

The Creatures In The Fog

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The greyness swirls around me, so thick, it feels like I could reach out and grab it. It had been bright sunlight when we'd entered the forest, or maybe that should be when we were forced to flee into it, but within minutes the fog started to descend. At first, it was just the slightest tendrils of mist, snaking between the trees as we ran for our lives, but as time passed, the tendrils started to merge, forming ghostly islands that brought the visibility down to a few hundred feet. That was okay, it was still far enough to see the creatures that were pursuing us, allowing us to stay ahead of them, to stay beyond their reach, but then the misty islands began to drift together and coalesce into a fog that grew denser and denser until I could barely see my hand in front of my face.

In fog like this, running's no longer an option: the forest floor's littered with fallen branches, rotting trunks and gnarled roots, just waiting to trip the unsuspecting, twisting ankles and snapping legs; yet stopping's out of the question, too. We can hear the creatures pounding feet as they close in on us, but we can't make out each other, let alone tell whether the shifting shapes we can see moving amongst the fog are friend or foe. All we can do is blunder forward, hoping we're heading away from our pursuers, and not towards them, as we grope our way, lost and disoriented, through the oppressive grey blanket which encircles and ensnares us. Voices echo through the woodland, muted by the fog, making it impossible to tell how near, or how far away, they are. You can tell the people speaking are scared, though; even the fog can't swallow the fear with which their words are spat. Then comes the first scream: it sounds close and I can see shadows moving just beyond my limited field of view. Suddenly, it stops: the scream, I mean; it doesn't fade out, it just ends, and that's when I know the creatures are among us.

I search around for something I can use to defend myself, cursing the fact that the creatures had surprised us as we slept. There'd been no time to prepare, not even time to grab the axe I kept under my pillow for just such an eventuality. They'd swarmed out of nowhere and over our camp in seconds, leaving us no choice, but to run or die. Now, it seemed this apparent choice had been an illusion: the real choice had been die there and then, or run and die later, enveloped by a fog so thick it seems almost unnatural; and for all I know, it is. I'd been a man of science once, but since the creatures had first appeared in my life, in all our lives, I'd been questioning everything I'd ever believed to be true.

There's another scream, and the sound of someone struggling, fighting for their life. Unexpectedly, the fog lifts, and for a moment I can see them: a man I don't recognise wrestling with one of the creatures, doing his best to hold it off, then another pounces on him and together they drag him to the ground. Just as the blood starts spurting from the man's neck, the fog descends again and swallows the creatures that are now feasting on his still-writhing body.

I bend down, feeling around on the ground for something, anything I can use to defend myself. At first, I find nothing, then my hand fastens onto a stout branch, no doubt brought down in a winter storm. I don't know how strong it is or how long it has been lying there, but it has to be better than nothing. As I straighten up, a shadowy figure races towards me through the gloom and I ready myself to swing. I strain my eyes, trying to work out if it's one of my companions, or one of the creatures, but there's no way I can tell: all I know is that it's coming straight at me, fast. I watch it close: twenty feet, ten feet, eight, five, but still I can't see what it is. In desperation, I swing, catching the figure across the side of the head. It yells as it goes down, and that's when I know the figure is human: the creatures never make a noise, no matter what they're doing.

I crouch down to help the man up, but as soon as I am close enough to see his face, I know there's no point: the side of his head is shattered beyond recognition, and I can see grey, greasy flecks of brain mixing with the blood that's seeping down his face. I'm revulsed and I feel my stomach heave, but I can see more figures moving through the fog all around me, so there's no time to reflect on it, and I force the burgeoning feeling of self-loathing, sparked by what I've just done, to the back of my mind. I peer through the greyness, praying for another break in the fog, but it remains as thick as ever and still I can't make out what the figures are. I raise my makeshift weapon again, but now I'm hesitant. I don't want to make another mistake, to accidentally kill another person when there are so few of us left. My mind races: is it better to strike out before I'm sure, and risk killing someone else? Or, the next time one comes close, should I wait until I'm certain, and risk being attacked before I can react? Neither option's palatable, but they're the only two which are available to me.

Another figure starts to close, but what should I do? As I adjust my grip on the branch I'm holding, I feel it slip in my sweat-soaked palms. I call out, but there's no reply. Does that mean it's a creature? Or is it just someone running so hard that they've no spare breath to reply? The silence tells me nothing. I need to make a decision, but my brain just keeps going round in circles: to risk killing, or to risk being killed? Which should I choose? The fog swirls and flows around me, around the trees, around the approaching figure, but still I can't make out what it is: human or creature? Creature or human? It's now only twenty feet away, what should I do? Ten feet, I shout again – Still nothing. I need to make a decision one way or the other, and I need to do it now, but I don't want to make another mistake. Eight feet. Do something. Anything. My mind's yelling at me, but I'm paralysed with indecision. Five feet. It's now or never. Three feet. Aaagghhhh!