

Short Story Synopsis

A group seven of adolescents gather at the entrance of the Rotting Woods for a game of “Manhunt”. Among the crowd, Ashlyn Warren stands with her cousins. She’s the oldest by at least two years but is acting as an outsider, visiting only for the summer. The second oldest of the group begins to tell the tale of a missing girl, Belle Jones, and what happens to those who enter the forest without offering something in return. To travel safely, they must offer either secrets or blood. Ash refuses at first, but submits when her youngest cousin begins to cry.

As the game begins, Ashlyn runs into another player who does not want to be there. She escorts him back to his home across the street before returning to play the game. But upon re-entering the forest, everything feels different. As she attempts to find a hiding place, she comes across another crying child. However, as she gets close, she realizes that the child is no child at all but a dangerous, inhuman entity. Ash immediately runs to find her cousins, fearing for their safety. However, as she attempts to leave with them, the Entity states threatens the other players. Ash leaves her cousins at the edge of the forest while she tries to save the others.

She finds the other three players when they attempt to tag her. They refuse to listen to her story, forcing Ash to take on the role of the villain to scare them into leaving. As she follows them out, Ash discovers her cousin Finn has re-entered the woods to try and help her. Realizing it’s quicker to track the Entity than to look for her cousin directly, Ash manages to find the Entity just before she takes a bite out of Finn. In an attempt to save her cousin, Ashlyn begins bargaining with the Entity, but she has so little to bargain with. Ash must make the choice between saving herself or saving her cousin/