIDGE

When we got to the very top of the ridge where the noise might of originated I slowed the truck down to a crawl and looked around not knowin what I might be about to find. That gaw damn sound was like jagged metal making love to itself for the devil to enjoy. I heard it a couple times before. Like a birdcat monster wailin to the uncared for universe.

It was desperate and it was mean. Like a pterodactyl bein run over. It made my heart lurch and blood get cold while we had been sittin at the kitchen table. I looked over at Denham and him at me with each a suggestion of confusion and fear. And hellbent curiosity.

'The fuck was that.' He went from goin fast on his cold beer to sittin as still as he could jus waitin for the horror of it to happen again.

'Wish I knew,' was all I had for an answer. 'Could be I dislike to find out.'

Denham was a little on in the evening and there was a handle of whiskey in front of him that he was doin more than just make looks at. 'Some kinda animal. What about goin out there,' he said.

'It's from up top on the ridge. I heard it before. No idea what it is. Comes on maybe once a month. Like a howl in the night that make me lock all the doors and load the gun.'

'Get the rifle and let's go look.' He poured a finger of the whiskey into the glasses on the table and took his down without a second thought.

So we did. I drank the shot he made for me and we started up the old Ford and went past the property to the top of the wooded ridge where it always seem to come from. I never went before when I heard it. But I was usually alone. Denham came over Wednesdays to play cards and chainsmoke and get in arguments and drive home on the backroads. Tonight we barely even shuffled the deck before the noise hit. Turned us into old boy scouts real quick.

I killed the motor and grabbed the rifle. I had to lean my shoulder into the big door of the truck to get it open. Denham hopped out the passenger side and swore and spit.

'You sure it's from up here.'

'Not sure for a shit. But I think so.'

We ambled through the stiff mud and we scanned around lookin for the source. That sound was what you call paralyzin. It was like an amplified raccoon bein poked to death by a team of razorblades. But of course when we were at the top it was ominous quiet except the bugs.

'Gaw damn bigfoot got himself a summer home up here I'm guessin.'

I didn't reply. The pines stared back at us. The crickets were so loud my head felt inflated. The moon of August was waxed pretty full above and the trees weren't quite thick enough to blot it out. I looked through the wilds of bush and thistles tryin to catch movement. I had the flashlight dug out and pointed into the brush but it was only gettin moths and mosquitos and the flakes of dirt we kicked up with our tires.

'What you think we're lookin for.'

'Some oversized mountain lion with a speech impediment.'

He laughed. I wasn't sure if it was a joke.

We got out to look around and the vibration from the crickets was almost like takin a bath in the full pitch of noise. There was a hoot from a bird that didn't come from more than a hundred yards away and it made both of us turn.

'Is that a bard owl,' he thought out loud.

'Nah. That's one of them European doves. Loud bastards. Swear they never sleep much either.'

I took a few steps into the brush and cocked the rifle to make sure it was ready. This was the kinda half-drunk adventure we woulda taken as kids. A couple doses of courage and suddenly you're chasin poltergeists under the brightness of the moon. But I heard that loud scream sure as he did. And Denham was never sober enough to reject an investigation. Hell, it was his idea to come up and look. I suddenly went from feelin scared to just plain foolhardy. Like a pair of drunk detectives trampin through the mud. But I think we were startin to get injured with suspense and the night itself was pregnant with sweet unknown.

Denham loosened up his belt and vaulted a big stream of piss off the side of the road. I had a brief vision of some albino cougar with a foamy mouth bitin his pecker off. Instead he pulled his pants up and tightened it and rubbed his arms and looked around like a dopey child.

'We ain't gonna find nothin. Your sasquatch man ain't showin his face to a couple of blue jays like us.'

The words were barely outta my mouth when we heard it again, this time closer than courage might allow. It was like it came from above as though a sawblade were an animal, cutting through the night louder than a car crash. My heart shot with adrenaline and held that rifle pretty tight waitin for some devil to materialize. But none did. It echoed in my ears and it rattled on while I looked into the dark wonderin a thousand questions.

Denham jumped back in the cab and yelled get the fuck outta here and I didn't argue. We were tearin down that hill back to the house with the V-8 thunderin and me thinkin there'd never in a thousand years be enough distance between me and the source of that sound.

'The fuck *was* that,' his voice all high pitched.

'Hell if I know.'

We got back to the kitchen table and filled our glasses up generous and stood stammerin like idiots for a good deal of time. I never seen Denham rattled like that before, and I admit I wasn't feelin too good about the whole thing neither. He made a joke about cancelin our poker Wednesdays. I looked out the dinin room window over the adjacent field almost expectin to see some violent beast pursuant to follow us home. But none did.

I never heard it again. Was almost like it got the reaction it wanted and moved on somewhere else. Kinda made me realize that if hell comes to call you needn't answer. Next time I'll just as soon stay away. When I think on it I can feel what that noise did to me on top of the ridge and I can live forever with knowin fuck all for what it really was.