

Peyton Shaw

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“Hideaway”

Summer was Bennie’s favorite time of the year. He would spend most of the weekdays helping his mother around the house while his brother went off to work. Bennie barely knew his father and wished never to see the man that left him at such a young age. The weekends were the highlight of his summer. Bennie’s mother allowed him freedom to do what he wished, and a lot of the time she did not know where he went off to. She assumed he took off down the road to Liam’s house. Liam Thomas was Bennie’s closest friend. They have been inseparable ever since Bennie moved into town about four years ago. Bennie would go over every weekend, he would say hello to Liam’s parents, and then they’d sneak out to the woods.

Two years back the boys decided to take a different route into the woods. After about thirty minutes, they had stumbled upon an abandoned barn. The walls were covered in miles of vines, there was rusty metal bits scattered across the floor, the door was unable to shut, and the barn was crowded with junk. With all its flaws, it was still quite a spectacle. The red paint of the barn was still vibrant. Liam tested the loft above, and it held the boy’s weight. Bennie saw a large object in the back and heaved the cover off to be surprised by a rusty old tractor. Perhaps the most intriguing thing about the barn was the tall, thin tree that grew in the center. The roof appeared to have collapsed a while back leaving a mountain of brittle boards down below and from underneath grew the tree.

The boys immediately claimed the barn as their own. Whenever they got a chance, they would head out and get to work fortifying the barn. Liam's father owned the local landfill and scrap yard which was a fine place for the boys to rummage around for parts for their barn. They would lug whatever they thought useful out into the woods. They were able to get one side of the door to close, but the other side remained open barely holding onto its hinges. They piled up various pieces of metal and in front of the door to create a smaller doorway to enter. Liam braced the smashed windows with the few pieces of fallen roof that weren't rotten. From the outside the Barn looked even more abandoned than before the boys got there, but the inside became neat and tidy. The boys put a lot of effort into the barn to make it their perfect hideout; it would remain their secret.

Both boys had a wild imagination. Together, in their hideout, they would slay mighty dragons. They've defended their barn against hordes of zombies. Their barn once held portals to all the planets across the galaxy with all types of fabricated creatures coming out of them. They had traveled across the world all while staying inside their barn. What one boy saw in his mind's eye, so did the other.

As time went on, Liam began to grow tired of the stories and the barn. Eventually, he became tired of Bennie and did not hide his feelings. He let Bennie know that he no longer wanted to play in the barn and go on adventures together. Taking the news hard, Bennie ran off into the woods to a nearby creek to get away from Liam and his betrayal. After a while, he returned to the barn, and Liam was nowhere to be seen.

Bennie sunk down with his back against the tree. Full of sadness and rage, he decided to go on an adventure by himself. An adventure where he would have to defend the barn against an onslaught of demons. He was immediately surrounded. Demons were closing in on him from

every direction. Wielding a rusty pitch fork in one hand and a piece of metal fashioned into a shield in the other, he took to the demons. He was wildly flailing his weapon about, releasing his anger with each swing against the demons. Lost in his rage and imagination, Bennie started striking the walls and tearing down all the boys built together. He looked around and saw the last demon creeping through the door. With all his mite, he struck the demon stabbing it straight through the chest. Still full of rage, he tossed a rope over one of the branches of the tree. He dragged the final dead demon over to the tree, tied the rope to its foot, and pulled it up high into the leaves. He displayed the defeated demon to serve as a warning to all the other demons that may plan to attack him.

Exhausted from his battle, Bennie fell slept under the branches of that lone tree while admiring his victory. The following day, he could not find the energy to move. He was holding onto hope that Liam did not give up on their friendship, and he hoped that his closest friend would come strolling through that barn door as if the argument had not happened the day before. He sat there all day, waiting.

Around sundown, he stood up, gave up hope for his friend's return, and walked home. The coming days were sad and lonely. His mother was too busy to notice his somber presence, and his brother was away at work. He would have to wait until the following weekend to attempt to rekindle the friendship they once had.

Two days later, there was a knock on the door. Bennie's mother was greeted by the sight of Liam's mother, Mrs. Thomas, acting frantic. She began by asking to see Bennie and then explained to Bennie's mother that Liam has been missing. She shared how he sometimes ran away for a day or so, but it was well into day three that he has been gone. Tears in her eyes, she asked Bennie when the last time was he saw Liam. Bennie did not know what to say. He wanted

to keep the barn a secret like he promised Liam, but he knew answering the question truthfully might help find his missing friend. He decided to tell Mrs. Thomas only the most necessary details. He described what happened the day he last saw Liam to Mrs. Thomas. He began with revealing how they would often sneak off into the woods to find adventures to go on. He stated they had gotten into an argument the day of his disappearance, and Liam wanted to end their friendship. He said that Liam went off into the woods. He chose not to mention the barn in case Liam, when he was found, still wanted to keep their barn a secret.

The following day a search party was gathered to look for the boy. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas asked Bennie if he wouldn't mind leading the search party as he knew the woods better than anyone else. Of course, he could not say no, so he led the party down their usual trail. He stopped as they neared the barn and lied saying they never ventured much further into the woods. Mr. Thomas insisted that a team of people should go up ahead and continue searching while the rest split up and closely combed where they had already been.

After an hour of searching, a piercing scream was heard from the team that went on ahead. Bennie knew they found the barn, and his heart sank because their hideout was no longer hidden. He then began to wonder why the search party was even interested in the barn. He thought that maybe Liam had returned and was waiting for him, which caused all the commotion. Bennie, along with Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, hurried through the woods to the barn. When they reached the clearing in the woods where the barn was, they saw a large portion of the search party standing outside the door with horrified looks on their faces.

One of the search party members approached Liam's parents and told them it was not a good scene. Mr. Thomas immediately shoved his way into the barn collapsing at the sight he was met with. Mrs. Thomas and Bennie followed him in and laid their eyes upon the atrocity. Mrs.

Thomas' legs gave out, as Bennie stood there silent. Liam's rigid body was hanging in the lone tree among the branches with a rusty pitch fork protruding from his chest.