

The Swamp

STRANGE, how cold the swamp can be. Gray, naked branches, showing the gnarled cyprus roots. The water, for once, is black and laps spasmodically against the worn, creaky boards of the pier. Whole sections of the pier gone — lost in October's hurricane. And the chill fog hides the spot . . .

“That's it! Here, Dan, take the glasses. Now aim, over the far buoy, up about five degrees, directly below the sun. There, isn't that the boat?” “Yes, yes, I see it. Why, they're three-fourths of the way across. Sara's going to swim the lake!” And she would have been the first girl to swim it, if she hadn't had to stop for the sudden rain. It always came like that, quickly out of the fiery blue, hard, pounding the shingles of the cabin like a hundred thousand skin drums in accompaniment to young Dallas' tales . . . “Yes, sir, Chief Wacamaw promised his beautiful daughter the entire green pine forest for her wedding gift. And then, when Prince Wanacah, her lover, was killed in a battle with the Mountain Cherokee, he gave it to her anyway. But the Princess was heartbroken, and her tears formed a great lake, which overflowed the forest, and the Green Swamp was made.” It begins clear across the lake there, past DuPree's store and bowling alley and the jukebox, with its ever-turning table . . . “Fever — you give me fever all through the night.” The boards of the pier are hard, but you, Jim — and the waves on my feet feel warm, like bath water. “Darling, did you ever see such a moon?” A Carolina moon — huge and silvery. And us, forever, here in the night breeze, warm and humid and feverish, lazily caressing. God, the wind — on the road after the dance — then harder, faster, harder and faster, faster, faster, faster, streaming my hair out behind me, jerking at the roots, as the jeep careens wildly

around the Point Curve. "There they are — way back there around the bend. Drive faster." "Jimmy, sit down. Please sit down." "I can still see them, I tell you! Hurry, faster." "Sit down, Jimmy, please sit down before you . . ." "Hurry, we can still win. Faster!" "Jimmy, please — J I M M Y!" But the fire ball returns every morning, and the breeze retreats south and east, past the point and the swamp to the beach and out to sea, and all is still in the brightness. And the boards of the pier sear the bare flesh. And the fire of the road is no better. The road, which brings the dusty car from the hospital and kind Dallas and the end: "It's over, honey. His brain couldn't take the jar of the fall. It's better. He never would have been right again." Again, again, again . . .

I've been away, but I'm here again. No, not again. The trees are bare now. The jukebox is gone, and the store closed. And out there beyond the point and the fog is the forest of the Princess — green no more. And the pier, cut by the storms of October, tossed and washed by the rains of November and December — no, there will be no again.

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CYCLOPS

Cyclops scans the steel-blue night
 And parries the moon with thrusts of light,
 Pierces cloud-wisps through and through
 And shouts silent warning to some few.
 Oh, spin your head and thrust your beam —
 You cannot scare us while we dream:
 Yea, who will spin your head and keep
 Your beam — when at last we sleep?

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