

Three

It felt like I sat in the tree's hollow for hours, just thinking. It was a moonless night, though there were a million stars in the sky. I took off my backpack and remembered we packed a first aid kit. So, I cleaned my cuts with cotton swabs and witch hazel, and wrapped my arms and legs with bandages. I then ate a Pop Tart and drank a can of orange soda, until I decided that I should continue walking around and find Bailey and Shawn, despite the fact that I was exhausted.

I grabbed a branch of the tree and pulled myself up placing my feet steadily on the ground. I was a little unstable at first, but decided I probably didn't break any bones and should be fine. I'm not going to lie, my legs hurt a lot, and my whole body did. I started to walk slowly keeping my hands out to the side in case I might fall. "Bailey!" I called. I walked a few steps forward, "Shawn!" A few more steps, "Bailey! Shawn!"

"Could you stop yelling!" I heard a voice scold. I jumped in fear and turned in every direction. "Who said that?" I said just above a whisper. I was too scared to speak.

"I did," the voice came again. It was low and hoarse. I looked around some more, but saw nobody. "Where are you?" I whispered.

"You seriously don't see me?" the voice said, annoyed, "I'm right here."

"Where?" I looked behind me. "Not there, over here," I turned to the side. "Look up," the voice said. I looked up to a tree to see a small human, crouched on a branch. He had a long, curly blonde beard, which was split into two braids with little beads at the end. His baldhead was shiny and pristine, and his gray eyes were practically bulging out of his head. His face was wrinkled. I gasped. It was an ugly creature.

"Took you long enough," it said, jumping down from the branch and onto the ground, "I thought you were never going to find me." He had to be about 2 feet tall. He waddled up to me, and by reflex, I backed up.

"What are you?" I blurted out. He glared at me, "I'm an elf."

"Elf?" I furrowed my eyebrows, "Elves don't look like that."

"Oh, so you have seen an elf before?" he asked tilting his head. I opened my mouth to say something, but closed it. I have never seen an elf before, but the way he looked was nothing like I have ever imagined an elf would look like.

"So, have you?"

“No.”

“That's what I thought.” He looked at me up and down, and then grimaced. “And what might *you* be?”

“I'm a human,” I replied. He still looked confused. “Human?”

“Yeah,” I said, “have you never seen a human?”

“Yeah, I have, but I didn't know they were *called* humans. Things like you come here all the time, it's annoying,” he said. My eyes widened. “You see people come here?”

“That's what I just said, didn't I?” he said. I weakly grinned. “Do you happen to know what happens to those people?”

The elf shrugged, not saying any words. He started to walk away, climbing up the tree. “Wait! Where are you going?”

He stopped mid-way up the tree and turned his head to me. “I'm tired, I'm going to sleep. You should too, you look tired,” he started to climb up again. “I am tired, but I have no place to sleep,” I said. He stopped again, now almost on the branch when I first saw him. “I don't know what to tell you,” he said, “Now can I sleep?”

“One more thing,” I said. He groaned, “Make it quick.”

“What's your name?” I asked. He mumbled, “Bugaloo.” I smiled. “Mine is Marlee.” Bugaloo nodded, as if he understood. “Well Marlee, welcome to Willow Woods.” He climbed up the tree completely, and then disappeared into the leaves and branches. I didn't really feel quite welcome, knowing this *was* Willow Woods, but I couldn't help but smile. “Thanks.”

Four

I sat quietly against Bugaloo's tree, playing with the curls of my hair. My surroundings were pitch black, and I couldn't see very far because of the darkness. I hugged my backpack, trying very hard not to cry. I know Dad is at home, worried sick. It had to be about two o'clock in the morning, and I was supposed to be home at eight yesterday. By now, I'd be surprised if he hadn't called the police or something like that.

I heard shuffles up on the tree, and I looked up to see Bugaloo looking down at me.

"You're still here," he said, annoyed, "Why haven't you left?"

"I have no where to go," I said, "and I don't want to sleep out in the open, so I just decided to stay here."

Bugaloo furrowed his eyebrows. "I don't want you to stay out here while I sleep, maybe Harvey will let you stay at his place."

"Harvey?" I didn't like the sound of that. Because when I think of the name Harvey, I think of-

"Yeah, Harvey's Cottage. I'm sure he won't mind, he loves visitors," Bugaloo said. I gasped and quickly shook my head, "I can't stay there!"

"Why not?" he asked.

"I...well...I mean...isn't that place haunted?" Bugaloo's face wasn't easy to read. "Who told you that nonsense? Heavens no it's not haunted. Most welcoming place you could go to around here."

I furrowed my eyebrows, "Really?"

"Sure, I most certainly don't want you here," Bugaloo snorted. I sighed and sat up, brushing the dirt of my clothes. I then looked up at Bugaloo. "I'm tired, let's hurry."

He jumped down from the tree branch onto the ground, and then made a gesture for me to follow him. I walked along with him, staying at least 2 feet in back of him. I know he's not going to hurt me or anything, but his odor could probably be smelt from a mile, and his face was something that wasn't quite pleasant to look at.

As we walked more and more deep in the woods, the more and more I started to worry of where the entrance was so I could get out of here once I found Bailey and Shawn. We made twist and turns all around. The sky was starting to turn yellow, and the sun was barely peeking out the horizon. The tall trees

canopied over Willow Woods like an umbrella, creating a cool shade. I crossed my arms and hugged myself because it was chilly. After walking for another five minutes, in the distance I saw a figure that looked like a cube. A stone path was leading to the cottage, which suddenly appeared from underneath the dirt. The heels of my Converse slid against it from the wet ground, creating a loud squeaking sound. *Squeak, squeak, squeak.* Bugaloo seemed annoyed by this.

As we walked closer, I noticed the spruce wood door, stained glass windows, and a small escape window above the door, where light shined through from inside. I grimaced, hoping this wasn't Harvey's Cottage. But as we got closer and closer, I spotted a sign right of the door, with the words Harvey's Cottage spray-painted in a dark red. Bugaloo balled up his tiny fist, then knocked on the door. We waited for almost ten seconds when the door swung open. My eyes widened and my jaw dropped when I saw who was at the door. *Who is that?!*