

Swamp Light

His heart pounded. The rhythmic thumping kept him present, in his body, in the swamp. His heart was not his friend. With its distraction, he could not leave. He needed to leave, his young mind could not handle this reality, the worse kind of abandonment.

The boy's mother was the first to leave. She left him at six months of age for a rotten tooth. That rotten tooth took her and kept her. The baby boy never smelled her or felt her loving touch again.

He lived with his aunt. They loved each other as only a mother and child can. But an aunt is not a mother and without warning he was taken from her. Nothing could be done to save this loving bond. This woman who could raise him to manhood, nurturing all that he could be, what he was born to be, now gone from his life.

Once again, he was with his father. A man that made no kind of loving attachment with anyone, not even a young son. The boy sensed that he was in danger with this man. This man who cared for no one but his own selfish needs and desires. The boy knew the man was trying to unload him. Please someone take me before...

The man brought the boy and his sister to a small house. Inside was a witch of a woman. The boy and his sister knew this in the way that only young children and small animals know. The hair raises on the back of the neck, heighten awareness, any little move could lead to danger.

And so, it was like this for a period of time. Yes, the little boy and his sister suffered. They were in need of a savior and it came in the form of a Catholic nun. This nun saw to it that the little boy and his sister were taken away from the witch but not the father.

The father was on the hunt again. He found someone to take the sister. She would clean the house, babysit the children and cook the meals but there was no room in this house for a young boy. The boy was left with the father, not even a sister to save him. The boy had every right to be afraid and he was.

The father took the little boy to the swamp. In the boat, they moved through the black water in darkness. The man had but one lamp, attached to his head. The yellow beam showed little of the mysterious blackness surrounding them. No moon, no stars, nothing. It was a warm, muggy night but still the little boy shivered. He shivered from fright, he shivered for love and acceptance. He came up empty.

The man said they were hunting gators. The boy could hear the gators' bellows, the bullfrogs, the owls, all matter of night creatures. These are the sounds that bring frightening thoughts to young children safe in their beds, just before they tear down the hallway to jump into the

warm, comforting bed of their parents. This little boy knew nothing of that. This is no dream, his pounding heart reminded him.

Deep in the swamp where no light showed, except the headlamp, the man told the little boy to get out of the boat. The man took the seat from the boat and placed it on a little mud hill. He told the little boy to stand on the seat and if he was very still he would have more time before the seat would completely sink into the mud, into the swamp. The little boy knew better than not to listen so he slowly stepped out of the boat onto the seat. Already mud began to seep around the edges. "Please no," the little boy begged. The father said nothing and paddled away. The little boy watched the headlamp, the only light, fade in the distance.

The little boy listened to the night creatures and his pounding heart. Which was louder, he could not say. The mud collected around his little feet, seeping into his shoes. His beating heart, the noisy night creatures, the cold muddy water, all kept him present. No escape was possible. The mud collected around his knees, his waist.

Just then he saw a small light in the distance. Please, he begged the night, let someone come for me. The light became stronger, it was moving towards him. It seemed to take forever before the light was shining right on him. "Get in," the father said. The boy struggled to get in the boat.

Silently they paddled on and out of the swamp. Not a word was said.

In later years, the boy-man wondered about that night. He wondered if it was a dream. He wondered if the father was teaching him a lesson, of what he did not know. He wondered if the father intended on leaving him there to die but couldn't for reasons only the father would know. The night stayed with the boy all through his life. The pain he suffered from this night infected his heart. Never again would he open his tender heart to anyone, not his wife, not his children, no one. He would never be abandoned again.

The old man was so alone. He had but one living being with him, a son. This son was so tied to the old man that it would take more than a surgeon's knife to separate them. The old man wove tendrils of discord through the son's mind. Took over his very soul. The son had no way to live without the old man's strings. The old man had other children but he pushed them away as one would push aside an unwanted plate of leftover food. He had no appetite for them. Even as he lay dying, he pushed them away.

The old man entered the night swamp alone. No longer the child but an old man. He wasn't frightened this time. He had a hard life, his heart was closed, he wanted nothing. Off in the distance he noticed a light. At first it was dim and small. The light got brighter. The light was so bright the old man could not look directly into it. The light was of a different nature. It was unlike any light the old man had ever experienced. All the dark corners were bright, all shadows gone. In that light for the first time the old man felt loved. He remembered the little

boy, his mother, his beloved aunt, his sister, his wife and children. He sat on the mound of mud and cried. He cried for the little boy, he cried for the father, he cried for them all, he cried.