

"The Many Tragedies of Manden Lake"  
By Will Ridenour

LOOPING SFX: SOUNDS OF A LAKE. WATER FLOWING.

NARRATOR

(clear, professional, documentarian)

1       To look at it, Manden Lake is...unremarkable. It has a modest surface area of 86 acres and a maximum depth of only 42 feet. There are no notable features. Few fish. And the name itself is singularly unoriginal; you reach Manden Lake by taking Manden Road through a town named -- surprise -- Manden.

2       Yes: to look at it, Manden Lake is unremarkable. But like many other dark things in the world, Manden Lake is deceptive.

3       Since the 1970s, Manden Lake has built up a dark reputation as a place of inexplicable disaster and death. Accidental drowning; attempted and completed murder; suicide. Manden Lake has seen it all. That's not even counting the close calls, the near misses, and the injuries slight and serious alike. Manden Lake has one of the highest boating fatality rates in the entire state despite being on the smaller end of lakes in the local area.

4       There appears to be no rhyme or reason to why so many dark things happen here at Manden. In Manden Lake, you will find no hidden rip currents or sudden drop-offs. No dangerous predators or toxic cyanobacteria. Every incident that has ever occurred at Manden Lake appears to be just a cruel, senseless tragedy -- except the fact it occurred at the same place as so many other cruel, senseless tragedies. Correlation without causation; a coincidence stretched past the point of credulity.

5       Some locals say the lake is cursed. That vengeful spirits prey upon the living, or that invisible monsters dwell in the deep. "Why else would so many bad things happen?", they say. "How else do you explain all this death?" The ghost stories surrounding Manden Lake are countless.

6       And yet, perhaps it matters less the *why* or the *how* than the *who*.

SFX: DISTORTION

NARRATOR (DISTORTED)

(low, rushed)

7        *I am standing at the edge of a lake. The water is choppy and the wind is heavy and the birds are silent and something is very, very wrong.*

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

(normal)

8        We'll come back to that later. For now, let's hear about four specific tragedies that happened here at Manden Lake. Four tragedies; four ghost stories. Three that happened in the past...and one that hasn't happened yet.

SFX: INTRO MUSIC

## PART ONE

NARRATOR

9        Our first tragedy takes place in the summer of 1974.

10       It's *hot*. It's the hottest it's been in years.

11       As the world slowly boils alive, a mother decides to take her young son to Manden Lake for a picnic and a swim. In theory, it's not a bad idea. The water is pleasantly cool on such a warm day, and the sunlight is radiant as it pierces through the pines to bounce off the lake below.

But the mother fails to notice that she and her son are the only ones at the lakefront that day. Or that the water is unusually choppy. And when they arrive, when the boy laughs and leaps into the water, when the mother turns around from setting up the picnic basket to see nobody there, when she calls and then shouts and then *screams* but there's never any response --

13       Well.

14       Later, the boy's mother will say she only looked away for a moment. It's always 'just a moment', isn't it?

15       For years afterwards, the boy's mother returns to the lake on the anniversary of her son's death. She goes to grieve and to remember, yes; but every time she goes, there's also a small part of her that hopes to find her son there, emerging whole and healthy from the water, laughing that same laugh she heard just before the worst moment of her life. It's an impossible dream, of course;

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

she was there when her child's body was dredged from the water, bruised and bloated and blue. But, honestly, can you blame her for it?

16 Her husband, the boy's father, does. At first, he's accepting of this yearly ritual; in fact, for all but one anniversary, he accompanies his wife down to the water's edge, and holds her tightly as she cries. But one year, the boy's father grows convinced that this trip does more harm than good. "You're just causing yourself more pain," he says; "it's not good for our other children to see you like this," he says. An argument starts and then very quickly ends.

17 That year, the boy's mother leaves for the lake by herself. While she's gone, a storm blows over Manden.

LOOPING SFX: STORM

NARRATOR

18 Thunder, rain, lightning; the skies rip open, and the earth trembles below. The boy's father grows worried. Just as he's about to head out to find his wife, the door slams open with a **BANG** --

SFX: DOOR SLAMMING OPEN

NARRATOR

19 And there she stands -- unharmed, but wet and ragged and *scared*.

20 Something has changed over the course of this trip. Something far beyond any storm. That night, pale and shivering, she tells her husband that she got what she wanted. She tells him that she saw their son.

SFX: THUNDER

NARRATOR

22 He was waiting for her when she arrived. The rain was already pouring, the thunder already booming, but she could see him standing there, out in the water. Her son was standing near the very same spot she had last seen him alive.

23 She rushed to him, of course. At that moment, all reason had left her mind. At that moment, all she knew was that *her son was alive*.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

But some part of her, some deep, subconscious, primal part of her, it must have known the truth, because she felt her body lurch to a stop just before she reached the water.

LOOPING SFX: STORM INTENSIFIES

NARRATOR

- 24       It was then that she noticed his milky white eyes...the blue tint of his skin...the seaweed falling from his arms. It was then she noticed he was in water too deep for anyone to stand.
- 25       For a while she was stuck there, just...staring at him. Unable to move despite the wind and rain and thunder, despite her brain screaming at her to run. Then the boy laughed and said: "I've been waiting for my mother." And *that* is what snaps her out of it, that is what gets her to turn and run. Not his appearance or his words but his *laugh*; because she knew then in her heart that it was not the laugh of her son.

LOOPING SFX: STORM NOISE FADES AWAY. LAKE NOISE RETURNS.

NARRATOR

- 26       ...That's how the ghost story goes, at least. As with most ghost stories, how much is fact and how much is fiction is...up for debate. A boy did drown at Manden Lake in 1974, that much is certain, but did his mother actually see him again during a storm years later? I'll leave that up to you.
- 27       One last thing: according to most versions of the story, the boy's mother never returned to Manden Lake again after this horrifying incident. But I know for a fact that's not quite true. When she died, the ashes of the boy's mother were scattered across the surface of the lake as outlined in her last will and testament.
- 28       I wonder if her son was still waiting for her then.

## PART TWO

NARRATOR

- 29       Our second tragedy takes place in the fall of 1996.
- 30       By now, what happened in 1979 is old gossip in Manden, but few believe in the ghost story at this point. For most, the accidental drowning of a young boy is just a blemish on the reputation of an otherwise lovely vacation spot.

(MORE)

## NARRATOR (CONT'D)

But that changes today, as a husband and wife take what appears to be a romantic boat ride at dawn.

31           The husband and wife are a beautiful couple. Truly, they are. And they've got the complete package; good house, good jobs, two darling daughters...even a well-trained dog. But, much like Manden Lake itself, these two are deceiving.

32           You know, if anyone had seen the husband and wife go to Manden Lake that day, I wonder if they would have even noticed anything was amiss. If they would have noticed the wife's stiff, listless movements. The box of tools the husband brought onto the rowboat. The dead look in both their eyes.

33           Who knows. Even if someone might have noticed, there was nobody around to see them that morning anyways.

SFX: ROWING THROUGH WATER

## NARRATOR

34           With methodical efficiency, the husband rows his wife and himself out to the center of Manden Lake. With methodical efficiency, the husband opens his toolbox and selects a saw. With methodical efficiency, the husband kills his wife, dismembers her corpse, and dumps the parts into the lake.

SFX: MULTIPLE SPLASHING NOISES

## NARRATOR

35           It's all over before sunrise. The husband goes home and starts making breakfast for the kids.

36           When the wife's absence is finally noted, the husband is scrutinized, of course, but his act is perfect, his alibi solid. Nobody knew about the boating trip, not even their own children. The police investigation starts, stumbles, stalls. An empty casket is buried, and all attendees take turns comforting the poor, grieving widower that the husband pretends to be.

37           For all intents and purposes, the wife disappears without a trace, and the crime is perfect.

38           Or so it seems.

39           Three weeks later, the husband returns to Manden Lake. He rows back out to the middle of the lake, ties a cinderblock to his feet, and then pushes it into the water.

SFX: SINGLE, LOUD SPLASHING NOISE

NARRATOR

- 40 Even in death, the husband is efficient.
- 41 In the note he leaves behind, the husband confesses to everything. Killing his wife, hacking her apart, throwing the pieces overboard. He claims that he had just been trying to appease the people that live in the lake; the faces that stare at him from the water; the voices he hears at night. He thought they wanted her. He thought he could get away.
- 42 It was not to be. As his last scribbled note read: "She's waiting too now."

PART THREE

NARRATOR

- 43 Our third tragedy takes place in the spring of 2010. It's a warm but windy night.

SFX: HEAVY WIND

NARRATOR

- 44 By now the dark legend of Manden Lake has properly sprouted and spread, and in each retelling the tragedies grow more fabricated, more gruesome and horrific. The boy didn't just drown, he was pulled in and ripped apart by a monster; the husband didn't just kill his wife, but all their little children and the town minister too. So the infamy grows.
- 45 It doesn't help that, by this time, Manden Lake has been cordoned off by the state. "HAZARD", the signs say; "KEEP OUT OF LAKE", they say. What hazards that exist in the lake are not even known, and yet the signs are still there. Unfortunately, they have the opposite of their intended effect on bored thrill-seekers and juvenile rule-breakers. And in a sleepy little town like Manden, there are plenty of both.

LOOPING SFX: MULTIPLE, INDISTINCT VOICES

NARRATOR

- 46 On this night in 2010, a group of local high schoolers visit Manden Lake. They slip past the warning signs around midnight, well after the time there might have been any patrolling police officers or forest rangers in the area. The high schoolers are reckless and high and drunk and dumb; teenagers, in short.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

They've come to take a look at the infamously cursed lake.

47           This tragedy is the shortest and most senseless of them all. It just takes one drunken dare and then one drunken mistake. A trip, a fall, and then a teenage girl's brains are bashed out against the rocks of the shallow shore.

LOOPING SFX: SMASHING NOISE. VOICES END ABRUPTLY.

NARRATOR

48           The girl was a senior. Had dreams of taking a gap year before college and traveling the world. She was a daredevil and a romantic and a fool and all that ended one night at a dark, dreary, dismal lake.

(choked up)

She shouldn't have been there.

(composes herself)

After the girl's death, the other teenagers swear that, at the moment of her fall, they saw a hand reach out from the lake and grab her ankle.

#### PART FOUR

SFX: INTERLUDE

NARRATOR

49           Three tragedies. Three final, fatal moments, each defining the history and character of Manden Lake. Death comes over and over again like water crashing against the shore. That's everything, all wrapped up in a bloody little bow.

50           But I promised you four tragedies, not three. So what is this last tragedy, this incident that hasn't occurred yet?

51           The last tragedy is me.

(voice slowly gets more and more personal)

52           When my uncle drowned in the lake as a child, it was terrible, but we were like no other family suffering from a premature loss. Sure, my grandmother had a strange experience during a storm, but she was riddled with shock and grief. She was just seeing things that night.

53           When my father took my mother's life and then his own, however, things started to change. We started to change.

(MORE)

## NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The infamy, the horror, the trauma -- it changes everything you thought you knew. My sister and I, our lives were measured against death, and we both reacted to it in different ways. I turned inward, into myself; my sister turned outwards, to dumb friends and distraction.

54           In the end, it seems like both were simply different paths to the same ending. I realized that truth when my sister slipped and fell and bashed her head. Someone had dared her to tread in the same lake that had tormented our family for years, and the fool had actually accepted. Truthfully, though, I don't blame my sister for being there; I have often felt the call of the lake too, after all, and found it hard to resist.

55           I tried to move away. Tried to leave Manden and Manden Road and Manden Lake far behind. But now, I don't know if I could have ever changed anything. Even if I had resisted more, even if I had tried harder to forget, would fate have contrived to bring me back here anyways? Do all my paths end here, at the bottom of some unremarkable lake?

56           Was I always doomed to be just another ghost story?

57           I don't know. All I know is that I am standing at the edge of a lake. The water is choppy and the wind is heavy and the birds are silent and something is very, very wrong.

58           I can see them now. My family. They're standing out there, out in the water, out in the deep dark depths where no one ought be able to stand. I see them, my grandmother and uncle and parents and sister, dripping wet, all tangled up in seaweed, eyes dead white. They're standing in the lake, and they're waiting.

59           And I know they're waiting for me.

SFX: VOICE FADES OUT. SOUNDS OF LAKE CONTINUE FOR A WHILE, AND THEN IT TOO FADES AWAY.