

Coyote's Pup

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Monsters in the Night

The high desert night was chilly especially for early August. A full moon shone brightly in the clear sky above Chance Latrans as he walked from the tent he shared with his parents to the campground bathroom just down the hill. He tugged the light jacket tighter around his narrow shoulders to shield himself from the cold wind that swept across the pond as he walked past. The campground was named Coyote Creek after the creek that ran next to the bathroom. Thinking there had to be coyotes somewhere around Coyote Creek, Chance hoped to see one.

He whistled softly to himself as he opened the bathroom door. So far, it had been a good trip. His folks made the most of his fifteenth birthday and he always enjoyed it when they took time away from their extremely busy corporate lives to do things as a family. Even if this year, they couldn't travel far from Denver, Colorado, it was nice to spend a couple of days in the New Mexico wilderness. Tomorrow, his mom wanted to drive into Taos and visit the galleries and shops there. It sounded a little touristy, but his dad promised a long hike in the wilderness the next day before they headed home.

Walking back from the bathroom, Chance looked up to the moon as it shown above the stand of pine trees behind the tent, before he unzipped the flap. His heart raced seeing it so close and clear. He never had a view like this in Denver. It was too big of a city. There were too many lights and too much pollution to allow such a clear view of the night sky. He felt like he could reach out and touch it.

As he crawled into his sleeping bag, his father snored softly on the other side of the thin wall that separated the rooms of the tent. It didn't take long for the sound to lull him back to sleep in the thin mountain air.

His mother's screams shattered dreams dominated by bright moons and the high-pitched howl of a coyote. Sleep fled amidst his father's shouts and his mother's screams. "Mom, Dad, what's wrong?" Chance called out as he struggled to free himself from the encumbering warmth of the sleeping bag.

"Get off her!" his father shouted. Chance heard his father hitting something.

A sound like a dog's whine of pain cut through the air.

Then his mother stopped screaming.

"God, Ruth," his father sobbed and hit whatever it was again.

"Dad, I'm coming!" Chance yelled as he kicked free of the sleeping bag.

A low growl resonated from their area of the tent.

"Chance, stay back!" his father called just as Chance flipped on the flashlight that lay next to his sleeping bag.

Chance tore open the flap that separated the tent rooms.

The first thing he saw was that his mother lay in a pool of blood on the floor of the tent. The light from the flashlight glittered off the growing red stain. Something about the way she laid there told Chance she was gone.

A medium-sized dog stood on her chest. Or at least it looked like a dog. Blood dripped from its muzzle. It snarled at his father as he hefted a collapsible camp chair to take another swing at the thing. Chance looked around for something to use against the creature. He spotted the ice chest sitting just inside his area of the tent. He ran over to it and he heard his dad hit the thing again with the chair.

The thing whined in pain.

"Get back!" his father screamed in a frantic tone that Chance had never heard.

His father grunted in pain and the tent shook.

Chance hefted the ice chest and started to turn just as the tent collapsed around him.

"Dad!" he screamed, as he struggled to keep standing with the encumbering weight of the ice chest in his hands and the ensnaring fabric of the tent.

"Chance, get out! Run!" his father screamed.

Chance dropped the ice chest and fought through the collapsed tent for the door. The zipper bound up as he tried to open it. Behind him, his father continued to struggle with the animal. Could he escape the tent, get to the Escalade and find the pistol his father kept in the glove box. He remembered his mother fussing about having a gun where Chance had easy access to it, but his father always reminded her that they lived in a strange and scary world.

The zipper finally gave way and he stepped out into a cold gust from across the pond. The wind ruffled his short brown hair as he started toward the truck parked just beyond the fire pit where hours before his mother fixed hot dogs for all of them. Tears started as he realized that

they'd be the last thing she ever cooked for him. He fought to keep focused. Get to the truck. Get the gun. Help his dad. He could hear his dad screaming now. Like his mother had right before she stopped.

The beast, whatever it was, was nearly finished with his father. Chance knew he must get the gun. The door to the Escalade was locked. Chance tried to remember the code.

His father stopped screaming.

He knew that the thing would be coming for him next. He frantically punched numbers into the pad under the door handle. He remembered it was four digits.

The tent ripped. It sounded more like a scream.

Around him, he heard people coming out of their tents, but there were only a few campers in the campground. The closest one was an old woman and her poodle down by the bathroom.

Chance tried another combination and the door still wouldn't open. He hit the door in frustration. His hand stung.

From the tent, a high-pitched howl pierced the night.

Chance realized he didn't have time to get the door opened and get the gun. He ran from the campsite. He ran for the trail he hiked the day before with his parents, heading up the hill that shadowed the north side of the campground. He hoped that he could find a big branch he could use as a club, or maybe the thing wouldn't follow him up that way.

Chance kept the flashlight aimed at the ground as he ran the well-traveled path. He knew a fall right now, before he could find a weapon, wouldn't be good. The moon lit the path well enough that he debated for a moment turning off the flashlight, but fear he would lose his way or footing stopped his finger from pushing the button.

He crossed the small footbridge that spanned Coyote Creek. He wondered if he'd just seen his first coyote. Was that what killed his parents? Maybe it was a rabid coyote? He heard the high-pitched howl again. It sounded closer to him than the tent. The thing pursued him. He pushed back at the panic growing in him as he heard soft paws running over the old wooden bridge he'd just crossed.

The path went up the side of the hill. Chance just made it into the tree line when something slammed into his back, knocking him to the ground. He grabbed a handful of dirt and tried to throw it back, hoping desperately to distract the thing. He kicked back and felt his

stocking feet connect just as sharp teeth tore into his shoulder. Chance screamed as the pain shot through him. He became frantic. He tried to roll and knock the thing off his back. It grabbed his hand in its teeth and pulled, worrying it like a dog would a length of rope. With his free hand, Chance hit at the grey furry head. He tried to poke at its eyes, but it jerked around too fast for him to hit anything other than the muzzle. It let go with a yelp when he managed to get a hard shot at the soft nose. The thing backed up a couple of steps, shaking its head.

Chance scuttled backwards trying to get a little distance between him and the beast. He hoped, almost beyond hope, to find a weapon of some sort to defend himself. A tree limb, large rock, anything would be better than bare hands.

The beast stared at him with eyes that glowed red in the full-moon light. It growled and advanced on him slowly. It sprang again, landing on his chest. Chance brought his arms up to protect his face and its teeth sank again into his injured hand. His screams echoed across the creek valley. Suddenly the weight on his chest lifted and something yanked his right arm hard. When he looked up again, he found himself lying on his side, watching another furry form chase the grey thing away. This one was orange with black stripes, for a second he thought it might be a tiger. A smaller darker form followed. Chance propped himself up against the trunk of a pine tree, and cradled his ruined hand to his chest. He felt light headed. He felt blood rush out of his hand. He heard footsteps come toward him and was surprised that there was no flashlight accompanying them.

“Over here, Mom,” a rough young female voice called out.

He tried to recall if there were any girls in the campsites. Chance tried to focus on the shadowed form and soft hands that felt for his pulse on his good arm.

“He’s still alive,” the girl called out again.

“How torn up is he?” another voice, this time a mature woman’s at a bit of a distance.

“Looks like it got him pretty good. We need to get him out of here,” the girl responded.

More footsteps came from the way that the two furry forms chased the beast.

“We lost it,” a young male voice cracked nearby.

“He’s a bit too fast for these old bones,” a soft man’s voice came from behind the tree.

“We have other things to worry about,” the older female said.

Chance felt the world around him tilt and then everything went black.