The sun was shining through the forest’s canopy. Its warm rays woke me up a while ago but I didn't want to get up from my grass bed. Why should I anyway, at home nobody was waiting for my return so I didn't have to rush. Probably only I remembered what day it was, a sad anniversary of an event that ended my parents freedom; my birthday. I knew the only sincere gift I would get today were the bites of the ticks that probably got to me while I was asleep .

Here in the calm weather of late spring the birds were chirping merrily flying above. Still a bit sleepy I sat up supporting myself on the trunk of the tree behind me. I took a sandwich out of my pocket and really content with myself I began inspecting my surroundings. Not that far to my left I saw a family of rabbits. Even those little creatures seemed to care for each other so why for me…

Abrupt gusts of wind stopped me from having useless thoughts. I finished my sandwich and began debating on whether I should treat myself to another nap, but suddenly all of my sleepiness was gone. In its place came weird uneasiness and unpleasant shivers. The birds stopped singing and even the wind halted. The uncomfortable feeling grew along as the abrupt silence persewired. I slowly stood up to get a better look around, only trees greeted my sight. They however were calm and didn't seem to share my concerns. Calming myself inside I picked my jacked off the ground and began walking. As I walked faster and faster in the end I found myself running. What was I so scared of? It was embarrassing to think but I didn't stop until I reached the end of the forest.

…….

My home was quiet, no whispers, no music playing, just silence. But here, differently from the forest, quietness was the norm. I knew that I was here alone, I always was. Weird shiver ran down my spine and on the way to my room there was a surprise waiting for me. Big, brown box stood before the door of my hermitage. I took a step closer to investigate this unexpected object that was blocking my way. On the top, that reached my chest there was a note. A plain off white card with my name written at the centre: “Matilda”.

My heart shook, did my parents remember? They weren't horrible parents, they got me what I needed except their time. Usually their assistant would deliver something he got on a way back from his work trip. Like a snow globe, or a toothpick holder that looked like grey piramide but he swore it was the Eiffel’s tower. But still the best birthday present I got was a pocket knife given to me by a homeless man outside of the library, who didn't even know it was my birthday.I think he was drunk or high . He kept mumbling that he and I were in danger and we needed to be careful of “Him”. He took out the pocket knife and gave it to me saying it was to protect myself. I didn't want to take something he was giving me, not in his right mind. I didn't care for the words of some crazy old man either. Still he insisted. He said people like us need to look out for each other. I took it. I bought him some food and told him I'll come back but after that I never found that man again. In place of our first and last meeting to see was only black mould eating away on the building. Nevertheless, since then always with me was a little pocket knife with a wooden handle. It became my most prized possession.

Shaking of memories and hope and remembering what was before me, I took the card and read its back:

“To my dear niece on her birthday. Do you remember times when we played together when you were still a small kid? We built forts from cardboard and pretended to rescue your toys from fairy castles. Let's play again. Once you close the lid this box will take you anywhere you want but to return you must find a creature that lives there and take it back with you. Just like your toys! Only after completing the rescue mission can you come back.”

See you soon, yours truly

Uncle John.

The sandnes of getting the hopes that my parents remembered being trampled was quickly overrun by the strangeness of the situation. Uncle John was someone I remembered from my childhood. But he never came back after some big fight with my parents when I was around 10 so sx years ago. Well I liked him a lot then. I remember our imaginary adventures to different magic lands being really realistic. They usually involved going inside closets, deep forests, forgotten alleyways or… boxes.

“I’m too old for this” i thought, and what present even was this. four empty walls of cardboard, an enigma of an uncle and a bunch of memories. At least he could give me some candy or anything really. And what was he doing here? Did my parents reconcile with him? It wasn't my business so I stopped wondering and after not that long consideration I decided to go inside for old times sake. I was still in my shoes but I didn't care. I supported myself on a nearby chair and not giving it any more thought I jumped right in.

It was even bigger inside than on the outside. I had plenty of room to sit so I did just that and closed the lid. I wondered if my busy parents would even notice that I was inside or even notice the box at all.

I took another look at the card. Where would I even go if I could. I closed my eyes and pondered. I didn't have anything in mind and at that a creature. I could go to Australia and take a spider but what if I went to the south pole? Would I be able to catch a penguin then? I was taking it too seriously and became embarrassed. I closed my eyes and played with a knife in my pocket. The forest came to mind.

I concentrated very hard just as uncle told me last time we played. I created an image of green trees in my head. My body began to tingle and my pocket knife became hot, the box started to vibrate. I was too scared to scream, the walls began to Crumble on me while becoming green like tree crowns. Warm sunlight was coming from somewhere. I remembered the strange feeling I got inside of the forest and with that thought like on signal the walls from green leaves started to turn into black mould. Then the walls were so close that they began to suffocate me, I desperately tried to cut them but to no avail. I don't know if it was from lack of oxygen or extreme fear but at that moment with the thought of death I lost my consciousness.

…….

I suddenly woke up, I was hoping to be back in the forest and that the devilish box was just a nightmare but no. Greeting me were black stone walls in front and dark and not at all welcoming forest behind their big windows. With great effort I got up and scanned my surroundings. I didn't have time to be shocked. The pain of my whole body was telling me it all was awfully real.

I frantically Looked for the box and discovered that behind me was a steep cliffside. It certainly wasn't somewhere I wanted to be. I begged the universe for that stupid box and a creature. The sun was almost touching the horizon, I didn't have much time to look or I would need to spend the night

* Hello - said a hoarse voice that didn't seem to belong to neither man nor woman.

I remained motionless in fear.

* I said, hello - a strange voice said again. I turned around on the walls and there was nothing but… black mould. It began to move like a swarm of bees getting closer and pinning me against the cliff.
* What are you doing in my castle adversary?- said the mould. I wanted to cry, the smell of it was making me nauseous. And the two walls certainly weren't a castle maybe a long time ago but not now.
* I'm sorry for the disturbance. I was just going - I said, hiding my trembling voice. I didn't expect anything good from something that looked like that.
* Make deal with me - There appeared a pair of glowing red eyes at the front of the swarm and it began to turn into some sort of a beast. It terrified me. Also this creature didn't seem to care what I had to say.

Then I saw it, just behind this scary thing I saw the box. Whatever deal it might have been, I knew better than to trust some mould monster so I decided to just go for it. In its slowly forming body that was flowing like thick slime I saw a beating heart. I opened my knife and in a quick motion I cut the heart out of the body, ran past the terribly howling black goop and jumped inside of the somewhat destroyed box. The last thing I remember was hoping that just the part of the creature would count.

Waking up on the floor and coming back disturbed to my daily routine I wouldn't have expected that my shadow was moving weirdly behind me.