

Fable: Nix the Water Reign

A mist drifts throughout the winding mountains on a cold autumn morning. The once lavish green hills where children used to play and animals would graze was now hidden behind a thickening fog. The beautiful landscape was bewitchingly charming. Hundreds of adventure seekers would flock to the mountains to experience the picturesque scenery. With their polaroid cameras and bohemian spirit, travelers wandered into the cliffs without an ounce of consideration for the natural energy of the mountains. A haunting aura emitted from the lake that breaks apart the hills. The unease feeling seeped from the water and arose up throughout the land. Horror stories have been shared since the last wave of people visited the european town. Now a darkness overcasts the area, engulfing a dreaded presence amongst the lonely town in the center of the mass isolation.

Down the bend of a road shines two dim lights. The lights move with the curvature of the mountain heading towards a dilapidated, wooden sign. Town of Shrecken. A poorly carved statue of a mermaid proudly lays at the bottom the sign. Headlights of a rented 1968 Volkswagen emerges from the misty road. Inside the car sits a family of four; the Mertons. They are an ordinary mixed American family of the 1990s. Educated. Community leaders. Secret holders. The father, Urwin Merton, the first in his African American family to earn his PhD without spiraling into a depression like his brother and sisters. As a remarkable hydrologist, Urwin was given the opportunity to test the Shrecken town water. Before the move, with a push of his glasses up the bridge of his nose and inviting smile, Urwin faced his sons and wife with the relocation news, knowing a big reason for the change in locations was because of his oldest son. Seeing how his family needed a change of scenery, he jumped on the chance to travel across the

world to Germany—yet not all of the Mertons were fond of the move. Coral Merton, third generation Mexican American is an overanxious wife and mother who has her reservations on the great move her husband decided on. But as a novelist, she followed along with nothing vital keeping in the United States. She lost her family when she was young. All that was left was her grandmother, who raised Coral with a tight leash. Leaving her home would give Coral an added reason to avoid the stern looks and unapologetic tone by her aging grandmother. However, as she sits in the passenger seat, she does not hide her dazed and uneasy expression. Her arms are crossed as she taps her fingers anxiously on her forearm. The bags under her eyes and unkempt hair doesn't faze Urwin as he takes her tapping fingers into his hand and comfortably squeezes. Coral untenses as she lets out an exhale.

In the back seat are Fischer and Fin Merton; brothers with opposite personalities. Fischer, at fourteen years old, found himself into trouble nearly everyday back in the States. As his former teachers would put it, he is a rebellious teen with no sense of empathy. Maybe some fresh air and cultural surroundings would do him some good, Fischer's parents thought before the move. Behind the driver's side of the car, Fischer grunts and cackles with each swift play on his Gameboy completely in his own selfish world. On the other side, behind the passenger seat, Fin, a stunning image of his father, stares intensely out the window onto the edge of the mountain. Just like Urwin, Fin devotes his time to science. He couldn't leave his precious materials in the States, which is why a pile of National Geographic magazines is stacked on the floor with his feet laying on top and a knitted blue blanket draped across the mound, which he clutches in his hands. On top of the pile is a magazine with a cover photo of a shark with the title *Jaws* shouting off the page. As Fin looks out the window, he notices a shift in the fog. Subconsciously, he grips

his blanket and holds it close to his chest. The smell of home emanates off the yarn. Fin eases his grip as he takes in the whiff of comfort.

A break from the haze accentuates a murky lake in the mountain's dark and secluded cavity. A single fisherman boat floats on the coastline. The water sways calmly, almost mesmerizing, capturing Fin's attention. He inches closer to the car window and watches the boat rock back and forth. His grip on the blanket loosens, falling onto the magazine stack. Suddenly, the water stops. The lake sits still. Fin tilts his head and squints from behind his oversized glasses to find the cause of the placidity. Closer and closer until he rests his head on the window, Fin sees a ripple appear from the side of the boat. The water off the coastline swishes heavily. The small boat wobbles vehemently, crashing into wave after wave. Fin gasps. He mouths, "Dad," but no sound comes out. His breathing starts to wheeze, never taking his eyes off the water. In seconds, the side of the boat is sideswiped by a quick, hazy, slender-looking figure from under the water. The attack on the boat continues until a crater appears on its side, tipping it over, favoring the broken area. Water seeps into the concave dent as the boat slowly sinks under the water.

Faded green rolls of hills overlook the muggy water. Small, poorly made lake houses scatter the area into a disconnected community. From the homes, a gray-haired man bursts out of his lakeside home and dashes towards his boat off the coastline to save what is left of his craft. He stops halfway, a look of terror exudes off his face. Not a single blink or jolt could break the man's fixation on the horror he has witnessed. As he examines the scene, the man marches back up to his home. At the door, his terrified wife and young son stand close as they watch the man return in a catatonia state. His lifeless eyes are wide and glazed over as he walks past his family. Both the wife and son meekly watch the man for any response, but the fisherman drifts towards a

chair directly facing the lake on the porch. He slowly lowers himself on the chair without taking his eyes off the coastline, staring mystified out toward the water. The son looks up at his mother who ushers him inside. She surveys their surroundings before taking one final glance at the man. With no interaction, she enters the home and slams the door shut. The impact of the bang causes a decorative wall hanging of a mermaid to rapidly sway back and forth. The man whistles a soft tune. In a quick jolt, he turns his attention up at the mountain road, staring into Fin's window.

Fin, completely stunned, twists his body forward to face the back of the passenger seat with his eyes closed tight. His frightened expression catches the attention of Fischer. With a wicked smile, Fischer pulls his eyelids inside out, a skill that terrorizes his victims. As Fin continues facing straight, Fischer roars in his ear. With a shriek, Fin flutters his eyes open and sees Fischer's scare tactic. Fin covers himself with his blanket as Fischer continues to invoke dread. The commotion in the backseat startles Urwin, who veers off the main road and straight to the edge of the mountain. Coral holds onto her seatbelt, muttering "I'm sorry," over and over. Fischer curses, holding back frightened tears. The car stops, hanging off a small embankment over the lake. Fin's body falls to the side of the car, face smushed into the window, staring straight into the lake 20 feet away from him. He gulps back his panic, praying to survive past puberty. The water wrinkles and Fin notices movement underneath. A shadow swiftly slithers in a figure eight, entrancing Fin.

Coral notices the water and wails for Urwin to help her, not the kids—her. Urwin takes a heavy breath in, holding it until he manages to move the car back and on to the road again. He sighs a relief as he looks back at his family. Fin snaps out of the daze and catches Urwin's attention. They both give each other a nod to show that they are ok. Fischer chuckles maliciously which angrily provokes Urwin to sternly scold Fischer for his antics and the problems he has

been causing since they first set foot at the airport. With a grim expression, Coral clutches her necklace and bites the inside of her cheeks to keep from shouting words she'll regret saying. The car enters the Town of Shrecken.

Urwin gently rolls the car onto a dirt road, following the path into the scanty, barren town center. The Mertons examine the environment, becoming more and more unnerved as they go deeper into the frail soul of Shrecken. Fin restlessly stares out the window searching for any townspeople that may appear, hoping that there might be nice villagers in his new hometown. Fischer scoffs after taking one glance outside his window then focuses his gaze onto his handheld device once more. Coral bites her lower lip to keep from anxiously shaking. She observes the wasteland of depleted buildings and poor charm. Urwin internally curses the gloomy weather for taking the beauty away from small town living, wishing that this first day would allure his family. With optimism in his heart, he continues on the road to reach the outside point of the center located at the end.

The lack of sunshine exuberates mystery and isolation within Shrecken. Not a single shop or restaurant is open, except for the solo bar at the edge of town. A drunken fisherman named Daniel stumbles out the doors of the only bar in town. He yells at a statue of a mermaid placed at the entrance of the tiny building calling for justice for his murdered son. In a rage, he picks up a rock and chucks it at the head of the statue. Emil, another fisherman and completely sober, rushes to grab Daniel. Both wrestle back inside as Emil reminds his friend about the dangers of misbehavior. Daniel sobs into Emil's shirt as he is led back inside the bar. Everything they are saying is in German, making it impossible for the Mertons to understand what the exchange was about. Thinking it's just the booze talking, Urwin assures his family that they will enjoy their time in Shrecken.

The family car declines towards a solo, withered, two-story home off the coast of the lake, a smaller home sitting a few acres away. As the Mertons approach closer to the front of the home, they are greeted by a grandmotherly woman standing eagerly at the entrance of the front door. Her large smile wrinkles the corners of her eyes. The robotic movement of her waving hand maintains the same speed, back and forth. Behind the woman's long thick skirt hides a little girl clutching a ruffle as she covers her face with a handmade, sinister-looking doll dressed in all blue. This gives Coral an uneasy feeling, and she sinks lower into her seat, peering over the dashboard of the car at the woman and child. Urwin doesn't notice the unnerving ambiance as he happily pulls into the front of the home.

Urwin parks the car and one by one, the family steps out of it. Coral rubs her arms together to keep warm, her long sleeve shirt doing nothing to protect her from the German autumn air. Fin steps forward to meet his mother and hands her a coat he pulled from the backseat. Coral forces a smile as she takes the coat. Fischer obnoxiously stretches, grunting as he pulls his arms and touches his toes. Urwin scrambles to the woman and extends his hand for a friendly shake.

"You must be Ms. Marline. It is very nice to meet you." Urwin announces.

Ms. Marline stops her hand waving and beams. She shakes Urwin's hand as she replies in a thick German accent, "It is such a pleasure to have the Mertons in Shrecken. Thank you, thank you." Urwin awkwardly chuckles as he holds back pain from the strong grip off Ms. Marline's hand.

Coral walks closer to Urwin until she is standing right behind him; she clears her throat to announce her appearance. Urwin whips his head back, realizing that he has more introductions.

“Ms. Marline, this is my family. Coral, my beautiful wife.” Urwin wraps his arm around Coral’s shoulders but Coral shrugs Urwin’s tender embrace off of her.

“Nice to meet you.” Coral bows her head, still with her arms wrapped around herself.

“And these are my children. Fischer and Fin.” Urwin gestures to the boys who remain near the car. Fin waves. Fischer snickers.

Ms. Marline gasps as she ushers the small girl, who is hidden behind Ms. Marline, to introduce her to the Mertons. “This is my great-niece, Meena. She lives with me and helps around the property.” Meena sheepishly smiles and waves before covering her face with her doll. Fin takes notice of the grimy toy. It has frazzled yarn hair, button eyes, an X for a mouth, and a violin patch on the tattered dress. Meena absorbs Fin’s interest. She watches him look from the doll to her eyes. Fin stands paralyzed, unable to take his eyes off of Meena’s dreary emotion.

Fischer knocks into Fin, breaking the trance between Fin and Meena. In a huff, Fischer stomps up the porch stairs. Meena watches him brush past her with a malevolent glare. She squeezes her doll until her hands turn red. Having renounced his manners, Fischer barges into the home. Ms. Marline, with a grin on her face, gestures to the Mertons to enter their new home. Urwin glances at Coral with a hopeful smile and parades up the stairs. Coral takes a deep breath before following Urwin. Fin surveys the exterior of the house, noting the marred, wooden walls and screenless windows.

Ms. Marline enters through the open door, tailing Urwin and Coral. Meena rocks back and forth on her heels, waiting for Fin to follow his family. Fin hesitantly moves up the stairs, not taking his eyes off of Meena. Once he passes the threshold, he takes his eyes off of Meena

and notices the intricate carving on the door. A mirrored image of the lake surrounded by the mountains as seen from the front of the porch. He glances from the door to the murky lake water, questioning the image. With a few blinks, he shakes it off and catches up with his parents.

Meena stands underneath the doorway with a pout, she intently watches Fin who observes the inside of the home. Droplets of water dribble down Meena's stockings. She takes a step forward, leaving behind a puddle where she once stood.