

Billy's Lost

This is another old write for publication on Rambling Writer

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It made the most horrible screeching wail, the sound of a lost soul, or a creature of the dark regions looking for prey. Echoes of this fearsome cry reverberated and seemed to grow in intensity. Billy sat on a rock and cried not knowing that he had heard a wild turkey. He was going to die because he had not minded his daddy and had gone into the woods alone. He was too tired to run anymore. After he found out that he was lost he had run a lot, finding himself in darker and more evil looking places. So now he had to rest a while.

What was really bothering Billy was that it was getting dark? When it got dark, it got cold and sometimes the wind blew and it rained. He knew that Daddy was looking for him by now. If only he could remember which way he had came from. Trees were tall and Billy could not see very far. Walking in a straight line when you had to keep going around trees, rocks, stumps and even whole trees that were rotting on the ground was difficult. As if to confirm his suspicions a breeze stirred the brush. He felt a drop rain hit his face. It was a cold spot in a face full of warm tears. He knew that he had to do the right thing or he was going to have to be out with the monsters of the night.

Hiding is necessary to avoid monsters. Billy had to find a hidey-hole a place to keep warm and safe. He remembered the old tree that he had passed a while back. A huge and partly hollow stump covered with moss and brush. Playing in it would have been fun if he were not so afraid. Billy started back the way he had come to find the stump. Billy had no way of knowing that if he had forged ahead a few hundred yards, he would hit the logging road. The same road dad had driven the car on to get to the camping spot. He turned and went back in the woods. If he had just waited in about ten minutes, he would have heard daddy driving his car down the road screaming his name.

He backed-tracked toward the tree, first downhill and then up the rise on the other side. Going deeper into the forest with each step, Billy never found his hidey-hole. He did find a good spot under a tree that uprooted its gigantic stump when it fell. It was grown over with thick brush and had a dry spot underneath a small boy could crawl in. The monsters would not see him in there.

The exhausted boy fell asleep as soon as he was comfortable. Falling into a deep slumber, he did not hear the searchers that passed within a couple hundred yards of his hidey-hole. They shouted his name. The exhausted sleeping boy did not hear their shouts.

Hank, the ranger who was organizing the search had laid out the search plan on a map. He had estimated that a small boy like Billy might go a half-mile in an hour. Hank adjusted his compass to three miles using the key of his map and drawing the circle. He then divided it up into grids before dispatching his searchers. Too

bad they did not have the dogs. It would not be until afternoon the next day that the searchers would have hounds. The hounds would find the hidey-hole. Billy would be much deeper into the forest by then.

Ted, Billy's dad, was frantic. He had spent the night driving up and down logging roads in his 4X4 Ford Bronco stopping every few hundred yards to get out and shout. Now his voice was raspy and ineffective. As day was breaking, he went to the ranger's station to ask about the search. Hank, the ranger, was busy working with his map and speaking to the new group of volunteer searchers. Ted heard him say into his cell phone, "Drive up FS121 five miles to these co-ordinates (baffling string of numbers), head on a bearing of 44 degrees to . . . another string of numbers. Do a ninety to the west and go two hundred yards and backtrack on the same bearing. Call in when you complete the sweep. Keep alert."

Hank didn't want to say watch for bear with Ted standing there looking so distraught. Not wanting to interrupt the search, Billy's dad waited patiently until he was done talking before speaking. "They haven't found him have they?" The ranger lowered his head and shook it from side to side. He told Ted, "Hang in there buddy we'll get him. Dogs will be here in a few of hours."

Hank poured a cup of hot coffee and gave it to Ted saying, "Drink some of this you'll feel better." When he offered Ted a doughnut he refused saying, "I'm not hungry, damn! I have to do something. Do you have any suggestions?"

The ranger told him, "Go up to the place you were camping and think like your boy. You know him better than anyone. Track him by instinct." He pushed a bag with a couple of doughnuts into Ted's pocket and said. "You'll need these later. Just remember if you get lost yourself, head downhill. You'll eventually hit a logging road. We can spot you on the road using aircraft during daylight. I hope the little guy finds a road."

As he walked back to camp Ted could not repress the fleeting hope that Billy would be there when he got back. However, the tent stood empty, bringing tears to Ted's eyes. He thought, "I've got to get a grip on myself and think. Think like Billy." Standing in the middle of the camp and looking at the surrounding forest road and stream. Remembering what had happened, when he discovered that Billy wasn't there. He had checked the stream thoroughly. Wading all the way to the beaver dam shouting his name. One thing to be grateful for was that he hadn't found him floating in the water.

Across the creek, at the shallow part, there was a steep cliff. Billy couldn't have climbed that. Thick blackberry vines would have made going that way too difficult for a little boy.

Billy had gone into the national forest into a pristine wilderness that covered thirty square miles. Looking over the forest on the other side of the road, he saw it. It was a tiny game trail leading into the woods through a thicket of brush. Billy would have liked that. Ted ran to it now, he had to stoop to clear the brush. The boy could have walked in standing up. A tiny little trail just his size. Ted was sure of it; he had gone down this path.

Billy woke to total darkness and was too afraid to cry. It was cold and his back was sore where the stick had been poking him No matter how he tried to turn it still

hurt. Crying would not help because Mommy wasn't here to hear it. It was cold though the days were still hot. He had awakened during the night, shivering and frightened. The monster was trying to find him, "She knew he was here."

Whimpering under his breath, like a terrified puppy, Billy crawled toward the opening and the first light of morning. The rain had stopped but water dripped everywhere. Leaving his hidey-hole would mean getting wet but he had to do something. Billy was careful not to make any noise, the monsters could still be awake, and it was still real early. He knew that monsters slept in the daytime but wasn't sure just when they went to sleep.

Not having anything to eat for almost twelve hours had made him so hungry. He was thinking about his daddy and the bacon he had made for breakfast over the campfire. Daddy cooked the bacon in a long-handled skillet with some potato and eggs. The memory made his stomach growl. Eagerly, he pulled a chunk of bubble gum from his pocket, tore off the wrappings and threw them on the ground. The gum was wonderful, sweet and satisfying, too bad he had only one stick. Dad had stuffed it in his pocket after breakfast telling him that if he chewed it a long time he could blow big bubbles. He said, "You'll need this later."

Trying to figure out which way to go was hard for Billy. He didn't want to back into the dark forest, he was sure monsters lived in there. From where he was he could see high ground that didn't have many trees. Climbing up there he might be able to see something or someone a road, house or anything. However, this was a bad decision that would take him deeper into the undeveloped remote wilderness. He was walking out of the search area faster than Hank had thought he would. Picking a visible destination and heading for it, stopped the walking in circles. Since waking this morning, Billy had traveled Hanks three-mile guess plus a mile or so in circles. The actual distance he had covered was only a mile and a quarter. Today Billy would do six miles before nightfall, which would put him seven and a half miles away. This was a mile and half outside the search area.

The collective consciousness of thousands of semi telepathic entities bombarded her mind with imagery, she found some worthy minds but most were full of self-serving greed. Focusing on the strongest and nearest she sensed fear in a young human. Yes she knew what they called themselves, people, humans, black, white and many similar and names. Thoughts of malice attached to these memories made her uneasy.

This was not the same civilization that had killed her mate so many years ago. Her precious trusting Tazariot killed by the inhabitants of this land so long ago. In many ways these new peoples were much worse. They killed each other and the ecosystem too. Hate, malice and above all self-serving greed made her so very sad. The old native people had needs too but they were simpler and more primitive. Most of them succumbed to the diseases, smallpox, diphtheria and influenza for which they had no immunities. She had grieved for them in their misery. Learning to avoid humans was a survival tactic. It was an easy thing to do considering the way they broadcast their primitive consciousness into the universal matrix.

Selsadon knew she could not intervene to help this young lost human. He would

report what he had seen and some would search for her. This had happened before and she had nearly been killed by one of their primitive projectile weapons. The survivors had learned to avoid detection by discerning the thoughts of the searchers and using the information to elude capture.

Memories of the disaster that had put them on this planet were growing dim now with the passing of so much time. Genetic enhancement allowing perfect cell mitosis gave her species a lifetime twenty times that of a human. Selsadon could expect to live two more centuries hiding all alone in this diminishing wilderness. Her only consolation was telepathic contact with other survivors of the shipwreck. She sensed now only thirty-four living survivors. Only two sets of mates survived together in the remote mountainous wilderness of a place called Tibet. Six new Yetis had been conceived on this planet. They would only live a hundred years or so because genetic enhancement was not available at conception. All of the other survivors were spread over the planet randomly, this because of a life capsule malfunction.

At times she had sensed Yeti in orbit. When the travelers became aware of a presence on this planet, a rescue attempt would be suggested. Always the survivors urged the travelers to not risk their life. Memories of a time dilation vehicle time shifting to this eventuality, only to be destroyed by a human weapon, was imbedded in their collective consciousness. All of her people had been injured and some killed by humans there was no doubt as to their brutality.

A single powerful image of anxiety flooded her mind. "This from an adult human." She could sense his grief. He was searching for the lost one. She could also sense that he was armed and concerned about predators. The survival instinct was strong but after all these centuries she had tired of playing the game. Selsadon decided she would try to find a way to help this little one. She liked him. His mind was pure sweet and intelligent, just like the offspring she and Tazariot had been denied. Even as she considered this images were flooding her brain, "No! No! Please don't Selsadon. He will kill you. The one with the weapon will kill you. These humans are not to be trusted." " Hide Selsadon, hurry, hurry Hide."

Ted resisted the urge to instantly hurtle down the path. He returned to his truck and picked up his rifle. It was a 300-Winchester Magnum. He loaded it with five rounds. A 9MM semiautomatic handgun went in his jacket pocket in the other pocket a package of Billy's favorite Oreo cookies. The handgun would be a backup. Four bottles of water and the flashlight went into a backpack. Now he was ready.

Following the game path, he came to small spring. He saw a single little footprint in the mud. Ted choked back a sob when he saw it; he dialed the number the ranger had given him on the cell phone. After several rings the phone was picked-up. "US Forrest Service, Ranger Johnson speaking," Ted exclaimed, "I've found the trail Hank. Billy went down a game trail across the road from our camp. I've found a footprint about two hundred yards off the main road on the game trail." Hank answered, "Save your cell phone power Ted, this is a lucky break, but please remember to keep your batteries up, OK!" Ted answered, "sure thanks. I'm going to push on. Bye." With that he hung up the phone. He gave one last look at the footprint turned and started down the trail.

The game trail came to a tiny clearing, deer prints all over but here there was no defined trail. To the right there were thick woods and to the left a stand of Tamarack thicket, easier travel than the dense woods. Ted was kneeling down now so that he was looking at the terrain the same way Billy would see it. He decided that he would go to the left. So he headed that way looking hard for signs any thing that would tell him he was on the right track. It took him about ten minutes to find the access road to the camp. Damn, Billy had gone either into the thick forest or to the high ground. Surely he would have stuck with a road after finding it. Billy was a smart boy.

Backtracking Ted went back to the clearing. That was when he saw the bear. It was a little black bear that wasn't a bit afraid of this intruder in his domain. He just continued on stripping the huckleberries off the brush. Ted wasn't too concerned, black bears, without cubs, seldom-bothered humans. The sort of bear that could be a threat to a little boy would be a hungry deformed or crippled or a female with cubs. This one was fat and shiny. He had good feed. It was obviously a male so no cubs to worry about. Sighting the bear didn't help Ted's anxiety level though. He was again faced with the dilemma of which way did Billy really go.

High ground or Thick timber those were the choices. Ted gave a long loud shout, "Billy, BILLY!" He paused to listen and heard nothing. Ted then unslung his rifle and fired off a shot into the air, he knew THAT! Could be heard for miles? He then fired a second shot knowing that a single report was always hard to place. Two shots in succession make it easier to determine the direction of the firing. The only effect the shooting had been to make the bear disappear.

Ted went to the timber side of the clearing and examined it. One thing that caught his eye was a deadfall that had dropped out of the thick timber into the clearing. Following the tree out of the clearing he came to its stump. He saw it there on the ground, a bubble gum wrapper. Billy had been here. Perhaps this was where he spent the night.

On his hands and knees, He looked up under the stump. A dry spot just big enough for Billy to hide in was there. Ted thought, "Good boy Billy, that was smart. Please! Stay smart till I find you." He didn't bother phoning this to Hank because the location was so close to the last call. Still, on hands and knees he examined the trail looking for some sign of direction. He saw a couple of scuffmarks in the clay heading toward the clearing. Billy had abandoned the deep timber and headed to the high ground. Ted was sure of it now. He didn't call Hank, "What if his assumptions were wrong?" It was best to leave things as they were. The Forrest Service could do an independent search with the dogs and perhaps turn up different results.

It would be a difficult task deciding which of the different game trails the boy had taken. If he could find any track or sign that Billy had gone this way Ted would have called the Ranger. Ted was going to wait till evening and then call to find out if, the other searchers had found Billy. Try as he might, Ted's best searches didn't turn up a clue in the hard shale of the trails.

Thirst was becoming the most important thing in Billy's life. He wasn't thinking of his Daddy or Mommy or even his Sister. Billy was thinking of how much he needed

some water. No water was anywhere here up on the high hill he had climbed. The creek was way down in the bottom. So now he started down the slope of the hill towards the bushes and trees that might harbor a hidden hole and water. He had stopped crying long ago, his eyes were hurting from all the dried tears.

Going over the slope was a mistake. The hill tricked him it started out gradual and soon became quite steep. Too steep to climb back up, his efforts to do so resulted in crumbling shale rock to cause him to lose his footing and then he fell. He slid down a steep bank that turned into a cliff at the bottom. His hands were bleeding from trying to find something solid to hang onto. The knees of his britches were torn open. Billy screamed just before he dropped off the cliff.

Selsadon heard the cry. She cried for the little boy sensing that he had survived the fall. Billy was badly injured and now he would die soon. She stood up and started out of her lair. Again the voices spoke in her mind, "No! No! Please don't."

It was getting late in the day. Ted knew he would have to find the boy before darkness set in. He found himself almost running up the ridge before he realized this was not the thing to do. It would be easy to miss a sign. Ted forced himself to slow down, and carefully study the surrounding ground looking for broken twigs, shale scattered in a pattern different than the texture of natural erosion, any clue to find Billy. He progressed up the ridge and realized how thirsty he was. Billy would have had the same experience, high on the ridge in the heat of the afternoon.

By listening hard, a far off stream could be heard; it was running down in the draw. Ted took out a water bottle and started to take a drink. He put the bottle back in the pack, if Billy didn't get a drink, Ted didn't need one either. He wouldn't drink while his boy was suffering from thirst. Ted started down hill towards the sounds of water.

The terrain soon became much steeper. Ted soon realized that if it wasn't so brushy, he might be walking into dangerous country. When things became so bad that he couldn't be sure of his footing anymore, he rigged a rope to a tree. That would give him a hundred feet of safety. About halfway down the rope, he saw one of Billy's shoes and a drag path in the steep shale. Ted's heart sank into his chest and he screamed "BILLY, BILLY, CAN YOU HEAR ME?" He scrambled on down the rope to the edge of a cliff barely catching the end of the rope. At the bottom of sixty feet drop in a tangle of brush was a little form. Ted screamed, "NO OH GOD NO!" There was no way he could reach Billy quickly without killing himself.

Ted tied off to his rope and took out his cell phone. With trembling fingers he dialed Hank's number. Hank picked up the phone and answered with the same "US Forest . . ." Ted interrupted and said, "I've found him. HE IS DOWN."

"Where are you?"

"I don't know the name of the creek or the draw, but it should be about eight miles from my camp. Head towards high country in the national forest, there is a draw with a cliff. Billy fell down the cliff and I can't get to him."

"Can you see him?"

"Not well enough to tell if he is even breathing." He was sobbing into the phone now.

A brief pause and then Hank answered, "The chopper is heading towards you. You should see it in a few minutes. Help me guide it to the spot."

Ted knew now how he would have felt had he found the boy face down at the beaver dam. It was a little more than he could handle, but he had to keep himself together for a while longer. It was then that he saw it, a bear, No! Bear don't walk erect all the time. It was a Sasquatch an abominable snowman No! It had breasts this one was a female. She was heading for his boy.

Ted screamed, "Leave him alone. Go away." She stopped and looked up at him, a feeling of overpowering sadness come over him. She proceeded on towards the boy. Ted un-slung the rifle from his shoulder and took aim, the Sasquatch hurried to Billy and stooped down looking at him. She gently cradled the tiny boy in her giant arms and stood up and focusing her gaze on Ted. He could almost hear her pleading in his subconscious.

Ted fumbled the lens-covers off his scope and levered a round into the chamber. He could hit a pie plate at that range without any difficulty. The Sasquatch had the boy tucked up under her breasts with her right arm and was trying to get away. He took aim at her lower back and fired. No way the bullet would get to his boy that way. She went down but didn't drop the boy. She started trying to drag herself into cover with one arm and one leg, dragging the other one. Ted was horrified, he thought, "What have I done." He realized this creature didn't intend to harm Billy.

Ted heard the helicopter clear the ridge, down low, and start to come up the draw. Ted became aware of Hanks voice in the cell phone. He was asking, "Can you see the chopper?"

"Yes! They are coming up the draw." Tell them to watch out, something has him."

"What has him?"

"I think it's a Sasquatch."

Hank thought, "Poor guy he's losing it."

The Yeti felt the pain and grief of Selsadon everywhere on Earth and in orbit. The captain nodded to his crew and gave them the chance to veto a rescue effort. All he sensed was agreement.

To be continued . . .