

Wendell Beckon

Woods Without a Door

In the forest, we pass each other in silence—watching, thinking we are unseen.



Grandmother always told us to stay away from the lower trails and to avoid them at all cost. "They're dangerous and if they ever have the chance, they might hurt you or take you away," she warned.

They said you could tell when they were around because of a strange smell that lingered. We were told that they would take revenge if any harm was done to them, but heard rumors about hunters taking one from time to time. Nobody knew for sure.

There was a story about a hunter who was said to have taken a young one.

"That caused a lot of trouble," my grandmother said. "Others came around and everyone stayed away from the valley for the rest of the summer." For weeks there were strange noises in the ravine, and their calls echoed with unfamiliar sounds again and again. It made everyone afraid for quite a while.

When we were young, my brother and I were curious about this and would look for them behind the trees. Sometimes I'd leave something out for them. It was a little game, but when our mother found out, she made us stop. We quit doing it for a while, but occasionally left a shiny stone where we thought it would be noticed.



Jessie slung his pellet gun over his left shoulder and said, "Are you coming? Hurry up! I want to be out there when it's still early."

"Do you really think that is going to give us any protection?" I asked.

"Not really! But maybe I can get a grouse or something, and besides, Sasquatches don't know if this is a real gun, so it offers some measure of protection."

It was late morning by the time we reached the elbow in the creek with the burnt out pine tree. I plopped down in the shade while Jessie went to look around. It had rained overnight, and there were bird tracks and footprints of small animals in the mud bank of the creek. The woods were fresh with summer growth—dust, pollen, and bugs floating in the shafts of sunlight that cut through the trees.

When I think back, I often wonder why I wasn't more afraid in those days. The truth is, I felt a bit nervous at times—mostly about running into a bear—but never enough to keep me away. Jess and I believed the stories, having heard enough to be convinced, though we didn't quite know what to think at the same time. As I grew older, my science-minded rationale

made me more skeptical that there was any concern venturing into the forest aside from the usual things.

"Macy? Do you smell that?" Jessie called from behind me.

I heard him walking up but kept reading, knowing the sound of his gait. I raised my nose and took a sniff. "No, only the pines. Why?"

"I smelled a skunk or something near the boulders and wondered if it had come down this way," he said.

"I haven't seen one. Did you find anything?"

"Naw, but I took a shot at a crow sitting on an old teepee I found."

"An old teepee? Where?" I asked.

"Up past the boulders on the ridge near the creek."

"I don't remember seeing that. Can you take me there after lunch?"

"Sure! Whad'dya pack for lunch?" he asked, grabbing the backpack and digging for sandwiches.

"Salmon and chicken salad," I muttered as I walked a few steps, staring up the trail.



My brother was excited to show me his teepee. I was actually impressed, but noticed something odd. It had large branches around the center and smaller ones on the outside, but there wasn't any way to crawl inside. It had no door.

"Why isn't there an opening? There isn't a way to get inside."

"I don't know," he said. *"Didn't notice that."*

It didn't look useful as a shelter because it seemed too close to the creek. I walked around it admiring its construction and replacing a few sticks that had fallen over. I was going to say we should start heading back when I heard a stick crack from down the trail and we both froze. We looked at each other signaling it was time to go.

"We shouldn't stay," I whispered and we quietly made our way back up the path towards home.



I thought the teepee was impressive, standing tall enough for someone to sit inside. It stood out beside the creek but seemed oddly placed and lacked an opening to crawl inside. I wanted to stay longer checking it out, but we got the creeps and decided to leave.

"What *WAS* that?" Jessie asked after walking for a few minutes—listening.

"I don't know. I've never heard such a close wood clack before, have you?"

"No!" he said, as if not wanting to admit the eeriness we both felt.

"You think it was kids? Or teenagers messing around?" I asked.

"I dunno. Kids—maybe. But it seemed weird. I don't really care to know."

"I do. I'm going back tomorrow. It's weird, right? Kids? Really?"

"Teenagers then," he said.

"Yeah, probably. Just trying to scare us."

We didn't talk the rest of the way, but I kept thinking about the sound that came from up the path. It was distinct. Not something I'd imagined an animal doing—and odd enough to make us stop and think about heading home.



We crossed the last cutline as the light was laying low over the trees, casting deep shadows that would soon spread into evening. Mom was waiting and had something for us to eat. We ate and talked quietly.

"I liked the teepee, but it's strange that it doesn't have a door."

"It's not a shelter, I guess," he said.

"I still think it's pretty neat."

Before I fell asleep, I asked, "Why did you knock that tree? We could have been seen."

"Just for fun," he muttered.

I drifted off wondering what they thought of my brother's teepee.

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