

Jersey Devil

by

Lauren Henderson

laurenkate2040@gmail.com

EXT. PINELAND WOODS TRAIL - DAY

A small SEARCH PARTY walks down a winding dirt path. AGNES CAIN - mid 20's, superstitious, headstrong - leads the way. A camera hangs around her neck. Her mother, HEATHER CAIN - 60's, troubled - follows behind. A fog obscures the crooked pines that tower over them.

AGNES

Dad? Dad?

HEATHER

Charles?

Everyone's on edge. Exhausted. An eerie stillness hangs in the air.

Agnes stops. Squints at the path ahead.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Agnes? What is it?

Her eyes widen. A HAND sticks out from behind a bush.

AGNES

(to self)

No...

She runs forward. Heart pounds --

She finds the BODY. It's bloody. Mutilated. Her grief twists into terror.

The rest of the party reaches her. A church bell DONGS. Agnes tries not to throw up.

EXT. CAIN HOUSE - DAY

The bell tolls. A truck pulls up to the farmhouse by the woods. BONNIE CAIN - early 30's, skeptical, intelligent - steps out of the passenger's side. Hands the DRIVER cash.

BONNIE

Thank you.

The driver nods. Heads off. Bonnie looks up at the house. Deep breath.

INT. CAIN HOUSE - DAY

ENTRY WAY

Bonnie walks into the old rustic home. Black cloths cover the mirrors and the grandfather clock is stopped at 11:00.

Many WAKE-GOERS walk around inside, all dressed in black. Some hug Bonnie and offer their condolences, others whisper to each other as she passes by.

Agnes and Heather talk to a PRIEST. Agnes fidgets with her old ROSARY NECKLACE. She senses something, turns. Sees Bonnie. Agnes excuses herself and approaches her.

They share a look. Both hold back tears.

AGNES

You're late.

BONNIE

My train got delayed.

Agnes breaks first. She pulls Bonnie into a hug. Bonnie hesitates, then closes her eyes and accepts it.

They pull away.

AGNES

I've been tryin' to handle all the...funeral arrangements and everything, but...

BONNIE

Ma left you in charge?

AGNES

(chuckles)

Shut up.

Agnes shakes her head.

AGNES (CONT'D)

I have no idea how we're gonna survive without him. You were the only one who ever understood all his business and finance talk.

BONNIE

...I'm sure you'll figure it out.

Agnes sighs, looks away. Bonnie tugs at her sleeve.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

I want to see him.

AGNES

You can't. Closed casket.

BONNIE

What? Why?

AGNES
 ...Nobody told you?

LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The sisters sit on the couch together, house now empty of guests. An old GUN - .308 Bolt Action Hunting Rifle - hangs above the crackling fireplace. Agnes shows Bonnie PHOTOS of their dad's corpse. Details of ripped limbs and clawed out flesh. It's gruesome.

BONNIE
 Jesus Christ...

AGNES
 Somethin' out in the woods was stealing dad's game. All the deer kept turnin' up dead and mangled. He was trying to hunt it down.

BONNIE
 (to self)
 What kind of animal can do this?

AGNES
 I don't think it's an animal.

BONNIE
 ...What do you mean by that?

Agnes turns to face her, frantic to explain.

AGNES
 I heard high-pitched screaming coming from those woods the night he went missin'. Wasn't a sound any creature I know of can make. Some folks saw something flying in the sky, too. Something big. And look-

She points to slash marks in one of the pictures.

AGNES (CONT'D)
 Three claws.

Agnes waits for Bonnie to connect the dots. When she does --

BONNIE
 You cannot be serious.

AGNES
 Think about it, Bonnie! What else could do that kind of damage?

BONNIE
There's no way you still believe in
the fucking Jersey Devil.

HEATHER
Language, Bonnie.

Heather glares from the kitchen. Her eyes are puffy and
tired. Bonnie shifts in her seat.

BONNIE
Sorry, Ma.

Heather walks away from the door frame.

AGNES
You know it's real, Bonnie. We saw
it before.

BONNIE
We didn't see anything, we were
just...imagining things. This
must've been a bear or coyote or
something.

Bonnie stands and walks away. Agnes follows.

AGNES
Are you stupid? This ain't a
fucking bear.

Bonnie turns to her.

BONNIE
It being a monster is more
believable to you?

AGNES
Yes.

BONNIE
You need to grow up.

AGNES
I'm tellin' you Bonnie, that beast
killed Dad. We can't let it get
away.

BONNIE
You wanna to hunt down a fairy
tale?

AGNES
It's not-

HEATHER

For heaven's sake, would you two
quit arguin'?!

Heather shoots daggers at the two sisters. They both look
away.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Bonnie, come help me with dinner.

Bonnie nods. Walks to the kitchen.

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Heather adds meat to a pot with broth and onions. Stirs. She
gestures to vegetables on the counter. Bonnie picks up a
knife and dices them.

HEATHER

You *finally* come home and all you
do is start fights with your sister
like you're children.

BONNIE

I'm sorry, but- you know how she
is. I can't help it.

Heather raises an eyebrow.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

She's talking about a monster in
the woods again.

HEATHER

Well, don't tease her too much. You
used to believe in the Jersey
Devil, too.

Bonnie chuckles. A smile creeps onto Heather's face.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

Well, I hope you'll stay a while.
Agnes and I need help adjustin' now
that your father's gone.

Heather puts down her utensils. Moves next to Bonnie and
works on the vegetables with her.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

She showed you those pictures?

BONNIE

...Yeah.

HEATHER

I don't know what in the world happened to him. Never seen anythin' as grisly as that. And knowin' that thing's still out there...

She shakes her head.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

It scares me.

BONNIE

Don't let Agnes work you up. It's just a...wild animal.

HEATHER

Doesn't matter what it is. If it can get Charles, it can get Agnes and me.

BONNIE

That won't happen.

HEATHER

I'm gettin' old. Not as good of a hunter as I used to be. If that thing comes out of the woods...

She sighs.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

We need you, Bonnie. Your sister is-

BONNIE

Neurotic?

Heather shoot her a look.

HEATHER

...blessed with a wonderful gift, but she doesn't know how to keep her head out of the clouds. She needs someone to ground her. Keep her safe.

Heather walks back to the pot.

HEATHER (CONT'D)

You've always been the best shot. Listen to your sister and go take care of it.

Bonnie looks down. Keeps chopping.

LIVING ROOM - LATER

Bonnie walks back to the couch. The fire has died down, and the glow of embers illuminates Agnes' sleeping face.

BONNIE

Agnes.

No response. Bonnie hits her arm. Agnes jumps.

AGNES

Ow! What?!

Bonnie walks to the rifle on the wall.

BONNIE

I still think you're crazy. But whatever it is out there, any animal *that* aggressive and unafraid of humans is dangerous.

She brushes her hand against the gun. Turns to face Agnes.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

I'll do it.

EXT. CAIN HOUSE - DAY

Bonnie and Agnes load supplies into Agnes' truck. Hunting gear, rations, ammo. Bonnie messes with the rifle. Puts it in the car.

BONNIE

If we can't find tracks before sunset, we're going home.

AGNES

And comin' back tomorrow.

BONNIE

We'll see.

Agnes loads herbs, salves, an antique BELL. Bonnie scoffs.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

None of that spiritual shit is gonna help us.

AGNES

Yeah, yeah. You'll thank me later.

Bonnie heads back toward the house. A TICKET falls out of her bag. Agnes grabs it. Reads. Her smile fades and she looks over to the door. Pockets the ticket.

EXT. PINELAND WOODS TRAIL - LATER

Agnes stops the car on the eroding path. They get out and haul their supplies with them. Agnes looks down at a bush. The dirt's just barely red.

AGNES

We found him here.

Bonnie hesitates. Puts her hand on Agnes' shoulder.

BONNIE

It's as good a place as any to start.

Agnes nods. They walk past the bush and head deeper into the forest.

EXT. PINELAND WOODS - LATER

Bonnie constantly scans the area. Examines small scratch marks on a tree. Squats. Inspects something in the dirt. Moves on. She's in her element, but finds nothing.

Agnes takes off her rosary. She holds it by the chain and whispers a prayer. Bonnie turns.

BONNIE

What are you- Dowsing? Seriously?

AGNES

We're burning daylight, and your method ain't working.

BONNIE

Okay, sure, just lead us to a wishing well instead. Great idea.

Agnes puts a hand on her hip.

AGNES

It's not just for finding water, it's for finding anything. Long as you have the right intention.

BONNIE

You are so-

The rosary swings. Agnes gasps. Closes her eyes. She follows where it leads.

AGNES

Shh. It's workin'. C'mon!

Bonnie groans but follows. They wind through the trees and turn at random intervals with the necklace's movement. Bonnie stops her from running into things, moves her around obstacles.

The rosary spins. Agnes stops.

AGNES (CONT'D)
Something's close.

Bonnie rolls her eyes. They both look around for tracks. Bonnie sees something in a muddy patch. Squats down.

BONNIE
Holy shit.

Agnes walks over to her and looks down. Both are wide-eyed. TRACKS, shaped like deer hooves but twice the size. Bonnie measures them against her hand.

AGNES
Yeah, definitely a bear.

Agnes puts the necklace back on. Bonnie stands. Rubs her eyes.

BONNIE
Let's see where it leads us.

EXT. PINELAND WOODS - LATER

They follow the strange tracks. The forest grows thicker. Little sunlight breaks through the leaves. It's tense. Suffocating.

The trail finally opens into a small clearing. There's a large nesting area, clumps of fur and feathers, bones scattered everywhere.

AGNES
Bingo.

They move forward. Bonnie spots something that shines in the grass. She picks it up.

Charles' HUNTING KNIFE. She twirls it, lost in thought.

BEGIN FLASHBACK: EXT. CAIN HOUSE - DAY

CHARLES (40's) and YOUNG BONNIE (8) are in the backyard. Charles skins a rabbit with the knife. Bonnie gestures wildly as she tells a story. Curves three of her fingers into a claw.

YOUNG BONNIE

The monster was *huge* and it was growlin' at us. Agnes started cryin', but I wasn't even scared. I grabbed her hand and we ran all the way back home.

She mimes a running motion.

CHARLES

Sounds like you were very brave, Bonnie. You know what else you are?

YOUNG BONNIE

What?

CHARLES

Not allowed to be in the woods after dark.

Bonnie looks at her feet.

YOUNG BONNIE

Sorry....

Charles smiles.

CHARLES

It's alright. As long as you keep protectin' your sister from the monsters.

YOUNG BONNIE

Uh huh! We're gonna hunt them all down one day.

She runs behind Charles and around the backyard. Pretends to hold a rifle and shoots the air. Does a few somersaults for effect. Charles laughs and returns his focus to the rabbit.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. PINELAND WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Bonnie stares into the knife's reflection. She points it away from the path.

BONNIE

Let's head east and set up camp.

She puts the knife in her bag.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

We'll come back after nightfall.

Bonnie walks. Agnes follows.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Bonnie sits in front of a small fire. Loads her gun. Various supplies are strewn about. Agnes pours tea. Hands a cup to Bonnie.

AGNES

Drink. It'll bring good luck.

Bonnie hesitates, then accepts it. She drinks. Agnes sits and does the same.

AGNES (CONT'D)

Oh, I forgot. You dropped this.

Agnes takes the ticket out of her pocket. Hands it to Bonnie.

INSERT: TRAIN TICKET

Bay Head Station to Penn Station. One way. Departure date December 1st.

BACK TO CAMPSITE

AGNES (CONT'D)

You're only here three days?

BONNIE

I couldn't get more time off work.

Agnes huffs.

AGNES

Dad literally *dies* and you can't even bother to spend a week with us.

BONNIE

That's not fair-

AGNES

It's more than fair. Stop runnin' away every chance you get!

BONNIE

I'm not trying to run from you, I just- I can't stay here. I don't want to be a piney forever.

AGNES

...Would that really be so bad?

Agnes walks off to put her things away. Bonnie watches her go, then stares into the fire.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Agnes turns in her sleeping bag. Bonnie sits at the fire, almost dozes off. Silence, except for a weak wind and crickets. Then --

A BLOOD-CURDLING SCREECH. Both sisters jolt awake. Their eyes dart up.

A huge shadow SWOOPS above the trees. Large wings BEAT as the creature heads toward the clearing.

Bonnie and Agnes glance at each other. Bonnie grabs the rifle and they SPRINT after it. They stumble through the dense forest, desperate to catch up.

They slow down as they near the clearing. The creature lands with a THUD in the center. Bonnie and Agnes sneak forward and peer at it through the trees.

The monster hunches over a nearly-dead deer. It thrashes in the beast's clutch. The monster BITES down and RIPS through the flesh. It stops bleating.

Bonnie watches with horrified eyes as the creature rises to its full, towering height. The moonlight reveals its form - head of a ram, bat-like wings, jagged claws, and massive deer legs --

BONNIE
...That's the devil.

AGNES
(whispers)
I told you!

The monster scans the area, then returns to its prey. Agnes pats Bonnie's shoulder.

AGNES (CONT'D)
This is our chance. Don't miss.

BONNIE
Thanks.

Agnes backs away. Bonnie raises the rifle, eyes fixated ahead. She palms the bolt as quietly as possible. Her hands tremble.

Something rustles next to her. She lowers the gun, turns. Agnes is gone. Eyes wide, she looks back --

The Jersey Devil stares right at her.

It CHARGES. Screeches as it barrels toward her on all fours. Bonnie lifts the rifle and FIRES. A miss. She rapidly cycles the bolt. BANG. Another miss.

The beast lunges at her. Knocks Bonnie to the ground and pins her down. She drops the gun. It looms over her and SCREAMS. Sharp, slobbery teeth inches away from Bonnie's head. Terror paints her face. The creature raises its claws to attack --

AGNES (O.S.)
EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE
DARKEST VALLEY, I WILL FEAR NO
EVIL!

The Jersey Devil slowly turns its head. Agnes chants from the other side of the clearing. Rosary raised in one hand, bell raised in another. She RINGS it slowly. Hypnotically. The monster's eyes glaze over.

BONNIE
What the fuck are you doing?!

She rings the bell again. The beast growls. Creeps toward Agnes as they stare each other down. Bonnie scrambles for the gun.

AGNES
LET DEATH TAKE MY ENEMIES BY
SURPRISE, LET THEM GO DOWN ALIVE TO
THE REALM OF THE DEAD-

The Jersey Devil reaches her. Slowly rises. Lifts its claws. Agnes lowers her arms, wide open in acceptance.

AGNES (CONT'D)
For evil finds lodging among them.

She rings the bell. BANG! A shot to the neck.

The monster screams and tumbles backward. It writhes in pain. The sisters run up to it. Bonnie aims at its head. BANG. BANG. The monster falls still. The devil is dead.

EXT. PINELAND WOODS TRAIL - DAY

Agnes and Bonnie emerge out of the woods. They struggle to drag a huge game sled behind them, which carries the Jersey Devil's body. They finally pull it next to the car and stop to catch their breath. Bonnie looks from the monster to the truck bed. Sighs.

They work together to lift the beast into the back of the truck and tie it down with ratchet straps. Exhausted, they step back to admire their work. The monster is way too big to fit in the truck.

AGNES

...That'll do.

They round up their belongings and pack everything in the back seat.

BONNIE

What are people gonna say when we show up with this thing?

AGNES

I reckon they'll call us heroes.

Bonnie chuckles. Thinks.

BONNIE

...Hey, did Dad ever teach you how he tracks inventory?

AGNES

I wish. His system's so outdated and messy, I can't make sense of any of it.

BONNIE

Yeah, he couldn't organize for shit. I'll have to reconfigure everything.

Agnes looks up at her.

BONNIE (CONT'D)

And we're still doing those hunting tours, right? That scheduling program is awful, I need to start from scratch. Ugh, that's gonna take ages.

Agnes smiles.

AGNES

I'm sure you'll figure it out.

She gets into the driver's seat and starts the car. Bonnie look to the backseat. The ticket sticks out of her bag. She grabs it and closes the door. Reads it. Crumples the ticket and puts it in her jacket pocket.

Bonnie gets into the passenger's side.

BONNIE

So, you still have a thing for that
butcher's son?

AGNES

Oh, shut up!

They talk and laugh indistinctly as the truck winds down the dirt path. The car and the Jersey Devil disappear into the bright, hazy air.

THE END.