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The Nightmare

In the dead of the night, clouds gray and green like smoke and gas loomed over the town of Sharon. Lightning struck wicked streaks across the sky. The wind blew angrily through the trees, breaking the ones too weak and brittle to hold firm. The town folk were nestled in their homes safe and sound as this storm danced through with its war drums and orchestra.

Lake Wonder bubbled, in the middle of it all, as a dark horse rose from the depths. Its fish-like tail came up and slammed down with a crash as thunder rattled the sky. It crawled to the banks as its hooves reached the shore. They transformed into delicate hands that grasped and clawed at the mud and sand. A woman pushed herself from the ground, she shook and contorted from the dark form she once had. Her eyes glowed blue like the lightening that crackled across the sky. She stared at a ranch that sat an acre away from the lake, *grinned sadistically*.

###

Travis, *a rugged boy with messy, dusty brown hair*, sat on the edge of the lake, a small fire flickered as he and his friend, Derek, entertained two girls. *Travis wore torn blue jeans and a green flannel, his brown work boots sat next to him with his socks that stuck out the inside of one boot.*

Derek was built like a brick house, bulky from years of peewee and high school football. His eyes looked like gold as they shown in the fire light. The two boys had been long time best friends, they had gone to the same small school. Living close by Derek was always in walking

distance to Travis' home. There was never a time the two weren't together. They were best friends till the end.

Derek stood from where he sat and picked up a stone from the ground. He played with its smooth texture as he examined it. With a shrug he tossed the stone across the water, it had skipped a few times and sunk.

"It's so cool that you get to work and live with horses," Juliet, a red headed girl, said.

"Yeah if he weren't so scared of 'em," Derek had said with a snort.

"Why don't you like horses?" asked Emma, her perfectly shaped eyebrow perked up.

Derek pivoted on his heel as he started to speak, "When he was six, he thought it would be a great idea during a game of hide and seek with me and his sister to hide in a horses stall."

Both of the girls gave Derek their full attention as Travis looked down to the ground.

"He royally pissed off one of the horses because it kicked him square in the ches—"

"Shut it dude!" Travis interrupted with a glare. "It wasn't only that, that whole week my life was a wreck," he continued his face sullen.

"What happened?" asked Juliet, as she turned to face Travis.

"Hey guys, he just doesn't like horses," Emma said as she scooted closer to Travis.

Travis looked out to the lake and let out a sigh. "My dad, he uh, killed himself out here," His voice was hushed as he spoke.

Derek walked over to Travis and placed his hand on his shoulder. "Man, I'm sorry, I forgot about that part."

Emma placed her head on Travis' shoulder. "How about we hear the story you were going to tell us instead?"

"Yeah, okay," Travis said as he cleared his throat. "My family were one of the first families to settle here in Sharon." He stood up and added another log to the fire. "My pop-pop and mammy bought this land with every last penny they had. There is more but my mammy doesn't talk about it."

"My family was also one of the first settlers here and they worked together to build the town of Sharon," Derek added.

"That's nice but how about a scary story?" Juliet asked. "Like isn't there any urban legends around here?"

Derek and Travis snorted as Travis answered, "No, the most horrendous thing that happens here is that we have to have a fence around our lake and property to keep people from killing themselves in the lake."

"So, your lake is a suicide spot?" asked Emma.

Travis shook his head, "Years ago, before I was even born, all the fish died. They tried cleaning it up but came back with some microorganism or something." Travis sat back down next to Emma and continued. "That's why we can't swim or fish here anymore."

The group fell silent, horses brayed in the distance.

A noise came from the lake that sounded as if someone were in it, the four teens jumped as another noise came from behind them.

"Derek did you throw another rock?" Travis asked.

Derek sat across from him and shook his head a glimpse of fear crossed his face.

A silhouette treaded towards them, it grew larger as it approached. It stood on two legs with antlers that stuck out from its head.

The group trembled in terror as there were suddenly no other noises around them.

Another splash came from the water as Travis jerked his head towards the lake but only saw ripples. He stood up and grabbed the stick he had been using to stir the embers. As he reeled it back the silhouette came closer. "Who's there!"

"Travis," a female voice bellowed. "Put that stick down before you poke someone's eye out!" Sophie came into the light of the fire. She was covered with straw and twigs decorated her hair.

"Oh, crap, it's just you," Travis said as he let out a breath.

"Yep, *and* mom wants you to come in we have company comin' in tomorrow," Sophie demanded and walked away.

Travis let out a sigh as he stood up and poured a bucket of water from the lake over the fire. "Derek could you get them home?" He asked.

"Yeah, no problem, see ya later, do ya mind if we stick around here for a bit just to make sure the fire is out?" Asked Derek.

Travis nodded and waved as he started for his house.

####

Lake Wonder shimmered in the distance; the fire Travis had put out before he left was ablaze again. Travis stood statuesque at the edge of his back porch confused as to why his friends were still there. He watched as his friends splashed and played in the lake.

"Travis, come on over here dude," Derek hollered.

Travis smiled, *he attempted to walk forward but found that he couldn't budge even an inch.*

Juliet and Emma called *for him, but their voices seemed wrong, they sounded like they were under water.*

A chill crept along his spine, it felt *slick* and moist as it slithered up his spine. Two delicate pale hands crossed over his shoulders as they caressed him.

"Come to me," a female voice whispered.

He went to turn towards what it was, but the hands forced him to face forward.

Forced to watch his friends swim and prance in the lake. *His face fell in terror as he attempted to scream for them to get out of the lake. All* he could see was black horse make its way towards them. It didn't look like a normal horse; it had a tail like a fish or mermaid. Its eyes were an electric blue. Travis watched as his friends started to play with the horse. Still they called out for him. The horse started to escort them deeper into the water.

Terrified he tried *again* to scream out *to* them, but no sound left his lips, only a gurgling sound like he was under water.

The horse's fishlike tale rose up and smacked the surface and a flash of lightning crashed. When the light had cleared his friends and the horse were gone. Only their voices remained as they beckoned for Travis to come to the lake. The voices became louder and *more* disoriented. The noise deafened him as he clasped his ears and fell to his knees.

The female voice whispered again; this time he could feel cold, clammy skin touch his cheek as it spoke. "Come to me Travis."

####

Travis shot up as he gasped for air, he clasped his chest, and sucked in a breath. He looked out his window towards the lake and saw nothing there. No trace of the girls or Derek. There wasn't smoke from the fire and everything seemed as it should.

The morning sun hung low as it reflected its brilliant light across the lake.

There was a tap on his bedroom door, he jumped from his bed and stumbled.

"Travis are you awake?" Sophie asked through the door.

"Yeah, I'll be down in a sec," Travis replied as he still took slow breaths. He looked out of his window and saw the sun peaking over the horizon. He quickly dressed and went down the stairs. As he entered into the kitchen, he saw his sister, mother and Mammy at the kitchen table.

"Good mornin' Travis," Mammy said as she stood to hug him.

While he embraced his grandmother, he noticed another woman there. This must be the company Mom was expecting, he thought to himself.

The woman turned towards him; her appearance was amazing. Her long black hair flowed down her shoulders in contrast to her abnormal pale skin, *it glistened in the morning light as if it were wet.* Her lips barely had color to them. She appeared to be a life size porcelain doll. The only color about her was her electric blue eyes that looked feral. She stood and stretched out her hand. "Hello, my name is Dr. Gula Calpa."

Travis stared bewildered by the woman. She was gorgeous, he started to blush as he reached out his hand. "I'm Travis," he gulped out.

Ann shook her head. "Travis, she is our new veterinarian for the foals and the mare that we have in the stables."

"It is a pleasure," he said as he stood up tall and puffed out his chest.

Gula smiled coyly as she clasped her hand in his.

A chill coiled around Travis, her hand was cold and clammy. *He quickly took his hand from hers.* He felt the hairs rise on the back of his neck and he felt strange for a moment. The room seemed to spin.

"Baby, are you okay?" *Mammy* asked as she touched her *grandson's* shoulder. "You look a bit pale all of a sudden are you goin' to be sick?"

Travis shook his head and the room stood still. "I'm fine ma—"

There was a rapid knock on the door.

"Please excuse me," Ann said as she left the room only to return with a tall peppered haired man.

Travis looked at the man, it was Alan, Derek's father. "Mr. O'Neal, is everything okay?"

The man shook his head and let out a sigh. "Derek didn't come home last night is he still here?"

Travis shook his head. "He said he would leave after he made sure *the* fire was out and take *our friends*, Juliet and Emma home."

"Well his truck is home but he sure ain't, I don't know about those girls other than they live outa town," Alan stated bluntly, his hazel eyes looked weighted down from worry.

Travis looked at him concerned *as he remembered his friends by the lakebed*. "The horse," he whispered.

"What horse?" Alan asked as his *expression had grown cold*.

Travis shook his head. "Sorry, I had a dream last night that they were playing with horse by the lake."

"Honey, all my horses were locked up tighter than fort Knox," his mother said.

Mammy stepped forward. "When I went out this mornin' there weren't no one out there."

Alan sighed and looked down to the floor as he spoke, "If you see my boy tell him to come straight home!" He headed for the door and turned towards Ann. "Please Ann if you hear anything."

Ann pursed her lips and nodded. *She walked Alan out and patted his back. "I'm sure he'll turn up somewhere. You let me know though if he comes home so we don't worry 'bout him."*

Alan nodded and shut the door behind him.

Ann pinched the bridge of her nose *as she entered the kitchen*. "Are you sure Derek left last night?"

"I think he did when I looked out my window this mornin' there was no sign of anyone there."

His mother nodded her head and took a breath. "Okay, shall we take you to meet our four-legged family?" She asked *stone faced*. "*Unfortunately, I will have to drop you and leave. I hope you understand.*"

"Most certainly," Gula replied as she gestured towards the door that lead out to the stables. "*I apologize for this meeting being under such circumstances.*"

"Travis please start your chores *and Sophie I'm gunna need your help introducin' Gula to the horses,*" Ann ordered and lead the way through the door.

As Gula walked past Travis she brushed up against his shoulder the hairs stood up on the back of his neck. He shivered and stepped out of her way. "Oop, sorry ma'am."

"No, please excuse me," Gula said as she smiled, her eyes looked ravenous. *She followed her escorts out the door and closed it behind her.*

Mammy walked up behind Travis and squeezed his shoulders. "How 'bout I make ya somethin' to eat?"

Travis nodded.

Ann and Sophie lead Gula towards the stables. "As you can see," said Ann, "my horses are close to the house." Her eyes trailed the edge of the lake as she searched for anything out of the norm.

Gula nodded. "I certainly understand if you need to tend to other business if you don't mind, I'll step right in."

Ann smiled softly. "Sophie knows her way around, she will show you from here." She took her leave and headed for the lake.

Sophie nodded as she opened the doors and extended her hand as she presented the stables to Gula.

The horses began to bray and nicker as the two entered. Gula headed straight to one of the stalls that had an expecting mare inside. It was as if she knew exactly what stall.

"How'd you know whi—" Sophie started as Gula hushed her.

"She's ready to bare this foal," Gula said her tone flat.

Sophie stood outside of the stall as she watched, her face in awe. The horse huffed and puffed as Gula pressed on her belly. "Sophie, could you take my place so I can pull?"

Sophie nodded, as she walked over and knelt by the mare. She hushed and hummed to the horse slowly as she patted and rubbed its belly.

Within seconds a new born foal was brought into the world and almost instantly it stood.

"Well my stars, I have never seen a foal come this fast let alone stand so quickly and I've been around horses my whole life!" Sophie said with astonishment and joy in her eyes.

####

Mammy stood at the stove; the smell of oil wafted through the evening air. She hummed a tune softly to herself.

Travis sat at the table as he peeled potatoes he hummed alongside his grandmother.

Ann entered her expression blank. "Well I found Derek's and two sets of girls clothes outside."

Travis looked up while he continued his task.

"You did tell them no swimmin' right?" Anne questioned. "What am I sayin'? Derek knows not to go in there." Her tone turned stern.

Travis laughed as he spoke, "Maybe they went streakin'." he sliced up as he did and cut his thumb. He hissed from the pain.

Ann rushed over towards him and grabbed his hand gingerly. "Oh lord, let me see. Mama could you get me the first aid kit?"

Mammy turned around with the quickness of a cat and opened a cabinet filled with medicine. She grabbed the case and dashed over to the pair just as, Sophie burst through the door. It had slammed against the wall and a picture crashed to floor.

Mammy looked up and rushed over with rag in hand, she quickly picked up the pieces of glass.

Gula glided in past the mess and suddenly she halted. She sniffed the air and licked her lips like a snake that tasted the air. "Smells like steak?" she questioned.

Ann finished cleaning her son's hand as she said, "No, that isn't steak, Travis just cut himself."

Travis looked up to his sister. "It went okay then?" He asked.

Sophie smiled with glee. "Oh, Travis, if you could have just been there to witness God's miracle," she said the joy had not left her voice.

"It was amazing, the foal stood within seconds once Gula pulled him out," Sophie said.

"Sounds cool, sorry I missed it," Travis' voice trailed off as he stared down at the floor in embarrassment.

Ann gave Sophie a sharp look and shook her head.

Sophie inhaled and exhaled slowly. " Sorry Travis I know how you feel about the horses," she said her face red with shame.

Gula walked towards him and took his hand to her lips, the feeling from earlier that day struck again. A cold chill slithered up his spine.

"My dear boy, your *sister told* me about your fear and your experience. Could you not consider trying again? Face your fear maybe?" Gula said sweetly.

"Oh, he ain't the only one with a fear of them horses or some other four-legged creature," Mammy had said as she put a picture of her late husband and son on the table.

"Mama!" Ann shouted.

Travis started to feel lightheaded, he could feel his heartbeat in his head. He whipped his hands away from *Gula* and held his head in them. "Well, I'm glad everything went well, but I think I need to lay down for the night."

Ann nodded worry replaced the anger. "Are you okay sweet love?"

"I just got a sudden pounding in my head," Travis confessed as he started up the stairs to his room. "Good night and congrats I guess."

###

Sophie stood in the stables as she brushed her horse General. She sat down the brush and started to braid his mane. The horses in the other stalls grew restless and whinnied and stomped.

"Hush now," she told them and started to hum.

She worked her way back to General's tale.

Travis stood outside and watched. He never came this close to the stables. As he turned to look around, he could see the black horse by the lake, it stood on the edge. Something looked off about it though. He stared at it and realized that its front hooves weren't hooves, but hands. He

kept his focus on the horse as it crawled its body shifted into a female body, naked and pale in the light of the sun. He could not tear his gaze from this beast as its head started to shift as well.

With a start he heard a noise and a cry of pain from the stables. He turned back to see Sophie on the ground, General reared for what seemed to be another kick.

"No!" He cried out and attempted to run in, but he could not move. Mud, it was like he was in deep sticky mud.

He tried to cry out again but this time nothing. He repeated his efforts only for naught.

The chill came on again companioned with pain in his head. He heard his name called. He looked to the sound and it was Sophie, but now she was by the water. The strange horse gone but a woman stood next to her. The eyes seemed familiar

The pain seared in his mind and he fell to his knees with a thud.

###

Travis shot up covered in sweat, *the early morning light casted shades of pinks and blues across his room.* He quickly pulled out his phone. His hands shook as he searched horses in water. He came across many images of Sea Horses and Hippocampus. He gave up that search and attempted to search Gula Calpa. He came across a forum website that gave him lore. Gula was the name for the demon of gluttony and Calpa was a Celtic word for kelpie. He then found an old picture from a website about his town and his family's ranch. There was an old picture of *some old people* and a woman titled *'The Doe's and Their Veterinarian'*. She looked very much like Gula.

Then there were several articles about his grandfather's, his father's and many deaths of others who were related and unrelated to him. All involving suicides or accidental deaths at Wonder Lake.

Travis tossed his phone on his bed and shook his head. I'm just being paranoid he thought. She is a veterinarian and maybe it's just a coincidence.

He stood up and rushed out of his room towards the kitchen. His mammy sat at the table a cup rested in her hands. "Mammy? how did Dad and Pop-Pop die?" He asked as he sat down across from her.

Mammy looked up from her cup and pursed her lips. "Your mama won't like me talkin about all that."

"I don't care, I was just lookin on my phone about some stuff and came across those articles," said Travis, as he slammed his hands on the table. "Articles about them and others that have died in that lake." He tore up from his seat and pointed out the kitchen window.

Mammy set her cup down and clasped her wrinkled hands, her wedding ring sparkled in the light. She let out a deep sigh as she spoke in a hushed tone, "Yes, Does have died here and many others too." She looked deeply into Travis' eyes.

"I thought Dad just left mom and never wrote or called us?" Travis asked his tone grew saddened.

"Yes, your mama did say he was havin' an affair. But that ain't the whole truth," she said as she reached for the picture of her husband and son that sat on the table. "All his belongings were by that lake very much like Derek's and your other friends. Your mama and I just think your daddy couldn't handle the stress."

"What stress?"

"Your daddy was sick and with your mama and her horses she never paid much attention to him." Mammy sighed and then sipped her tea. " He told your mama he was leavin' the day you got kicked by that horse," she said, " I guess after he packed, he just acted like a coward and took his life instead."

Travis blinked back tears. " So, Dad just decided to drown himself? What about Derek and the girls? They wouldn't do something like that!" He slumped in his chair.

"I'm sorry you had to hear that from me sweet thing." She sighed." And no, I don't think Derek and those ladies would do somethin' like that," Mammy whispered and handed Travis the picture. "Your pop-pop bless his heart left this world when you daddy was your age, he had always wanted grandkids," she said as she smiled softly. " He drowned in that lake too, he suffered for nightmares for a long time and then just like that." She snapped her fingers.

"Did he—" Travis began to ask.

"No, he didn't."

Travis wiped his tears and looked at the picture. There stood his grandfather and dad, but there was someone else in the picture. " Mammy is this you?" He asked as he pointed to the person that stood behind the two men in the photo.

"Nope, that was our veterinarian Demmi," Mammy said as she lifted up to see.

"She looks like Gula," he said flatly.

Mammy took the photo from him. "Maybe she just has one of those faces."

They could hear a ruckus from outside. A scream rang through the air.

They both rushed outside to see his mother and Gula carry his sister from the stables.

"What happened?" Travis demanded.

"Gula was showing Sophie and I how to do an exam on General and he reared up on your sister," Said Ann her words rushed. "I have to take her to the hospital right away!"

As his mother walked away with his sister.

Travis and Mammy had waited up for Ann and Sophie with no word.

"Travis sweetie I think you should go on to bed," Mammy said solemnly. " There ain't nothin' we can do right now but wait."

Travis nodded and he went to his room with hopes that they would know more in the morning.

He lay in his bed thoughts of the past three days ran through his head. He never knew the true horrors that haunted this place. He felt off though, something about the woman in the picture troubled him. Who was she and why did she look like Gula? Why did the woman in the article look like her too? His eyes began to grow heavy as thunder loomed in the distance. The promises of a storm electrified the air. Within seconds his eyes closed and soon he had fallen asleep.

####

Travis stood at the lake's edge; the black horse stared at him face to face. Derek stood next to him and grabbed his hand.

"Touch her Travis," Derek demanded his face was pale and puffed up like a balloon.

Travis' breath grew sharp and panicked. He went to speak but nothing, only water left his mouth.

The two girls appeared on his other side and grabbed at his other hand. He fought them relentlessly, but to no avail.

"Touch her, touch her!" Disoriented voices bellowed around him. Visions of late relatives he had only seen in photos, his father and grandfather, and many others that were unfamiliar stood around him.

He grew frantic his breath staggered. "Let me go!" He coughed out as water gushed from his mouth.

Derek and the girls forced Travis' hands on the horse's muzzle. "It'll only hurt for a moment."

Travis attempted to rip his hands away, but they were glued to the horse. It started to step deeper into the water and Travis had no choice but to follow. Soon he was under the water, he gasped for air. He could hear laughter and see blurred faces of Derek, Juliet, Emma, and many others.

The sound became louder and louder until there was nothing but silence.

"What the hell are you dammit?" Travis finally yelled.

###

Travis shot out of bed, sweat fell from his brow. He looked frantically around his room it was still dark. He looked out his window, Gula stood at the shore. With speed he threw on his boots and stomped down the stairs only to find himself already *knee deep* in the lake.

"No, I must be dreaming still," he said as he looked down to see Gula's face on the horse's body.

"Finally, a meal worth the wait," It spoke with Gula's sweet voice.

"No, it's a dream dammit wake up!"

With a gapped maw Travis was swallowed up.

Then the lake grew still.