

From the Woods

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It came from the woods, as most strange things do. At night, when the town was asleep, it would creep in and slaughter livestock, destroy the crops and vanish without a trace, leaving behind no physical evidence or tracks to follow.

Cyrus Manhoof, the owner of the town mill, volunteered to sit watch overnight to slay the beast that tormented the town. After a town meeting, it was decided that Cyrus was able enough to hold himself against the creature, and it was agreed that he would take watch at Walter Reiser's farmstead, which sat at the far east of town butted against the edge of the woods.

That night, young Manhood took his watch. Walter had just released his sheep from the barn for the springtime, and Cyrus hoped that the foul creature would prefer fresh, tender prey.

Everyone in town gathered at the church and followed Father Jonas in praying the rosary before retiring for the night. We all expected Cyrus to have slain the beast by next morning, so we all slept soundly.

The next morning, Walter Reiser rose and made a pot of coffee to take to Cyrus. As he left his house, he was shocked to find an early April snow had fallen. Strange, since we had no suggestion that we were due for snow.

Walter trekked to the eastern edge of his farmstead to check his sheep, only to find a grizzly sight; Cyrus lay dead, his throat ripped open

and body eaten upon. A tossing of snow lay around his body, where Cyrus had stumbled about clinging desperately for life. Blood was splattered about, some of which had melted the snow. Ice had formed over Cyrus' face, glazing over the horrified expression that would become his death mask. As usual, there were no tracks left by the beast and no evidence that it had been there besides the now frozen corpse of Cyrus Manhoof.

The town was devastated. If a strong young man like Cyrus Manhoof could not best the beast, what chance had we? An emergency town meeting was held, and we all debated about just how to handle the situation going forward. The debate raged far into the evening and early night with no clear conclusion. We all dispersed, some still bickering, others consoling each other, but all of us very low on morale.

The next few days were much of the same as before; livestock being killed, crops destroyed and no one daring to be out after sunset. It seemed as if the beast had us all trapped in our own houses.

A week after Cyrus' death, a stranger came wandering into town from the east. He was met with trepidation, no one in town was all that interested in anything coming west from the damned woods. However, he quickly won us over and gave us hope.

His name was Emile Wetiko. He was a hunter and trapper coming south from the French territories in Canada on exile. Though he was a

charming young man, he told us he had run afoul of a wealthy landowner in Quebec and was forced to leave.

We asked of his traveling through the woods; had he seen anything strange? He shook his head, just a few foxes and rabbits. He thought perhaps he had spotted a wolf, but it turned out to be a badger. We then informed him about the plight of our little town.

Emile took this all in earnest. He sat and pondered what we had extolled. At length, he nodded. "Yes, quite curious and terrifying. If you would like, I could track and kill this beast, if you like?"

We protested, reminding him of the fate of poor Cyrus Manhoof. Emile, however, persisted. We relented, seeing that there was no changing his mind.

Emile was put up in the house of mayor Stodt. The next afternoon, we provided Emile with as much supplies and provisions as we could part with and bid him good hunting. At late afternoon, he set off into the cursed woods, and we were all convinced that this would be the last that we saw of Emile Wetiko.

The town arose the next morning and a head count was done on the livestock, and to our surprise and elation, we found that none were missing! Still, there was no sign of Emile, and we feared that perhaps he and the beast had come face to face and done each other in. We were ecstatic to see

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