

Luciano Ferrara

Black Rock Forest, 1957

*The following text was found in a worn, leather field journal, hidden in the hollow of a tree trunk. In the surrounding area, Consortium Recovery Agents also found the remains of a makeshift fire pit, approximately 12 miles onto a seldom-used footpath with a gate marked, “**DO NOT ENTER.**” The pages were tucked inside the leather slip at the back cover, and are the only legible entries of the source.*

2/19/57 11:30PM

Since I'm pretty sure I'm next, I might as well put it all in one convenient place. This book was just supposed to be a data log, but I guess it's more useful as my last testimony. We should have just kept studying rocks and trees, not stupid myths.

It's been three days, since we set off onto the trail towards the unknown. Richard had inspired the lot of us to search for the true center of Black Rock Forest: the supposed location of the titular “Black Rock.” I remember standing at the gate, thinking that if the rest of the Consortium were trying to keep people away from some mystical secret of nature, they weren't doing a very good job. Richard barely hesitated as he vaulted over the waist high fence, proverbial torch in hand to lead his five man ‘research team.’

It has been two days since the first of our inexperienced team went missing. We woke up after our first night on the trail, and Donald was just gone. Left behind all of his gear, but no footprints. Richard just brushed it off, saying that Don probably ran away because he was “afraid of the unknown that we dare to brave.” We knew Don was yellow, but even if he had deserted us, he would never have left his supplies. We're foresters, and it's February in goddamn New York. Don wasn't stupid, just cowardly.

It feels like an entire lifetime, but it's only been one day since we lost my lab partner, Collin, to... whatever the hell is out there. He had been paranoid the whole day after Donald disappeared,

constantly looking around the woods and stopping us every few minutes to investigate a noise behind him that no one else had heard. I didn't want to add fuel to the fire when we were already coming unhinged, so I said nothing, but I felt it too. It was like the feeling of someone watching you from afar as you walk down a dimly lit street, or that sense that you've seen the same person's face following not far behind you for a while, despite being in a large crowd. Like you're being *stalked*.

2/20/57 7:00AM

When I awoke this morning, I scanned the clearing that Richard, Sarah and I finally settled on to camp in last night (after endless debate from Dick), only to find it empty. Richard had insisted that we keep moving; to try and stay ahead of it, but Sarah and I were too exhausted to continue, let alone waste any energy thinking about what "it" could actually be. I guess it's just me now, alone in this haunted forest. I used to think Black Rock was a nice place for a family picnic. Now, I'm not so sure. Every sound sends me into a panic, like the snapping of a twig is going to be last thing I hear before the snapping of my neck.

The cold seeps through all four layers of my clothes, and the wind chill is no friend to me. I do not fear that I will die alone out here. I *know* that I will die alone out here. It's futile to fear the inevitable, especially when the fatigue's already done most of the work, silently, over the past few days. Physically, it's almost unbearable, but mentally, it's torturous. Nature has bared her gnashing teeth at us many times in the last few grueling days, but it is the *unnatural* (or perhaps even the supernatural?) that I fear most. Paranoia is understandable in this situation, which is perhaps why Richard and Sarah brushed off Collin's unease so indifferently, but I've worked with Collin for a few years, and if there's one thing I've learned from working so closely together, it's that I always trusted his gut feelings.

The anxiety of being watched has only intensified as the days pass, and I can't escape this gnawing feeling of haggard eyes piercing the back of my head; it's like a primal instinct of pure fear, warning me to flee back the way I came, though I know it's far too late to turn back now.

I doubt that I'll survive the night, but I'm not even sure I'll last the day. I keep thinking back to the moment Richard stepped into Collin and I's lab, bags packed, and a harrowing sense of urgency plastered on his face. "Grab your gear, we're going on an expedition. Don't forget the logbook, Ben. You're going to want to document this." I wish I had told him to screw off and gone back to looking at minerals, but I let Collin talk me into it, like I always do. At least I remembered the book.

All I have left are these scrawlings to anchor me to reality, which I fear warps around me as the threat grows closer. I've been hearing rustling in the surrounding brush, and seeing glimpses of shadows blurred at the edges of my vision. I know that it's closing in on me. I've felt the buffeting wind that I'd become so familiar with die down, and the forest's forces seem to bend to its whim.

11:30AM

It's close. I think it's taunting me by approaching in the daylight. All of my colleagues (save for Collin, I refrain from saying "friends") from the Consortium were taken at night, but I guess if I'm the last, why not have fun with the prey? I can actually feel the tension in the air settling around my face, like a cloud of smoke. It smells like bear fat. All of the shadows cast around me seem darker in contrast to the light than they should, as if they were bottomless corridors.

Everytime I close my eyes, hypotheticals build into full-blown visuals, and I find myself imagining what could have happened to the rest. It terrifies me to think that they've all met their maker without ever getting a look at their taker; ripped from life by some faceless monster in their sleep. Well, not me. Dad always said I was a "craven;" that I'd die facing the corner with no honor. Way to project, old man. If I'm going to die out here at the hands of some creature, at least I won't have to live on, tormented by my friend's spirits. Reminds me of something that Richard would say: that it's better to "die braving the unknown, rather than be haunted by the ghosts you know." Well, I don't want to die cowering, waiting for it to take me too. If this creature is trying to hide behind me, I want to see the damn thing's face.