

WHAT WE CAN'T SEE

Monday, March 22nd

Dominic and Jaxson, the best friend duo, were walking home from school like they always did. Every day after school, they stopped by Mr. and Mrs. Lance's corner store to grab two essentials: Arizona Teas and Sour Gummy Worms. It had become a sacred ritual since fourth grade, a way to wind down after long school days. By now, Mrs. Lance had their order ready before they even stepped through the door. She was practically family, always asking about their day or slipping in extra candy when they weren't looking. Today was no different.

"Hey, Jaxson!" Dominic called as they met up in the courtyard.

"Dom! What's up?" Jaxson's grin was as wide as ever, the kind that could light up the duller days.

"I had the worst day," Dominic groaned, his shoulders slumped. "I swear, Mr. Webb's class is straight from hell."

"Lucky I don't have him," Jaxson said, shaking his head. "That guy's such a hardass."

"He's worse than that. I swear he's out to get me. Every day, it's like he's waiting for me to mess up."

"Sounds like you just gotta outsmart him." Jaxson elbowed Dominic playfully. "Maybe next time, hit him with one of those 'unanswerable questions.' Teachers hate that."

"Unanswerable? In Webb's class? He'd just throw more homework at me."

They reached the corner store, chatting easily as always. Dominic, despite his frustration, was at ease now—this was their space, their routine. They grabbed their usuals, thanking Mrs. Lance, who waved them off with a smile. The day, though exhausting, was just like any other.

But as they left the store and started toward Dominic's house, passing the familiar stretch of sidewalk that ran parallel to the woods, something shifted. The late afternoon sun was casting long shadows over the trees, and the air felt just a bit heavier than before.

Dominic's pace slowed. His eyes flicked toward the tree line.

Jaxson didn't notice at first, rattling on about some mod he was working on, until Dominic stopped dead in his tracks.

"Did you see that?" Dominic's voice was tight, his eyes locked on something deep in the woods.

Jaxson squinted, glancing toward the trees. "See what?"

“I don’t know... Thought I saw something. A deer or something.” Dominic tried to shake it off, but his voice was off, a hint of unease creeping in.

Jaxson, sensing the tension, gave Dominic a sidelong look. “You sure? You’ve been acting weird ever since we got out here.”

“I’m fine.” Dominic forced a smile, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Probably just nothing.”

They kept walking, but the easy flow of conversation had stalled. Dominic was quieter now, distracted. His gaze kept drifting back toward the woods, like he was expecting something—or someone—to be watching them.

By the time they reached Dominic’s house, the usual handshake felt rushed, the energy between them different.

“You good, man?” Jaxson asked, eyebrows knit with concern.

“Yeah... just tired,” Dominic said, the words hollow.

Jaxson gave him one last look before heading off, the unease creeping into his own mind. But he shrugged it off. Dominic had his off days sometimes. No big deal.

Once inside, Dominic headed straight to his room. He tossed his backpack aside and tried to focus on homework, but his mind kept replaying the moment by the woods. What had he seen? A deer? No, it felt... wrong. Like something darker. *But what?*

The thought dug at him, and the more he tried to push it away, the more it clawed back. His unease followed him into sleep, and that’s when the dream came.

He was back in the woods, but they didn’t feel threatening this time. The air was clean, the trees swaying gently in the breeze. It was peaceful, calming. He walked deeper, drawn to something—he wasn’t sure what—until he stumbled upon a lake. The water shimmered, a cloudy blue under a golden sky. The sand on the shore was pristine, whiter than any snow. There was no sound, no movement. Just stillness.

Dominic felt himself relax. He walked along the edge of the lake, dipping his toes in the cool water. *This place... it’s perfect.*

But then the light shifted. The golden sky darkened, turning red, the calm lake churning as the air thickened. The trees at the far edge of the lake grew denser, twisted. The peaceful serenity morphed into something heavier, suffocating. The ground beneath his feet was cracked and dry.

Then he saw it—standing just beyond the trees. A figure, tall and black, eyes glowing crimson.

“Dominic...”

The voice slithered through the air, deep and twisted, barely human. “Come home, Dominic.”

Panic surged through him. He spun, running back toward the lake, but it wasn't the same. The water had turned thick and black, and the once-white sand was charred, ashen. He stumbled, desperately looking for a way out.

Then the whispers came. Shadows slipped from the trees, eyes glowing like the figure's. They circled him, their voices low and twisted.

"We can free you," they said in unison, their words distorted.

Dominic jolted awake, gasping for breath, drenched in sweat. The clock on his nightstand blinked **2:00 a.m.** His heart pounded in his chest as his eyes darted around the room. It was just a dream. But something pulled his gaze toward the window.

He didn't want to look, but he couldn't help it. His body moved on its own.

And there, just beyond the trees in the distance, he saw them—red eyes, watching him from the darkness.

He didn't sleep for the rest of the night.

Tuesday, March 23rd

The next morning, Dominic trudged to school, eyes heavy, nerves shot. Every step he took felt like walking through a fog, and he couldn't stop glancing toward the woods, half-expecting to see those eyes again.

When he met up with Jaxson, he tried to act normal, but it was impossible. Jaxson picked up on it immediately.

"Hey, man, you good? You look like death."

"I'm fine," Dominic muttered, eyes flicking toward the treeline again.

Jaxson frowned. "You've been acting weird since yesterday. Did something happen?"

"No. Just didn't sleep well." Dominic forced a laugh, but even he didn't believe it.

The day passed in a blur. Dominic couldn't focus. He couldn't stop thinking about the eyes. The creature. He saw it again during lunch, standing just at the edge of the soccer field, looming tall with those glowing eyes. No one else seemed to notice, no one looked twice.

How can they not see it?

By the time the final bell rang, Dominic's nerves were shot. He tried to leave school without drawing attention, but Jaxson caught up to him as they headed toward the corner store.

“Dom, what’s up with you? You’re not yourself.”

Dominic stayed quiet, his thoughts a tangled mess. They went through the motions—grabbing their usuals from Mrs. Lance—but Jaxson couldn’t shake the feeling that something was seriously wrong.

As they left the store, the sky darkened prematurely, clouds rolling in, casting eerie shadows over the woods. When they reached the stretch of sidewalk by the trees, Dominic froze, his body rigid, his gaze locked on the dense forest.

Jaxson stopped beside him, worry deepening. “Dom? What are you looking at?”

Dominic didn’t respond. His face had gone pale, and a single tear slid down his cheek. Jaxson had never seen him cry before—*never*.

“Dude,” Jaxson nudged him. “Snap out of it.”

Dominic blinked, his focus returning, but he wiped his face quickly, embarrassed. “Sorry. Zoned out.”

But Jaxson didn’t believe it for a second.

That night, Dominic’s parents found his bed empty. His window was open, the curtains fluttering softly in the breeze. By morning, missing posters with his face plastered the town.

Thursday, March 25th

The rumors started quickly. People talked about cults, skinwalkers, devil worship, anything to explain why Dominic had vanished. The police had a simpler explanation—some drifter, an easy target.

Jaxson didn’t care. All he knew was that Dominic was gone, and something in his gut told him the woods had something to do with it. Every day since Dominic’s disappearance, Jaxson kept their tradition alive. He’d go to the corner store, buy an Arizona and gummy worms, and leave them at the memorial in the woods, where Dominic’s body was eventually found.

But today was different.

Jaxson knelt at the memorial, setting down the tea and candy, when he saw it—just out of the corner of his eye. A figure, standing near the trees.

It was Dominic.

His heart leapt, hope flooding his chest. “Dom?” he whispered.

But as soon as he blinked, the figure was gone. The air around him grew cold, and his heart raced.

Then he heard it: a voice, faint but unmistakable, carried on the wind.

“Jaxson...”

Jaxson froze, his breath catching in his throat. He glanced toward the woods, half expecting Dominic to step out from the shadows. But no one was there. The figure—his friend—had vanished.

The air thickened, and the trees seemed to close in, casting long shadows over the path. Jaxson’s heart pounded in his chest, a cold sweat creeping down his neck. He backed away slowly, his mind racing. Was it really Dominic? Or something else? Something from the woods that had taken his friend?

"Come home, Jaxson."

The voice whispered again, soft but insistent, twisting his name in a way that felt wrong. It wasn’t Dominic’s voice anymore. There was something darker behind it, something that made the hair on the back of Jaxson’s neck stand on end.

He turned and ran, his feet pounding the pavement, the trees blurring past him. His mind screamed at him to stop, to go back, to find Dominic. But something deeper—some primal fear—told him to keep running. He didn’t stop until he was back at his house, his lungs burning, his heart hammering.

That night, Jaxson barely slept. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw Dominic’s face, pale and distant, standing at the edge of the woods. But it wasn’t really Dominic. It couldn’t be. Whatever had taken him was something else, something that wore his face like a mask.

Friday, March 26th

Jaxson avoided the woods the next day. He didn’t stop by the memorial. He didn’t buy the Arizona or the gummy worms. He kept his head down, trying to act like everything was normal. But the whispers followed him. He could hear them, just on the edge of his consciousness, every time he passed the woods on his way home.

“Come home, Jaxson...”

By the time the weekend rolled around, Jaxson couldn’t take it anymore. He had to know. He had to find out what had really happened to Dominic.

That Saturday, Jaxson went back to the woods.

He stood at the edge of the tree line, his heart pounding, his breath shallow. The air was cold, colder than it should have been for late March. The sun was low, casting an eerie golden light over the path ahead.

“Dominic?” he called out, his voice trembling. “Dom, if you’re out there...”

Silence.

He took a step forward, then another, until he was deep within the woods. The trees towered above him, their branches twisting together like skeletal hands. The further he went, the darker it became, until the world around him was a maze of shadows.

Then, just ahead, he saw it: the lake from Dominic’s dream.

The water was dark, almost black, reflecting the blood-red sky. The sand, once pristine white, was now charred, as though a fire had swept through and burned everything in its path. And standing at the water’s edge was Dominic.

“Dom!” Jaxson’s voice cracked as he ran toward him.

But as he got closer, he stopped short. Something was wrong.

Dominic turned slowly, his eyes glowing red, his face twisted in a grotesque, unnatural smile.

“Jaxson... You should have stayed away.”

Jaxson stumbled back, his heart racing, the world spinning around him. This wasn’t his friend. This was something else—something ancient, something evil, that had taken Dominic’s form.

The figure stepped forward, the ground cracking beneath its feet, its voice low and distorted.

“We can free you too. Just come closer...”

Jaxson turned and ran, his breath coming in ragged gasps, his legs burning as he sprinted through the trees. The whispers grew louder, filling the air around him, pulling at his mind, trying to drag him back.

But he didn’t stop. Not until he was back on the sidewalk, back in the world of sunlight and safety. Jaxson never spoke about what he saw in the woods. Not to anyone. The town moved on, the missing posters of Dominic slowly taken down. But Jaxson knew the truth. Dominic wasn’t gone—at least, not in the way people thought. He was still out there, somewhere, in those woods. Watching. Waiting. The woods had taken him. And they wanted more.