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## Those Beneath

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Those Beneath...: An Excerpt (Chapter 1: A Foreboding Premonition)

Dee Lancaster

“Come close, little ones, Nana has a story for you,” Three teenagers gathered around a woman in her rocking chair, looking up at her scarred face, and her gap-toothed smirk. “One filled with peril, monsters, the power of friendship, and greed. But be warned! The legend I will tell you now, you must not follow, for dangers lie in the depths of greed...”

*‘Thirty-odd years ago, in March, three Maine college students were traveling through Yellowstone National Park. Freshly Juniors, they were all celebrating being in their twenties.*

*The leader of the group, Des, was the fearless adventurer of the three: always wanting to discover new places and climb mountains. They were always known for their fiery blue eyes and a signature gap-toothed smile. Viko, the eldest, was the group's genius: always studious, learning about the ancient tribes that lived before us, known for their superior intelligence. And finally, Liz, the responsible one. She always got Des out of trouble when they got too deep, especially when they trespassed on property that wasn't for everyone. She was known for her kindness.*

*Together, the three of them made a nearly unstoppable group of adventurer friends. Nothing could take them down! Until Des decided the group should hike Eagle Peak in Yellowstone. Des had received an anonymous tip that there were strange sounds startling the wildlife, a creaky sort of baying, and corpses littering the mountainside. Des wanted to find out the source of those strange sounds, the findings, but they made the mistake of leaving out those details when giving the group a rundown.*

*“Gather ‘round, boys! I’ve got a new trip for us!”*

*Viko and Liz walked into the suite’s common area, looking at Des who bore a shit-eating grin.*

*“So, I’ve got a new trip planned for us!”*

*Viko and Liz exchanged looks as Des threw their hands in the air.*

*“Who wants to fly to Wyoming?!”*

*Both Liz and Viko looked at each other in surprise, unsure what to make of this trip proposal. Des always had crazy ideas, some were fun, and some were dangerous. Like when they decided to skip biology and search the woods of Mt. Blue to find the ghost bear, only to trespass*

*on a crotchety old man's dairy farm. Yellowstone, however, would be quite the trip, even for Des.*

*"How long have you been planning this, D?" Liz asked, knowing Des can get spontaneous when they have a bad day.*

*"Oh...uhm...since this morning..." Liz was about to chide them, but Des quickly held up their hands. "Wait! I have a detailed itinerary and a three-page bulleted list of what we would be doing! Look, I know I get slaphappy when I see people doing cool stuff, but I think this would be really fun for us. We have never left Maine for any adventures before, and we've always talked about visiting Yellowstone for my twentieth birthday. Please, just look over the list and think about it, okay?"*

*Des laid the itinerary and list on the table before walking into their room, a defeated look on their face. Liz and Viko looked at each other again in surprise; this was new coming from Des. Both had never seen them so passionate about any of their trips together, this was almost unlike them.*

*Liz was the first to read the itinerary. A soft smile formed on her face, noticing her friend had planned this out quite well. Viko stood beside her as Liz lowered the papers for them to get a turn, scanning along all four pages of the detailed proposal, humming before nodding up at their tall friend.*

*"They planned this out pretty well for such a short amount of prep time, should we sleep on it?" Viko asked.*

*Liz thought for a moment. "Yeah, we'll talk about it tomorrow..."*  
*The two friends bid each other goodnight before heading to their respective rooms, leaving Des to dream of their trip proposal. Late into the night, Des awoke to a muted baying coming from outside. They got out of bed to quickly look out the window, only to be met with a sight that chilled their blood.*

*Directly outside the window was Eagle Peak, and its large grey pine trees. Des slowly made their way out of the dorm room, walking through the halls. One would think Des would be very alarmed by the sudden appearance of a massive mountain outside their window, but to them, that was not the alarming part. As they made it down the flights of stairs, they were met with piles of steaming bones, bits of flesh still attached.*

*Once outside, Des realized the mountain was no longer there, they were inside of a slimy cavern. They must have crossed through a dream door, now they were inside a cave system, shown by the mysterious cave opening and skeletal corpses. Wanting to find the source of this madness, they delved deeper into the unknown.*

*After what felt like hours, they reached a fork in the path. Des's heart stopped when they heard the screams of Liz and Viko. To make it worse, they also heard the screams of children, women, and men. Conflicted, they paused before the openings. They were frozen, who could they possibly choose? Each scream was coming from its own cave. When their friends began to scream in agony, Des's body decided for them. Running down the stone hallway toward the screaming, they were met with a sight that made their blood run cold.*

*A large reptile-like creature had Liz in its mouth, swallowing her while she was still screaming before turning to Viko. Des no longer had control over their body, rather than run to save Viko, they fled, like a coward. What happened next came in quick succession. Des heard a baying roar from behind, oddly muted for being so close. As they reached a chasm in their path, they were met with no other choice but to turn back.*

*When they turned around, they were met with the reptilian monster. Des could not describe its appearance, other than its skinless face stained with blood, and a legless backside. If it had eyes, Des could not see them, but they knew what the creature was here for. It wanted them.*

*Before they knew what was happening, the creature leaped towards Des, grabbing them by the arm, and falling into the chasm below with them in its maw. They felt no pain when they hit the bottom. When the leader opened their eyes, they were back in their bed. Everything was the same, except for the claw scars on their arms, and the muted baying in the distance. This wasn't good...*