

Walking through the mountain woods soothes me. It's meditative. Spotting a deer across a clearing further eases my mind. It popped his head up, stared at me for a half, and sprang away through the very opening I was headed for. I smiled, not minding the fear of me, for I know what men can be like.

I get a few yards into the deer trail and the very same deer is rocketing towards me. As I sit up and look back where it went I wonder what the heck is wrong with that deer. I turn to look forward again. My stomach twists. What would make a deer come right back at me? I consider this as a start going again, looking closely all around. I find a good sized stick that will do as a bat in a pinch. I didn't expect a naked woman.

She runs past on a connecting trail, naked fear on her face, turning the other way looking over her shoulder, and shoulder checks a tree leaning into the path. She spins, falls hard, rolls, backwards crab walks, looking at her would-be killer.

I follow her eyes. Before I see him, I hear him yelling "... fucking whore, try to make me the fool. I'll rip you a new asshole right to your slit." He strides towards me but doesn't see me. His eyes are on the naked backwards walking crab. "You're going to pay for that. Yeah, cut you a new hole that will make you the biggest cunt there ever was. I'm going to take this knife..."

I swing for the fences. His face explodes with blood from mouth, nose and cheek. He goes down quick, but not all the way. At least not until my second swing, sledgehammer style, cracks his brain, and my stick.

I stared stupidly at the soon-to-be corpse lying on the path until her bawling registered in my head. I was about to ask her if she's alright. "What the fuck!?" Is what I said.

"What did you do" was her reply. "Now they'll kill us all!"

"Who?"

Instead of answering, she passes both us, not glancing at either perpetrator or rescuer and heads back the way she came, picking up speed. I follow, eventually not asking any more. We got to a cabin. She stops cold. It's an ugly cabin. Not necessarily uncared for, but definitely not loved. She turns and faces me finally. "We have to get them out."

"Who?" My vocabulary must intimidate her.

"The other girls."

"Can you please explain all this?"

"Those assholes sex-slaved us. Do you fucking get it now?"

"Oh shit. I'm sorry." My empathy melts her.

"Fucking men. What the hell can I do?"

"Get you and them away from here to start."

"And you have a place to go? Because it's cold already."

My back and knees knew a storm was coming, probably big, mostly likely the first big dumping and the official closure of the only road for the winter. "I do. It's not what you think but it's safe and warm. Can you all walk a 3 miles?"

"Doubt it."

"I'm guessing the house is empty. How long until the rest of the guys come back?"

She thinks for a few seconds. "Couple hours."

"Let's get moving then."

We go in. It looks the same inside. My stomach re-twists as I spot 3 breathing corpses handcuffed to the walls. "I want another hit," blond corpse mumbles. Red corpse stares in terror at the front door. Once she's free I make her the look out while we gather sleeping bags, food, clothes. I don't have enough food for 4 extra people for the winter.

The journey is difficult but not impossible with the sled found under the shed, probably from the previous owners. I pulled, two sat on the sled (actually tied up to be honest), and the other two girls took turns pushing. It was rough, slow, and had breaks, but we made it to my cave of wonders.

I literally fell into paradise. I was already spending more time walking in the mountains than living in the city. The mountains understood me. People baffled me. I purchased acreage next to the national forest. I had enough land to not see or hear people hiking through the park. I fell in a 8' hole. But it was slow fall at an angle. It lasted way too long for me. I found a cave, seemingly natural leading down. The ever changing sized, but always going down, cave eventually flattens out for a while and is crossed by a river. 50 feet up and left from the river is a gurgling hot spring.

Today, windmills run the grow lights and water the food growing while the hot spring feeds the hot tub. The light is obviously a fake moon with a round steel plate blocking the half moon.

The girls were all hesitant about a cave, but we touched the cabin and the truck. After learning one of the assholes was a state representative, and the other the county sheriff, we elected not to try driving past them as they were coming back from hunting.

That first week was tough. There was much crying, anger, pain expressed. The DT's caused rages and weeping fits. The shakes lasted for hours. Disoriented, refusing and/or unable to eat, sleep, drink, pee, stop moving/shaking wreaks havoc on all near by. The first hot spring therapy session I fell asleep. I had only slept four and a half hours in 6 days.

Diane led the session somehow. She told the girls to get in the hot tub. They bitched and whined. God help them, Diane got them in and talking. Nothing was not ok to say or express. That was her first rule.

The second week they decided to live. Suicide was openly discussed. Susan said "We made it through months of hell and this first week here, maybe one day I won't want to die."

Megan constantly wrote, except during the hot springs therapy sessions. Lying down, standing up, sitting, eating, talking, even walking against the current in the river. It seemed to make her better. Stronger.

Ruthie got her first elk on an eerily and bitterly cold January night. The moon was bright. The world was holding her breath. We stood in absolute silence for over an hour before the big guy took the bait I had thrown.

Susan plans to join Diane at a women's shelter. Diane can run the place, but Susan just wants to be safe and wash dishes or whatever. Megan will join them and keep writing when she's not working. Ruthie says she's going to find her family back east. No one asks more.

By June, the roads are clear. But we wait until August. We have no clue what befell the abusers, nor whether the police, FBI, ATF, or Homeland Security were still keeping an eye out. Chances are slim to none that the girls would be mentioned by the bad boys. But they may be lurking. I still think there's a good chance half of them didn't live past that night.

The storm was bigger than I expected. While it was only snowing when we got to Paradise, the next three days I kept making the trek back up to keep checking. Winter hit hard and fast. With the house and truck burned, and the clouds engulfing the smoke, it's pretty likely some of them died either trying to hunker down or walking the 24 miles to the next building.

I secretly hoped they fought with each other, shot each other, with the lone survivor being rescued, only to lose both hands and feet to frostbite. His life plummets. Friends shun him, because he really always was an asshole. Just as he is starting to have a chance at a new life, the book comes out. His return to hell happens the next year.

August. We say our goodbyes. The empty rental home was the perfect 'halfway' house for them. We are together. They can ease back into it. But the power of the hot tub therapy sessions is strong. They know they have a long hard journey ahead. "That's why we want to start now." Susan might be more than a tag-a-long.

Cave of horrors survivor tells all

"Months of bitter cold. Forced marches in the freezing river, being screamed at the whole time. Forced mutilation of live animals." Susan said the hardest part was "...not trying to kill myself or make him kill me. Something inside me said to stay alive. I invented a way to get out. He was so crazy and living another reality. I agreed with half of what he said and disagreed with the other. I changed my answers back and forth. I got crazy. I lost myself in my own confusing stories. Somehow we ended up in a cabin and I called 911."

This monster is no longer just in my head.

Divisible by 19