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Summer camp is supposed to be fun. It's supposed to be games and swimming and hot dogs and campfires and silly pranks.

It's *supposed* to be.

But not this year. Not at Camp Willow. What I went through at Camp Willow was one of the most horrifying experiences of my life.

To get to the camp, I rode the bus with a bunch of other kids. It was a long ride. I live in Grand Rapids, and Camp Willow is near Rochester Hills, which is on the other side of the

state.

My name was being called just as I was getting off the bus. There was a man with a megaphone, holding it to his mouth and speaking. He was standing with a group of a dozen kids that were about my age. Other buses had arrived, and their passengers were unloading.

“Last call for Rick Owens!” his voice boomed out. “Is there a Rick Owens here?”

“Right here!” I hollered out, slinging my heavy pack over my shoulder.

“Hurry it up! We haven’t got all day!”

Jeepers, I thought. *I just got here. Give me a break.*

I joined the group of waiting campers. They were all my age, boys and girls. I didn’t recognize any of them.

“Campers! Welcome to Camp Willow!” the man with the megaphone blurted out. “My name is Mr. Leonard, and I’ll be your patrol leader. Take a few minutes to make sure you have all of your gear, and then we’ll assign you to your cabins.”

Camp Willow is really cool. There is a main

lodge and about ten cabins that surround Willow Lake, which is pretty small. In fact, you won't find the camp or the lake on any map. But kids from all over Michigan—even from around the country—come here every year. It's a popular camp, and I'd been waiting all summer.

Of course, that was before everything happened.

Before the Mega-Monsters.

Oh, you can think what you want. But Mega-Monsters exist.

I know. I saw them. So did my friends. And the terror would begin that very first night at camp.

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My group was called the Wolf Patrol. I was assigned a cabin with five other guys, and we stored our gear and then met for a short patrol meeting around the big fire pit. Mr. Leonard handed out a sheet of rules, and then we all took a few minutes to meet one another in the group.

“I’m Rick Owens,” I said to a girl standing to the left of me. “I’m from Grand Rapids.”

“I’m Leah,” she said. “Leah Warner. I’m from Saginaw.” She had a friendly smile, and she was a little taller than me.

A blonde-haired girl in front of us turned around. "I've been to Saginaw," she said, her eyes lighting up. "My family travels through Saginaw when we go north to visit Mackinac Island. My name is Sandy Johnson."

We talked for a few minutes. I liked Leah and Sandy. They were pretty cool. I met some other kids in our patrol that were from other states. One kid came all the way from California!

The rest of the day was spent getting to know our way around the camp. Our patrol leader took us around and showed us different things like where the camp store was, where to go in case of an emergency, and where the mess hall was. The mess hall was a huge room in the main lodge where all of the campers gathered three times a day for meals. Our first meal in the mess hall was going to be at seven o'clock the next morning.

After we were shown around Camp Willow, the rest of the evening was free time. I wandered down by the lake and talked with Leah and Sandy. We were all excited about the things we would be doing during the week. Fishing, hiking, swimming, canoeing . . . this was going to be the

best week of the summer!

I had a hard time falling asleep that night. I was so excited. Finally, after counting a billion sheep, I finally fell asleep.

But not for long.

I was awakened by a terrible nightmare. It was *awful*. I dreamed that I was in my cabin and there were big, red eyes glowing in the window! The eyes belonged to a horrible creature, and in my dream I could hear him breathing just outside my window. He was looking at me the way a dog looks at a steak bone.

Suddenly, I awoke and sat straight up in bed. My heart was pounding, and I was breathing heavily. I'm not sure what time it was, but it was really dark. My bunkmates were all sleeping.

I turned to look out the window, afraid of what might be there.

Nothing.

Whew, I thought. *A dream. That's all it was.* I laid back down, and, after a while, I fell back asleep.

Next morning, I was jolted awake by a trumpeting bugle. It was *loud!* There was no way

anyone was going to sleep through that!

I showered and dressed and got ready to go to the mess hall for breakfast—but when I walked out the door of the cabin, I got the shock of my life.

There, in the soft earth, were footprints. Not human footprints, but strange, claw-like footprints, much bigger than a human's.

And the footprints led right up to the window by my bed!

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At the mess hall, I sat with Sandy and Leah. I told them about my dream and about the tracks beneath my window.

“That’s pretty freaky,” Leah said.

“In your dream, did you see what the creature looked like?” Sandy asked.

“Not really,” I said. “It had red eyes, and maybe a big nose. I guess I don’t remember anything else, except the fact that it was gross-looking.”

“It was probably just someone trying to scare

you, that's all," Leah offered. She took a sip of orange juice and returned the glass to the table. "You know. Just a prank."

I shook my head. "Those footprints didn't look like they were made by a human," I said.

I sat quietly during the rest of breakfast. Sandy and Leah got along well, and they talked a lot to one another. All around me, dozens of kids talked and laughed and ate cereal and French toast. One dark-haired kid at the end of our table was really loud and obnoxious. He threw a strawberry and hit another kid on the other side of the mess hall, then pretended that he hadn't done anything. Every camp has a troublemaker, and it looked like he was going to be the one this week.

But I kept thinking about the creature in my dream. And the footprints.

Leah is right, I told myself. It was probably someone just playing a prank. A joke. There is no such thing as monsters.

Our patrol spent the morning hiking and learning the names of all the trees. I even caught a grass snake! Then we all went out in canoes and

rowed around the lake. It was a blast! We splashed other kids in our patrol with our paddles, and by the time we were done, all of us were soaked. By lunchtime, I had forgotten all about my dream and the footprints.

Not for long.

Our afternoon activity was swimming. Our patrol, and several other patrols, met down by the beach. The day was hot and there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

Our patrol leader pointed to the buoys. "Nobody goes beyond that point," he ordered. "Stay in the swim area. Everybody understand?"

We all nodded and spoke up, eager to dive into the cool water.

"You've got thirty minutes. When the bell rings, get dried off and meet by the flagpole."

I was the first to hit the water, followed by my fellow members of the Wolf Patrol. The water was cool and fresh. There was a diving board at the end of the dock, and we took turns diving.

I guess Sandy hadn't been paying attention, because when I saw her, she was a few feet beyond the buoys . . . outside of the swim area.

“Sandy!” I called out. She turned her head.
“You’re outside of the swim area!”

She waved, and then began swimming back toward shore. I turned around to jump off the diving board . . . but in the next instant I was stopped by Sandy’s piercing scream. I spun, just in time to see a horrified look on her face.

“*SOMETHING’S GOT ME!*” she screamed in panic. “*IT’S GOT ME! IT’S GOT MY LEG!*”

Suddenly, she was pulled beneath the surface. Sandy was gone.

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I ran down the end of the dock and plunged into the water. A lifeguard was at his post and he, too, dove into the water to help.

All of a sudden, Sandy's head popped above the surface. She was sputtering and coughing.

"Hang on Sandy!" I shouted as I crawled arm over arm through the water.

Just then, another head emerged right next to Sandy. It was the dark-haired kid that threw the strawberry during breakfast.

"Ha ha ha!" he smirked. "Gotcha!"

“Jerk!” Sandy scolded.

“Fooled ya, fooled ya,” the kid teased, swimming away.

I reached Sandy. “What happened?” I asked.

“That kid snuck up under me and grabbed my ankle and pulled me under,” she said sharply. By now, Leah had swum up to us, and we all headed back to the dock. On shore, the lifeguard was scolding the dark-haired kid. He kicked him out of the water for the rest of the day.

“See?” Leah said smartly as she climbed up the wooden ladder to the dock. “He got what he deserved.”

“I’ll get him back somehow,” Sandy said. She was really angry. “Maybe I’ll sneak up to his cabin at night and scare the daylights out of him,” she said.

I didn’t think that she was serious – until later that night.

Sometime after midnight, I was awakened by screaming coming from the cabin next to mine. The kids had all of the lights on, and the dark-haired troublemaker was standing by the door with a flashlight, screaming something about a

monster. That kid was really spooked!

I smiled. *You really got him back, Sandy,* I said, climbing back into bed. *You got him good.*

The next morning, I found Leah and Sandy in the mess hall.

“Nice going!” I said to Sandy as I sat down.

She had a puzzled look on her face. “What do you mean?” she asked.

“Scaring that dark-haired goofball,” I replied. “You know . . . last night.”

“I didn’t do anything,” Sandy insisted, shaking her head. “I mean, I would have *liked* to, but I’m not going to do anything that is going to get me in trouble.”

“You . . . you mean . . . that wasn’t you last night? Scaring that kid?”

“Nope,” Sandy assured me, shaking her head again. Her light blonde hair brushed her cheeks. “I was sound asleep.”

Terror began to well up inside me. *If it wasn’t Sandy playing a joke last night, then what did that kid see? Did he really see something?*

I had to know.

Without saying a word, I got up from the breakfast table and left the mess hall. I ran all the way to the kid's cabin, searching the ground.

It didn't take long.

On the ground, all around the cabin, were footprints—exactly like the ones I'd seen at my cabin yesterday morning!

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