

11 A.M. IN CAMDEN

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11 a.m. in Camden, Maine was bouncing in the back of my cousin's best friend's pickup that was far too abrasive for him to be driving. Expletives were unapologetically roaring from the radio and dissolving in the tepid air with the windows fully down to make sure everyone around us knew we weren't afraid to say fuck. As the rap songs wore on, the juxtaposition of someone as callow-looking as Judah singing about banging hookers and smoking pot became more and more amusing. It reminded me of the way kids would echo curse words like new school vocabulary — and I had to fight the urge to giggle all the way there.

When we arrived at the creek, we were dried out and dirt-speckled from the droplets of gravel that hit us during our drive. As advertised, a small creek snaked through a garden of birches before emptying out into a tiny lake. Two wizened oaks guarded the mouth of the water, stout and solid like the Royal guardsmen. A couple toddlers splashed around in rain boots and threw clumps of confetti into the air.

“So this is really it?” I asked dubiously. “This is

where you guys hang out?”

“More or less,” My cousin Owen said. “It’s where we kill time before the *real* fun starts.”

There was an eclipse of madness behind his face as he spoke, and his mouth pulled into a crooked smirk. From that description alone I imagined the creek to transform into some harlequin horror land the moment the sun went down — bare branches would turn into spears, spiders would hang from their leaves like acrobats, and the boys would take their brambled thrones on innocent tree stumps. With a couple war wounds and mud masks, they could be the protagonists of *Where The Wild Things Are*.

“What should we do first?”

“You wanna climb Old Haggard?”

Owen threw his hands in the air at the mention of that.

“Beam me up, Scotty!” He cried.

The three of us scaled a menacing pitchfork at the bend of the creek and settled in the highest crooks that could hold our weight. Owen, being the competitive spirit that he was, felt it obligatory to climb one extra rung, just to rule the world. As the boys bickered over who could climb the fastest, I closed my eyes and became one with nature.

Without anything visual to focus on, I found

myself thinking about how good the wind felt sluicing through the leaves and the way my feet could sway so freely. It had been a good ten years since I'd climbed a tree, at the very least. So many childhood hobbies are quickly killed by adolescence.

Being around Owen and Judah again (for the first time since starting my senior year) was so magnetic that being alone felt horribly empty, but perhaps that was just the curse of nostalgia. Even so, all I wanted to do was skip rocks, and rock bars, and bar authority all summer long.