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## Movement in the Trees

by Mia Sundby

The ground beneath my feet caved like putty as I hiked, the teeth of my walking boots desperately gripping the stones which jutted out like fangs from the mud to swallow me whole. I grimaced at the thought. I'd been doing that more and more over the last couple of days; my imagination was running away with me. Still, I couldn't help but feel that the land around me was trying to eat me alive.

First, I'd lost a lense cap to a snarling bog I'd crossed --I'd lurched forward with a yelp, the plastic skipping across my numb exposed hands, and had slipped into the bog itself. As my boots had gurgled and filled with foul-smelling water, I'd lost sight of the cap, focusing instead on pulling my leg out. Panic had flooded me as I'd realised I was stuck.

By the time I'd prised my foot loose, shaking and nearly hyperventilating, my leg had \*burned\* as though the top layer of skin had been scoured off. Though that was impossible through my waterproof trousers and my leggings. And the lense cap was lost to the aether. If the aether was a mass of fetid water smelling of farts. Maybe it was.

The image amused me, and I managed to calm myself. Yet, as I stood, my drenched leg still felt wrong, and for a split moment I could have sworn I felt a hand travel up it.

I had whipped around, eyes wide, but I was alone.

Then, my tent had been torn to shreds in a sudden storm. Despite picking what I had thought was a sheltered spot within a copse of twisted trees, I had

awoken in the middle of the night to a howling gale and a person-sized tear in the tent wall.

I don't know why I thought it was person-sized.

It was big, that's all.

Then, as I was gathering the meagre camping contents I had brought with me and trying to figure out how I could patch up the person-sized --\*big\*-- hole, I could have sworn I saw movement in the trees. It was quick but my eyes latched onto it before I had so much as realised I was looking at anything. For that split moment, I thought I saw something stood on hind legs, with long swaying arms, watching me. The hairs on the back of my sweat-sticky, rain-slick neck stood up. Gooseflesh pinched my skin. I stopped breathing.

Just staring.

Something deep down inside of me, something forgotten and feral, \*knew\* that creature. \*Memory believes before knowing remembers.\* It was something my dad used to say, though I'd never understood what it meant until this one moment. In this one clear, fleeting moment, I knew as though someone had shouted it in my ear that I needed to get as far away from that thing in the trees as possible.

Paralysed, I stared. As my brain had attempted to puzzle out what I was staring at, the wind whipped my hair into my face. When I looked back, the creature was gone.

If it \*had\* been a creature, I corrected myself.

I was tired and jumpy and my imagination was running away with me. Besides, despite my father's best efforts and the many camping trips when I was a kid, I was a city girl. I had lived in cities for most of my adult life --what the hell did I know about how trees look in the dark, or if creatures as big as a human stand up on their back legs to stare back at you in the darkness, or if they cut through the thin walls of sleeping campers' tents to breathe down at them as they sleep...

"For fuck's sake, Cam." I hissed to myself, pulling up short. "Enough." Squeezing my eyes shut, I took in a deep, drizzle-damp breath, and sighed heavily. "Take some photos, you idiot, and snap out of it."