

Caldwell Farm

“We’re toast. We’re toast. We’re toast,”

Laurence knew he should have never agreed to Jessie’s dumb bet. Damn the consequences of having to pay for gas money for the next three weeks when he was already living off of ramen packets. The promise of a meal of unlimited IHOP paid for by his friend was too much for him to resist, his usual scaredy cat demeanor gone in the face of Tres Leches pancakes galore.

“Calm down,” said Jessie incredulously. Laurence wasn’t fooled. The other man was sweating nervous bullets, the beads of moisture on his face clear in the eerie moonlight that was cast on the pair as they continued to walk.

“Calm down! Calm down!” Laurence shouted back as he swatted away a corn stock that would have otherwise hit him in the face. “We’re being stalked by a crazy man with a chainsaw and you want me to calm down!” He was starting to hyperventilate now, the reality of their doomed situation setting in.

They weren’t the only ones being hunted in the field. Adrenaline junkies from all over had come to the infamous Caldwell Farm, a hotspot for disappearances and strange activity. The farmhouse itself sat abandoned, long ago falling into disrepair after its owners were murdered. Another draw for some psychos Laurence guessed. It was unfortunate that the so-called murderer had never left and was targeting that night’s intruders, finding them one by one. They had already narrowly escaped a few times, each time skimming closer to harm than the rest.

Screams echoed through the autumn air every so often, preambled by the distinct sound of a chainsaw. The direction from which the noises came from formed an untraceable pattern,

and Laurance flinched every time a particularly frightened shout sounded too close by for comfort. The fact that he wasn't alone put him slightly less on edge, but having strength in numbers with Jessie did not deter his fear the way it should. Instead, an almost visceral panic was rising in him, convinced more and more, as time went by, that they were both destined to die in this godforsaken cornfield.

Fallen stalks crunched underfoot as Laurence and Jessie marched forward through the winding layout of yellowed stems and leaves, a cool breeze occasionally raising any hairs that had been left unstanding on Laurence's neck. The field had gone quiet for the time being, the only sounds being Jessie's heavy breathing and Laurence's panting. It was almost peaceful in the silence, if only for a moment. Laurence could begin to imagine that they were simply on a nice evening stroll, the moon high in the star filled sky, and the soft breeze rustling the-

“Shit!”

Not even five feet in front of him, Chainsaw Man had reappeared from out of the field. His mask, featuring a chillingly unnatural grin, was slightly tilted, its fake rosy cheeks made even redder with a fresh spray of blood.

With a rev of the chainsaw in his hands, Laurence and Jessie stumbled into a sprint, swearing up a storm as they rounded down another lane of corn - broken, bent stalks tripping them every few strides. They ran blindly, until the revving had long faded behind them, and only then did they dare to stop. Laurence stood there for a moment, doubled over his knees, gulping in lungfuls of night air while awkwardly angling his elbows to nurse a stitch in his side. His eyes remained firmly locked on his dusty sneakers instead of having to look at the nightmarish sight of corn surrounding them. Jessie patted his back sympathetically, a gesture Laurence could not even begin to appreciate.

“Look,” Jessie said through his own gasps, and Laurence chanced a glance up to follow the line of his friend’s shaking finger.

Laurence could have sobbed. The end of the corn was in sight, they could go back to Jessie’s beat up car and get the fuck out of there.

But no. It could never be that damn simple. Because in front of them was not the dirt road with the waiting Chevy Malibu, but the cursed-to-hell farmhouse. Laurence stared stupidly at it for a moment, hardly believing his bad luck. Wildly he swung his head left and right. Rusted through tractors and farming equipment framed the edges of the cornfield and the house on both sides creating a tetanus-inducing barrier. There was no chance of getting around. The only way out was in.

“I am not going in there, Jessie,” Laurence said. He had locked his knees the moment Jessie’s outstretched hand had reached for the sleeve of his hoodie.

“Oh, come on. We can do this. We’ll run through it real quick and then be right out. Anything will be better than that motherfucking corn,” Jessie encouraged. Laurence thought it sounded more like the vote of confidence was for his friend’s benefit than for his own. Jessie had begun to rub his arms in a repetitive motion, an action that Laurence knew wasn’t because of the weak chill in the air. Jessie was a walking furnace. He knew the cause was the cold fear that must be settling deep into his bones.

Laurence let out a loud sigh of acceptance.

“These better be the best fuckin’ pancakes,” He mumbled under his breath. He reluctantly walked forward towards the tarp covered front door, hand pulling the plastic aside with a painfully slow movement. He blanched in horror at what was revealed.

Lights flickered from inside broken fixtures in the entryway some of which were sparking ominously. Where the power came from after all these years, Laurence could not tell you. The sound of creaking floorboards and window frames complimented the peeling wallpaper and broken, molting furniture horrendously, and Laurence's already pounding heart skyrocketed another few notches.

"We're toast. We're toast. We're toast," Laurence began repeating once again in a dizzying rhythm that matched the rapid pace of his heartbeat, and it was only Jessie's nudge on his shoulder that prevented him from high tailing it backwards and taking his chances of going back into the cornfield.

One tentative step forward into the house immediately had broken glass crunching underneath his feet, the sound diminished by the moth eaten carpet. Shuffling side by side in an awkward sort of huddle, Jessie and Laurence quickly stepped out of the entryway and into the living room, only for them to stop abruptly in terror at the dead body dangling inches from their faces. In fact the room was filled to the brim with them. Laurence in his growing hysteria thought the sight was pretty corny actually, being not too far from classic horror scenes as they go. Their heads were wrapped in burlap sacks, while the rest of their bodies dangled limply, a meat hook lodged deeply in each person's shoulder, fresh and crusted blood covering both the rough fabric of the sack and torn spots of missing appendages.

There was a slight noise next to him and Laurence felt all the blood drain from his face at the sound before he realized it was just Jessie. He pivoted to see the man doubled over gagging, leaning against the door jam in his attempts to keep their dinner of Chinese takeout inside his stomach. Laurence himself could feel his Chicken Lo Mein begin to twist around ominously, but he knew he could handle intense gore better than his friend. He had learned that the hard way by

holding a popcorn bowl that in ten minutes was suddenly full of vomit after suggesting that they watch *Saw* together one weekend.

With a new found determination from not being the more frightened friend for once, Laurence grabbed a hold of Jessie's letterman jacket and yanked him around the first of the cadavers blocking their path, pointedly ignoring the screaming in his own brain at his actions and the ghastly sight of the next body that was even more mangled than the first. With a surge of hope, Laurence could see the way out of the living room just past one of the victims that was partially gutted and sporting half a missing leg, and he picked up the pace. With a shaking fist he tightened his hold on Jessie's jacket, who, at this point, was almost as unresponsive as the bodies around them. He craned his neck, maneuvering it around a particularly beefy fellow who was slowly spinning, and he nearly cried out with joy.

There it was, the green glow that he had been searching for. It beckoned him forward, promising an end to their suffering and endless fright. Laurence was sure he looked like a man possessed, dragging his listless friend behind him as the green glow began to touch the very front of his features, eyes wide as saucers as they too took on an emerald hue.

When they were only a few tantalizing feet away, Chainsaw Man decided to make his appearance, jumping out of a coat closet inches from Laurence and Jessie's feet. Laurence screamed as he began raising the chainsaw above his head, his gloved, bloody hand about to pull the cord.

Wham!

Jessie had finally snapped out of his carnage induced shock and had punched Chainsaw Man directly over his toothy smile.

"Ow! What the hell man!," Chainsaw Man screamed at Jessie.

It was like waking up from a very vivid dream for Laurence. Chainsaw man had pulled the synthetic mask off of his face, revealing a kid, most likely a college freshman, sporting a busted lip and a glare that, if it could, would be more deadly than the chainsaw that was now hanging limply at his side.

With a rush of mortification at both his own fear and the fact Jessie had actually punched the guy, Laurence apologized profusely before finally steering Jessie through the waiting door with the green glowing 'EXIT' sign. He was both unsurprised and unprepared to see a woman standing there with an unamused look on her face, perfectly manicured nails tapping annoyedly at the plastic of her clipboard, the release waivers that held both of their signatures lying on top.

She looked at Jessie pointedly as Laurence did the same, waiting for him to explain his behavior towards the scare actor who had only succeeded in doing his job and got decked for it. There were several moments of awkward silence. Laurence could see Jessie's cheeks slowly turning red at the intensity of their combined gaze. Finally, letting out a nervous chuckle, he raised bruising fingers to run them through his sweat-plastered hair in a clear sign of his embarrassment.

“So...IHOP?”