# Nightmare in the Forest

As the fog cleared, I found myself once again in the scenery I'd grown all too familiar with. The dark forest stretched endlessly in every direction, the canopy above blocking all but a few scattered moonlit specks on the forest floor. It was quiet—for now. But I knew it wouldn't last. The same mindscape that had plagued my nightmares for months surrounded me once more.

It looked just like the painting I'd seen long ago—those impossible colors bleeding through the trees, the massive bear staring out, not in anger but in knowing. I used to wonder what it meant. Now I was trapped inside it.

Then it began. The forest grew darker, the air colder, and an eerie chorus filled the silence—scraping leaves, birds not chirping but screaming, and the deep thud of footsteps, nearly drowned out by my heartbeat.

The steps grew closer until I was once again face to face with—quite literally—my worst nightmare. The air was swept from my lungs. No matter how many times I saw it, it never got any less magnificently terrifying.

Its deep brown eyes stared through my soul. It reared up on its hind legs, massive arms stretching wide, paws so large one could crush my skull, each toe tipped with a sharp claw. As the grizzly bear dropped to all fours, I already knew what came next: the roar that shook the trees, leaving my ears ringing, and then the pounce—followed by me waking up, just before its teeth met my chest.

Sure enough, it let out that roar. But as it readied to leap, something felt different. Not with it—with me. Normally I'd be frozen in fear. And I was shaking, but not from fear this time.

I was furious. Months of psychological torture—always running, always helpless. I was done doing nothing.

As the bear pounced, I channeled all my frustration, closed my eyes, and let out a roar of my own. As the scream left me, fear returned. I dropped to my knees, eyes shut, bracing for impact.

But it never came.

Instead, I felt a warm breath on my forehead. I opened my eyes slowly.

The bear was inches from my face. Its eyes no longer pierced through me—they looked at me, with something close to understanding. Swept up in the moment, I reached out and placed my hand on its head.

And something passed between us.

A connection. The bear—who had haunted this forest for hundreds of years—and me, the first to oppose him.

Just before I woke, the canopy above opened, revealing a sky of brilliant, unforgettable color. It might've been a dream. Or something more.

But to this day, I feel connected to that bear. And I'm certain I always will.