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Author's Note:

This story was created as a post-as-I-go on my blog on Halloween, 2009 during a posting blitz I did for publicity . . . and for the sheer fun of it . . . on Facebook, Twitter and, of course, my blog ([www.cherrydumas.blogspot.com](http://www.cherrydumas.blogspot.com)) Along with this story (which, except for a few sentence structure changes, spelling and grammar fixes, it remains in its original form) I posted jokes and riddles, facts and trivia about Halloween/Samhain. I had a total blast at it, and from the feedback I received, so did those that followed me.

As stated earlier, *What Hides in . . . the Fog!* was written as I was posting it. None of it was preplanned. I had no idea how the story was going to go. But by the time I was finished, it had sparked an idea in me. I have not pursued it yet . . . not with the other stories I am writing (*Underhill, The Prank, Mu Mysteries* [ [www.enchantmentofthemind.com/Mu.htm](http://www.enchantmentofthemind.com/Mu.htm) ], *Grakas: The Gnome*, and soon, the sequel to *Judgment at Witches Court*). But I do plan to create a story based from this. This has too many possibilities for me to pass up.

Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy the polished (or I hope it is polished) edition of the story. Or, if this is your first time reading, I hope you enjoy it as much as I did writing it.

Cherry

P.S. Sorry about the cover art . . . artist I am not ;) LOL. Maybe one day I can afford a good graphics program instead of just Paint Shop Pro and can learn how to make spectacular cover art . . . one day ;)

What Hides in . . . The Fog!

The trees' tower over me. I see a cliff just a matter of feet away on the left through the occasional gap between the trunks. But my goal is not the cliff. My goal is far, in the distance. So far, I cannot even hope to see it yet. My goal is a distant town. I hope to make it before nightfall, but I fear that hope is going to be futile. I can already feel the day getting cooler. I can already see the shadows getting darker; though I cannot *see* the progress of the sun . . . the branches of the trees block all glimpse of the sky. I'm lucky to see what glimpses of the cliff I have seen.

The forest is unusually quiet. Or at least I assume it's unusual. This is the first time I have been in these woods . . . any woodland really. It's imperative that I reach this town, or I would avoid these woods at all cost. Unfortunately, going through these trees is the only way to reach the settlement.

But I'll go into that in a moment. First, the forest. Looking around, I see no sign of life anywhere, not even a twitter of a bird. I always thought that woods would be rife with sounds. Maybe not mammals like deer and foxes. But squirrels and birds, those I thought I would see plenty of . . . but I'm not seeing any of those at all.

Come to think of it, I haven't even heard the rustle of leaves . . . except those crunching under my feet. For that matter, there hasn't been any wind whistling through the branches either. The *only* sounds I have heard are the ones that I, myself, have made.

Odd. Very odd.

Now, the reason that I have to go to this godforsaken town. And believe you-me it is forsaken. For all I knew, there are no living beings here, from the rumors; it was abandoned some fifteen years ago. An illness had ravaged the town and the survivors, what few there were, had left when they were able. I don't think there were many. Maybe a dozen . . . maybe less. And their stories were . . . strange. Some said it was a fever that took the citizens of the town. Some say a monster. All agree it came from the fog.

Typical. I laughed when I heard it. Yeah . . . typical.

The story went that it came on Halloween night . . . All Hallow's Eve. The fog blanketed the town then the screams started. This is where the story became confusing. And became a typical Halloween tale. Yet, my superiors are sending me out here, to verify it. Come on now. This is all insane. How typical, how Hollywood-ish is this going to get? A Fog. Screams. Next you are going to tell me that vampires or werewolves are going to come rushing out at me. Yeah, and I will believe it. I roll my eyes as I plod through the forest.

The silence of the woods *is* grating on my nerves though. It is like it is holding its breath for something.

The air is even getting chillier . . . and the light is becoming darker. I look up, but still can't see anything, the trees are so dense. How could anyone in their right mind *want* to live out

here? I am *definitely* not a nature child. Nope, give me a big bustling city any day. But . . . it does seem to be getting dark awfully fast.

I look at my watch. Shit. The damn thing has stopped. Just like the car, just stopping for no reason. What is with *that*?

I was driving along the narrow winding road that is supposed to pass through the village when the head- and dash-lights began to flicker, then went out. At first I didn't think anything of it . . . then the car sputtered and died completely. Nothing I tried would start the car back up. Now, I know that typically I wouldn't need the lights on during the day, either the head or the dash . . . well the dash.

The headlights are on all the time now thanks to new car regulations . . . which can be annoying. But the dash, well, typically I don't. But the dense trees made it dark enough that it made the lights necessary. But when I tried to start the car back up, nothing would happen. The car failed to respond in *any* way.

I wasted a good two hours trying to get that stupid piece of metal to move, but nothing worked . . . not that I knew what I was doing anyway. Finally, knowing I *had* to get to town before dark, I decided to walk. I didn't realize it was going to be quite the hike. It looked closer on the map. That and I didn't think it would get so dark quite so fast, but I didn't need to mention that again, did I.

Looking around me, the shadows were almost pitch-black now. I had no concept of time anymore. How much further to go to the town, I have no clue.

Until this point, I had been walking steadily . . . at some points, almost running. But there was little or no change in the scenery. I wonder if all forests are this unchanging, this constant. If they are, it is no wonder woods-people always seem on the crazy side.

I decide to stop and try to get my bearings, though how, I am not sure. Looking around, I wonder . . . maybe I can see something if I get high enough. These trees *are* pretty tall, but I haven't climbed a tree since I was a kid . . . and I wasn't ever really good at it. What if I fall? Should I . . . or shouldn't I? Should I continue to wander aimlessly and hope to stumble upon the town, or should I *try* to see if there is any hope of finding it. Who knows, maybe I am hopelessly lost, never to be found again? Though, if I can find the road, I could find my way back out. Too bad I wandered off it awhile back. I had stupidly thought I would find a shortcut to the town. Me and my bright ideas.

Seeing a likely tree to climb, I grasp the lowest branch and lift my leg to lodge my foot into a gap in the bark. The bark bites into my hands as I wrap them around the branch. God, what an unpleasant feeling. No wonder I never really liked climbing these things as a child. Shifting my weight to the foot on the tree, I begin to lift myself.

Unfortunately, dress shoes are *not* the thing to climb trees in. My foot abruptly slides out of the gap and, with a jarring thud, lands back on the ground, scraping my chin on the trunk as well.

Cursing foully, I grab my handkerchief out of my back pocket. Dabbing at the scrap, I can tell it is bleeding pretty badly just from the sting.

There's no other way around it, if I am going to do this; I am going to have to take off my shoes. Bending down, I unlace the shoes and pull them off. Standing straight, I look back up at the tree. Trying it again, this time I succeed in raising myself to the first branch. After that, it was fairly easy. That is, if you count getting scratches and gouges from the unforgiving twigs and bark easy. But I manage to get to the top . . . or as close to the top as I can get.

I push the foliage out of the way and look around.

Trees . . . trees, and more trees. Where the hell is the town? I see a slight break in the trees to the right . . . that must be the road. If I remember the map correctly, it showed the town to the east and the cliff to the south. So that would put the town somewhere to the . . . oh hell, I don't know.

I look around. It is getting pretty dark, but not as dark as the forest would have me believe. I would say, about eight. If I had had to *try* to judge the time according to the light in the trees, I would have said it was after ten.

Oh! Among a large gap in the trees over there, I can see a steeple. The town, a not too far-away, either. I can make that, no problem. It'll take maybe a half hour longer if I hurry.

Good.

I take one last look around the sky before having to dive into the oppressiveness of the foliage. I begin my descent back into the hell of the silent woods.

I miss the noise and pollution of the city already. My lungs do not know what to do with this air. I feel almost lightheaded from it. Yeah, they can keep this. I will stay in my city from now on.

Reaching the forest floor once again, I put my shoes on and once again head toward town. Amazingly, it is the direction I have been heading the whole time. Guess my sense of direction isn't as bad as I thought it was.

\* \* \*

Finally, I've reached the village. And I was right; it isn't much to look at. I don't think it would have been much to look at, even if there had been people here.

It is small. And I don't mean, "Oh, look how small-town cute it is!" I mean it is *small*. One main street, one intersecting street, and perhaps two or three small side streets. I was lucky to have seen this from the tree top. How it even made it on the map is anyone's guess. What made people *want* to live here in the first place?

The buildings are even small. I won't go into how run-down they are. That is to be expected; after all, as far as I know, no one has even driven through this town in fifteen years, let alone lived here. The road I had been driving on wasn't exactly a thoroughfare road, so it was not like it had a lot of traffic.

Walking over to peer into a broken window, I see this building was supposed to be the store. You could have fooled me. There wasn't even a sign proclaiming it as such. Though, I guess with a town this small, there needn't be one.

Huh. *Ummm*, wait a second. I literally scratch my head with this puzzler. Counting the dozen or so survivors . . . there couldn't have been many more living here. Where was my briefcase? *Shit, Damn Sam!* I forgot the stupid thing in the car. *Great*. Now I don't have *any* of my notes. This is just *perfect*.

Yeah, this is one *fan-freakin'-tastic* assignment. I won the lottery with this one.

Regardless, I better find a place to crash . . . somewhere where it isn't *too* bad, *too* derelict. 'Cause, it is getting dark . . . true dark. My true assignment is just getting started.

I look around. I doubt there is much use to hope for a hotel. I snort an abrupt laugh. What am I thinking? A hotel? What, do I expect all the amenities to go with that hotel? Yeah, I am completely on my own here. Finding a bed will be good enough. It's bad enough I don't even have any of my supplies.

Thinking of that, I realize I don't even have any of my food or drink. Great. Maybe some canned goods haven't spoiled somewhere here. If whatever kills the people here doesn't kill me, food poisoning will . . . or starvation!

Turning away from the store, thinking to come back *after* I find a place to sleep, I look at the town. The side streets will probably be the best bet for a private home. Which would probably be the most comfortable . . . more laughter at that thought.

I quickly walk toward the nearest street and turn down it, and stop. More trees . . . of course. They have taken over the town. It is surprising they haven't taken over the main street yet. I move toward them and push my way through the underbrush to the first house. The roof *looks* sound, so let's see about the inside.

Moving to the front door, I try it. Locked. Why lock it? They abandoned the town. Oh well, not today's problem. Ah, a window. Picking up a branch, I break the window and use it to knock out the remaining glass. Climbing through the now empty frame, I enter the living room. Dust coated everything so thickly that I can't even tell the color of anything, but the floor does seem sound.

This will work.

I quickly look around the house for supplies and see that I am going to need some. I go back to the "store" and make sure to grab some candles and matches while there. Nothing electric or battery operated seems to work. And surprisingly . . . the canned goods, and even some bottled water, still seem good. Even after fifteen years . . . I am not questioning *that* luck . . . or, would it be more of an oddity? I shrug; I am not up for this. I have other things to worry about than the state of the food supply at the derelict store.

I head back to the house and prepare for true night to settle in.

Luckily, the wait is not long. There is nothing more boring the waiting in a dust laden empty town waiting for absolutely nothing to happen.

Because that is what I was sure would happen . . . absolutely nothing.

Tonight would be the fifteenth anniversary of the *illness* that took over the town. Let's see if it would repeat itself with me.

I laugh. Not that it would matter. Nobody would miss me. This is the last stop before I was to be fired. I have no family, No friends. I don't even have a dog or a goldfish. I have nothing.

So what if I might die.

My employer even told me not to bother coming back if I don't discover what happened here. So it is not like anybody will check if I survived here.

Silence. Never have I hated it so much.

Tired of staring at the walls, I move to the front door and stare outside. Not a hint of fog. I had never before been more certain that absolutely nothing was going to happen.

A walk would probably do me good. Get me away from these depressive thoughts. I wish I had had someone to bring with me, but there was no one. Besides, it is one thing to bring myself on a potentially suicidal mission, even if it is of the mundane type . . . it is another to bring someone else.

Grasping the doorknob, I walk out and down to the road. Damn trees are everywhere, but still no hint of life.

I wonder if whatever killed the people all those years ago did something to the wildlife. But that couldn't be . . . the forest would be a lot different if so . . . wouldn't it? Horticulturist I am not.

Shrugging my shoulders, I walk through the dim light into the center of town. There are just enough stars and the Moon is almost full and bright enough that there is enough to see.

The town looks even worse by the gray light of the Moon. It emphasizes the shadows. Eerie. For the first time since arriving, I feel the first shiver of unease. But not from the feeling of impending doom. No this shudder is from the horror of being in a small town, especially one that is abandoned and looks like *this* . . . from the sheer hideousness of my surroundings.

I wandered around the town for god only knows how long, walking from one end and back again. Over and over again. I lost count of the number of times I would reach one end of town, turn around and go to the other, only to repeat the process. The Moon gave no indication. I never could tell time by the Moon. All I knew was that my feet were increasingly sore from all the walking today, through the woods and now through the town.

I half-hoped my walking through the town would uncover some clues to what happened all those years ago, but if there *were* clues, time had eaten them away. I *thought* I saw dark spots in some of the houses and buildings I broke into that looked suspiciously like blood, but I am no expert.

Although it would collaborate with some of the survivor stories if it were.

Let's see. How did those ones go? I wish I had my notes. It was something like the tales of vampires or werewolves . . . *something* coming and gnawing on the people, drinking their blood, ripping in to them. Who knows? They never *saw* anything other than the end result, and it *did* look like teeth, but nothing *pointed* like vampires teeth. And nothing animal-like either. It was more human-like gnawing. As if in their fever, they had been gnawing on themselves. Which, is a possibility . . . the fever could have been producing hallucinations and odd behavior. The survivors could have been touched with it as well.

Although nobody wanted to entertain that notion. All these years, they did not want to write it off to that. No, it has been speculation and rumors and fear.

Just my luck *I* got chosen to be the voice of reason.

Deciding that enough was enough for the night, that nothing was going to happen, I turn to head back to the house. But as I near the center -- yeah, some center -- of town, I see the first tailings of the wisp of fog.

A fog unlike any I had ever seen before . . . .

This fog is not the brown fog of the city. It is not even the whiter fog I have seen in pictures that haunts the country- and seaside . . . this fog is almost blood red. This is *not* right. What the hell?

It has got to be a trick of the light. Yeah. That's it. That and I have listened to too many stories about this place.

Then I hear the noise. Not howls of werewolves. Not insidious voices of vampires. Not the hiss of creeping fog. No, this is the chatter of woodland creatures. The chirps and cries of birds. The sounds I expected to hear as I walked through the trees earlier. Now this is definitely getting creepy. Not one building is secure thanks to me. Not the *entire* building that is. *But* I can hide in a single room. Yes, that is what I will do.

The question is, just *what* am I hiding from?

The woodland creatures don't *sound* threatening. They are making the sounds that you would expect them to make on a sunny day. It is just that they started making them when the fog appeared. And the fog . . . I can't lock the fog out . . . can I?

Running into the nearest house, I looked around for the best location to hide. At first I thought of the closet. And in fact, I did head in the direction, but if it came to fighting -- though what I might have to fight, I had no clue -- there wouldn't be any room. Though I did look in there for any possible weapons. And luck be mine, there was a baseball bat. *Somebody* was looking after me, after all . . . or was prolonging my death for their amusement.

Thinking about where to hide, I tried not to think about what might be out there -- if anything. Wouldn't it be the biggest cosmic joke if I were doing this over nothing?

Looking around the house, I saw the perfect room. The bathroom. Big enough I could maneuver around in, it had a window that was *barely* big enough I could escape through if I had to, but small enough that I could defend it and the door. I could shove towels around both to *try* to keep the fog out, yet I could keep them open to watch for the attack . . . if it comes. And the bathroom door might actually lock, though I won't count on it being a *good* lock.

Going back to the front door, I saw the fog had actually made significant progress toward the house. And strange enough, it looked like it was actually *aiming* for the house. Huh. A fog with intelligence? Yeah right. More like, there is a breeze blowing it in my direction . . . though . . . I can't *feel* a breeze.

What is even stranger is I can still *hear* the creatures . . . the squirrels and the birds. At least I assume it is just squirrels. How the hell do I know? I have never seen them before, not even in a zoo. I avoid those things like a plague too. But that is the point, I still can't see them. I can hear them, but I can't see them, yet they sound as if they are close. Maybe they are hidden in the fog. Maybe the fog brought them. I don't know, but it is getting creepier by the second.

I shut the door, making it into another barrier, however feeble it is with its broken lock, I head for the bathroom. Leaving the bathroom door open, I sit on the counter that is next to it.

While I wait, I stare around at the room. Except for the dust, it is fairly clean. There are the suspicious dark spots here as well. I don't dare look in the toilet. Luckily, I haven't had to go. Yet. I don't even want to entertain *that* possibility. I shudder at the mere thought.

Thanks to the dust, I can't even tell the pattern of the wallpaper or vinyl flooring, let alone the color . . . but I *think* I can see a hint of flowers. Typical.

The mirror behind me has smears of faded red on it in the shape of a hand. I turn away, not wanting to think of how that got there.

Hopping down off the counter, I look in the cabinet for some towels . . . forgot to get those; I am going to need them to shove under the door.

Hearing a noise, I turn toward the door, the front door, that is. Though there is nothing there. The door is still closed tight. But the noise. The noise is getting louder. It is the incessant sound of the woodland creatures. Am I going insane in this lonely deserted town with its nightmarish history?

It is a possibility.

For as surely as I am kneeling on this dusty vinyl flooring, I am hearing something that is not there. I can hear the chattering of squirrels, the squawking of birds. Even the hissing of some sort of forest cat. Yet . . . I see nothing. Then, the first tendrils of fog begin to form together. But not in the typical tendrils of fog . . . however bloody-looking this fog is, no, this fog is forming into the shape of the animals. Squirrels, birds, a bobcat . . . I slam the door shut before I can see any further.

I shove the towels under the door, knowing it is probably futile. I run to the window. Outside I see the fog-shapes of deer and bear. I break the glass and, despite the shards, I shove my body through. I can outrun the fog in its tendril form . . . but in its animal form . . . I don't know, but I have to try. Some of the people got away . . . of course, they may have been let go.

I ran.

Then I stopped. I didn't get far; I wasn't even out of the town. The fog was hanging around the house I had left, completely surrounding it, but it was slowly leaving. Drifting this way and that, as if searching.

Where was *I* going though? I don't know the area. I don't know how far the fog extends. I don't have any supplies. According to the map, there are not any other towns for hundreds of miles. It was a miracle the people who got away *did* manage to get away. This running away is ridiculous.

Besides, the medical reports on the bodies found showed *human* teeth on the bodies. And most were *self*-inflicted wounds. Wounds caused by others, but by their owners. Some of the bodies were drained of blood. But enough blood was around that it is possible they had wandered around until they drained themselves. *Nothing* suggests anything supernatural did it.

But what is with the fog . . . it *has* to be a hallucination. It *has* to be. Which means . . . it is harmless.

Now that I have rationally determined that these are both an auditory and visual hallucinations, how the hell am I supposed to fight it . . . and what is causing it? Especially to have given it to a whole town all those years ago.

There has to be a cause somewhere.

I look around the town, and realize that I have not explored the church yet. There probably isn't anything there, but I have to explore every possibility.

Ignoring the fog, I walk toward the spire.

To get to the church, I have to walk close to the fog . . . a little too close for my comfort, but I am determined not to fear it. It is ridiculous to fear it.

As I get close to it, I reach out and touch it. Just to prove to myself that it is harmless. But as I reach out to it, it shrinks away from *me*.

Yeah . . . fearsome, that.

Laughing at it, I continue on my way to the church. Closely followed by the animal noises, sounding angry this time.

Looking over my shoulder, I can see the fog is following me at its more leisurely pace. Yes, there is definitely something about this that is created more from the mind than from something paranormal or supernatural.

Or so I will keep telling myself . . . until it is proven otherwise.

I walk to the church and push the door open. The first door I have found that had remained unlocked.

And, unlike the other doors, it did not squeal as I push the door open. Now this is an intriguing development. Why would this door remain smooth and the others not? I don't think God cares for the building despite what the clergy claim . . . at least, not to the extreme of keeping the hinges oiled.

Walking in, I see other clues that this building is not as abandoned as the others . . .

Walking further into the building, I see the pews, while dusty, hold very little of it, so little, you can see the gleam of the wood underneath. You can see that they have recently seen the polish of wax. You can also see that the floors have also seen the same wax. Well, maybe not the same kind, but waxing as well. I have no clue what kind of wax goes on what. I don't care. My point is, someone has been housecleaning here, and it has been recently.

The angry animal noises, and noisome fog curls around me through the door I left open, yet it doesn't touch me. Surprising, that.

Dismissing it as unimportant now that I know that it cannot harm me -- I refuse to entertain the possibility that it will not, not cannot -- I walk further into the church, halting halfway down the aisle. I rub at the polished pew with my hand as I consider where to go. Up, or to the back.

The fog decides for me.

It curls its way -- it is no longer in the shape of animals anymore. Once I had left the house, those shapes had reformed back into the almost liquid form of this shifting mass. Where was I? Oh yes, it curls its way toward the back of the church.

I follow it. Well, not so much as follows as walk with it. I would be walking *in* it, but it refuses to touch me. It makes me wonder if I had not run from it in the house, what would have happened there? It makes me wonder a lot of things.

According to the survivor report . . . everything started with the fog.

But back to now. With the fog semiguiding me, yet trying to avoid touching me . . . I wondered at the whole madness. Just what in the world is going on?

I followed the fog through a door in the back, behind the altar. I expected to go into the priest's office, but we didn't. Sure, there was a door leading into what I assumed would be his office, but there were two other doors as well. Both hanging open. One led up to what I assumed would lead to the spire and subsequently, the bell. The other leading down. There must be a cellar down there. That is where the fog went.

It is strange to follow a fog. Especially to follow a fog that goes to specific locations and doesn't spread itself everywhere.

I laughed as the fog pushed itself against the wall in an attempt to avoid touching me. I never thought to encounter a neurotic fog before.

Down we went. Further than I thought we would go.

Down and down. The steps did not lead straight down, no, they twisted upon themselves at various spots, and they were steep.

The deeper they went the darker and more oppressive it got. I would have expected to feel a spider web against my face or arms . . . but there were none. This was further indication that this building alone was still used. For what purpose, remained to be seen.

I could no longer see the fog. But I could still hear it. It was very strange to hear woodland creatures right next to me. If it were not for the fact of the steps beneath my feet and the railing I desperately clutched as I descended, I would have thought I was once again in the forest.

Without warning, the ground evened out beneath me. It did so with such abruptness that I stumbled. If I had not had hold of the railing, I think I would have landed on the ground . . . probably on my face. As it was, I swung around into the side railing with such force I was winded.

Stumbling back against the wall while clutching my stomach and gasping, I try to get my breath back. The fog sounded angrier than ever, yet I don't recall touching it yet. *One of these times I will touch it.* I silently vow as I wheeze.

Looking around, at first I don't see anything, but then, a faint . . . something. A cackle.

Wait.

A cackle?

Yup. This place has definitely gotten to me. Who cackles in this day and age? And is that candle light?

There *is* someone here!

Still clutching my stomach, I slowly make my way toward that faint light. I didn't know what to expect, I didn't know if they knew if I was here. I didn't even know if there was more than one of them. I suspected it was only one. All I could hear was one cackle . . . well, one *person* cackling. I heard many cackles.

The closer I got, the brighter the light became. I could see that there was another room. And that there must have been several candles . . . the light was flickering too crazily for a single wick. As I got closer,

I saw the shadow on the wall.

I stopped. The fog next to me did *not*. *It* continued its way into the room.

"Preciousssssssss! My Preciousssssss."

I laughed. I couldn't help it. It was too Gollum-esque. Straight from *The Hobbit*. Couldn't this person have thought of something other than *that* to call this fog?

Regardless, my laugh had caught this person's attention. It was hissing. Yes, hissing.

So, first we have Gollum, now we have a snake, huh? Am I to expect a snake goblin to come erupting out of the room? Shaking my head I continued on to the room. Guess my reason for secrecy is over.

"I know you know I'm here." I call out.

No response except the increase of the hissing. Still, I walk toward the opening. I could detect no movement from the person. I won't even say man, because I don't know. The voice *was* deep, but it was hard to tell if it was a male or a female voice.

In the light reflected on the wall, I could see the faintness of the fog shifting. Strange how out in the open it had seemed so large, even upstairs it had seemed so. But down here, it seemed much smaller. It is as if it can compact itself.

"Who are you?" I try again.

Still no answer. Just the incessant hissing.

This is annoying. I thought, half-amused. Better amused than admit that I was a touch scared. I never did handle fear well.

I continue to walk to the door. I have no clue what to expect. This town is supposed to be deserted. Of course, any vagrant could have settled here. I have no idea what they did for food or water, but it is possible that *someone* could live here. There are no reports of it, and according to the survivors, no one stayed when they fled. They said everyone was accounted for.

Also, when the authorities came and collected bodies, they did a thorough search, and they said they had collected everyone, alive and dead.

So who this was . . . I shrugged.

Finally, at the door, I took one last breath around my aching ribs. Just what I had needed, to have an injury when I may have needed to fight. I hoped not fight. I am a runner. Usually. As evident by my half-assed attempt to flee earlier. I *would* have fled if I had anywhere to go.

No use worrying about either of those now.

I braced myself. Though, for what, I really had no clue. I clenched my hands and realized at some point I had dropped my bat. Well damn.

Stepping around the open doorway I faced the person waiting for me.

I had been right to brace myself. I had not been prepared.

The . . . person . . . and I stared at each other in shock. I don't know what he thought of me, but I sure was not expecting . . . him.

He was human, that was evident. And he was a survivor. I guess the authorities did *not* clear them all out. He was young. Perhaps in his early twenties, and completely covered in bite marks. Some are old, the white scar tissue barely discernable. But some so fresh they still bled. Obviously, he had lost his mind.

"Prescioussssss. What isssss he?"

"Your mother read you a little too much *Hobbit* before you went insane?" I asked casually. Not really expecting an answer.

He hissed at me, showing his blood and gore speckled teeth. His teeth so thick with it, they were blackened. The saliva dribbled pink down his chin.

"So," I said, walking closer to him . . . though no *too* close. I'm not stupid enough to get in grabbing or biting range. "You have been here for fifteen years. You were just a child when it all happened. What *did* happen? Can you tell me?"

More hissing. He turned as I walked past him, but not much else.

I could feel my stomach clenching, but not from fear. I was actually getting a little hungry. Stupid to think of food at a time like this. But I haven't eaten for so long, all I took time for earlier was one of those bottles of water . . . and it didn't taste too bad, though they were a little stale.

I pushed the hunger aside.

"I thought the injuries were self-inflicted. Did you know, they thought it was vampires or werewolves that killed your town?"

The man started babbling, but I didn't understand a single word he said, so I continued walking around. There were a few items from around the town, a comb here, a doorknob there. A blanket. A coffee mug. Junk mostly. But mostly, I saw skeletons from forest creatures. I really wondered at that "fog." But that is something to worry about in a bit. This boy-man was the problem right now. I cast a look at him, but he had gone back to dancing around and babbling at the fog. Since he was ignoring me, I continued looking around. I came upon a stash of photos. I bent to pick one up.

And that was my mistake.

As I reached for the photo, I heard a god-awful screech. I looked up, dropped the picture I had just touched and barely had time to brace myself for the attack.

Bite-boy landed against me with such force, I was knocked back against the wall. Again the breath was knocked out of me as he landed a painful hit with his bone elbow to my already bruised ribs. As I tried in vain to get my breath, he bit my cheek as hard as he could. I could feel the flesh tear and the blood run. Pushing him off before he could actually rip a chunk of meat off, I could get my arms up in time to brace myself for the next attack.

He swooped in, mouth gaping wide. He didn't try to gouge me with his hands, in fact, they virtually hung limp at his sides. He leaped at me with his legs, guiding himself like a missile with them. His teeth snapping open and closed. I had never seen anything like it.

Fortunately, I had enough strength to keep him off.

Something about it broke through to him, and he started throwing things at me. This is actually the first I had seen him use his arms. Huh. They aren't useless after all.

Shaking my head to get myself out of the daze, I dodge and weave to avoid his missiles. And doing fairly well. That is, until one hits me in the face. Oh, that smarted. It hit with enough force it put me on my ass.

And he laughed. He actually laughed. Granted, it was not a comforting laugh. Not even a friendly laugh. It is a raise-the-hairs-on-the-back-of-your-neck insane laugh. I looked around for what hit me. A canister of . . . what is that? I sniff it . . . water?

"Drink."

Startled, I look at him. The first coherent words out of him. Will wonders never cease?

"Drink. Talk."

Talk? Hmmm . . . possibilities.

"How about we talk, and I drink later?" I would much prefer *not* to drink . . .

"Drink!" He shouts it . . . no, he roars it. It is beyond a shout.

"Ok, ok. I will drink." I shrug and I think with dark humor. *It's not like I will get out of here alive anyway.*

Downing the water in the canister, I grimace at the bitter taste. Well water, and not too fresh.

I wonder . . . I drank the bottled water earlier, and that was when I started seeing the fog. I wonder if the water was bottled locally. And if so, I wonder what the well water will do. Because if the bottled water is causing the hallucination of the fog . . . .

Mentally shrugging, I settle down for a long talk with bite-boy. Yeah. Long talk. More like long silence.

"Who are you?" I ask.

Silence. Or rather, babble . . . it is the same as silence, really. Being from the city, you are used to all sorts of babble. It all becomes a sort of silence . . . and that is what this is.

"What happened here?"

Babble/silence again.

Ok. So this isn't working. The only time I got a reaction was with the pictures, though I didn't particularly feel like being attacked. Yet . . . .

Looking at the bite wounds all over the bite-boy, there was a strange fascination with them that wasn't there earlier, if I was being honest with myself.

But when have I *ever* been honest with myself?

I moved to stand and bite-boy's gaze sharpened on me.

I stood and walked closer to his picture stash, and he began to growl. I growled back.

What. The. Hell?

That was strange.

Brushing it off, I bent to pick up a picture, and I saw bite-boy jerk to fly at me again, but I met him halfway.

Ripping and tearing at eat other with our mouths.

I fling him away and back toward the wall, wiping his blood off with my hand. He crouched, staring and growling at me.

So, it *is* the water. I thought as I stare at fascination at both my skin and the blood running on my skin. I wonder if I would've torn at myself first if he hadn't had attacked me.

He started that maniacal cackle again.

"Welcome." He cackled "Welcome."

I growled at him, and he stopped cackling only long enough to briefly growl back.

Then the fog.

The fog moved. I saw it clearly. It was beautiful. Yes, it was tinged red as I had first seen it, but there were so many other colors in it. And the animals it had formed? Even when it was formless, they were still there, deep in it. There. Always there.

It came at me. Chittering and chattering. The squirrels gamboling and playing, running over my feet. The birds landing on my arms. There were no larger animals in this portion of the fog. They couldn't fit down here, but the smaller animals, oh yes. I could see them. They are beautiful. And now they didn't hesitate to touch me, though, I don't feel a thing.

Is it in my mind? I don't know anymore. A bird *landed* on my hand, drawing my attention to it. I lifted my hand slightly and the bird flew off. I didn't feel a thing, but I wasn't paying attention to the bird either.

It was my hand I cared about. Always my hand.

I lifted it. The light shining off it was . . . odd. Not beautiful. Not like the fog. It was hideous. I wanted it off me. I tried scraping it with my other hand.

Ewww. It was there too. No! All over me! Where is the beautiful fog? Maybe it can cover this hideousness.

The fog. Yes. The fog. I look around. It is around me, but it is not covering it. I have to get it off me!

Maybe I can chew it off. Yes! I can try that.

I lift my hand to my mouth and bite. I bite as hard as I can, trying to chew the flesh off. The pain doesn't matter. I need to get that flesh off.

Then a flash of sanity.

I jerk my hand out of my mouth and spit the blood out.

God! How horrible! I stumble to my feet and pushing past bite-boy, I run out of the door.

I can hear his maniacal laughter follow me as I trip my up the multitude of stairs, eventually coming out of the church into the sunlight.

Sunlight!

I throw my arm over my eyes.

Had I been down there that long? I know I had not been down there all night, because I had spent part of the night above, but I did not realize I had spent the rest of the night below ground. And the sun. God! The sun! It hurt my eyes.

Carefully lowering my arm, I squinted. Maybe my eyes will get used to it. Whatever that water did, it made things unbearable.

But, even now, I can feel the light easing. It does not hurt so much. Maybe it was because I was in such a dim light all night. Yes. That's it.

I must calm myself. Still, that hideous light radiated off my skin, despite the light, I can still see the fog, that beautiful fog with the creatures cavorting deep within it.

And that urge to bite and tear my skin was overwhelming.

I have to get out of here and to civilization. I must . . . and get warning about the water. Because if it is here, what if it is in other places?

But how am I to get out of here? Even if I make it to my car, it doesn't run anymore, and it is hundreds of miles to the nearest town . . .

And still, I can hear bite-boys maniacal laughter echoing in the recesses of my mind. Always laughing. Always calling "My precioussss."

I have to get out of here!

Running. I ran for hours, until I couldn't run anymore.

When I couldn't run anymore, I walked.

When I couldn't walk anymore, I crawled.

The typical horror story escape. But I had to get as far away as I could. Though, however far I went, the fog stayed with me. I don't think I would ever rid myself of this fog. At least, not until I rid myself of the influence of the water . . . maybe not even then. Maybe the effects of the water are permanent. I don't know. All I know is I am covered with bleeding wounds. Wounds from the trees and rocks . . . and wounds from my teeth.

I couldn't move another inch. I collapsed. The night was almost over. I had run all that day and most that night. I am exhausted. Maybe some wild creature will come by and end my torture, though I had not seen or heard any . . . any living creature that is.

But, by this time, I knew no more. I lapsed into unconsciousness.

\* \* \*

When I regained consciousness, I had no clue how much time had passed. The sun was high in the sky, but is it the next day, or is it the day after? I don't know. I feel so weak. I need nourishment, but I don't dare eat or drink anything from this region . . . if I will ever dare eat or drink anything again remains to be seen . . . I have to get away from *here* first.

Climbing unsteadily to my feet, I stumble into an uneasy walk, then I gain my balance enough to run again.

After running for a while, I suddenly come across the road. Not the road I had driven yesterday, but the main highway. I have no clue how I had managed to miss the road I had been traveling and hit the main highway, but I am not about to start dissecting my blessings, not now, not when I needed them so badly. Hopefully, I will be able to get a ride from here to some city for help . . . .

I walked along the road, and it took awhile, but a car eventually came. It stopped, and they were going to take off when they saw me, but I convinced them that I needed help. Still, they wouldn't let me ride with them. Not that I blamed them. No, not really.

They *did* call the cops, who brought an ambulance with them, who took me to the hospital. At first they didn't believe me, but when I had them call my boss, who explained to them why I had been sent to the town, they sent someone there to check it out . . . who found bite-boy.

The state did some testing on the water, and found some very strange things and quarantined the whole area, plus some. Who know what will happen?

As for bite-boy and me? We have been committed. Bite-boy, it is not so surprising. Not really surprising for me either.

I have some good days; they have me on some medication that helps. But, there are days when I need those restraints, when the fog is my best friends and the skin . . . oh the skin *must* come off! Those days are bad. Those days I scream. I can hear bite-boy echoing me as he, too, wants to rip and tear at his own skin. But these restraints do not let us.

On my lucid days, I fear for the future of that area. I don't think they are going to contain whatever is in the water -- and as I found out later, the soil. One day it is going to spread, and heaven help those it contaminates . . . especially if it spreads to a large city . . . .



Cherry Dumas is not a typical Gemini. Nope. Not with a Cancerian cusp in her astrological make-up. So she is actually a triplet and not just a twin. Can you imagine the twisted party that can go on in her mind? Ups and down and ins and outs. One minute happy-go-lucky and ready to socialize at a drop of the hat . . . the next, ready to stay at home, with a good book and her animals. Sometimes within a single hour. It can certainly give root to plenty of stories, but is sometimes just plain exhausting . . . both to watch, and to experience.

Ok, enough of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. I hate talking about myself in that tone. Seriously, I do. I do love to socialize and get to know people, but my preference is to read and write. Period. I will come out and play, and when I do, I play

hard, but then I come back into my shell and write, write, write. This is good for my fans, as they get the stories. Though, even with how much I *do* write, I am a sloooooow writer LOL. One day, I may become faster, who knows. *If* that day comes, I hope it does not compromise my story telling, if it does, I will keep my slow pace and continue to beg my fans patience. For now, enjoy what I do put out, because my heart and love go into each piece.

For updated links, check my website, or subscribe to my blog, Twitter or Facebook accounts.

- *Website*: <http://www.enchantmentofthemind.com> - where I keep my book information.
- *Blog*: <http://www.cherrydumas.blogspot.com> - My main blog. About me, about my life, about my writing, and hopefully when my health permits, about appearances.
- *Newsgroup*: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/cherrydumas> - updates from the various blogs, and newsletter.
- *Facebook*: <http://facebook.com/cherry.dumas> - Where I help to build my writer persona...as a crazy, insane person. Maybe not too insane, but definitely crazy and fun loving. Where I also post my updates throughout the day and keep in touch with fans.
- *Facebook Fan page*: <http://facebook.com/officialfanpageofcherrydumas> - most of my writing updates go here. No gaming stuff, all writing.
- *Twitter*: <http://twitter.com/cherrydumas> - Where I post my updates throughout the day, and eventually hope to build interaction with my fans to be able to answer questions.
- *Character Blog*: <http://www.missycraven.blogspot.com> -Missy (*Into the Forest / Underhill*), from her point of view. She talks about her life.
- *Character Blog*: <http://www.vampiredominick.blogspot.com> - Dominick (*Into the Forest / Underhill*), from his point of view where he talks about Missy and his daily life.
- *Character Blog*: <http://www.ritahut.blogspot.com> - Rita (*Into the Forest / Underhill*), from her point of view, where she talks about her life and the involvement Dominick into it, and her hatred(?) of him.
- *Twitter*: <http://twitter.com/allorana> - Allorana's (*Mu Mysteries*) twitter account where she posts about her blogs and her other activities.
- *Twitter*: <http://twitter.com/prstssshashanna> - Shashanna's (*Mu Mysteries*) twitter account where she, too, posts about her blogs and other activities.
- *Twitter*: <http://twitter.com/MuMysteries> - where updates to *Mu Mysteries* are put.