

**13 HAUNTED
NIGHTS
NIGHT ONE**



The Inspiration

Algernon Blackwood's **The Willows** is a cornerstone of supernatural literature, impacting generations with its profound exploration of the unknown. First published in 1907, this novella intricately weaves psychological horror with the majesty of nature, plunging readers into a realm where the familiar turns unsettling. Set along a remote stretch of the Danube, two friends embark on a canoe trip seeking serenity but instead confront a force that challenges their understanding.

Blackwood's masterful prose captures the essence of the natural world, presenting it not merely as a backdrop but as an entity with its own will and voice. The subtle, creeping dread throughout the story reflects deep-seated anxieties about humanity's place in the universe and our vulnerability when faced with nature's ancient powers.

Algernon Blackwood (1869–1951) was a prolific writer and one of the most notable figures in supernatural fiction. His affinity for nature, shaped by extensive travel and outdoor adventures, infused his works with a genuine sense of wonder and terror.

The Willows has influenced numerous authors and filmmakers, establishing a template for narratives that explore the interplay between the human psyche and the mysteries of the natural world. Its impact endures, reminding readers of the delicate balance between admiration and fear when confronting the unknown.

Between Signals and Shadows - Episode 1

by Holly Rhiannon

06/15/2023 11:03



moment of static and she appears on the screen. Bending over with a grin towards the camera propped on the ground. A hint of grass is seen at the bottom of the frame, blowing in the wind.

She looks frustrated, adjusting her appearance; the black hair with a shot of white through the front.

"Well, we definitely can't do any recording outdoors, this wind is ridiculous!"

"You didn't notice that when we were arriving?" A voice sounds behind her with a laugh, and another young woman can be seen in the background, fidgeting with her own camera.

The static returns.

06/15/2023 12:30

Sitting indoors now, the same woman appears looking more settled – put together. Behind her, the log walls of a cabin.

"Alright. Time to actually get this vlog started! Holly Rhiannon here reporting from ... well, you'll see. Sort of. Last year, Jenna and I heard about this spot nicknamed Willow Island. It's in the middle of a river in California – and no, I'm not going to tell you what river. Willow Island isn't even this place's official name. It doesn't have one. We didn't hear about it through the usual channels. You're not going to find anything about it if you start poking around online, I promise. This spot is remote. Like, really remote."

The sound of wind whistling through crumbling window frames interrupts her thought and she whips around momentarily before turning back to the camera with a sigh.

"And yeah, it's pretty windy. Let me get poetic with you here for a second ..."

Her voice drops as she mutters a note to herself. "Hey, editing Holly, put our pretty B-roll footage over this bit."

"We made our way through the smog-laden streets of Los Angeles. Our contact had given us a spot to meet somewhere between the fashion district and skid row on San Pedro. As the sun dipped below the horizon, Jenna and I questioned our decision. However, while we walked, we began to reminisce about past adventures. The many places this podcast has taken us over the years. From derelict homes of possessed pensioners to the moors of Scotland; screaming with preternatural presence."

She sighs. A strange sight, to witness the recording of a voiceover without the related footage. I have learned over time how these things are meant to work; meant to look. And watching this young woman's eyes glance over her shoulder, watching her pause to check her makeup or phone, something of the mystery is gone, replaced with a kind of intimacy. This is new to me.

"The thing is, while we've been lucky to have a multitude of astounding experiences over the years, we've also faced our fair share of hoaxes. As we arrived at our meeting spot and stood, slightly concerned, eyes darting about our surroundings with caution under the glaring, flickering streetlight, we eventually made eye contact with one another. Knowing glances. Our contact wasn't going to show ... were they?"

A laugh sounds behind her and she pauses, turning around.

"Hey I can hear that!"

A muffled "Oh, sorry!" And silence.

Turning back, she licks her fingers, setting hair right that was never wrong in the first place.

"When we thought that it was about time to leave, suddenly they appeared. And the game was afoot, as they say. Now ..." *her voice lowers again, "... let's switch out of the stock, I don't think we've got anything for this."*

She repositions herself, the camera-ready person appearing like a summoned creature.

"So, I think it's most important to say that this wasn't just some random stranger. This is someone we know. Mind you, we haven't met them in person, but we know them. We do our work and our research. So this person? Not putting us in any danger. Trust me. What I will tell you though ... this contact didn't really want us to follow their recommendation. Which is strange. But hey! We're here now and so far it's been just fine."

06/15/2023 19:43

The camera cuts out, and when the screen lights up again, a crackling fire appears. Holly can be seen through the smoke, sitting on a lawn chair, with noises of clinking and cutting, presumably cooking sounds, in the background. She smiles, sipping a glass of wine as another layer of smoke appears, along with the sound of sizzling. There must be a barbecue at the cabin.

She clears her throat.

"This place! We'd left the next morning, after meeting with our contact and confirming we did plan to record some podcasts and vlogs on Willow Island. They couldn't talk us out of it."

The other woman's voice crows from off screen, "Damn right!"

The two women laugh.

"We had to take a boat to come here. After leaving the last sign of civilization behind, the road quickly faded into something else entirely. The pavement gave way to dusty tracks, snaking deeper into a world untouched by progress. The trees — mostly willows, gnarled and impossibly old — grew so thick and twisted they choked out the sky, leaving everything beneath them bathed in a strange, dim light. It wasn't night, but it wasn't quite day anymore either. The wind rustled the silver-green leaves, making them dance like waves over a green sea, and as we pushed deeper, the sound grew louder, a whispering chorus that followed us."

She leans towards the camera, a look of excited determination on her face.

"By the time we reached the river's edge, it felt like we had slipped into another world. The water here didn't rush; it meandered, threading itself through narrow, winding channels. Small islands, more like patches of land barely held together by tangled roots, dotted the river in all directions. They shifted in size and shape, as if trying to evade us. Willow branches brushed against the boat, dipping low over the water as if they were alive, welcoming us – or warning us."

She takes another sip of wine and mutters, "I think we've got some B-roll here." Then continues:

"The current pulled us faster than we anticipated, and we had to stay alert to avoid the sudden, swirling eddies that formed and dissolved as quickly as we spotted them. There were moments when the water's surface seemed to come alive, rippling not with waves, but with leaves. Jenna gripped her camera tighter with every bend, while I focused on keeping the boat steady. The air felt different here, charged with something I couldn't explain – like the place itself was watching us ..."

She seemed now to have gone into a trance, staring away from the camera, instead at the flames of the flickering fire.

"That was intense!" Jenna appears from off screen and hands Holly a plate. Holly snaps out of her reverie and smiles at her friend, steadying the plate while she leans over to turn off the camera.

06/16/2023 11:00

"The island is quite a bit smaller than expected." Holly is on camera again, putting her hair up into a ponytail, as Jenna digs around in a backpack behind her.

"We went hiking pretty early this morning since it was all misty when we got up and it looked like it'd give us some really cool B-roll. We were finished crossing the entire island and coming back in, what,"

She glances back at her friend, "three ... four hours?"

"Something like that," Jenna responds, not looking up from the task at hand.

"I mean it still was a good amount of walking, but the ENTIRE island and back in three-ish hours? The way this place was hyped up, it did seem a bit more mysterious, but how can any place really be mysterious when it's so small?"

She's making a confused face in the camera, leaning in, trying to determine what to say next.

"Hey ... hey!!" Behind her, Jenna can be seen running out the flimsy, wood-framed screen door. Holly's eyes light up.

She grabs the camera, and the footage shakes as the lens is turned on her friend – following her as she runs, for a moment obscured by the willows and then found again at the water's edge.

"It's a BODY!" Jenna yells, eyes fixated on a dark form bobbing along, carried by the stream about twenty feet from shore. The camera's lens follows the form, and as it aligns with the womens' position, it lurches around and looks straight at the recording device; eyes reflecting the sunset, an odd yellow gleam about them, as the shadowy form turns over. Holly gasps from behind the camera, and the bobbing shape gives a swift, gulping plunge, diving out of sight.

The camera is turned around, facing its holder once again. Her expression is a knowing one. Her eyes scan towards her friend and the camera does as well, as the two speak in unison.

"An OTTER." They burst into laughter.

"Oh –" Holly pauses, pointing. "There's some wood over there that doesn't look too damp – we should probably grab it for the fire."

She deposits the camera on an elevated surface; likely a tree stump, and records for a moment, a scene devoid of humanity. All that is captured is the sound of wind in the trees, the lapping of water, peaceful against a misty shore.

There's a calm to the scene, but also an eeriness as faraway bird calls echo, bouncing up against one another and falling somewhere in the dewy grass.

A few minutes later and the two friends are seen again, bundles of wood in their arms, jogging back into view, a ways off by the bank. Their muffled words are heard.

"He's crossing himself! Look, he's making the sign of the cross!"

Further off, a tiny black shape floats along the river's surface; presumably a boat of some sort.

"That's weird ... I think you're right" Jenna speaks, staring out at the water as Holly turns around, clumsily running back to the camera. She deposits the bundle of firewood unceremoniously, grabs the camera and runs back to the water, image shaking in a nauseating fashion.

The camera is now on the water. What is indeed a craft pushes further away, a man seated aboard, staring in a serious, penetrating way at the island as more distance grows between himself and its banks. He shouts something as he disappears further into the mist, but it's unintelligible.

The camera is on Jenna, and Holly can be heard questioning, "What do you think he was on about? He seemed really superstitious, I wish we could talk to him."

Jenna's expression is one of concern. She responds in a measured tone, "Yeah ... he probably knows the legends of this place; saw signs of people here, maybe the smoke last night, and thinks we're demons or something." She laughs nervously.

"Right, right..." the camera is flipped around to face its holder again.

"One thing I should tell you about this place is that there are a couple of towns nearby, and the people there are where all these stories originated. Either they are extremely paranoid, or they're onto something. And that's one of the reasons we're here. Our source said they believe in all sorts of rubbish, but if you know anything about me and Jenna, we're not about to scoff at any stories of the strange and supernatural. Just because there isn't a scientific explanation for something doesn't mean it didn't happen. After all, every scientific discovery was once undiscovered."

While the words she speaks are clearly ones she's said before; rehearsed, her voice and manner lack something that is usually there. It's hard to say precisely what ... but the atmosphere of the trip is different now since the events of the morning.

The camera goes dark.

06/16/2023 14:12

Holly's camera flickers on with a sharp burst of static, followed by her figure inside the cabin, hair still damp from a quick walk through the incessant mist outside.

"I can't believe how fast the river's rising. It's actually wild," she mutters to herself, fiddling with the camera's focus. "The weather forecast didn't mention anything about a flood risk, but you'd think we might be drowning by tomorrow with the way it's going."

She sets the camera down on a makeshift tripod created from a stack of books, then pans it slightly to catch Jenna standing by the window, peering out toward the trees swaying violently in the wind. Holly leans back in her chair, eyes flicking toward the ceiling as the rafters creak ominously.

"Hey, Jenna – what do you think?" Holly asks, her voice carrying an edge of curiosity. "Will we be underwater by morning?"

Jenna doesn't look away from the window, her shoulders tense as she replies, "I don't know ... but if the river gets much higher, we're not going to have a choice. We might need to pack up early."

Holly laughs, but there's no humour in it. "You always know how to stay grounded, huh? I guess it's my turn to have too much imagination today."

Jenna finally turns, giving Holly a measured glance. "It's not about imagination – it's about not getting stuck here. You see how quickly the water's moving."

Holly sighs, leaning forward in her chair. "Yeah, yeah. But isn't that why we came? To find something strange, something we can't explain?"

Jenna shrugs but doesn't respond. The camera lingers on her for a moment before static cuts the scene again.

06/16/2023 19:00

The fire crackles softly in the center of the screen. Holly sits close to the flames, staring intently at them as if lost in thought. Her voice is lower, almost absent-minded.

"This place ... it feels different. Like it's ... alive," she murmurs, barely audible over the wind.

She lifts a cup to her lips, her eyes still fixed on the flickering firelight. Its glow casts long shadows over her face. Jenna is off-screen, but her presence can be felt – like the silence between them is more than just a pause. It's deliberate. There's an unspoken understanding hanging in the air.

"I've been thinking about those stories," Holly continues, breaking the silence. "You know, the ones from the towns nearby. The legends."

Jenna's voice comes from behind the camera, cautious. "What about them?"

Holly leans back in her chair, exhaling slowly. "It's like ... those people know something we don't. Maybe it's superstition, sure, but what if there's more to it than that? The way the river acts ... the way this island feels, like it's watching us ... it makes me wonder."

Jenna doesn't respond immediately, but there's a sense that she's listening, considering. The camera zooms out slightly, capturing both women now, framed against the darkening sky and the ever-present willows swaying wildly in the background.

"We're not scared, though, right?" Holly says, almost to herself, the trace of a smile on her lips.

"No," Jenna finally says, though there's an edge to her voice, a hesitation. "Not scared. Just ... cautious."

Holly raises her cup. "To caution, then."

Jenna raises her own cup to clink it with her friend's, though the tension between them remains palpable. The fire pops loudly, sending a cascade of sparks into the night air.

06/16/2023 23:45

The screen is nearly black, save for the faint glow of embers from the dying fire. The camera has been left on, pointing toward the empty camp, the sound of the wind still relentless. The willows sway violently, their branches scraping against one another like whispers in the night.

A distant splash echoes from the river, and then another. Holly stirs in the background, the camera catching her shadow moving through the darkness. Her voice, groggy, barely registers. It seems the pair had nodded off.

"Did you hear that?"

Jenna doesn't reply. There's only the wind and the faint sound of water lapping against the shore.

The camera remains focused on the empty camp for another minute, a quiet unease settling into the scene until Holly's hand reaches over, flicking the camera off, leaving the screen black.

06/17/2023 00:20

When the camera flickers back on, the mood is noticeably heavier. The fire is out, and both Holly and Jenna are sitting on the damp ground, their expressions more serious than before.

Holly is holding a flashlight, its beam cutting through the thick darkness toward the river.

"There was someone out there," Jenna says quietly, her voice barely audible over the wind.

"I saw him too," Holly agrees, though there's uncertainty in her tone. "He was just standing there. By the water."

Jenna shakes her head. "No, that wasn't just someone. That ... didn't feel right."

The flashlight trembles slightly in Holly's hand, the beam wobbling as it scans the riverbank. But there's nothing there now – only the swirling water and the rustling willows.

06/17/2023 00:30

The camera captures the two women, their faces illuminated by the faint beam of light. Disorienting shadows play across the trees. The wind howls, almost as if it carries whispers of warning.

"Did you get a good look at him?" Holly asks, her voice trembling slightly as she adjusts the beam, searching the darkness beyond the tree line.

"No," Jenna admits, shaking her head again. "It was too dark. But ... there was something off about him. The way he stood there, like he was waiting. Watching."

Holly swallows hard, her throat dry. "I can't shake this feeling that we're intruding. Like we've stumbled into something we shouldn't have."

I can't help but chuckle at their confusion.

A rustling sound interrupts their conversation, and both women freeze. The camera shakes slightly, the beam of light wavering as Holly grips it tighter.

"What was that?" Jenna whispers, eyes wide with fear.

"I don't know," Holly breathes, her voice barely above a whisper. "But it sounded ... close."

The camera pans slowly toward the sound, illuminating the surrounding trees, the shadows of the willows looming like sentinels.

Jenna leans in, her voice low, "Do you think we should –"

A loud crash echoes through the night, sending both women jumping to their feet. The beam of light flares wildly, catching glimpses of the thick brush shaking violently.

"RUN!" Holly yells as she turns and bolts toward the cabin, the camera swaying wildly as it follows her frantic movements.

06/17/2023 00:45

The camera captures the front of the cabin as they burst through the door, slamming it shut behind them. Holly tries to catch her breath while Jenna rushes to secure the door, her fingers trembling as she fumbles with the lock.

"What was that?" Holly gasps, looking around the dimly lit cabin, the flickering shadows making it feel even more claustrophobic.

"I have no idea," Jenna replies, finally locking the door. She leans against it, eyes darting to the windows. "But I think we need to talk about what just happened."

The tension hangs thick in the air. Holly swallows hard, pulling her hair back to steady herself. "Okay. But first, we need to check if we're really alone."

With a determined nod, Jenna moves to grab the flashlight from Holly, her expression shifting from fear to resolve. "Let's see if we can find out what's lurking out there."

Holly follows Jenna's lead, their hearts pounding as they move cautiously toward the windows, the eerie darkness outside beckoning like a secret they can't quite grasp.

06/17/2023 00:50

The camera flickers on, revealing the cabin dimly lit by a single lamp. Holly and Jenna peer through the thin curtains, straining to see beyond the yard. The wind howls, carrying faint echoes of laughter that chill the air.

"Did you hear that?" Holly whispers, voice trembling.

"Yeah," Jenna breathes, stepping back from the window, eyes wide. "It sounded like it was coming from the river."

Holly's breath quickens. "What if it's that man? What if he's not alone?"

Jenna's brow furrows. "We need to stay together. If we go out there, let's at least be prepared."

Holly nods, pulse racing. "Right. Let's gather what we need."

The camera cuts out as Holly sets it on the counter, the lens capturing her rummaging through drawers, searching for supplies. The screen flickers back to life as she pulls out a couple of flashlights, a small knife, and some snacks, an uneasy sense of security against the growing darkness.

06/17/2023 01:00

The atmosphere thickens as they huddle, whispering, their voices barely rising above the wind.

"What's the plan?" Holly asks, glancing at Jenna, who bites her lip, brow furrowed.

"First, we need to find out if that noise was just our imagination or if it was something more," Jenna replies. "Then we'll decide what to do next."

They exchange a determined glance and step outside, the wind swirling around them, as darkness envelops the island. Holly adjusts the camera, gripping it tightly as they venture away from the cabin. The light from their flashlights cuts through the thick night, illuminating twisted roots and fallen branches that seem to reach out like gnarled fingers.

"Keep close," Jenna urges, her voice a low murmur. Holly swings the camera in front of her, capturing the riverbank bathed in moonlight, the water shimmering with an unsettling beauty.

Suddenly, the camera shakes as Holly jumps back, a loud rustling in the underbrush echoing behind them. "What was that?" she whispers, her grip tightening on the camera. They both freeze, hearts pounding in sync.

Jenna flashes her light toward the noise, but only shadows respond. "We need to check it out," she insists, edging forward.

Holly hesitates, then steadies the camera on a nearby rock. "I'll record just in case," she says, hitting the record button again. The red light blinks on, capturing the moment as they step cautiously toward the river.

Then, out of the corner of the camera's view, something shifts along the water's edge. A figure slowly emerges from the river, dark and indistinct, moving toward them.

Holly gasps, yanking the camera back up. "Did you see that?" she whispers urgently. The camera shakes slightly, revealing their panic as the figure steps closer, nearly gliding over the water's surface, the whispers in the wind growing louder.

The screen suddenly goes dark as Jenna yanks Holly's arm, but the last sound caught on the camera is the soft splashing of water, followed by a sharp intake of breath.

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Editor in Chief: Pamela Kat Johnson
www.pamelakat.com

Editorial assistance by Ainsley Suntjens

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