

Canadian Nocturne

There it is again.

The sound begins as a deep throbbing groan similar to a bullfrog echoing from a lonely pond that morphs into a screech not unlike a dying child, gurgling at the end. The call, if you could label it as such, seems to start in the distance and end just outside the door...like an animal moving at light speed. Sidney has never heard anything even remotely like it. He's abused his brain with suggestions...owl, coyote, wolf, lynx, groundhog?

Do groundhogs even make a noise?

After hearing it for the first time last night, he even tried Googling animal sounds this morning, but remembered the cell reception was nil. Being a writer, his imagination was doing him no favors. He was beginning to regret the decision to cloister himself from civilization for a few weeks to finish his first novel. It seemed like a great idea at the time. His girlfriend of six months had just dropped him for a mullet-haired, Harley-riding pool shark, and his best friend Ralph had offered his dad's Caribou cabin nestled in the wilds of Manitoba at no charge. Of course he had to be flown in by a bush pilot so it turned out to be a bargain-less deal. Lying in the semi-darkness on an Army surplus cot in the corner of the one-room cabin, Sidney was at least glad there was a solar array on the roof that powered his laptop during the day since it was now providing a feeble red LED glow that diffused the gloom. But then again, the scarlet incandescence also enabled him to discern the faint outlines of the disembodied heads of deer and elk and coyotes that lined the walls. The long dispatched menagerie all seemed to be staring at him, like that picture of George Washington on the wall of his grade school. They appeared to be blaming him for their demise and plotting an appropriate revenge.

There it is again.

Not for the first time, Sidney was intimately aware that he possessed no weapon, of any kind really, unless you counted the fork and dull knife in his Boy Scout mess kit. He suddenly recalled the rallies

he attended back home and the witty sign he always carried: "Protect People, Not Guns." His next thought was an epiphany of sorts.

Then how DO you protect people? Don't think my mess kit's gonna cut it. Of course if it was the Predator or Freddy Krueger out there a 357 Magnum would be as useless as an ejection seat in a helicopter. Maybe I should cut this writing adventure short. Oh yeah, right! They're not picking me up for two weeks and I can't call anybody to get me sooner. Who came up with this crazy idea anyway? Me, damn it.

He closed his eyes hoping to squelch further disturbing thoughts, but they increased exponentially forcing his eyes back open. He recalled finding the pile of crap on his walk by the small lake yesterday. Really weird. It looked liked animal scat of some sort, but it was pale blue and kind of luminous. He had knelt down to inspect it more closely and was surprised it didn't really stink as expected, but gave off an odor like charcoal lighter fluid. There was no way he was going to touch it without gloves, so he grabbed a nearby stick and poked the pile. The result proved it possessed an inner radiance and there was also brown and white animal fur mixed in the slurry.

Crazy.

He had blown it off as maybe campfire starter gel and cleared the incident from his busy mind...until now.

There it is again.

It was hard to tell, but the sound seemed much closer this time. He couldn't look through a window to check it out because the small cabin didn't have any. Probably to keep grizzly bears from crashing through. Sidney's eyes wandered to the only door in the room. Fortunately, it was formidable and had a large wooden bar that spanned and secured the door to the frame. Staring at it in the dark he thought he heard a faint scraping sound like a tree branch brushing against wood, but there were no trees close to the cabin. He hesitantly pushed the covers aside and quietly sneaked over to the door. He put his ear against it for several moments, then sighed and headed back to the cot. Halfway there he stopped dead

in his tracks and turned back to look.

Was that music? Couldn't be.

He walked over and put his ear to the door again. After a few moments Sidney thought he could detect faint music, real tinny like from a cell or small speaker.

Then, over the music, a squeaky girl's voice said, "Can I come in?"

He paused for a moment to think.

The voice squeaked again, "Please help me."

Sidney reached over to the bar and laid his hand on its rugged surface...

CONTEST ENTRY ENDS AT THIS POINT

He stood there for several moments as his mind inadvertently shuffled through titles of novels where the protagonist did something really stupid and reaped the predicted results. The scraping noise commenced once more and he jerked his hand back like the bar had delivered a 220 volt bite.

"Please help me."

Sidney's eyes scanned the rustic surroundings which now seemed more like Monte Cristo than a bastion of security.

Aha!

He rushed to a far corner of the room where a broken whitetail rack lay on the dusty floor. Grabbing the remnant of the antler, he rotated it in his hand until the most prominent point thrust outward like a bony dagger. The pebbled surface provided a good handhold as he swished it around and lunged at shadows like a less than dashing Zorro.

At last, a weapon.

Sidney grabbed a small LED flashlight and taped it to the antler.

Now, it's an assault weapon.

He grinned and flashed it around the room making guttural noises like what he thought an AR-15

should make. He approached the door again and listened with his ear pressed to the wood.

Just the wind.

He carefully adjusted the antler in his right fist as he slowly slid the bar from its metal supports. Taking a deep breath, he eased the door open a few inches and stuck his "Antler-15" into the space.

Nothing.

The door squealed like a stomped rat as he pushed through the portal letting his flashlight survey the area in front of the cabin.

Nothing.

He shivered for a moment, a delicious mixture of apprehension and the chilly night air.

Maybe I need to grab my jacket.

He stabbed the darkness some more with the light.

C'mon wimp, I'm just gonna do a perimeter sweep, won't take but a minute.

Sidney snuck up to the right corner of the building and popped his head around and back like he'd seen all the SWAT teams do. No shots rang out so he advanced to the side of the cabin. The flashlight discovered a sparkle of color a few feet away. He walked over and picked up a small plastic device and studied it.

What the...? Looks like one of those old fashioned transistor radios.

Sidney eased a notched dial on the side with his thumb until it clicked and strange instrumental music streamed from the tiny speaker.

Hmmm, I've heard that before. It's like some kind of theme music for something.

Suddenly realizing he was totally distracted Sidney dropped the radio and fearfully scanned the area with the light, but nothing was there. He moved toward the back corner and repeated the SWAT move. Still no shots. He stepped around to the back and flashed around. Still nothing of interest. Shivering more intensely now, exclusively from the cold this time, he swung around the final corner without checking first. Sidney stopped abruptly when a loud squeal split the night followed by a dull thud.

What the...?

He hurried around to the front of the cabin and his suspicions were confirmed. The door was now shut.

He sighed and relaxed.

No big deal, the wind shut it...won't lock without the bar.

He pushed on the door. It wouldn't budge. He stepped back and tried to shove it with his foot which only proved painful.

What the hell is going on?

Sidney started pounding on the door in frustration. After a few minutes, he slid down to the ground bathed in sweat, clutching his now bleeding hands. Unfortunately, the sweat began to attract the night air which re-triggered his shivering exponentially.

Then through the thick wooden door he discerned a faint, squeaky girl's voice utter, "Thank you."

Sidney's dazed and disturbed brain clarified for a moment in acknowledgment.

That music from the radio...it was The Twilight Zone theme.

From the nearby forest a deep throbbing groan slowly invaded the silence. It was even more ominous on this side of the door.