

Until Dawn

J.R.

Based on the game

Prologue

Beth Washington had a habit of hyper-focusing on things, whether it was school work, clothing, decorating, she always had a way of delving into a task and clearing her mind of everything else but said task; her sister called it her superpower. Right now, Beth was fixated on cleaning the dishes. Out of the ten of them on this mountain, they'd gone through twice as many plates and bowls. Beth liked her friends, but she'd be lying if she didn't say that they were as neat as pigs. Even though it was past one o'clock in the morning, Beth felt that someone had to do the dishes, because no one else would do them otherwise. And after laboring away for one hour, she was finally on the last plate and she was scrubbing vigorously, glad to finally be done with such a soulless task and even gladder to know that her soft, warm, bed was just moments away. It had been an exhausting day, she'd been woken up at seven AM to catch a eight forty-five o'clock flight out of LAX to Calgary in Alberta. After three hours of dying on a plane it was then another four and a half hour drive from Calgary to Blackwood Mountain and her Parents' Lodge. Then of course instead of resting after their travels, like sane and rational people, her friends decided that it'd be a fantastic idea to throw a party and as far as she knew all of them but her brother and his best friend were somehow miraculously still awake; but in all fairness, Josh and Chris were only asleep through the aide of the Devil's infernal piss that was Johnny Walker.

With a relish, Beth finished the final plate and set it off in the plastic rack to dry. She breathed in a deep breath of air, finally she could seek refuge beneath her nice warm sheets and sleep away all the aches of travel and friendship. But for the moment she was quite taken by what she saw outside the window above the sink. It had started to snow again, the flakes were fat and heavy, they came drifting down with impressive speed to fall into the already existing blanket of snow. The tree's had turned white, their branches pushed down by the weight of all that snow. The scene was quite peaceful; snow falling over a dense forest on a mountain deep in

the rockies. But the peace was broken the moment that Beth saw a man peering out from behind a massive evergreen. A man who was staring right at her.

**

In the darkness of the living room, Sam's stomach was tied in knots. She was watching as Jess and Emily giggled, gleefully, over the genius of Jess's plan, and all the while Mike stood smirking like some oaf all too pleased to be included.

"Don't you guys think that this is all just a little bit cruel?" she intoned,

"Oh come on" Jess smirked, "she deserves it, she's been making moves on Mike all day. I'm just looking out for my girl Em".

"Yeah, Mike is my man, not hers," Emily added.

"Em, I'm not anyone's man", Mike's smirk transformed into a dazzling smile. Clearly he was deeply amused by all of this.

"Yeah fine, get mad at her for all that. But this is just really mean guys" Sam frowned.

"Stop shitting on the mood Sam" Jess laughed, "she'll be fine".

And with that, Sam watched as her 'friends' made their way into the darkness of the huge lodge. Jess had, several hours ago, devised a prank to perform on Sam's best friend Hannah; as an act of retaliation for Hannah trying to flirt with Mike all day. Sam hadn't thought that they were serious at first, but now she realized that they were, in fact, deeply serious. A darker part of Sam felt that, in some ways, a prank like this might snap Hannah out of this stupid crush. Sam loved her best friend but Hannah was simply obsessed with a guy who would simply not be compatible with her, not to mention that Hannah had this perception of Mike that Sam knew wasn't reality. Sam had known Mike since her freshman year when they had ended up in the same geometry class. Mike was a sophomore at the time and even at fifteen he was a ladies man, it had seemed like he had a new girlfriend every few weeks. And all those relationships seemed to end in very messy and dramatic ways that would quickly become school gossip.

Mike wasn't the sort of guy who was into really deep and personal relationships, but Hannah was. Hannah was a dreamy girl who in many ways, Sam felt, was still a child. Sam loved Hannah for that, but it made her blind to a lot of things. The biggest of which was that Mike wasn't interested in her, no matter how

much she flirted with him. Mike played along of course, he was Mike after all, and he'd even feigned interest when she showed him that sweet little butterfly tattoo she'd gotten; but Mike would never be into Hannah, tattoo or not. And in her foolishness, Hannah had picked a bone with Jess and Emily. Jess and Emily weren't bad people, but they could be cruel; and the prank that Jess had planned was perhaps one of the cruelest things Sam had ever seen her friend come up with. And though that darker part of Sam felt that this prank would make Hannah see reality, the other part of her recognized how awful this idea was. And this rational part was determined to stop Hannah from walking into something that would humiliate her to no end. Figuring that Hannah was in her room; Sam headed up the huge set of stairs, calling Hannah's name.

**

Horried, Beth drew closer to the window determined to see any defining features to ensure it wasn't one of her friends punking her, but the man had vanished. Just as quick as she had seen him, he was gone. Beth stared at the dark treeline for another moment, maybe he was still there, or maybe she had only imagined him. She was tired after all, and it was incredibly dark outside. Either way she felt that she should alert someone, make sure all the doors were locked. But as she turned to tell the others she found that, apart from Josh and Chris, she was alone. Her brother and his best friend were passed out on the marble island, surrounded by a sea of deflated red Solo Cups and corn chips that had spilled out of a bag. Mike had dared them to a drinking game to see who would pass out first. Josh and Chris were the two smallest guys amongst the friend group and Mike wanted to see who could handle their liquor better, Josh had won of course. For someone who wasn't large it never ceased to amaze Beth how much her big brother could take. Josh could probably outdrink all of them and still have room to spare if he so chose. But several bottles of Johnnie Walker was enough to knock anyone off their feet, even Josh.

Still, Beth felt that she should at the least tell Josh of any threat real or imagined, her dad had put Josh in charge of watching the lodge and he was the one with all the keys to lock up the place. But when she shook him and yelled his name in his ear he had only groaned and shoved his head deeper into his elbow. Beth felt

that she should have expected as much, her brother was dead to the world. As she turned away however, she noticed a piece of paper lying upside down on the counter top. Curiosity overcame her and Beth snatched it up, it was written in red ink and was addressed to her sister: *Dear Hannah*, it began, *You look so damn hot in that shirt. Come to the guest room at 2:00 am, XXX Mike*. Beth smirked, "Geez, what had our naive sister gotten herself into now" she muttered at Josh, who made no response other than to move his head, lost in his dreams.

**

Hannah's stomach was full of butterflies. The hallway would have been pitch black had it not been for the fiery orange light of the candle. Darkness usually scared her, but not tonight, tonight she was finally getting what she had dreamed about for a whole year, MIKE! She knew that he would love her cute little blouse, and she knew that eventually all her flirting would pay off. She had nearly fainted when she read that letter. She was so excited and happy and scared and it all felt so magical. The night was alive with ecstatic energy, her heart was pounding so hard she felt that it might burst asunder.

Mike was waiting for her, he actually wanted her! Hannah could have screamed and jumped and cried all at once, but she knew that she had to play it cool, she couldn't be a silly little sixteen year old girl she had to be a sexy hot girl now, the type of girl who talks about her tattoo like it's nothing, the type of girl who doesn't squeal when the boy she likes is into her too. The door to the guest room was just up ahead, it was getting hard to breathe, it was all finally going to happen, Hannah couldn't believe it. She reached the door, her hand was on the handle, she was cracking the door, her chest felt restricted,

"Mike? It's Hannah." She called softly into the darkness.

"Hey Hannah", she heard bed springs creak and then she saw him, standing all tall and handsome in his flannel.

"I didn't think you'd come," he smiled.

"Well I did," She smiled back, "Where should we begin?" She asked, her stomach doing backflips.

"Well", Mike began, "I thought that we could start with a little making out and, you know" he shrugged, "See where it goes from there".

Hannah was aware that she was grinning and blushing but she didn't care, she started to unbutton her blouse. She wasn't sure why but it felt like the right thing to do.

"Oh, hell yeah" Mike grinned with all the charm you could ever want, and then from the darkness of the room another voice spoke,

"Oh my god she's taking her shirt off", it was a girl's voice spoken in a hushed whisper, but Hannah heard it, and her heart stopped where it stood.

"What, who's there?", she felt panic rising, what was going on?

Then she saw. Emily and Jess crawled out from under the bed, their faces glowing with snickers and cackles. Ashley in her beanie peered out from behind the closet door, smiling and laughing. And in the closet Matt emerged holding a GoPro, already starting to laugh. Hannah felt cold, she felt naked, she felt like the world had collapsed, her friends were laughing at her and in the middle of this amusement was Mike, looking at her like you would some dumb little girl. Hannah felt tears on her face, hot and wet, the door flew open and she was partially aware that Sam was there calling her name and trying to comfort her, but she only had eyes for Mike and how he was looking at her with pity written all over his face.

"I'm sorry Hannah" he tried to explain, "this all got out of hand".

"MIKE!" She yelled at him, she wanted to say more, but her friends were laughing and Sam was trying to pull her out of the room with soothing words and Mike was there, watching her cry like a little baby. Hannah did the only thing that felt right, she ran.

**

Beth had convinced herself that the man she saw was nothing more than a figment of her imagination. Her eyes burned with tiredness and she felt full of aches and pains. But the mess on the island would not do, so instead of her nice, cozy, bed. Beth had set about picking up corn chips and wiping guacamole off the surface of the polished marble. Josh and Chris were still passed out, lost to the world of reason. She half thought about finding Mike or Matt and having them cart her brother and his friend off to bed, sleeping on a cold marble counter in tall wooden chairs probably leads to a morning of sore necks and cramped backs. But another part of Beth figured that they seemed perfectly serene where they were

and disturbing them would be like disturbing two, stupid, drunk, and moronic little angels. Besides, she thought it'd be funny to see how uncomfortable the two idiots would be in the morning, universal payment for their night of idiotic hedony, or something like that.

From outside the window, she saw what was unmistakably a human form run by, and there was no doubt in her mind that this was not some illusion. She bolted from the kitchen into the huge living room, and she saw all of her friends running to the back door which was thrown wide open. Beth grabbed her pink winter coat off the back of an armchair and followed. Emily was yelling into the night, "It was just a prank Han".

"What's going on?" Beth yelled at her friends, "what the hell did you do?"

"It's fine", Jess shrugged, "Hannah just can't take a joke".

"It wasn't serious", Mike said guiltily, "we were just messing around Beth"

But Beth was furious, her mind was already putting together what had happened, "What the hell is wrong with you people?" She yelled at them, and without a second thought, she was running off into the woods, looking for her sister.

The huge trees seemed to close in around her, the cold went bone deep, and the darkness was suffocating. Beth could barely see, even when she paused to turn on her phone light. She kept calling Hannah's name but there was no response. The wind was starting to pick up and the snow was starting to fall faster and heavier. She half remembered Chris saying that he'd seen how there was going to be a massive snow storm that night and all that meant to Beth was that she needed to find her sister now before something bad happened.

Her legs were starting to go numb from the snow that was melting into a chilly wetness on her clothes, the cold was eating at her lungs making it hard to breathe. Beth continued to yell her sister's name but the howl of the wind was the only thing that answered. Beth was starting to get scared, the wind was occasionally punctuated by these horrible sounds that sounded like some sort of animalistic screaming. She figured it was just the way that air moved up on the mountain, but there was something so human about the sound that it sent a chill through her spine deeper than the cold.

She was growing tired now, and she was starting to ache. She wondered if any of her asshole friends were out here as well. *I'm gonna chew the shit out of them when me and Hannah get back*, she decided, but first she would need to find Hannah, and how far could her sister have seriously gone? From up ahead on the trail, she heard the unmistakable sounds of crying.

Hannah was on her knees in the middle of the path, wearing nothing but a blouse and jeans, crying hysterically.

"Jesus Hannah, you must be freezing" Beth yelled,

"I'm so dumb Beth", her sister sobbed, "Why would they do that?"

"Because they're assholes Hannah", she unzipped her own jacket and wrapped it around her sister who was shaking violently. Beth figured her sister needed the coat more, Beth herself had a woolen sweater that in her brain, so wracked with anger, fear, and exhaustion, she figured it would be enough to keep herself warm until they reached the lodge.

"Hannah, we need to go", she began pulling her sister up, Hannah was still sobbing, Beth could have killed her friends right then and there.

From somewhere behind them, branches were snapping. *Those assholes finally showed up to help* was the first thing she thought, but there was something off about this. When she turned to see who had come, she found only darkness, and some instinct told her that there was something in that darkness that wasn't her friends. She remembered earlier, when she thought she'd imagined seeing that man from the window, and she now began to feel that maybe she hadn't imagined him at all. When she looked at Hannah she saw that Hannah too had sensed whatever was watching them predatorily from the path, the man was starting to make sniffing noises that sent shivers splashing across Beth's skin, he was smelling them like some animal.

"Beth?" Hannah whispered, Beth felt a sense of true fear spreading within her, instinct telling her to get out of there as fast as she could.

"Run, Hannah!" she yelled.

They took off, Beth had suddenly forgotten her aches, the cold, her exhaustion, inside of her there was only this desperate desire to escape. Horrifyingly she heard sounds of crashing from behind her, the man or whatever it

was was chasing her and Hannah, and it was screaming. Its screams sounded animalike, but terrifyingly human all at the same time. It sounded like wind and pain and cold and death, and Beth wanted to cry just from hearing it. They were running blindly down the trail and they came across a covered bridge, the old wooden boards rose up like hands to grab at their little ankles, and one of them grabbed Hannah's. Her sister stumbled, Beth grabbed at Hannah's wrist and pulled her up with an almost inhuman strength, the man was still behind them, and the sisters took off yet again, the trees were thinning and opening up into a sky of swirling snow and storm Beth felt energy surging through her, energy that she felt in some insane way could carry her to safety but then she stopped dead when she realized they were standing on a cliff face looking over the abyss.

In their blind attempt at escape they had come to a dead end with no way out. From the treeline they heard something big coming towards them. The man was closing in. Hannah grabbed Beth's hand, sobbing again. From the trees, Beth saw an absurdly tall and gaunt man step towards them, his eyes were milky white and his sharpened teeth were spilling from his mouth. Hannah screamed and Beth felt a great force pulling her back and over the edge of the cliff. Her hand reached out and her fingers coiled in an iron grip around a tree root, a rope of salvation. Hannah was clutching desperately to Beth's free wrist. Beth could feel Hannah slipping,

"Hold on!" Beth yelled, "Hannah please hold on!"

"I'm sorry Beth", Hannah sobbed, "we're going to die"

"No we're not" Beth shouted back, but her voice betrayed her and cracked with fear. Beth Washington wanted to console her sister, but every rational part of her was screaming that they were going to die. Her hand was growing weaker, her fingers were slipping on the root and above her she could feel the man moving in. Beth looked up at the dark sky above her, wanting in her last minutes to see the man who had forced her and her sister to their deaths, but the dark sky was lit up suddenly by a great orange cloud that splashed heat across her face and the air was punctuated by horrible screams of pain.

Beth's fingers were slipping, Hannah was sobbing, and the sky had just been set on fire. This all felt absurdly like a dream, when at last the face appeared over

the edge. His eyes were shielded by goggles, his mouth and nose by a scarf, and his gloved hand reached menacingly over the earthen side. He was going to grab them, he was going to carry them off and do horrible things to them. This man who could set the sky on fire and scream like some sort of animal. Beth did the only thing she could think of, she let go. From some distant place she heard Hannah screaming, or maybe it was herself, she wasn't sure. Her head felt full of cotton, her senses felt dull and dead. And as Beth Washington fell to her death all she felt was the cold.