

# **YOU WILL FEAR THE FROG**

By JESSE D'ANGELO

**This is a story about a Frog, my friends.**

**He is not a nice Frog and He is not a normal Frog. He is a big Frog and He is a mean Frog. He is an intelligent Frog and He is a powerful Frog. He is a very abnormal Frog and some even say He is an evil Frog. He has passions and lusts. He is vain and dangerous.**

**You will fear The Frog.**

It was a hot day for October.

Young William Charles presumptuously strolled into The Frog's swamp. Swinging his massive weight from side to side, he plodded through the wet earth, announcing his presence with repetitive squish and slurp of his footsteps. His outdated New Balance running shoes were not built for his weight, nor this muddy terrain. His tan cargo shorts nearly reached his baby-fat calves, and a plain blue, extra large shirt hung shapelessly from his shoulders. His shaggy head of chestnut hair bore no resemblance to any known style, and his round and acne-infected face betrayed no emotion. William was stuck inside his own head, pondering silently as he walked alone. Sweat streamed down his face and body. It was a hot day for October.

William kicked a muddy stone into a muddy marsh. He liked to come to places like this. To be alone, away from all the other kids from school, who would surely make fun of him. They always did. He and his family had just moved to this new town two months earlier, with a new school and new kids. But kids were always the same wherever he went. They either made fun of him or didn't talk to him at all. So William always spent his weekends alone. He had walked down the quiet streets of Oakwood, his new home, detached. He walked through the parks and forests, the library and the poor excuse for a shopping mall. So it was with this lonely sense of boredom paired with an urge for exploration that William made his way into The Frog's swamp, against all warnings.

Like most small towns, Oakwood had its own monster lore. People talked about folks who'd gone into the swamp, never to return. Legends of boogey-men abounded, unexplained oddities, and seemingly normal people going completely insane. But the tall tale spoken of most in relation to this swamp was the legend of "The Frog." A giant, mean, man-eating frog that prowled in the murky waters. Supposed witness sightings of this cryptozoological amphibian had been reported since the town's original wood frames were erected over two hundred years ago. An evil, giant, bloodthirsty frog.

William scoffed.

He walked through the knee-high grass, unaware that he was being watched. A slight rustle in the grass to his left caught William's eye. Either a big bug or a small lizard, he thought. The young man strolled on. Looking at the mud on his sneakers reminded him of chocolate, so he produced

his ever-present King size Snickers bar and tore into that mother. The kids at school had taunted that William must have some kind of mutant gland in his leg that secreted Snickers bars; that every time he plucked one from his pocket, another one would squirt right back in. William wouldn't have minded such a mutation. Biting into the sweet goodness, he felt something small and wet slap into the left side of his neck, almost like a spit-ball.

He wiped it away and headed deeper into the swamp. Sunlight became scarce as the trees grew increasingly dense. The shadows of the swamp inched around him. The wind began to blow. The sounds of the creepy-crawly critters intensified. It got darker and darker, impossibly dark. William stopped chewing, looking around with growing trepidation. Colors muted, shapes became more vulgar and ugly, and sounds bent and distorted. William stopped walking altogether, stopped breathing. He heard another rustle in the foliage behind him, and with it, a voice boomed in the most sinister and unearthly baritone:

***"YOU WILL FEAR THE FROG!"***

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"I'm telling you, guys! My dad said when they brought him in to the hospital, he was as white as a sheet!" Sidney Luman swallowed a bite of his bagel and lox as he spoke. Flecks of bagel and bits of cream cheese sprang from his sixteen year-old mouth. His large brown eyes urged his two friends to pay attention.

"Yeah, probably from looking at himself in the mirror," Ryan White cracked in his standard arrogant style.

Danielle Ferrara laughed automatically with his jest as she vigorously scrolled through her cell phone's text-message inbox. She laughed at anything Ryan said, funny or not. They were just friends for now, but not for long, if she got her way.

"He says it took six big guys to keep him restrained," Sidney said. "Kid was screaming bloody murder nonstop, kicking and fighting... He was caked in mud from head to toe, covered in deep cuts all over his face and body... And he was *terrified*! I mean, they had to strap him down hard before my dad could even examine him. It's..." Danielle's sharp little voice pecked Sidney's thought right out the air.

"Sidney, what's the point? That William kid is a freak anyway, and we don't even know him! Sooo... why...exactlyyyyy... do you care?" Ryan laughed his laugh and kicked her chair in approval.

"That's messed up, you guys," Sidney said. "So what, we didn't know him? We all go to the same school. He's a person like anyone else! And besides, don't you think it's all just a little bit strange?" Ryan turned his blue eyes away from Monica Green's lower quadrant across the cafeteria and finally directed his attention at Sidney.

"Okay, what? So what happened to him? He's covered in mud, all jacked up and bleeding... So did like, a fuckin' bear attack him or something?" Ryan was not the most eloquent of speakers.

"Don't know. He doesn't say a word. All he does is *scream*, all the time. His physical injuries turned out to be pretty minor, just lacerations. Mostly from running and tripping through the swamps. But they did an MRI of his brain... Dude, the frontal temporal lobe — Y'know, the part

of the brain where fear is processed – had swollen to three times its normal size! You know what that means? His brain is being completely overridden with fear!”

Sidney’s words made a noticeable impact of his two friends. The strut and stride had gone from their sharp tongues. Ryan ran his fingers through his blonde hair, pondering the concept of that much fear. Danielle’s eyes were racing like a Las Vegas slot machine. But she had no answers. Sidney cracked a wicked smile.

“Guys.”

“What?”

“Guys!”

“What, Sidney?” Ryan snapped. “Spit it out! What is it you’re... Oh! Oh wait a second, that’s bullshit! Don’t even start with that again, Jewman! I don’t want to hear any more stories about fuckin’ Bigfoot, okay?” Ryan rolled his eyes and went right back to looking at Monica Green’s lower quadrant.

“You guys have heard the stories that all the ‘ol timers tell around here. The stories about the...” Sidney glanced left and right to make sure no eavesdroppers were listening in before he finished. “...About The Frog.”

A moment passed as Ryan and Danielle drank this in, and their expressions remained frozen in serious contemplation as they studied the conviction in Sidney’s eyes. That moment ended as they both burst into laughter, their faces turning red. Ryan picked up several used napkins and proceeded to hurl them at his friend. “Booo! Boooo!” Ryan called out as his next projectile of choice became the French fries.

“Dude, guys! Would you stop it! I’m serious!”

"Sidney, the fucking Frog is a bigger joke than Bigfoot! Come on man, a giant ugly frog living in the swamp? Big enough to swallow a man? *Come on!*"

**Do not insult The Frog.**

"There have been eyewitness sightings of The Frog way back to the 1800's! Even before then, the local Indians told stories about an evil frog!" Sidney's words flew from his lips faster than his brain could formulate the sentences.

"Yeah, spook-stories, Sidney. Not evidence," Danielle said as she finished off the last of her cafeteria burger. Sidney let out a sigh, trying to calm down and focus his words.

"You ever notice how many people go missing around here? Like, without a trace? Ever notice how many unsolved murders and crimes there are? ...And when people come out of the swamp and say they've seen a giant, ugly frog... Man, there's gotta be *something* to it. What if there really is some crazy fucking, evil frog out there? And what if we could prove that it's real? You know how much money we could make?"

"What exactly are you getting at, *Jewman?*" Ryan studied his friend's eyes.

"Well, shit-for-brains, my dad does have a damn good video camera. And your dad does have a big fucking gun..." A cunning smile cracked across Sidney's mouth. He had them.

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It was 10:06 pm. Sidney determined that his parents were finally asleep. He could safely slip out now. He was clad in dark brown pants, a black hoodie and a cap. He had already checked his bag five times to make sure he hadn't forgotten anything, but he went ahead and checked a sixth and final time: Two flashlights. Plastic Ziplock bags. Tape measure. Map. Folding knife. Chewy granola bars. Tape recorder. Tapes. Batteries. And of course, his father's two thousand dollar digital video camera. Sidney swallowed hard, threw his bag over his shoulder and began stealthing down the unlit hall.

He made his way downstairs, making sure not to step on the stair that always creaked, and inched towards the back door. Sidney pulled his keys from his pocket, and took hold of a small remote control connected to them. With a flick of a button on the remote, the security panel on the wall beside him activated, silently displaying the message, "disarmed." Sidney opened the door as gingerly as possible and took off into the night, while a red Honda Accord purred like a cat outside on the street. The windows were tinted and rolled halfway down, letting the muted sounds of Lupe Fiasco's latest top-20 hit and the fragrance of Louisiana Kush come wafting out.

"Let's go, Jewman!" It was about as loud as a whisper could get before it became a scream. Sidney cursed Ryan under his breath as he climbed into the car. Danielle laughed as the two boys threw playful insults back and forth, and Ryan shifted his whip into drive.

**If you look for The Frog, The Frog will find you.**

The night settled in, crouching down onto its haunches on the edge of The Frog's swamp. Ryan, Sidney and Danielle stepped out of Ryan's car and looked out into where they were going. They had been laughing and joking the whole ride, but now confronted with this chilling, gloomy marsh, the group of teenagers fell silent. Sidney was the only one who hadn't partaken in the burning of the brain-cells ritual, his mind sharp and ripe with fear. Ryan reached into his back seat and produced the Benelli .12 gauge pump shotgun his dad would never miss. He held the weapon up, his glazed eyes searching through the murk, trying to look as bad-ass as possible.

*"Ribbit... Ribbit..."* Ryan cracked up at his own bad joke, and Danielle followed suit. But this time her laughter was strained, peering out into the unknown. The cold, dark, wet unknown that may be the home of a monster. Sidney shook his head at Ryan and got his camera ready, putting it on night-vision mode. Danielle had brought along an old machete as her defense, grasping it tight in her right hand, a flashlight in her left. Both were shaking.

"Sidney, you really think there's something out there?" Her voice cracked. He glanced briefly at her, but paid little interest. He was too busy checking everything, batteries, tapes, lights... Ryan slapped the back of his head, trying to get down to business.

"Come on, man. Are we doing this or not, Sid?"

Sidney took a deep breath.

Everything was ready, and it was now or never. Sidney turned to his friends, studying their faces and eyes, deliberating on their capacity to make rational decisions



in this state of mind. "You guys are sure you're okay to do this? I mean, you're not too fucked up, or..."

"Dude, Sidney, come on!"

"I'm serious, Ryan! This is not some shit to be taken lightly! There might really be something living in this swamp. We're not here to take a pleasant stroll in the dark — we're here to find a monster! And if it's real, then this thing is dangerous, and we need to take it seriously and have clear heads if we're gonna go in there! *Y'know what I'm saying?* I mean..."

"We hear you, Sidney. I get it." Danielle spoke. "You're right, This place is like, totally scary and dangerous, and I can't even believe I'm doing this... But yeah, I think if we go in there... We have to take it seriously."

Sidney checked with Ryan to make sure he concurred. Ryan sighed and nodded. "I'm cool, man. I'm not that high. I feel fine. Let's go do this. I'll follow your lead." The sarcasm and machismo had gone from Ryan's tone, replaced by a rare maturity. Sidney was satisfied, pressing 'record' on his camera and taking the next step out into the night on shaking legs.

"Okay then, people. Right this way." Sidney led the team forward. Ryan switched on the small flashlight that was built into the underside of his shotgun. But even with three flashlights, the illumination they cast was mere streaks on a black canvas. There were no stars out that night. No moon. Certainly no streetlights or houses. They were completely alone, miles away from anyone or anywhere, in complete darkness, all but for their little paintbrushes of light.

They reached the tree-line and, after a moment's hesitation, took the plunge. They tried to keep their feet on dry land, but that was easier said than done. The flora and foliage was so dense and wet, the visibility would be terrible in the daytime as well. Their whipping flashlight beams crossed each other, creating a stuttering image of abstract shapes in the dark. Trees and vines, bushes, birds, mosquitoes, water and mist swirled around them. The heat and humidity was like a warm comforter on a hot summer night, swallowing them up in its thick stew.

**The Frog watched them. He sat motionless, part of the dark. He smelled their fear, smoky and savory like a pig roasting in an underground pit. The Frog watched them.**

"*Uhcch*, Sidney! You didn't tell me there'd be all these bugs out here! *Pfft! Tfft!*" Danielle swatted at the gnats, moths and mosquitoes as they buzzed around, going about their business. Sidney and Ryan snickered at her, but felt just as uncomfortable. Insects were slapping against their skin, flying at their eyes, and making things unpleasant. Sidney kept his sights on the viewfinder as he navigated through the dense, wet nightscape. He saw the movement of birds, rodents and small lizards, but no sign of a giant frog. Sidney's legs trembled, his feet heavy in the mud. He led them on.

"Man, if some big ass fucking frog comes out at me, I swear to god, Sidney..." Ryan attempted to conceal his trepidation with a tone of sarcasm. He looked over at Sidney, who paid him no mind. Ryan sighed and turned his eyes back to the woods, looking for anything. And then...

Something. A flash of movement. "You guys!" Ryan swung in the direction of the movement, in time to see a large and terrified beaver scurrying away for his life. Ryan lowered the shotgun and laughed.

"I think you found a real swamp monster there, Ryan."

"Eat it, Hebrew."

"Shh! Quiet, you two. Listen."

Crickets and cicadas chirped.

The wind whistled and moaned. Birds called out in their mysterious and haunting dialects, and the small creatures of the black canvas scuttled and slithered. The swamp was alive, but nothing seemed out of the ordinary. The three youths stood frozen in their small bubble of electric light, listening for something to echo through the void and chill them to the core. But there was nothing.

"What is it?" Ryan's eyes darted left and right as he whispered.

A cold feeling had crept into Danielle's chest, a sensation that told her they were not alone. Her eyes were slowly adjusting to the dark, but still, she could see nothing. "I just... thought I heard something... I don't like this, you guys. Can we please go?"

"Hey, wait! Over there..." Ryan pointed his light at something moving in the brush. Sidney and Danielle strained for a look, but could see nothing. "I think I found your frog, Sidney!" Ryan chuckled, very happy with himself. Sidney and Danielle finally saw what Ryan was pointing to and let out a collective, disappointed sigh.

A small frog sat motionless on a branch at the edge of an overgrown and swampy field. Looking up at them in curiosity, the animal was the size of a hamster, and

colored as if by a five year-old. Vibrant yellow, blue, red and purple hues created the maze-like pattern on its skin. The eyes were huge, deep red and unblinking, accompanied by a regal horn over each eyebrow and a blank scowl of indifference across its wide lips.

"He *is* pretty cool looking. What kind of frog is he, Sidney?" Danielle leaned in closer to muse at the curious little creature.

"I don't know. I'm not a..." Sidney forgot the term. "A frog specialist." He rolled his eyes and continued scanning the terrain with his camera. Ryan took a step closer to look at the frog, when suddenly — *Phfft!* — The colorful devil spat right in his face, then darted back into the protection of the bushes in a snap of speed.

"*Ach!* Gross, dude! Shit..." Ryan said, wiping the ooze from his lips. They all swept their beams around looking for it, but their small friend had vanished into the shadows.

"Shit... Oh well, bye-bye little, froggie... Bastard. Ribbit ribbit," Ryan cackled. He turned his attention elsewhere, swatting insects away as he looked around. "Dude, this is *balls*, Sidney."

"Yes, please," Danielle added. "That's what I've been saying, you guys. I don't like this place, I don't like being here, I got a really bad feeling..."

"You guys are acting like a couple of bitches, y'know that?" Sidney's fear was under control for the moment. "You talk a big game and that's about it."

"Dude fuck you, Jewman! I'm not afraid! I just don't like being here. Fucking bugs everywhere, can't see a thing — *Ach!*" Ryan continued swatting the insects away. "I mean,

can you feel me here? Does this not just *suck*? Can we please fucking go home?"

"Really, Sidney! Did you think this through? Three kids with flashlights deep in the swamp at night? Looking for a *monster*? Shit, even if there isn't a monster, this is still really dangerous! I didn't think it would be like this..."

Sidney could feel the heavy weight of the opposition. Passionate cryptozoologists, his two comrades were not. He too was finding this much more difficult than anticipated, and the discomfort and disgust of the insects and filth all over him was overpowering. But more than any of that, was the very real fear that just maybe he was right about the legend of this swamp, and if so, how stupid he was to actually attempt this. But at the same time, he liked being the last one to fold to the peer pressure of cowardice. "Well, I guess if you guys want to *give up*, that's cool. We can go back." Sidney milked it for all it was worth. Ryan glared back at him. And the three intrepid explorers turned to head home.

**It was already too late, friends. The unaware teenagers were already marked by the king of the marsh. The Frog. His venom was on their flesh, working its way into their blood. He spat at them from the shadows, timing His shots perfectly with the attacks of the insects, so they had not even noticed. Now they were at His mercy.**

Sidney continued to film as he led the expedition back to "base camp." Danielle's hands shook as she tried to hold the flashlight and machete steady, and Ryan gripped the

Benelli tight. The jittery bright-white of the flashlights and the cool, noir-black of the swamp did not complement each other. It created a dizzying effect, discombobulating; the shadows lied to them. Furthermore, Sidney was no longer sure they were going the right way. He thought he could find his way out, but everything looked different now, any natural landmarks he'd noticed walking in were nowhere present coming out. Sidney stopped and looked around.

"Fuck."

"Sidney, did you get us lost?"

Sidney scanned the swamp, looking down into his night-vision camera to pierce the oppressive darkness. But still he just saw a generic green mist over a generic green swamp, where everything looked the same. It couldn't be right. This logical truth shot through his core in a current, vibrating in his spine and making his heart pound. This wasn't natural. This wasn't right. Something was going on... The Frog.

"Fuck..." Sidney had no more words.

"God damn it, Sidney! Where are we? What's going on?" Danielle cried, her voice cracking and tears welling up.

"You guys, I don't feel so good." Ryan said.

"We've... Gotta keep moving."

Sidney began walking in the direction that should be the way back, feigning confidence as long as possible. But he could feel the dread bubbling up inside of him already, the inevitable feeling that something terrible was about to happen that he would be completely helpless to stop.

"I feel weird too..." Danielle's head was spinning. Shapes were beginning to bend and sag. Sidney might have written it off to their indulgent drug use earlier, but he

was now feeling it too. A swamp is always "alive," but now it was as if every branch and bush and growth of algae was animated and slithering. The muddy marsh, the trees, the grass and the sky overhead; All had become physical appendages of a vast and mysterious living consciousness. A gigantic animal whose bellybutton just happens to be the landscape in which they tread. Sidney could feel his heart punching him from the inside, his hands throbbing in a cold sweat. He could feel the eyes on him, a dark presence in the warped woods, piercing into his soul and judging him, sizing him up with no emotion.

"Dude, Sidney! Man... I'm telling you, I don't feel good! What the hell is going on, man?" Ryan staggered and tripped, trying to use his shotgun for balance. Danielle began to cry, tears running down her cheeks as the uncontrollable dread overtook her. "Sidney, man, what the *fuck*?" Ryan called again to Sidney, who finally turned to meet their eyes with a look of guilt and confusion.

"You guys, I... I don't... I..." Sidney could not find words.

"Sidney! God *damn* it, dude! What the hell is going..." Ryan could not finish his sentence. He was interrupted by a sound so evil, it froze them all right to the core. The meanest voice in the deepest note of the lowest pitch and the darkest tone, booming through a giant, inhuman pair of slimy lungs, reverberated through every pore of the swamp. It said —

**"YOU WILL FEAR THE FROG!"**

The sound that escaped Danielle's throat was not quite a scream, but a disturbed and twisted groan competing with

choked tears. None of them could move, their feet frozen in place as the baritone of the dark voice resonated through every leaf and puddle. Ryan shouldered his trembling shotgun, whipping it around, but could see nothing. Sidney checked his camera, but it too was now warped and the green glow of the viewfinder was an evil, glowing eye to him. Reality had lost its meaning, and more laws of science and reason came crashing down as something huge began to hulk through the overgrowth ahead.

All three of them froze.

The giant shadow moved closer, a twisted, guttural croak coming from its lungs. It took heavy strides through the tall grass. The dark shape moved on a course straight toward the three soft, pink intruders, and they began to retreat. Backing up with shuffling, slurping, tripping steps, Ryan, Sidney and Danielle were dripping with horror. Sweat-drenched clothes clung to their backs as trembling flashlights illuminated the warped swamp world around them.

Up in the sky, a sound like a Pterodactyl in labor blasted through distorted speakers, cutting into their ears. The dazed kids tensed and looked up, bracing for an impact that would not come. They turned back around to discover the dark shape was gone, but they could all still feel the presence. Tears rolled down Danielle's cheeks. Ryan's fingertips were white from gripping his shotgun. The sounds of movement were all around them.

Sidney caught a blur of motion in the corner of his eye, something immense and dark behind him. They all saw it, or at least felt it; the soft sound of large webbed feet on the dirt and lichens. They dreaded what waited behind them, but as the deep croak vibrated to their bones



once again, they were helpless against it. Slowly, they turned like three rusty hinges to meet whatever menace awaited them, and it was then that their sick nightmare began to come true.

The Frog sat perched on a soft, mossy hill behind them with a gravitas matched only by His ugliness. The size of a small European car, His undulating, fleshy body was a muscular mass of muscle and slimy, mottled, dark green skin. Bulging red eyes the size of salad bowls protruded over down-turned, grimacing lips. Those red orbs cut right into them, burning in their souls. Like a mighty king, The Frog sat atop His perch in the swamp, three helpless little pink pigs cowering before Him.

His power was undeniable.

Sidney fell to his knees. Ryan fired two shots directly at the god-like beast, without so much as a flinch in reaction. Mist swirled around His fleshy, amphibian legs. A continuous, deep growl echoed through the night, as if the swamp itself had been outfitted with speakers playing ominous music and buzzing feedback. Ryan and Danielle were frozen stiff, and Danielle didn't even notice that she'd wet herself. Looking up at this beast, this monster, this man-eating diety, they were truly helpless, and at that moment, they would learn the true meaning of fear. Another booming echo came from The Frog, an order that they would not dare disobey.

***"COME TO ME NOW, AND LET ME FEAST UPON YOU."***

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A crazed and filthy Ryan White stumbled into the Tin Cup Diner on the edge of Oakwood the following morning at 7:17 am. Other than being caked in dirt and swamp muck, the first thing the employees and patrons of the country restaurant noticed was that the cartilage of his nose had been cleaved off right to the bone. In a face untouched except for mud and small abrasions, this gaping hole full of swamp and dried blood stood out like a stop-sign. It was a clean cut, and he had clearly stood still while someone sliced it off with a sharp knife. Possibly himself. Now his face had a skeletal countenance, his nose gone, his eyes bugging out from their sockets and jittering around.

The first three fingers on his left hand were missing, later to be determined as a result of a shotgun discharge. Much of his hair had also turned gray. He was taken to the downtown ER at Erlanger, unable to speak or even mumble incoherently. Neither police, nor doctors or friends were able to get him to talk. To this day, White is a resident of the Moccasin Bend Mental Hospital, his condition barely more than Catatonia.

Local authorities organized a search party and followed Ryan's trail back into the swamp that afternoon. At 3:59 pm, they discovered the body of Sidney Lewman, completely naked, floating in the muddy shallows. Except for part of his left ear, his head had been blown completely off his body as a result of a shotgun blast. The firearm in question was found close to Lewman's body. The camera containing the supposed proof of this experience has never been found. Danielle Ferrara was presumed dead, though her body has never been found.

The kids and the old timers will continue to talk, my friends. They always do. This latest incident would soon fade into the quilt-work of the whole local legend. People would forget, skeptics would jest, but soon more bold explorers would return to the swamp. He would be there, hiding in the branches of the mighty elms and cottonwoods, a tiny streak of color they would all dismiss.

None of them will ever find Him.

But every single one of them will fear The Frog.

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