

Skinwalker Cabin

By

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I met my partner when he was visiting England for business. Our companies had some trivial partnership together - they used us as their UK-based foothold, and we used them as our American counterpart. It was something about cutting costs and allowing each other to conduct sales without having to undergo endless procedures, though, I'm almost certain if you delved into it, there were more clandestine reasons, like tax benefits, but, it wasn't really our place, nor our motive, to check.

He had flown over with a small handful of their 'company ambassadors', whereas ours had selected a few of us to partake in the seminars. It was very much what you'd expect: a pitiable bland room, with clinical lighting, uncomfortable chairs set in rows, a whiteboard heading the room so that the buzzing projector above could show menial slide after tedious statistic, and, everyone's favourite, the table at the back crowded with small polystyrene cups, urns of filter coffee and breakfast tea, as well as an assortment of the most tragic sandwiches you could imagine.

I stifled a groan, initially, when I was one of the names called out at having the honour to represent our business, "nay, our country" to our American brothers and sisters. Not because of the interaction with them, but because of the content – staff training, staff motivation, team building, anything of that ilk was enough to claw at the happiness of any sane human. It did mean a week out of work, which was nice, but going off any of the previous ones I'd attended, I couldn't help but think work was the better option.

However, as soon as I saw him scrolling on his phone, sitting amongst the throng, all chattering about mundanities, clearly sharing my dislike and disinterest for the week ahead, I couldn't help but feeling a little elation from a kindred spirit. Misery loves company and all that.

The first day was what you'd expect, but, when the two of us were paired up for a roleplaying exercise, and partook whilst skirting around the task at hand with sarcasm and cynicism, I could tell he found that connection, too. Perhaps when you're tottering about at the bottom of the barrel, anything of worth you find is highlighted. I'm not complaining, it worked in my favour.

The next day, I could see he sat closer to me, and between speakers and clips, he'd throw a furtive glance at me, giving a roll of the eyes and a wry smile, or miming an exasperated exhalation. Each time, I smiled. We chatted, and by the third day, we were sitting next to each other. His colleagues and my own noticed that we were chatting away, and, as if plummeting back in to the depths of primary school, began encouraging the two of us to swap the filter coffee for something a tad more substantial and creamy, so, we did just that.

I showed him about London, and of course, Soho, which was only two tube stops away from where the cursed business centre was situated. He was gobsmacked. Looking through every window, gawping at every same-sex couple passing us by without a hint of danger, and hitting me with a fusillade of questions. He was from a super conservative, modest-sized town near Utah, and said that anything like this would be almost an invitation for abuse over there. Even where he was living now, a slightly bigger town which was fairly more liberal, was still nowhere on a level such as this.

We got our coffee (latte for me, Americano for him (go figure)), chatted away, went for dinner, went for drinks, spent the next day hungover and subject to smug glances and loaded

smirks from our colleagues. And, then, before we knew it, the week ended. We both knew we didn't want that to be the end of our correspondence, so we swapped details, stayed in contact, and well, the rest is history.

For the first three years, we'd dabbled with the idea of a long-distance relationship. He'd fly over to England, I'd fly over to America, we'd spend as much of our holidays as we can around one another, then fly back. It was working well enough, but, we weren't getting any younger. We wanted stability. I approached my bosses speaking about a possible transfer – it was easier than expected. Before long, my desk was cleaned, my apartment was packed, my visa was prepared and my flights were booked.

We moved in together straight away, and, considering this was not in my 'next-five-years' plan, it was the smoothest move I'd ever had. Seriously, moving from South East London to North London was a much more burdensome and chaotic feat. But here I was, being woken up with a gentle nudge of the shoulder and the heavenly scent of coffee to greet me (latte for me, Americano for him), redecorating the home because "I want it to have both our input", exploring my new town and settling myself into a brand new work environment.

And thus, the exposition ends. I've been living here for two years now, and, finally, the topic of meeting his family has come up. The two of us had never really broached the subject over the three years of communication before I moved here – it would be a week, or two if we were lucky, and we just wanted to spend every second together. But, seeing as my presence was a mainstay, that we were living together, navigating the world together, it seemed only fitting that my existence was brought to his parent's attention.

They had a little log cabin, a quaint, twee affair, situated in some immense forest. When he told me, he noticed that I was agape at the nonchalance in which he broke this news to me. "Oh, it's no big deal. They bought it for next to nothing. Path Walker Cabin, it's called. It used to be a Ranger Lodging when the area was popular for hiking, but the trail was too difficult for beginners, and too easy for anyone experienced, so, it just kinda got abandoned."

He said they used to go there when he was younger every year, but by the time his sister and he were teenagers, the trips stopped. Either his parents would rent it out to close friends, mutual friends, distant acquaintances and ultimately, complete strangers for a modest sum (depending on the connection), or his parents would leave him and his sister to their family home, and they would enjoy the privacy and solitude that only a cabin in the woods could offer.

Now, it was my turn to ask question after question. The way the city streets of London were so far removed from his comfort zone, the idea of spending a week in the middle of some isolated forest, sequestered from any neighbours or civilisation, and only each other for company was alien. I couldn't tell if I was nervous or excited about the idea, but he tried to win me over by pinning the most romanticised idea a cabin in the woods could author, rather than the outright terrifying.

Oh, the things I was promised. Sitting in the old comfy chairs together, as we stoked the cinderling charcoal in the roaring hearthside, knowing that outside, the snow was peppering down with a silent grace, but the pervasive cold would have no invitation. How I'd meet his dog, old and loyal it was, and though half-senile, had incredible levels of energy and a proclivity for playing and hugs. How his mum and dad would question me about my parents, my family, my goals. About England, about the monarchy, and 'soccer' – questions of which I fretted, since in sooth, I knew very little. How, if his sister came with her kids, we would set up a huge fire outside, sit around on the little log stools, pick the best stick we could find from the encroaching forest, and use them to melt marshmallows.

S'mores? Me, a nobody from the south of England was going to eat s'mores like some cute romantic movie. It was a pleasing concept.

It didn't take long before I was won over by the idea, and he promised that no matter what, he would bat away any awkwardness that presented itself (the mounting worry above all others) by being outnumbered by his family. We booked the holiday off work, we went shopping for matching camping gear (just in case) and thermal gear (a necessity) as well as little essential tools, and my favourite purchase, the same three books each, so we can read through them together when tucked away in our little room.

"I used to have a little reading nook there," he explained, "but I never got much reading done. From my window, you can see where the forest falls into, um, a decline, I guess? I used to sit with my binoculars as a kid and just watch the birds and squirrels and whatever else. It's pretty cool."

Well, who was I to say 'no' to such a profoundly different experiences than what England could offer. We don't have vast wildernesses – we have moors, we have forests, we have woods, sure... but nothing on the level of what he'd shown me in photos or old, crackling family movies.

Fast forward to the day before we left, and in spite of myself, I was brimming with excitement. The sort of butterflies that storm about your stomach in a tumult on the first day back at school, or when you're trying to sleep on Christmas eve. The ones that, with each stomach toss, conjure infinite thoughts and fancies in your head that can only be sated by acknowledging each one with the respect and audience it deserves, and then moving onto the next with as much veneration.

I decided, in my wide-awake anxious-excitement, that it would work in my favour to study some camping skills. Imagine me sitting there, in the midst of this new family, as the 'green boy' from overseas who had no camping experience, when all of a sudden, I grab the flint and tinder, and scratch sparks into the firewood. Surely, I could pick up some basic skills to impress my potential new family?

I started going through endless guides, mostly click-bait articles, or amateur vloggers that narrated their own imagined hazards in camping grounds, before giving up on the idea of trying to arrive tomorrow as Twink Grylls. I'm sure anything I needed to know would be either taken care of for me, or taught to me by him or his family. So, instead, I started looking into what to expect in regards to bugs, or predators, or general hazard of geography, when I stumbled upon something peculiar.

An article, headed:

'A Night at Utah's Skinwalker Cabin'.

Obviously, my attention was instantly commanded by the impact of the title. Click-bait or not. But, even more-so by the image that was attached to it. I'm by no means known for my photographic memory, but I'd often flicked back through the photos he'd shown me, the way you'd look at hotels you've booked, or experiences you've planned, to generate a level of excitement. The image looked eerily similar to those pictures. I clicked in, and eagerly began to read.

"The forests around Utah are renowned for their vegetation, their towering trees, their abundant wildlife, and their well-trodden hiking trails. My buddy and I have been updating our blog about our experiences in each one [links to those below], but none of them could compare in adventure to our night at Skinwalker Cabin.

“As soon as we stepped foot in this forest, something felt off. We’d heard of the disappearances, the legends, the ghost stories or the alleged sightings, but that’s never stopped us before [see: [camping in abandoned gold mine](#)]. We stuck to the hiking trail that was once a popular destination, but it was clear to see this was no longer used. There was a faint vestige of a path, highlighted by a vague alteration in the overgrowing nature, but it wasn’t long before the trail was swallowed by the forest, and the two of us decided we would try find our own way.

“Even in broad daylight, we felt a sense of uneasiness, but as it started getting dark, it was almost unbearable. It felt like behind every tree, there was some intelligent presence glaring down at us from above, or peering at us from the distance behind some unseen tree – a phenomenon that is often claimed by people as stupid as us to attempt to find the cabin.”

My heart was already pounding, feeling like I had stumbled upon something desecrated, something illicit, some deep and dark family secret that I was not meant to uncover. I could feel my heart hammering, my breath hollow, and with as little disturbance to his sleeping frame beside me as possible, I opened a new window on my phone – being sure to keep this odd little blog saved so I can go back to it – and typed in ‘Skinwalker Cabin’.

Varying articles popped up, some going into the legends of Skinwalkers (something I’d heard of briefly, but knew very little about), providing information about their origins and supernatural qualities, but, as much as I wanted to delve down that rabbit hole, it wasn’t quite what I was looking for. I wanted to see if this cabin- I kept scrolling, clicking in to link after link trying to make my web page fall upon what my anxieties were alluding to.

‘Utah national forest’, ‘Wilderness of Utah’, ‘Unexplained Disappearances’, ‘Body Found on Trail’, ‘Stalked through the night-’, ‘Legend of Skinwalkers’, ‘Navajo Lore’, and then...

“Path Walker Cabin, which is more commonly known by locals and thrill-seekers as ‘Skinwalker Cabin’, has been home and central to countless tales surrounding mysteries, murders, and-”

“Why’re you still up?” I heard from behind me, and my soul almost catapulted from my mouth. He could see I was panicked and flustered, and that energy only woke him up from his sleeping stupor.

“Um,” I froze. I was within my right to say I was just looking into the trip, and stumbled on this stuff, was a little creeped out and just wanted to find out more about it. But, I just could utter the words. It was almost as if saying them aloud would make it real, or, at the very least, cause a bit of an argument. “Porn.”

“Oh,” he yawned, laying back down with his forearm covering his eyes. “Well, get to sleep soon, we’re up early.”

He turned away, somewhat disinterested by my ingenious excuse, and I, for the rest of that night, began to slip into one of those deep, obsessive holes that only vapid, endless forums and poorly written blogs could offer. Because, the next day, I was going to be staying in Skinwalker Cabin, and I needed to promptly terrify myself, and allow every horrifying story – from crimes to supernatural – to take root in my over-active, anxious mind... just like any well-adjusted thirty-year old would.

And let me tell you, I didn’t like what I read.