

Hear That?

By Sara Miller

It is not abnormal to hear noises in the woods. In fact, I expected it. Wind rattling the leaves, twigs snapping, something moving through the brush was commonplace. It was usually a doe watching you, or a rabbit scurrying away. I was always comforted by those noises, knowing that there was something alive with me in the otherwise quiet forest. So I'm sure you can imagine my surprise when I heard it all go silent.

The sun was just setting, bloodred and beautiful, partially hidden by the trees. I had always enjoyed walking through the woods, even in the dark. As I have said, it never really frightened me. Nightbirds had begun calling, sure to be relentless all night long. Dried leaves that still clutched to the branches of the trees shook in the wind. As I walked, an overwhelming feeling of wrongness overtook me.

I remember feeling something like that when I was young, young enough to still believe in the boogeyman and check beneath my bed before I slept. It felt different, though. Like there was some sort of pressure being exerted on me from the trees I was surrounded by. I would stop every ten yards or so, and look behind me. Then I realized. I'm sure that you have guessed by now.

Silence.

Not one time before had I been in the woods and not heard some sound of life around me. Even when it was very quiet, there was something that broke the blanket of silence. A bluejay, or maybe a mosquito buzzing in my ear. I wanted to turn back, to go back up the trail to where I began. I didn't. It felt childish and foolish, to give into fears like that. Oh, how I wish I had gone back now.

I am still not sure what attacked me. I suppose it could be chalked up to a wolf, or even a feral dog. Although that would seem the most likely story, I don't think that's what happened. A wolf does not hunt alone, and a dog would not cause so much silence. It does not matter, I suppose. Either way, the results are the same.

I think it must have been my screams that led the man that found me to where I laid.

It had pounced on me, from my left. I felt a rip in my skin, from my neck down to around my hip, and only half-heard the horrible noise that came with it. It went as quick as it came, leaving me to bleed out on the ground.

The rest is a blur of screaming, blood, and dimming vision. I can remember the man, he looked so lovely, almost angelic, in that bloodred, sunset light. I remember his voice; the cold, blue light of a phone screen as he yelled at whoever may have been on the other end of the line. I remember, towards the end of it, when the light was growing dim, a siren cutting through the silence. I remember nothing else.

I hope that if you, dear reader, are ever alone in the woods, and feel a *pressure*, a *wrongness*, that you do not ignore that instinct. Where I ended up isn't too bad, but I have no idea where you might go.