

The Veil

Sophia walked into her parents house and closed the door behind her. Loud music was playing from up the stairs in front of her. The heavy guitar riffs and deep guttural screams of Demon Hunter rattled the air waves.

To her right was the living room, where her father was watching television from his chair in the far corner. The fat, bearded man appeared indifferent to his daughter's presence. She never told them when she was coming home, or even where she was going before she left. It was a habit of hers since she realized they were usually indifferent, just as her father was now.

Through the living room, beyond a wide open frame that marked the change from one space to another, was the kitchen. There, her mother sat on a stool with her back turned to the living room so that she faced the stove. Behind her on a small kitchen island sat a plate of warm hotdogs. Her mother continued silently scrolling on her phone while waiting for some macaroni noodles to cook. A fly buzzed around her head, but she did not seem to notice. One strange sound after another from her device, that was at full volume, added to the jarring noise filling the air from both upstairs and the television.

Sophia, already feeling a tightness in her chest, ran upstairs. She swung around into the first room on the right, which was her room, and shut the door behind her. It only did so much to muffle the noise. She sighed. With her back leaned against the door, she slid down until she was seated on the floor. Her date was already over, and she was home.

Golden hour shined through the curtains in her bedroom, just on the other side of her bed from where she sat. It illuminated the dust swirling around in its shimmering beams. The temperature was hot, and the air was stale. It began to feel as though time had moved on and left

her behind in a hazy purgatory. At some point the music stopped and her parents could be heard shouting to their two children to come eat dinner. Sophia opted to stay in her room.

She thought about her date with Isaac. She thought about his handsome face, his wavy black hair, and his deep green eyes. It had been a wonderful day. An escape into a world of goofy characters and events all from the comfort of a reclined seat, holding hands with her boyfriend. Life was good to her when she met him. It was good when she was with him.

When she began to feel better, she stood up and climbed over her bed to open the curtains, but instead of the expected view of her neighborhood, she was met with a bright flash that sent her reeling backward. This began her own personal experience with the soda-like popping, and the beam of light. Visions danced in her head of fascinating foreign places, and the voice spoke to her as it did to Isaac, “Many are called, few answer.”

Sophia laid back for a moment on her bedroom floor. The strange revelation she had just experienced left her in a state of shock. So much so that it took an hour for her to realize the unusual silence in the house. By that time, it had also gotten dim outside. She wandered downstairs to investigate the quiet, finding her father and mother watching a show about alien hunting together at an unusually reasonable volume. They did not notice her peering over the banister beside the television. They only stared at the glowing colors. This created a shift in mood for Sophia. Something was wrong. She even thought she saw food still hanging in the corner of her fathers mouth.

“What are you doing?” Asked a deep voice behind her.

“Duke!” She started, and turned to her brother, “Don’t scare me like that!” She looked back at her parents who had still not moved.

The brawny young man patted her head, “Whatever you say Soph. I’m going to the gym. You missed dinner.”

“What did you eat?” Her eyes were still trained on their parents who seemed oblivious to their conversation only fifteen feet away.

“Mom made hot dogs and mac n cheese, but I’m cutting so I just had some carrots and a protein shake,” He brushed his brown hair back with his hand and slipped an old stained ball cap over the top of his head. He looked like a young version of their father, “Don’t stay up too late. I might be out with the guys tonight. We’ve got a match this weekend so we’re probably going to get some rounds in on the mat. Coach left the gym unlocked. So that’s where I’ll be if you need me,” He gave a concerned look to their parents and sighed, then left out the door. A small fly zipped out with him as it shut.

“Thanks,” She nodded and walked back up to her room.

She watched Duke’s car roll down the street from her side of the house. Above him she looked up to the rooftops of their large suburban neighborhood, and then the horizon. That is when she noticed something that surprised her. A chill ran down her spine. There was a wave of ripples rising up from the faraway tree line at the edge of the neighborhood, like heat waves off of a hot grill. She wondered if it was a large fire, yet there were no signs of flames or smoke. It was silent, and had appeared to have gone unnoticed by the outside world.

The tree line had once been a place where her and other children from the neighborhood played. A place where they slayed dragons, hid from monsters, and hunted mythical creatures. Once, her and her brother camped out there. She remembered vividly how the owls hooted, and crickets played their songs. She still had a scar on her right leg from that trip when she fell onto a long thorny branch that had fallen from one of the trees that grew out there. Those thorns were

the reason they called it “Spike Woods”. It was a sacred place where the joy of many childhoods had developed. Sweet memories permeated the very soil. To anyone who had not grown up here, it was just a piece of scenery separating the neighborhood from the mall on the other side, but to her it was a place of distant memories now unearthed by a strange mirage. Sophia felt drawn to it.

“I have to go. I need to know what that is,” She said to herself, and pulled out her phone to text her friend Margot.

Hey, have you seen that thing over spike woods?

OMG I thought I was going CRAZY! Are we going??

You know it

GIRL IM PUMPED ITS BEEN TOO LONG

Sophia stared at the message for a moment, realizing now that she had neglected her close friend since meeting Isaac. A friend who was once joined at her hip and that was now ready to join her at a moment's notice. It made her think about her parents downstairs who had not spoken directly to her in almost two days, “I’ll do better,” She told herself.

Girl, me too! I’ll see you soon

She tied up her hair, put on her boots, and packed a backpack with some camping supplies. Something was telling her that this could take longer than expected.

An hour later, Margot pulled into the driveway. She was slightly taller than Sophia, with an oval shaped face and brown hair, and she was wearing overalls and boots.

Sophia climbed into the small Ford Focus and looked again at her home.

“You ready to go?” Margot asked.

She considered her answer carefully, “Without a doubt,” The strange feeling radiating from Spike Woods was like a weight on her chest. Her stomach turned and left her feeling uneasy.

Without another word, the two friends cranked up their music and took off down the road. Dolly Parton’s “Jolene” blared through the speakers. Within a few short minutes, they were parked at the end of an unfinished street that pointed straight into the woods. The first thing that they noticed was that everything was silent. Not even a bird was singing.

“Spooky,” Margot grinned with uncontained excitement, “Did you see the weird talking light?”

“Yeah,” Sophia gave her friend a goofy nervous smile, and they both chuckled.

They exited the car, and as they wandered through the trees, dodging long thorns and carefully sidestepping poison ivy, the two were becoming more and more aware of the silence between them. Soon, even the sound of their own footsteps became almost completely muted. This happened soon before they noticed the wall appear in front of them.

Sophia looked to Margot, who looked back at her. Colors began to burn brighter. Margot’s eyes went from mossy green to jade, and then to a bright lime color. Her visage began to wriggle as it was pulled into the wall of rippling light. Sophia could see her trying to scream but there was no sound. Paralysis struck, and there was no escape. A strange gravitational pull sucked them both into the wave.

Duke stepped out of the gym. Heat still radiated from his body even after showering. His friends Howie and Ron sat on the tailgate of Ron’s truck.

“Hey Duke!” Howie shouted excitedly, “You coming with us tonight?”

“No, I don’t think so. I gotta check on my sister,” He continued on his way to his car, putting his white ball cap back on his head.

Ron piped up, “Misty is supposed to be at the bonfire tonight.”

Duke stopped.

Howie smiled, “You don’t even have to stick around too long man. Show your face, and say hi.”

Duke looked at the two of them, “Alright, but just like fifteen minutes. Don’t forget we need to be ready for this weekend,” He pointed at Howie, “No smoking.”

Howie responded silently with both hands up in feigned innocence. A broad smile spread across his thin face.

The three left the school and drove out to the trailer park across the highway from Duke’s neighborhood, where some others were already sitting around a fire. The boys danced goofily to a unique mix of country and rap music. Even Duke cracked a smile when Howie lit his pants on fire as he tried to flip over the flames. A young girl started approaching him with a calm demeanor and stoic confidence. She had shoulder length blonde hair, and a broad smile that made his heart skip.

“Hey Duke, I see you brought the whole circus with you,” She stated as she parked herself firmly at his side. Her eyes trailed over to the fire.

“Well Misty, the circus actually brought me this time,” He replied, looking deep into the embers of the fire.

The two stood quietly side by side for a minute. Duke became lost in thought. The glow of the fire reminded him of the strange light he witnessed today. In it, he thought he heard a voice. The hazy sounds had told him something, he thought, but he could not remember what.

The memory had been almost completely lost to him already. Then suddenly he became aware of Misty speaking to him.

“So, how are you feeling about this weekend?”

He did not know how long she had been speaking, “Sorry, I-”

She placed a hand on his arm to stop him, “No, no. I should know by now how focused you get on weeks like this. It’s a big year for you, and I know you want that scholarship at all costs.”

“Well, not all prices are worth paying,” He said, immediately realizing what a strange thing it was to say, and changed the subject, “What about you? Still want to be a nurse?”

“So far that’s the plan,” She stopped there, realizing this conversation was going nowhere. Duke was hardly an accessible man, and his last statement was a little weird to her.

Suddenly, a voice burst forth, “Help!” It cried. He recognized the tone. It was his sister, Sophia. The hair on the back of his neck stood up. He looked around frantically for her, but she was nowhere to be seen and nobody else acted as if they had heard anything.

“What’s wrong?” Asked Misty, “You’re pale. Is everything ok?”

“Misty, did you hear anything just now?” He frantically checked his phone for some answer.

“No, did your phone go off?” She looked at him with a puzzled expression. It was unprecedented to see him in such a state.

“I think my sister needs me,” He put his phone back in his pocket and quickly made his way to the car.

Misty followed, “Then I’ll come with you.”

Duke knew better than to argue with her and opened the passenger side for her. After climbing in, he looked instinctively at Spike Woods. Something was drawing him there. He felt the voice of his sister there. Like ripples that reverberated through the air space. He knew she was there.