

# Summer Rain

By Alison M. Crandall

She sighed, jumping down the cold steps two at a time. It was still early, but the sun was already blinding. The still-dew-soaked grass felt wonderful between her toes. Summer mornings were the best.

She jogged through her yard to the path that led into the woods and to an old pine grove. The path was only used by her now and was very unkempt. But that was what made it even more special.

The woods held a secret. An old tree house, one her and her friends had made one summer, many years ago.

She walked down the path, gazing upward. The sun shone through the leaves on all the trees, giving the forest a green glow. She didn't pay any attention to her feet because she didn't need to; she knew where she was going.

Leaves and branches brushed against her uncovered skin. Though it was early, it was warm, and even in the shade, shorts were a must.

Pushing aside two last branches, she reached the clearing, and was engulfed by the sunlight that flooded it.

She shaded her eyes to see the familiar setting. The large maple holding the tree house, the river, and the small grassy bank, all exactly as she had left it the day before.

It never seemed to change, no matter how many times she went there. It was her favorite place in the world.

She lay down in the grass, one hand hanging over the bank into the water, the other folded behind her head for a pillow.

It was her ultimate bliss.

She watched the clouds for awhile before drifting off into her usual daydreams. She didn't even hear someone coming across the log bridge.

Until they spoke, that is.

"Eli?" he asked.

She jumped up. "Mark!"

"I figured you'd be here," he laughed. "You're always here."

"Not always," she ran over to him and hugged him tight. "I missed you."

"I missed you too, Eli."

"How've you been?" she asked, releasing him.

"Great actually," he answered, stepping back a bit, "though lonely without you guys."

"You haven't missed anything. Everyone's too busy."

"I see ..."

"Casey's working, Nate's been going all over the place with his dad ...he's going on another diplomatic mission thing—tomorrow actually ..."

"So I've heard." He sat down on the bank, and she sat next to him.

"What've you been up to?"

"Working, you know that. That's what graduating early means."

"It's the very definition," she agreed, laughing.

"Yea..." he trailed off.

They sat there for awhile, tossing pebbles into the clear water.

Mark skipped a flat stone and smiled. "Come on," he said suddenly, taking her hand and pulling her up, "let's go to the pond."

They continued past the tree house, following the path and river down stream, Eli first, her feet carefully picking their way around rocks and roots. Mark watched her intently. She had changed over the past year. She was taller, tanner too. Her eyes had the same green glow that he loved, as they always had, but her raven hair was longer and straighter. She had grown up.

Eli laughed, looking back at Mark, who was staring. "What's wrong? Do I look *that* different?"

He laughed in reply, "no, but you're a lot taller than I remembered."

She rolled her eyes, walking back toward him. She measured from her head to his with her hand. "And you're still about a foot taller than me, you freak." She laughed, turning around and heading back down the path. "Come on, this was your idea."

Mark nodded, following.

When they arrived at the pond, they stopped.

"Hey! Nate!" called Eli.

The boy sitting on the dock looked over, and stood up when he did. "Hey Eli! When'd *you* get back loser?" he asked Mark.

"Eh, about four hours ago."

"Starting the party without me then?"

"Of course," confirmed Eli.

"You two are evil," he said, eyes narrowing, "pure evil."

"...and always will be," agreed Mark, nodding.

Nate shook his head, laughing. "Well, come on in, the water's perfect. When Casey gets out of work, we'll have to call her to invite her to our...party."

Eli nodded, then ran to the dock, past Nate, and dove in.

"Whoa!"

She really *had* changed.

"Shocked?" asked Nate, looking at Mark, "I was too."

Mark smiled and studied the younger blonde boy. His hair was longer than its usual fashion, but his strange deep blue eyes were sharp and expressive as they always were. They reminded Mark of the ocean.

Eli surfaced, brushing her hair out of her face. "Are you two coming or not?"

"Where?" Mark asked.

"Swimming?" she reminded him patiently.

"Oh! Right."

Nate rolled his eyes, "it appears we've progressed, while he regressed...deteriorating already...and he's only a year older than us," he faked a sigh, "it's a shame."

Mark pushed Nate in and jumped in after him.

A few hours later, exhausted and wet, they trudged back up to Eli's house. It was past five, and the blue was slowly disappearing from the sky as if it was being painted over with a golden color.

Eli looked up at her house. It was really an amazing place. A regular home though it was, it was her childhood home, and her dream home. It was close to her friends and nature, but not miles from the civilization of the city.

The solar tiles on the roof reflected the sky with a warped purple tinge. It made her smile. The stars looked even more amazing than the sun in that reflection.

She glanced up at the living-room windows. They were dark, but there was nothing abnormal about that. Her father was still at work, and her mother was either in her office or the greenhouse room. Eli looked over at it and saw her mom standing there watering her plants. Her mother looked up and waved at the three of them.

Eli jogged the rest of the way to her house, Nate and Mark following.

It was still comfortably warm, and the air smelled like apples, the perfect night for one of their parties.

They took their shoes off in the basement and Eli wiped her feet on the mat. When they ran upstairs, Eli's mom was waiting for them in the kitchen, already pouring lemonade. Eli smiled; her mom was almost too nice sometimes.

"Hi boys!" her mom greeted, "I haven't seen either of you around here lately. We live in the same town, explain yourselves." She glared, then laughed, "I'm only kidding...Here, have some lemonade." They sat down at the table while she continued. "I was just watering the plants in the greenhouse." She sighed, "if it wasn't so fun, I'd break the housing rules. Imagine people who don't like gardening. It must be a nightmare."

Eli's mom was an architect working on the Environmental Homes project. She had designed their home too. Solar tiled roof and greenhouse room for cleaner air, generally, an environmental paradise. As a plus they were nice homes too. It was an international project, and every house was to be fitted to the new standards, or else rebuilt.

She called Casey, who said she'd be over when she got out of work. Eli set the video games up and left the boys to entertain themselves while she got everything ready.

At eight, Eli ran upstairs and turned off the games. The boys groaned, but got up and headed downstairs. She led them outside and back to the path. When they arrived at the tree house, it was glowing, and Casey was already there.

"Whoa..." sighed Mark. He had forgotten how much he liked the old place.

Casey laughed, "*Don't* tell me you set the lights and everything up already."

"I did," replied Eli. "I'd rather set up on my own so we can have fun together. Hold on a sec," she said, jumping to grab a branch. She climbed up quickly and tossed the rope ladder down. She laughed. "Just like old times."

They all went up onto the clubhouse deck. "It appears to have gotten smaller..." Mark laughed, and walked over to the door.

"Nah," Nate disagreed, "you're just a giant, that's all."

They went inside. It was as if none of them had ever left it.

"Here's the old flag! From the raft trip!"

"Oh no..." Casey looked at the boys, "they're getting excited..."

"And the guide book!"

"Let's go out on the deck..." suggested Eli, brandishing a blanket. Casey was behind her holding the snacks, laughing.

They shuffled outside to enjoy the night.

"And THEN we crashed on the rocks..." Nathan reminisced.

"Which was stupid," added Casey.

"Especially since they weren't hard to see," Mark reminded.

"Not to mention we *knew* they were there," laughed Eli, "but you two were too thick headed to stop arguing in order to get out of the way."

"And then the waterfall..."

"That was just terrible luck," said Casey.

"Luck? I had had an odd dream about us falling down a waterfall the night before that."

"And you based that creepy 'ghost story' on it," Mark pointed out.

Casey shrugged. "We're just lucky we didn't get seriously hurt."

Nate looked up and sighed.

"What is it?" asked Mark.

He returned his focus to his friends. He looked serious.

"Uh oh, what's up?"

"This trip...it's going to be a long one...I'm probably not going to be back for the rest of the summer." He gave Mark a glare, "So you better take care of these trouble-makers for me."

Mark nodded, smiling. The girls laughed.

"But..."he looked up again, sadly, "I'm going to Iraq."

"What?" Mark asked incredulously.

"You can't!"

"That's too dangerous!"

"*Listen!*" Nate hissed. "It needs to be done, and I wanted to go. My dad didn't want me to go either—but think about it. The adults will talk and make negotiations, but what about the kids? In a few years, they'll be the next ones to attack us. It's my job to reason with them." The others stared at him quietly. "I'll be fine. I've survived worse situations..." He laughed weakly. "I just wanted to be the one to tell you guys so you wouldn't try to hijack my plane to keep me here once you found out."

They remained quiet. No one knew what to say. Nate bit his lip. He knew they weren't going to like it. He looked up again and smiled. "Hey, what's this?" he stood up and jumped, trying to grab something.

"What?" asked Mark, standing up too. "Oh," he said, grabbing it, "it appears you've found Eli's lost rope swing." He handed it to Nate, who laughed, holding it out to Mark.

Mark gave him a look. "There's *no* way you're getting me to use that thing."

Nate shrugged, grabbing it with both hands and jumping off the deck. They all watched him, swinging over the river. He leaned to make it go quicker.

"He's insane," whispered Mark. He paused, "who wants to cut the rope?"

"Mark!" the girls exclaimed together; Eli smacked him in the back of the head.

Nate let go.

They looked over the deck, but he didn't surface. Eli grabbed the rope and slid down. Mark and Casey went down the ladder.

"Nate!" Eli called, but he didn't respond.

Eli jumped down from the rope and walked toward the water, but Mark beat her to it. "*Nate!*"

He surfaced, grinning. "Ta da!"

Mark tackled him back into the water. Casey shook her head. Eli sat down on the bank, muttering about "boys."

They resurfaced a few minutes later, after a lot of splashing. Mark ruffled Nate's blonde hair. "You scared us," he was saying.

"And?—I thought that was my job."

It was true. He was in the most accidents and dangerous situations and had almost died in two of them.

They climbed back up to the fort to dry off, but it started raining. Eli stared at the sky, it wasn't supposed to rain that night. Casey had run into the door to avoid getting too wet, but Mark shook his hair, splashing them all.

Nate laughed, his smile hiding a look in his eyes that made him look a lot older than he was and a lot wiser than he normally seemed.

"Woo!" he yelled mindlessly into the night. He ran into the tree house to turn on the radio then ran back out, dancing foolishly. The others laughed at him then joined in. It was just like old times.

The tree fort glowing in the darkness of the night, the stars shining brightly like Christmas lights strung across the ceiling, quiet music playing in the silence of the woods, the friends' laughter making it cheerful and far from eerie.

There was a strange finality about it though, and when they finally dried off and lay down to sleep, they drifted into an uneasy sleep, dreading the morning.

Only one of the four was awake when the sunlight penetrated the fort's windows. He stood up and walked onto the deck alone. He gathered the shards of his optimism to face them.

"Hey, losers wake up," Nate was standing in the doorway to the tree house, framed by sunlight. He was looking down at them. "I wanna do something before I have to go...with you morons...Get up!"

Groggily, they all sat up.

A few hours later, with a grin and a promise to write when he could, Nate left them at the airport.

The three met at the tree house every chance they got, and though it was a lot quieter without Nate, it was relatively fun.

They had decided that the letters would be sent to Eli's house since Mark no longer received mail at his parents' house, and Casey had a few too many brothers looking for trouble.

It was weeks before they received the letter they were promised, and Eli didn't open it until they met at the fort. She read it aloud.

*Losers,*

*It's been a busy week, so I hope you'll forgive me for starving you of information. I obviously made it here safely, and all's going well. The kids are really nice here—nicer than Mark, that is. They seem to be on the same terms as us, no hostility. I've actually been staying with one boy this week. He's better than Eli at video games, which is scary to admit. You'd love it*

*here Casey. There's all these old buildings and stuff. It's like Egypt, in a way. My dad said the peace talks are going well too—good news for all of us. I was going to call, but I haven't found a working phone that I'm allowed to use. Not even my cell works. I hope you guys are having fun, though not too much. No raft trips until I get back, understand?*

*Nate*

*P.S. I'll be back in about two weeks, so this will probably be the only letter you'll get.*

"Losers?" Mark asked.

"He's insane," explained Casey.

"Two weeks..." Eli flopped back onto the deck happily. That gave them time to hang out before the summer ended.

A little over a week later, Eli was watching the news in her living room with her father.

"All this doesn't make any difference. If one leader wants to go to war, they will."

Eli smiled sadly in agreement, "yea."

"Your friend there, Nate, he does diplomatic work, right?"

"Yea, he's there now."

"That's not a good idea. Things are very unstable."

"He said things were going well there."

"Not anymore. Someone got shot at or something. No one died, but..."

Eli bit her lip. "It wasn't his dad, was it?"

"No, I don't think so." He put his arm around her shoulders. "He'll be fine Eli. Don't worry."

"I..." she paused at a headline, and her heart sank. "T-turn that up."

*"Today at 3 pm a plane on route from Baghdad to Boston crashed near the Iraqi border. The report states there are no survivors..."*

Eli jumped up, and her father grabbed her arm. "Don't lose hope. He's not supposed to be home until next week."

She nodded numbly, running to the kitchen phone. Eli dialed Nate's cell-phone number. No answer. She dialed again. No answer. She hung up the phone and walked back into the living room.

"Any luck?" her father asked.

She shook her head, unable to speak. She sat back down.

Her father looked at her sadly. She was a mess even though she kept her face calm. He didn't know what to say, but stayed there with her, watching the news endlessly.

She fell asleep, and he got up. He had forgotten until then that she had asked him to do something.

A few hours later, her father sat back down again. She appeared to be sleeping. He sighed, tucking a newly printed and framed photograph into her arms. He hoped it would cheer her up when she woke up. Eli had sat there like a statue.

Then, she saw the photo, and remembered...

"Finally!" Nate said. He was holding a camera.

Eli rubbed her eyes. "What're we doing?"

They were all on the deck now, leaning on various branches and bits of railing.

"I want to take a group picture of us before I go!"

Mark rolled his eyes and sighed. "*Morning* people."

"His enthusiasm is endless..."

"Why is it so important to wake us up for this?"

"Because we don't have a recent group picture because *Moron* decided to leave us last year. Our last group picture is from third grade!"

"It was more recent than that."

"I doubt that. Look, just do it, please? Come on, I don't have all day."

Once he successfully got all of them awake and on the ground, he stuck the camera between tree branches. He leaned one arm on that tree.

"Everyone ready?"

"Yep," answered Eli.

"Alrighty then." He threw his other arm around Eli and clicked the button.

The camera clicked, and Nate ran to it. "Okay," he gave the camera to Eli, "I asked your mom for a camera, so this is yours. Get it printed for when I get back, okay?"

Eli nodded, "Sure thing. But you better be back soon... *And* you better write."

He nodded.

"It'll be quiet without you."

"And boring... We can't do the annual raft trip without you."

Nate smiled at them.

*"Earlier we reported on the flight that was shot down on the border of Iraq..."*

Eli sat bolt upright, clutching the picture over her heart. Her father frowned.

*"It was a flight from Baghdad to Boston crashed on the western border of Iraq. It was carrying at least twenty Americans, including a peace delegate from Massachusetts and a student delegate, believed to be his son."*

Eli's heart froze.

*"It is now confirmed there are no survivors."*

She burst into tears.

Her father tried to comfort her, unsuccessfully. He held her tight, but she squirmed out of his grip and ran out the door.

Concerned, he picked up the phone and dialed.

"Eli," someone was climbing up the tree to the tree house. "Eli?" they asked, but she didn't respond.

"Come on Eli, come out." Still no response. "Eli?"

Silence.

"Are you okay?" They were at the door. "Your father told me to find you here ...What's up?" Mark opened the door to find Eli sobbing silently. "Eli!" he hadn't seen her cry in years, and it scared him. "What happened, Eli?"

She just shook her head, unable to speak. Mark embraced her. "Eli ..." He wiped the tears off her face, "Are you okay?"

She nodded. She was holding the picture.

Mark noticed it, "What's that?" he asked, and she handed it to him. "Oh, the picture we took." He laughed, "It came out pretty good, don't you think?"

Eli shook her head. "Mark," she said finally, taking a deep breath.

He looked at her calmly, but he was worried beyond reason. "What?" he asked slowly.

"There ...there was ...an accident."

"Accident? What happened, Eli?"

"Nate's plane ...it..."

"Eli ...? ...It *what?*"

She was choked up again, but managed to whisper a barely audible word, "crashed."

Mark stood up slowly, in shock. "It ...he ...Is he okay?"

She shook her head sadly, not meeting his eyes.

He leaned against the wall, and slid down. Now sitting, he stared at the floor mindlessly. Eventually snapping out of it, he lifted the picture again, propping it up on his knees. He looked at the group. Casey, himself, Eli... and Nate, who was grinning happily. Mark put his head in his hand.

"He... he warned us..." Eli whispered.

Mark nodded, but was unable to come to terms with it.

Nate was his best friend.

They sat there quietly, until, hours later, when there was a knock at the door.

"Hey, Mark? Eli? You guys in there?"

It was Casey. "I was just up at your house Eli. Your parents are worried about you. I told them I knew where you were though ..." she looked around. "What *are* you two doing? You're so depressing to look at." She sat down.

"Nate ...he's ..."

She frowned wearily. "I know. I found out at work." They looked at her, unbelieving. "I was ...a wreck ...but ...we can't ...we can't cry forever." Casey sighed, "I miss him."

Mark nodded, handing her the picture. She smiled weakly. "He was always the cheerful one, wasn't he?" She traced her finger over his face.

They spent the night there again, and woke up to a sunny, though rainy morning.

The day of Nate's funeral, a week later, it was raining again.

The three friends, their parents, and various other friends and family were gathered there under dark umbrellas—though the umbrellas didn't save them from themselves.

Eli was reduced to crying on Mark, who could only stand there, supporting her, stony faced. Casey remained stoic as well, but was gripping Mark's hand like a vice.

Eli whispered to Mark, who gave her a surprised look. The three of them had barely been able to utter a word to each other in the past week, and though she only managed four, those four simple words had a big impact. Although he didn't know it yet, it would later make him realize something about Nate, and he would've never remembered the fact, nor would it ever make any difference in his life if it hadn't been said here.

"He loved the rain."

It was October, Casey and Eli had returned to school, but Mark had stayed in the town for awhile longer. He was to go back to work in November.

*"The plane carrying the U.S. diplomats from Iraq to the United States that crashed on the Iraqi border..."*

Mark cringed. "Won't they just let it go?"

Eli's father sighed. "Nine-eleven, Hurricane Katrina, ...It'll never end ... It's the government's fault too. They didn't do anything about the terrorists *or* global warming until people got hurt."

Mark sighed, "Yea, and now that they *did* do something, they managed to mess it up. Replacing the oil industry completely..."

"And now they're angry enough to *fight* us about it."

*"...after investigation was found to have been shot down by anti-aircraft fire."*

Mark stared.

The president was on. "*We are at war.*" The two of them stopped dead. "Not again..."

*"...all legal-age males are to report to their nearest military base by Friday for further instructions..."*

Mr. LeBree shook his head. He turned the TV off and put his head in his hands.

Mark looked at Eli's father. It had only been a few years since the United States *finally* was able to pull its troops out of Iraq. Around the end, that same call for legal-age males had been used. Eli's father had gone then, though she wasn't old enough to fully understand the situation. Mark had understood, too well, but he had been underage then.

Eli had been to the old fort before going home. She figured she would have found Mark there. He wasn't there though, and she headed home. It was possible that he was hanging out with her dad. They had always gotten along pretty well.

She sighed, putting her hands in her sweatshirt pockets, taking the longer route. The leaves crinkled as she walked over them. The wind blew them around in little spirals in her yard. It was pretty nice, the cool air and the warm sun. It gave the world a strange golden glow.

Eli walked up the steps, one at a time. Frowning while she remembered when she had been so excited to go to the fort in the summer that she couldn't even take the time to use all those steps.

That time was gone.

She entered through the back door that opened into her living room. She glanced around, no one was there. The TV was on, quietly talking to no one. The volume had been turned down below normal.

Eli sat down and pulled her sneakers off. She carried them toward the kitchen mat where they kept the shoes, but stopped at the mantelpiece. She turned to face it. There were pictures of her and other people in her family. Her dad, her mom, grandparents, cousins, but there was one special picture, just right of the center. She picked it up, smiling slightly. She could still remember that morning. The warm sun, the dew-soaked grass...

She shook her head suddenly and set the picture back. Her face reset to a frown. There was no use in dwelling.

Eli walked into the kitchen and tossed her shoes onto the mat. Looking up she saw her mother, head in hands, at the table.

"You didn't go to work? Are you feeling okay?"

Eli's mom didn't answer.

She walked closer.

Her mother was crying. Her coffee cup was next to her, cold. The paper was still folded in front of her. Her hair, ruffled, the neat bun ruined.

"Mom?"

Someone was coming down the staircase. It was her father, carrying an odd bag she hadn't seen before.

"Dad?" she asked, but got no response. Not even a glance.

She walked over, and he brushed his hand over her shoulder, but didn't stop. His eyes were set.

He walked out the door.

Eli was speechless. She didn't know what was going on, but with a second glance at her mother, she ran outside.

Mark was standing there, by her father's car, holding a similar bag. Eli's father came out.

"Mr. LeBree?"

Her father walked over to the car and opened the trunk, tossing his bag in. Mark followed suit.

Eli ran out the door as her father sat down in the car. Mark had his hand on the door handle. "Mark!"

He turned. "Eli..."

She grabbed him tightly. "Where are you going? You can't leave me again. I don't want to be alone..." She buried her face in his shoulder, and punched his chest softly. "I can't..."

He hugged her. "Nate's plane...didn't crash."

She looked up at him, and he met her eyes. They were so sad.

"It was shot down...We're at war, Eli." She didn't respond. "Eli..." biting his lip, he pulled her off, and with one last look at her, he got into the car.

She was crying too much to see them drive off, but when they did, she sat down on the sidewalk.

The next day she went to school. Casey was worried about her, but knew better than to try to cheer her up. She wasn't good at it, and anyway, that had been Nate's job.

Eli walked home that afternoon by herself. It was quiet, and the usual golden glow of the autumn sun was gone, replaced with a gloomy grey streaked with rain. She looked at her feet as she walked, hood up, hands in her pockets.

Arriving home, she opened the mailbox as usual and pulled the letters out. When she got inside, she tossed them onto the kitchen table carelessly.

She headed toward the stairs to lock herself in her room, but one caught her eye. She gasped.

It was from Nate.

*To Eli, Mark, and Casey,*

*I don't even know where to begin...but I know I have to. You guys are my best friends, and I have to tell you...I lied, and I'm sorry, but I didn't want you guys to worry.*

*My dad was shot at when we first got here, and negotiations were going badly before. This country lost its economy because of our country, not to mention the anger over the invasion a few years ago. The kids are the same, not that I blame them. Our bombing destroyed everything for them. We'd probably feel the same way. What we did wasn't September 11<sup>th</sup>; it was a terror attack that didn't end for years. And after they cleaned that up, we manage to destroy them again because they don't fit the environmental standards of the new world "order", not to mention they were main producers of what we replaced.*

*Eli, what your mom does is amazing. Her work ends the environmental hazards of the world caused by pollution, but I, even in my optimism, don't think a utopian society is possible. Maybe someday, but not any time soon.*

*Mark, you're my best friend. You always have been. And I know that I should've probably been more serious about it at times. I was really terrible at being serious most of the time, wasn't I? I just wanted to make you guys laugh.*

*Eli, you're an amazing girl. I'd never have thought to meet my match in you. You're as crazy as I am now, not to mention your overwhelming gaming skills. I don't know what made you change, but it's amazing to see, after how timid you were...*

*Casey, keep up with your dreams. I know they can seem farfetched, but I know you can do it. Just be sure to keep a hold on that smile.*

*I'm writing this now, and I don't even want to send it. I want to believe I'll tell you guys myself, when I get home. And with luck, I'll be home before you get this. I hope for that, with all my heart, but I don't believe it. They want war, revenge, and I don't think my flight will be safe. Before I left, I told you guys what I did because I knew I'd be in this situation, and I accepted that. I wanted to go because I wanted to try to help, even if it was hopeless...*

*I miss you guys.*

*Nate*

*P.S. Remember how much I like the rain.*

*For the thousands of words I will never have the chance to say, listen to the rain on a summer day.*

## Afterword

I've learned a lot about the environment and energy in the world, in my school and from the news. I was particularly interested and concerned about the current problems with choosing an alternative energy source and the effects on the environment from what's going on while we decide what to do. I've also learned and know that solar energy is a reliable source, though expensive to put into place. Also, in a program I watched on TV, I saw that some places are growing plants to create some energy for the building from their extracts.

I used those two sources in combination to create a new world-wide "housing plan" in which every house would be fitted with solar-panel roof tiles and have a greenhouse in order to produce environmentally safe energy for the building. And with a clean energy source, the environment is cleaner, which the children in the story interact with, and appreciate.

The current war in Iraq also brought the oil aspect into my story as I asked myself what would happen if oil *was* replaced, and the effects that would have on the countries and people that produced and relied on oil. My story was based upon this and the like I have for my own house and the woods that surround it, which is the setting for the story.