[Snap Judgment]

**Glynn:** Oh, you've waited long enough. At long last, get your marshmallows and graham crackers, light the coals, grab a cold drink, stoke the fire, because it's time for Campfire Tales. A summertime taste of paranormal from Snap sister podcast Spooked to get you in the mood. And know this, the brand-new season of Spooked Season 7 returns to Luminary on September 9th, and to unlock the newest Spooked stories fresh from the tomb and regularly through the spring of 2023, subscribe to the Luminary channel on Apple Podcast or directly on Luminary. *luminary.link/spooked*.

[upbeat music]

As a kid, my grandfather had a shotgun. He brought it out twice every year. Once as the clock turned over on New Year's Eve, he went out to the porch and blasted into the sky. Pow, pow, pow, pow, pow, pow. "Granddaddy, granddaddy, you said whatever goes up has got to come down." "No, not on New Year's Day, baby." The other time was the night before Halloween, when Detroit, thousands of fires erupted the moment the sunset over the horizon, the city's raged, blazing orange and red and gold, devil's night. And I watched granddaddy get his gun, set up his folding chair on the porch, and sit smoking his cigarette, stroking the barrel. "Now, get back up in the house now, baby. Go get your grandma." All around us, Detroit burns, and hiding behind the bars on our windows, looking out into the darkness past granddaddy, I see shadows running on the sidewalk. Hooded figures wearing Batman, Superman, Donald Duck masks, carrying torches, gasoline containers, some pausing to consider our home, then hearing the cock of his gun barrel before deciding to move on.

If he's going to stay up to protect us, I'm going to stay up to protect him, all night long if I have to. And I try watching, watching shadows, fires, police cars, I try. Then, first light presses me awake. My face sleep masked against the window, I jump up scared, open the front door, and see my granddaddy still sitting sentry on the porch, still holding his shotgun, pulling the dregs from his last cigarette. His pack was super long Menthol cools, empty. "You keep your granny safe like I asked you?" "Yes, sir." "Good boy." "Granddaddy, weren’t you scared?" Then, for just an instant his eyes flash hot. He looks at me like he's seen something else. "Already paid the fire once, baby. I won't pay it again." Before he says it, I never knew how his sister had passed. I didn't understand that it wasn't an accident. I didn't know that someone had meant to burn his black family from their home in the middle of the night and how every person that crawled out of that inferno long ago took something of the flame with them. I didn't understand that he's been battling a different fire for a very long time.

Then, the burn passes from his eyes and he's almost my grandfather again, and I need him back from that place he just went. "Granddaddy, granddaddy, can I have just a little bit of ice cream on my cornflakes?" He looks at me all the way then, "Baby, you can have a lot of ice cream in there, if you don't tell your grandma."

[Spooked theme music]

Today on Snap Judgment, a very special tradition. We're taking you on a path through the dark woods. We proudly present Campfire Tales: Part 1, Dismal Falls, featuring stories trapped beyond the veil from our sister show, Spooked, a Luminary original.

On this Spooked road, we know full well that things are never as they seem, that people are often fighting invisible battles against unseen forces. We know all of this. But still, there's a different type of magic to being in the wild, that highlights the mystery of everything we do not see. Our next storyteller, Chuck, Chuck comes face to face with his unknown, deep in the Appalachian wilderness, that place called Dismal Falls.

[riveting music]

**Chuck:** My name is Chuck. I've been hanging out in the woods since I was really young. Kind of been out there ever since, between backpacking tours and wilderness therapy. Ended up making it what I do for a living at this point.

So, this happened in 2015, it was summertime. The camp that we were working out of, our main base camp, from what I understand it was an old Christian summer camp. I'm not sure of the details, but it was a pretty old camp. A lot of the cabins that we used had been redone a little bit. And then, of course, we had the horse stables. And we had, I want to say like, probably 15 or 16 of them, older horses a lot of them and the horses were actually essentially a therapy as well. The kids would work with them for part of their therapy. And then, the horses were also being rehabilitated from abusive homes at the same time.

[crickets]

At night, you would hear down by the stables, the donkey. His name was Stanley. He was a mini donkey. And he would start going off at night down there. I don't know if anybody out there has ever heard a donkey freaking out, but it can be kind of weird. A little bit scary. But he would do that pretty consistently. And then usually the next day, when we would go down to do horses, first thing we do is groom them. When you go to groom them, their manes and tails would be just completely in knots. Even if we had brushed them the day before, the horses would be in poor shape.

At the time, I really didn't think a lot of it, but I would have kids going to have to like, "Look at this. I didn't do this." I'd be like, "Okay, what's your point?" They'd be like, "We were the last group here. I didn't do this." I'm like, "Well, maybe Ms. Anne did it. It's not part of my paygrade right now to worry about the horses' manes."

[somber music]

I don't know a whole ton about horses, but I do remember growing up, my great grandma would talk about that happening. And she said it meant there was a witch on your farm. I guess it was because she would go out and every single day, the manes and the tails on the livestock were tangled up. It was like somebody had gone out and just went haywire on these animals. And they'd be skittish, and they would be jumpy, and they just were not in a good mood at all. That was one of the few things she ever talked about, was she said, "I swear there's a witch out here." She would say it all the time.

From the first time it happened down about the horse stables, I definitely thought of that. I remember her saying that immediately, "That damn witch." But I was like, "Well, if it happens a couple of times, whatever. It's not a big deal. It's coyotes or something like that." But consistently it happened there, I did start to wonder a little bit about that.

I'd heard about Dismal Falls. I'd read about it. I read about it initially on a photography website, and I saw pictures of it. And I was like, "That's a beautiful waterfall. I want to get out there and go see this." And I got linked over to a book called *Land of Waterfalls*. This was by a guy named Jim Bob Tinsley. He wrote it in 88. And he wrote it about Transylvania County mainly, which is the land of waterfalls, as they call it. There's tons of waterfalls out there, charted, uncharted. There's some that don't even have names. And he describes it as one of the most foreboding places in the Southern Appalachians.

I was mainly reading to get directions, just want to know how to get out there. Decided I was going to go check it out the next day. And so, I drove up and I parked there at the base camp and started my hike up there.

[car door opens and shuts]

[footsteps]

It's almost like a tunnel made out of rhododendron and mountain laurels that are so low to the ground that they're almost over your head. Very thick to get through, you're kind of on hands and knees. And that goes on for some time. Then you pop out of that, it opens up a little bit for you. And you're still going up a really steep grade, pretty blind, you can't see a whole lot. And you come around this corner and on your left side there's this really large boulder. I mean it's got to be the size of a house. It's a big boulder. So, I took note of that and kept on moving, and not too long after that you come to this point where the trail splits into two.

[footsteps]

At that point, I stopped and got my map out. I was not sure which way to go 100%. The lower route that stayed pretty flat, according to the map would go to the Dismal wall[?], but the other trail that goes, I mean from where I was at, it looked like it went straight up hill. That's the one that goes to the waterfall. I mean it is really steep. So, I start the climb up that way. I get probably about halfway up it, and just felt like I was being watched. I got that just that pit of your stomach feeling and hair on the back of my neck kind of stood up. And weirdly enough my nose actually started bleeding right then too. I turned around to where this sense was coming from. And all I could see was just this foot and part of a robe disappear into the rhododendron thicket.

[suspenseful music]

**Glynn:** What could be lurking in those bushes? Find out when Snap Judgment, The Campfire Tales episode continues. Stay tuned.

Now, if you want more Spooked, if you need more Spooked, be afraid. Spooked Season 7 drops this September 9th. Brand-new episodes arise from the ashes and will be released regularly through next spring. Available on the Luminary channel on Apple Podcasts or directly on Luminary at *luminary.link/spooked.*

Welcome back to Snap Judgment, The Campfire Tales episode, featuring stories crafted in the dark of night from our sister podcast, Spooked, a Luminary original. Last we left, Chuck was deep, deep into the woods on a hike when a strange figure appeared, then disappeared into the bush. Spooked.

**Chuck:** Just caught a glimpse of it. At the time, I mean, we had been out the night before. I was dehydrated a little bit, kind of tired, and a little bit hungover, and so I was like, "I'm definitely seeing things. I shouldn't take a break." I'm thinking, "Well, how is that possible because I didn't hear anything? And with how thick the leaf litter is there, you can hear anything. It was quiet. It's very quiet out there. So, thinking about all this and it's getting me flustered. So, I'm just like, "All right, I'm going to keep going." Kept on moving.

Eventually, I got to the top of this hill that I've been climbing, and I crested over the top of it. And there's a tree there. The tree has got a rope coming down from it, that goes to another tree. And that tree has a rope. And then from there, it puts you down in the rhododendron by the banks of Dismal Falls. It's just a big one bridal veil, really, really pretty waterfall. It drops 40 feet with a nice cascade. And then, it hits down and it just runs down this-- I mean it's got to be a couple 100 feet of just slickrock. So, I hike in, go sit at the bottom of the falls. I sat down to just chill out and have some water, look at the falls. Water was nice and cool. So, I'm enjoying that. I was chewing on some mint. I'm feeling good. I'm feeling really good. I'm not even stressing on the foot.

Not too long after I got there and had settled in, I get that feeling again, like I was being watched. As I have this feeling, I hear what sounded like a voice. So, I turn and look. And up at the very top of the cascade, there's a woman standing on top of the waterfall. I could see her plain as day, she had curly gray hair, bow down her shoulders. I would say she was in her 80s and was wearing a cloak. A black one or at least a dark colored one. It seemed to be in spectacular condition for somebody who runs around the woods in it. And that's about all I could make out from where I was. But no sooner had I looked at her, she turns and walks off into the rhododendron bushes. And then she's out of sight.

[tense music]

At this point, I'm more confused and curious than scared. I'm 6'8" and I'll weigh like 240, I'm a big dude. I'm not intimidated, but I'm trying to think, like, why somebody would be up there. I didn't even know you could go up there. So, I decide, "Well, I'm going to go up there too. I'm going to go figure this out on my own."

[zips]

So I throw my stuff in my bag, and start making my way up this slickrock next to the bridal veil. Now it took me close to an hour to navigate through all this slickrock. This stuff is pretty serious. It's tough to navigate. I'm trying to catch my breath. And then I hear from the bottom of the falls. This time, it was definitely a voice. I heard it really clearly. And it just said, "Hey." [echoes] And so I turn and look. And now she's at the bottom of the falls, where I have just been. Now I'm trying to figure out how she would have gotten down there past me when I was coming up, because I couldn't find any other trails. Something's not right here. I was like, "This person's following me."

What my brain and body said was, "Get out of there, dude. We don't need to be here. Let's get out of here." Already had my pack on, so I just stepped off of the bridal veil. [running footsteps] And I just went crashing through the bushes until I finally found the trail that I'd come in on. I scramble up those rope assists, crests back over the ridge. And so now I'm heading back down. I'm trucking pretty hard downhill, back toward that split and the trail where I saw the foot initially. So, I blow past that point, and I'm running pretty much full speed down this hill. And I come back to that point where the big boulder is, that big house sized rock. Of course, now it's on my right side. And as I come around this blind corner around this rock, she's standing right there in the trail in front of me. I almost ran smack into her.

I took a tumble to avoid hitting her, hit the ground pretty hard. It winded me pretty good. When I came to a stop, I had basically rolled up against this this rock. So, I'm rolled up against my backs against the rock, and I'm sitting up and she is standing over top of me. Just looking at me. No expression on her face at all. And her eyes, they were so light blue that they were almost white. Like the irises. They almost blended right into the whites of her eyes. The rest of her was really old looking, but her eyes were very, very youthful looking, just piercing. Scared me to death. We just stared at each other for a second. Felt like an eternity. Like time slowed down a little bit.

[suspenseful music]

I break eye contact, and roll, get my feet under me, and I take off. She just watched me. She watched me get my feet under me and go.

[running]

Now, I'm really running. I mean I'm terrified at this point. The whole time I'm trying to tell myself, like, "You're making this up. There's nothing weird going on here." Even though I'm in a dead sprint running from something. Finally get right about down closer to basecamp. And slowed down, check behind me, stopped, didn't hear anything. I figured out was not being followed. And so, I just continued my walk. I got to a point in the trail where there's this down tree. And across over this log, come around a corner, and there's a bobcat sitting in the middle of the trail. Ears were not moving, eyes were not moving, not a whisker flinched. And that's very out of character for that animal. I mean, I've been in the woods for a long time, over 15 years, and I've only ever seen one actual wild bobcat. You're lucky to ever see one, much less one sitting just in the trail looking at you. So, I stop. And I'm staring at this cat. And I notice the eyes.

They weren't like cat eyes. The pupils, they weren't slitted, it wasn't the same shape. I mean, they were shaped like human eyes. The pupils were, I mean, almost dead white, like very, very light blue, almost dead white. So, I knew right away as soon as I saw that cat's eyes. I was like, "Oh, that's her right there." I was terrified. I was looking at this thing dead in its eyes. And it's looking at me. I knew. I felt it deep down in my being that she could do whatever she wanted do to me. I was at her mercy. So, I started talking to her. I was like, "Look, you got a beautiful mountain here. I will never go back to your waterfall. Please let me go. Just let me go." I didn't even speak that out loud. That was something I thought. And no sooner had I thought that, this bobcat turned, walked off the trail, let me go.

[eerie music]

After that, it did take some time to process it. But really, that's when it all clicked for me right there. It sunk in for me. And I was like, "Whoa, whoa, hold on a second." It's just like, yeah, that was really, really weird. I think I ran into a witch. I don't know, that just was very organic in the way that it just my brain automatically was like, "Yep." An experience like that, it humbles you a lot, especially in that in the position that I was in. I mean, you're a big bad guide, like I have squared up with-- I've punched a bear in the jaw. I'm not intimidated by a lot of things, but sure enough, yeah, it humbled me a lot, because that was probably one of the few times in my life where I felt truly helpless when I was laying up against that wall, looking at this what seemed to be like an 80-year-old woman.

This was an old witch, and I think she's been there for a long time. Longer than 80 years, I would think. I think she's much older than that. And I think that's where she lives. That's her stomping ground, and it's way out of the way for a reason. So, when I go out in the woods, like I'm picking up trash, I'm taking care of the woods, and I think she saw that. I think she was kind of like letting me know that she was there, she's making her presence known more than anything else. And yeah, really, that's what I got from her for the most part. Because like I said, she could have done whatever she wanted to when I was laid up against that rock wall. It sounds crazy, but I think she stopped me on that trail to judge my character. She decided for whatever reason, not to harm me and just to see if I was worthy enough to be in her woods, and I think she determined that I must have been.

[riveting music]

**Glynn:** Thank you, Chuck, for coming from those woods and bringing your story back with you. If you, listeners, decide to go exploring, please bring a friend. Original score was by Clay Xavier. It was produced by Greta Weber.

Now, if you want more Spooked, if you need more Spooked, be afraid. Spooked Season 7 drops this September 9th. Brand-new episodes arise from the ashes and will be released regularly through next spring. Available on the Luminary channel on Apple Podcasts or directly on Luminary at *luminary.link/spooked*.

[upbeat music]

Well, please know that this is not the news. No way is this the news. In fact, you could go for a sunset hike to the top of a mountain with a dear, dear friend. Together, you can enjoy the spectacles, shadow, [unintelligible 00:25:40] to the woods, even while the full moon begins to rise and [unintelligible [00:25:41] to your friend, your friend now staring back at you with a particularly wolfy grin, their ears suddenly larger, sharp incisors spouting on either side of their mouth, and when they humbly, greedily launch towards you, know that you would still not be as far away from the news as this is, but this is PRX.

[upbeat music]

If you need more Spooked in your world, more creatures, more ghouls, more things that go bump in the night, know this. All new episodes of Spooked return to Luminary September 9th. And to get the newest Spooked stories as they're released and regularly through the spring of 2023, subscribe to the Luminary channel on Apple Podcast or directly on Luminary. That's *luminary.link/spooked*.

*[Transcript provided by SpeechDocs Podcast Transcription]*