



I sprinted away from the campsite, my vision a blur of green and brown, branches smacking my face. I felt the stinging pain, but I wasn't thinking. If I was thinking, I would have fought. But I went into fight or flight mode. Do I blame myself?

Absolutely.

Whatever had destroyed our campsite, spraying smoldering char from the campfire, ripping our tent to shreds, denting our truck, and hurling her broken body onto a rock, certainly was not human. I had only my crumpled backpack, which I had picked up in a flurry as the chaos began. I thought I might have still been half asleep, but I couldn't be sure. I wasn't thinking, I was barely even awake, but I knew that if I didn't get out, I would die.

I was camping with my best friend, Sam, a kind girl with straight As and rich parents. Of course she was popular, how could she not be? She had blond hair, dyed green at the tips, with tanned skin from the beach—her summer house, of course—and white round glasses that sat on her nose.

She's gone now. I am still trying to come to terms with the fact, my head pounding. I do not want any hope that she survived, hope would give me a false sense of security, which I do not need while barreling through the woods at 20 miles per hour.

My throat is parched, and my vision is fading. I feel my legs beginning to give out, but I need to put as much room between me and whatever killed Sam as possible. I stumble, balancing

myself against a sapling. A red maple. I fling myself from the tree with hysteria, nearly falling. Too many bad memories associated with the species. I swipe spit off my lips, and that disoriented feeling threatens to overcome me.

I push forward, my chest heaving as I felt the rain soaking my hair into a knotted mess. It was too much. Sam was gone. Dead and gone. *Get over her! She's dead and gone, all gone, and you need to accept that already!* I told myself.

As I reach a small clearing, I collapse, coughing black specks. My backpack falls beside me. My vision splits into two, and I shake my head, trying to rid my vision of the horrible dizzy feeling, but that only makes it worse, my world fractured into a duet of horrible pain. My brown hair sticks to my face, and I'm vaguely aware of the rain pounding down on my back, soaking my clothes. I hack, clutching the moss on the ground for dear life. The trees writhe around me, gray. A place that would ordinarily be serene is changed. Smoke engulfs the trees- or is that fog? -and the moss is slick with something warm underneath my hands. I just know it's blood. My mothers blood. Centipedes crawl over me, and an owl swoops down, stabbing my eyes with its talons. I scream for Sam, but of course she won't come.

It's all fake, I know.

How do I know?

Because I'm already dead.