

The thing in the forrest

Experience, Human Nature



Sometimes in life when we have an experience that deeply affects us, it can change our whole perspective. The story "The Thing in the forest" is an example of how this can happen. The two main characters Penny and Primrose meet when they are children and share a horrific experience in the forest. Then by chance meet back at the scene and briefly reassure one another that what happened really did happen. But their contact ends there once again almost as if seeing each other was too uncomfortable.

Then oddly enough both women end up going back to the forest looking for some kind of resolve. In "The Thing in the Forest" the two little girls encounter a terrifying creature that profoundly affects their sense of reality; this results in similar personal traits and shared sense of searching for what's real despite that they never talk of it. When the two girls meet not much is given about their characters, however throughout the story we find that the two ladies have quite a few things in common. This is due to their experience in the forest that they shared so long ago.

Some of the similarities are within their character and some are sheer coincidence. Neither woman has married probably because of their disrupted childhood when they were exiled from their families and sent to live in the "great house" by the woods until it was safe again at home (Byatt). This is when Penny and Primrose decide to go into the woods and are followed by a younger girl who is never seen again. The girls encounter a creature that smelled of "liquid putrefaction" and looked like a mixture of "rank meat and decaying vegetation" (Byatt).

The wake of the creature leaves “ a trail of bloody slime and dead vegetation” in which the younger girl disappears (Byatt). Then the very next day the girls are placed with temporary families. Once home again both girls fathers die in accidents. Penny’s father died in a firefighting accident and Primroses was a causality of the war as he was soldier. The experience of being exiled, their fathers sudden deaths and and seeing this terrifying creature that possibly killed the younger girl has hanged their sense of what is real, I’m sure the concept of love and relationship is very easily questioned for the both of them. Both women also have chosen jobs that work with children; Penny becomes a child psychologist dealing mostly dealing in thedreamsof children and Primrose among her other odd jobs becomes a children’s story time teller at the local mall. Both women are embroiled with children and their minds just on different ends of the spectrum. One listens and one tells.

When Penny and Primrose meet by quirk of fate back at the “ great house”, that has now been given to the nation and made in to a museum, they are taken aback by the unplanned visit. They become aware of each other while reading a description of a story in a book about a fabled worm like creature that supposedly lurked in the woods near by. The alarm of the story and the by chance meeting of the two women while simultaneously reading its historic description jolts the two. They feel as if they would have never recognized each other if it weren’t for the given situation.

They reassure each other that they both really did see the creature that it is real. The women remark on how strange it is that the children’s presence

during the exile is not depicted anywhere in the history of the house. This lack of mention about the children in exile ever being in the house reaffirms some of the question of what is real in the two women's minds. They decide on having some tea and reminisce a little more about the time they spent in exile, on the train, in the " great house", brief tidbits of their life and the younger girl named Alys who had disappeared. It did finish her off, that little one, didn't it? " " I wonder if we'd made her up," said Primrose. " Nobody ever asked where she was or looked for her," said Penny (Byatt). The women are slightly relived at their agreement because this gives them the assurance they need not to feel as if they made the whole thing up. The assumed death of the younger girl could be said to mirror the psychological death of Penny and Primrose, and this reassurance helps them feel as if they can finally move on.

This brief conversation between the two is the last contact they will have with each other. The women both decide not to honor the dinner date they planned, I believe at this point the Penny and Primrose feel any further contact with each other is unbearable because of the underlying memories of any supplementary conversation. Yet they are still searching for what is real within them selves. Searching to the extent that both women are drawn back in to the woods and for the same reason. Primrose goes to the woods with purpose; she even follows the same path from years ago. Primrose had really been in a magic forest. She knew that the forest was a source of terror" (Byatt). While in the forest she questions what is real in her life, her home and how her mother disclosed that her father had been killed. She resolves that the forest and what happened in it to be truly real. In all of her thinking

she decides she is satisfied and in turn wants to go home. The way Primrose views this experience and the woods around her in a story like fashion is very telling about why she deals in storytelling for a job.

It all comes from the same place and this is why she has always careful not to scare the children she reads to. Penny on the other hand ends up in the forest even after purposely walking in the opposite direction of their original path. She is very perceptive of her surroundings in a different way than Primrose, who feels the need to almost coach herself along in a story like fashion, whereas Penny was looking for signs of the creature. She looked for all things that would be concrete evidence of the creature. It was the encounter with the thing that led her to deal professionally in dreams. Something that resembled unreality that had lumbered into reality, and she had seen it" (Byatt). Penny believed she could feel the creature and decided that it chose to recede back into the forest. She also spent some time thinking of her own father and how when he died her mother became a recluse, seeing this reaction scared her emotionally. This is the reason she threw herself in to study and possibly never married.

At the end of it all this women still do not converse or sit with one another when taking the same train home. They just share an acknowledgeable stare at the train station then go their separate ways. Primrose goes home and back to work but with a new confidence, she decides to tell the story of " The Thing in the Forest" she is no longer afraid. Penny goes back to the woods with the conviction that she needs this, for this creature to come to her

because it has become the most real thing she can recognize. “ She was ready” and waiting for it (Byatt).

Despite how different these women are, they are one in the same. Penny and Primrose shared something awful that forever changed them in very similar ways. They also shared separate experiences in the same forest and came to the same realizations that the creature is real and it had affected their person emotionally and steered their paths throughout life. It is apparent to me that that these similarities the women share cannot be a coincidence but are a direct result of that horrifying day they saw “ The Thing in the Forest”.