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### Skeleton Lake

By Daniel L. Wiedenfeld

The heat from the campfire felt good against his hands. The ride over on his motorcycle hadn't been that cold, but the fire's flames cut the chill from his bones. "Here." Sledge said, as he tossed Hugh the bottle of whiskey. Unscrewing the cap, he put the bottle of whiskey to his lips and drank thirstily from it, stopping only after some air bubbles rose up inside of the bottle. "Hey, take it easy! That bottles got to last us until sun rise." Sledge grumbled chuckling at Hugh.

"Sorry, I don't know what's wrong with me; I guess it's just... this place gives me the creeps!" Hugh replied, taking a seat on one of the stumps next to the campfire. The smoke rising up from the campfire had a good smell to it, was that hickory or maybe oak? The smoke snaked its way up through the tree branches over head, and on up into the sky to join and mingle with the stars above. "Don't tell me you believe that old story about ol' man Shelton being murdered out here next to Skeleton Lake?" Sledge said laughing softly, as he threw back a good helping of whiskey now himself.

"Come on you guys?! You promised you wouldn't talk about any horror stories if we came out here with you," one of the ladies complained from across the fire. "Horror story?! It isn't a horror story, it's the truth. Just because no one is still around that knows how it happened, doesn't mean it never happened." Sledge said, getting into it now. The ladies all started to lean in closer to their men; some even put their arms around their man looking back over their shoulder into the darkness. Grizz chuckled to himself, as his woman held onto him now; knowing that Sledge wasn't going to stop until he had gotten the whole story out, Sledge loved all of that old spooky campfire stuff.

"Yep, right over there in the old Biker Lodge, that's where it happened. The night was a lot like it is tonight, dark clear sky, half moon..." Everyone turned to look over at the old run down lodge building even though they may not have realized that they were. Jonny J threw another piece of wood onto the fire startling some of the girls. They all sat watching the hot ashes rising up out of the fire. Dancing and swirling about like a bunch of little fireflies. As the firewood crackled, Sledge continued; "Yep, old man Shelton... you know he only had one leg?" "Come on!" one of the girls said laughing nervously thinking that Sledge was laying it on a little too thick. The bottle of whiskey was passed around; and any of the girls that didn't drink their share, had to take a drink from their beer instead. Everyone seemed to be in a playful mood tonight.

Looking grim Sledge continued with the story; "Well it seems that ol' man Shelton was out here at the lodge getting things ready for the Biker Rally, only it didn't look like it does now, all run down and all. The lodge was in good shape then, well... word got out that there must be some money out here at the lodge, change for Beer Sales, Brat and Hamburger Sales, money to pay the Band with and what not. So these two drifters riding through town caught wind of the story from the 'Full Throttle Saloon' and not knowing

any better, believed it. They decided to ride out here to check it out for themselves. Heck, it took those two fools over an hour just to find the place and by the time they did, it was already getting dark."

The bottle had made its way back to Hugh, who took another powerful swig from it as he listened nervously to the story...

"Ol' man Shelton was the only one left around here by then, everyone else had ridden home

to get a good nights rest before the big weekend and the Bike Rally. Some had ridden back to the Full Throttle Saloon to party some more, but ol' man Shelton stayed behind to finish putting up the Biker Banners, do a few more finishing touches and lockup." Sledge grabbed the bottle from Hugh and took his time swallowing from it, letting his story have time to sink in. This gave everyone's mind time to wander and fill in some of the blanks in the story. Letting the story grow into an even darker tale with everyone's imagination running wild, of course the whiskey didn't hurt anything either.

The guys were all enjoying how tightly their girls were holding onto them now, as they were becoming engrossed in the story without even wanting to be...

Talking softer now, almost in a whisper, drawing them in even deeper, Sledge continued in his gravelly voice; "Well those two fools finally found this old Biker Lodge and ol' man Shelton still hard at work putting up those banners, they snuck up on him!" The bottle of whiskey made its way around again, no one missed their chance for a swig this time. Everyone seemed to be taking nervous glances over their shoulders into the darkness behind them, feeling as if someone was sneaking up on them. Even the branches on the trees seemed to be reaching out towards them...

Sledge, looking each of them in the eye, continued; "Well they overpowered the old man and when he wouldn't tell them where the money was, they started to beat him. Hell, there wasn't any money. Anyone from around here knew that they kept the money at the Full Throttle Saloon until the day of the rally; right where the two fools has just come from. Well... one of them hit ol' Shelton hard, he tripped and fell over backwards hitting the back of his head killing himself. No one really knows what happened next exactly, or why, but it seems that one of the two idiots took an old camping axe and chopped up ol' man Shelton's body and threw his bones into the lake, presumably to hide the body."

Hugh roughly grabbed the bottle of whiskey by the neck of the bottle taking another big swig, looking over his shoulder uneasily at the lake saying; "So that's why they call it Skeleton Lake!" (The lake's real name is Bass Lake) Sledge smiled to himself, he knew that he had them now... "Well word has it that ol' man Shelton still haunts this place... people say that sometimes when they go by the place at night, they can still see a faint light coming from the old lodge house windows, even though the power was cut to this place years ago... ol' man Shelton is still inside putting up the banners for that Biker Rally. And as the story goes... ol' man Shelton vowed he'd come back some day and get those two fools that murdered him and chopped his body up into little pieces"...

An old man came charging into the camp fire, moaning and stumbling and swinging an old hand axe! The women screamed! Someone accidentally kicked the camp fire sending ashes and sparks and flames flying into the air! Hugh jumped up falling over backwards; tripping over the tree stump he had been sitting on, spilling some of the whiskey into the fire causing it to flare up into an eerie blue flame, which caused even more screaming from the women!

The old man standing over Hugh swinging the axe, started laughing unable to contain himself any longer. It wasn't an old man anyway, it was Lone Star. Hugh had drawn his knife and it was pointed right at Lone Star's throat as he slowly started to realize what had just happened. Grizz and Jonny J were just rolling with laughter as they had seen Lone Star coming through the trees even before he had gotten to the campfire. Their girls were pounding them on their arms cursing them for scaring them like that. Sledge was doubled over with laughter, laughing so hard, that it was hurting his sides. Lone Star ran to stomp out some of the hot ashes that had started to catch some of the grass on fire.

Continued page 22

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