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Sing Your Blues

CAMPERS COME OUT here often, out to the edge of the long, low, shallow lake. They bring their GPS, their propane tanks, vacuum-packed gourmet dinners, bottles of wine, champagne, generator-run coolers, bug lights, bug spray, eighteen changes of clothes, the latest top-of-the line rod and reel with glinty, matching flies, and bottle openers. They like roughing it.

Greg and Bill like scaring the campers, usually young couples. They run down, shit matting their assfur. Greg will kick things over, throw some things out into the lake because he likes the splashing, while Bill presses his face to the mosquito-mesh tent window to oogie-boogie the cowering people. They come back, seven feet of tittering idiot apiece. Maybe one of them gets caught in a blurry picture, or in a grainy movie. They'll giggle some more, and then a bird will flit by, or one of them will hear a deer, or a turkey gobbles far enough away for one of them to hear. They lope off, leaving me alone.

Maybe later, I'll hear Greg tromping out in the lake, chasing moonlight-mercuried darts of fish, or the angry droning of bees as Bill attacks a hive.

I'll sit, and sometimes hear, just out by the edge of the camp, the woman sobbing and the man shushing her in whispered tones.

The tent, winking lantern light shadows on the inside, is framed in tall, dark-barked trees, the pines and cedars, and the

silvery, peeling river birch. And I imagine he's rubbing her back in soft circles or hugging her because he doesn't know what else to do but holding seems right. Her shoulders jerk and twitch, but she holds him back, elbows down, loose because her hands are shaking. She cries muddy makeup tracks on his neck and shirt, breathes a wet breath through her nose, and is comforted even though she is frightened. He wants to cry, too, but doesn't.

Eventually, the man will play brave and peek, like a baby breaching, out of the tent, head first, then worm out. Turning in a circle in the middle of their little civilization-away-from-civilization, eyes wide, he'll see that the brutes are gone, and they'll pack up — most often leaving all their things behind — and drive off in their gurgling metal truck, and, I imagine, swear to never come back.

And I'll go down to the camp, and dig through their things; sometimes I'll wear the man's hat or sniff at the food. I'll kick dirt over the fire. If there is a CD player or a stereo with batteries, I listen to it, sitting in the tiny clearing of their camp, pulling the earphones tight over my head or turning the stereo low. The songs they bring are sometimes romantic, soft and throaty, with velvety horns or piano. Maybe there are sad songs, but those are my favorites.

I'll sit and cross my legs, and I listen. And, always, the batteries die, music trailing off into night sounds.

There is a hollow stump southwest of the lake, and I take the CDs and stuff them there and leave. Then, I find Greg and Bill, probably licking honeycomb from their sting-welted fingers, and sit with them. When they doze off, bellies full, I stalk back to the stump and look at the disks, mirrored backs reflecting tree branches and stars.

And, one by one, I break them.

The sky pinks and I walk away from the stump, brushing over my tracks with a cedar branch. I'll find Greg and Bill, heavy chests rising and falling slowly, and lie down, and sleep.