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## **The Lake**

"It wasn't a bear attack!" Joe yelled stubbornly. His mother sighed, "Alright. I believe you, now get in the car before we're late."

"I'm not going," said Joe undoing his tie.

"I know you're upset, but you can't miss Adam's funeral," she demanded.

His dad looked away from his phone and watched his son sympathetically. "Why don't we give him a break? His twin brother just died."

"Fine," she said reluctantly, "but stay in your room. We'll be back soon."

Joe went to his room, feeling grateful that his dad managed to convince his mom to let him stay. He sat on his bed, holding a crumpled, blood-stained picture and trying desperately to figure out what happened to his brother. Adam had been missing for four months. The police had stopped searching for him, and his parents had accepted that he had just run away from home. This seemed possible considering his past behavior. Although they were twins, Joe was much more reserved and obedient while Adam was more adventurous and energetic. He was never satisfied with his room's confinements and snuck out with his friends every chance he got. Joe refused to go with him, but Adam always trusted him to keep his secrets because, despite their differences, they were very close. This is why when Adam didn't return any of his calls or texts, Joe got suspicious.

A week ago, Joe decided to take a walk to the small lake about half a mile behind his house where he and his brother often went to go swimming. He sat on a rock looking at the water when the lake started bubbling violently. He jumped back and watched until it stopped suddenly, and the mangled body of a teenage boy came up to the surface. There was blood all over his torn, dirty clothes and deep cuts all over his body that made Joe wince in disgust when he saw some bone jutting out of his skin. Joe reached for his phone to call the police but paused when he caught a glimpse of a small piece of paper crushed in his right fist. He carefully took it and noticed a star-shaped tattoo on the boy's wrist that looked exactly like the one Adam had gotten a year ago. He opened up the paper piece to find that it was a picture of him and his brother and ran toward his house, realizing that the boy was Adam.

After a couple of minutes, Joe stood up, stuffed the picture in his pocket, and walked downstairs. He was about to go to the lake again for the third time since he found his brother, but when he remembered his mom telling him to stay in his room, he sat down in the kitchen. He sat there for a while and finally thought, "She would never know. It wouldn't even take an hour," so he grabbed a snack and left through the back door.

When he got to the lake, he sat on the same rock, looking out over the lake and eating his chips. He had already walked around the lake at least ten times searching for signs of what happened to Adam, but when he finished his chips, he got up and started walking again. Although there were no footprints, paw prints, or blood trails, the police had decided that the most logical explanation was a bear attack, but Joe knew that Adam never went out in the woods without a friend, and none of his friends knew anything about where he was before he was found. When Joe was on his second lap halfway around the lake, the water started bubbling again. He stepped back, half scared and half excited for answers, and waited as if expecting another body to appear. He waited for about five minutes, and when the bubbling didn't stop, he pulled up the legs of his dress pants and strolled into the water. He got to where the bubbling was, a part of the lake that was too deep for him to stand, and looked around while treading water. When his legs got tired, he started swimming for the shore, disappointed that he couldn't find anything, but then the water started pulling him down. He struggled for about a minute, thinking that the same thing that happened to his brother was about to happen to him, and when he accepted that he wouldn't be able to get out of the lake, he let himself be dragged down to the bottom.

Joe woke up a couple of hours later on the lake's shore and was very surprised to find that he wasn't dead. He sat up and looked around his body for cuts or bruises, but all he could see was some swelling around his ankles. When

he realized that his parents were probably back, he grabbed his shoes and started towards his house.

Joe came back through the back door and almost immediately heard his mom shouting, "Where were you? And how did your nice clothes get so dirty?" He looked up to reply but froze when he saw his brother leaning against the countertop with a giant smirk on his face. He dropped his shoes and ran to hug Adam.

"Get off me! You're getting mud everywhere!" he yelled. Their parents were so confused that they waited a few minutes before prying the two apart.

"I thought you died," said Joe, still in shock.

"Going to the grocery store?" Adam replied while laughing. "Why are you acting so weird today?"

"What? I'm just messing with you, dude. Come on, let's go change before dinner." Joe had no idea how his brother had suddenly come back from the dead, but he wasn't about to complain.

"Why are you wearing your nice clothes, anyway?" Adam asked as they were going up the stairs.

"I was going to your funeral." Adam stopped for a moment to process what he heard, then shrugged and continued to his room.

Joe and Adam had separate rooms on opposite sides of a hallway and shared a bathroom at the end of it. Both of them were pretty messy and always had trash and dirty clothes all over their small rooms, and their parents had given up trying to make them clean up. Unable to find a pair of clean shorts, Joe just changed his shirt and went down with his brother to eat.

The next morning, Joe woke up and headed for the bathroom. When it was locked, he started banging on the door because he thought it was jammed, but then he heard a voice inside. It's been so long since he's had to share his bathroom with his brother that he had forgotten the pain of fighting over who would get to use it first. After some arguing, he accepted his defeat and decided to go and see if Adam's room had changed at all. He looked around and saw that everything was the same as it was before except a trunk in the corner of his closet that he had never seen before. It was small and black with a silver lock in the front. Joe bent down to get a closer look, but Adam came out of the bathroom right before he could touch it, yelling at him to get him a towel.

After they had eaten and washed up, Joe suggested that they go hang out with some friends, but Adam said he was busy.

"Busy with what? The school doesn't start for another month," said Joe.

"Summer work," Adam replied.

Over the next couple of weeks, Adam continued to lock himself in his room and avoid other people, but Joe was so happy to have his brother back that he didn't question this. Then he began wondering how doing summer work could take so long, so one day, when he saw Adam leave his room to get food, he went to see what he had been doing in his place. He looked on his desk and in all of his drawers to find anything that didn't belong there, but there wasn't anything that he hadn't seen before. Then, as he heard Adam coming up the stairs, he saw the black trunk from a couple of weeks ago in his closet with the key still in the lock. He took the key and snuck back into his room right before Adam could reach the top of the stairs.

Later that night, Joe cracked his door open and waited for Adam to leave his room again so he could go and open the trunk. He waited for almost three hours, and right before he was about to quit and go to sleep, he saw Adam come out. He peeked his head out of his door, and after Adam was out of sight, he crept to his room with the key in his hand and opened his closet door to find that the trunk was missing. He sat there in confusion for a little while until he felt something hit the back of his head, and he was knocked out.

Joe woke up on Adam's bed and started to get up when he heard Adam on his desk chair, "Where's the key?" he asked calmly.

Joe noticed that the key wasn't in his hands or his pocket, and without turning his head, he saw that it was still on the floor of the closet.

"Why? What's in the box?" he replied, pointing to the trunk behind Adam.

"You don't need to know," he said while standing up.

Joe stared at him, angrily and said, "You've changed Adam. You always used to want to hang out and do anything but sit at home, but you've been locked up in your room for almost four weeks doing 'summer work.' This is our last year here. We should be having fun."

Adam paused and then started walking towards the door, "You're right. I just had some things to take care of.

Tomorrow we'll go out and do something. We should go to sleep; it's getting late."

Joe, satisfied with this, started for the door too, but when Adam reached for the door handle, he grabbed his wrist and turned it.

"Where's your tattoo?" Joe asked suspiciously.

"My what?" said Adam nervously. The two stopped and stared at each other, and out of nowhere, Adam swung his fist at Joe.

"What are you doing?" Joe yelled after ducking.

Adam said nothing and charged towards him. Joe pushed him down while sidestepping, grabbed the key off the floor, and ran to the box. He saw Adam get up while he was opening it and thought, "Please be pepper spray. Please be pepper spray." He opened the box and found a small knife with a worn leather handle and a thick blade with a jagged edge.

He picked it up and noticed that Adam had calmed down. "I'm not gonna hurt you, Adam, just tell me what's going on," he whispered as he backed against the window, slowly opening it.

Adam looked up and made it seem like he would speak, but instead, he ran at Joe. Joe, thinking that he would instead fall two stories, let his furious and irrational brother have a knife, and jumped out of the window. As he was falling, Adam grabbed him by his left hand, and Joe looked up.

"Adam, I don't know what's wrong with you, but let's just calm down, alright?" he pleaded. They looked at each other until Adam began to smile. His eyes and nose slowly sank into his face, and his teeth grew sharper and longer. Joe noticed the grass around him wither and the leaves on the trees falling.

"What are you?" he asked, his eyes wide with fear.

"I'm Adam," it replied as it changed back to look like Adam.

Joe yelled, "What did you do to my brother?" while holding back tears.

"You're about to find out," it said with a disturbing smile. It started pulling Joe up by his hand, but as soon as he felt pressure on his hand, the image of what was left of his dead brother flashed in his mind, and he cut his left hand off at the wrist with the knife he was clutching in his right. He screamed in agony as he fell, but he ignored the pain and started running.

He ran without purpose, looking back over his shoulder every couple of seconds until he found himself ago at the lake where he found his brother's dead body. He sat on a rock, looking down at his arm. Not thinking he could lose any more blood than he already had, he let it rest and looked up. Joe started scrambling at the sight of the creature staring at him from across the lake.

"There's nowhere to go, Joe," it yelled, "you're gonna suffer like Adam."

Joe yelled back, "Don't say his name." He tried to act determined, but he was about to give up. He had almost no strength left, and his head was getting very light from dehydration and all of the lost blood. He saw the creature laughing while walking around the lake and started to accept what was coming. Then, he heard something in the lake and looked over. It was beginning to bubble. He saw that Adam's clone had noticed it too and had stopped laughing and started to run towards Joe. Without thinking, Joe jumped in and swam towards the bubbles. He could feel himself being dragged down, and this time, he didn't resist. He passed out, and the last thing he heard was incoherent shouts of frustration from the surface.

Joe woke up in a hospital bed with his arm wrapped up and his parents asking a hundred questions each, but the first thing that he thought was that he had to warn them.

He sat up quickly and asked, "Where's Adam?" in a panicked voice.

His parents looked at each other and then down at him very confused, "He died, Joe. Don't you remember?"

"Oh. Yeah, I must've forgotten," he said. He laid back down very relieved, and for the first time since he found him, he was happy that Adam was gone.