

HOW CAN YOU TELL WHERE IT STARTS
AND ENDS?

written by
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OVER BLACK

A radio is heard being quickly tuned, switching rapidly between stations, songs, and shows. No single sound can be identified for very long. Each second of a song, of live jazz, of a presenter's booming voice all converge to form a sound all of it's own, somewhere between static and language.

CUT TO:

AN INSERT: A MISSING PERSON'S POSTER

Affixed to a telephone pole, the poster reads: "Aurora Jones, 19, last seen September 15 on the Jester's Court Hiking Trail at 2pm". It shows a photo of AURORA JONES (19). She is pretty, and missing.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - ENTRANCE - DAY

Carrying a backpack and wearing athletic clothes, MADDY JONES (25) hikes up the entrance to the wooded trail. The entrance is marked by a small sign, but otherwise the trail is heavily forested.

She starts her hike along the dirt path. A middle-aged couple, two HIKERS, pass her going the other direction. They smile at her with empty politeness.

MADDY
Trail busy today?

HIKER 1
No, not really.

MADDY
Okay. Thanks.

Maddy gulps her water and starts walking.

CUT TO:

LATER - DAY

The sun beats down and Maddy sweats as she walks the trail. She passes a cluster of overgrown shrubs, the dirt path snaking through thick forest.

She stops at a tree trunk next to the path, inspecting something --

A torn ribbon of fabric is entangled in the branches. It sails in the wind.

It's feminine and seems out of place, as if it's been torn from a silk gown, the kind not worn on a hike. Maddy tears the fabric from the tree and studies it. Pockets it.

SOON AFTER - DAY

Maddy takes another swig of water. The forestry has opened up, affording a view of a sheer hillside below the trail, overlooking a green valley. It's ominous but beautiful.

Up ahead, Maddy spots another foreign, out-of-place object. She rushes towards it. Tucked between the path and thickets is a SHOE. Again, it's feminine and somewhat alien. A high-heel, unblemished by dirt. Maddy holds it for a moment and tries to put it in her bag, but it doesn't fit.

LATER - DAY

Maddy steps off the 'official' trail, onto a path of worn grass. She follows the path into deep woods. She steps over tangled roots and approaches...

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - CAVERN - DAY

...a rocky hillside, near-vertical in front of her. Imposing. She follows the wall of rock towards an open cavern -- not fully enclosed, but an entryway, drenched in sunlight.

Maddy steps into the open cavern and is enclosed by it. Runs her hand along the rocks.

She takes a deep breath, breathing in...

The cavern walls exhale in response. Maddy is perturbed.

Another deep breath...the walls mirror her perfectly. The cavern itself exhales, inhales, breathing as if alive --

FARMER (O.S)

Hello?

Maddy startles. A FARMER (40s), dressed in overalls and boots, stands at the cavern opening studying her.

MADDY

What?

FARMER

Is everything alright?

Maddy tenses, on edge, as the strange man stands between her and the cavern exit.

MADDY

The --

FARMER

I own property about a mile thataway, I sometimes come this way for a walk before dark. You seem lost, is all.

MADDY

I'm not lost.

FARMER

What are you doing?

MADDY

It's a public trail...hiking.

The Farmer screws his face up, confused by this.

FARMER

Sorry? I --

MADDY

I'm looking for my sister. She went missing -- we *think* she went missing -- on this path.

The Farmer looks around.

FARMER

Well, do you want a hand?

MADDY

Her name's Aurora Jones. Have you heard?

FARMER

Can't say I have. But I'm happy to help. My collie, Georgia, y'know, she's a spoiled house dog, but she's something of a scent hound?

Maddy stares at him, confused. The words, individually, make sense, but he may as well be speaking Chinese.

FARMER (CONT'D)

If you've got something of your sister's to help her pick up the scent. The house ain't too far of a walk.

Maddy doesn't respond. A beat. We cut to --

EXT. FORESTED AREA - SUNSET

The Farmer confidently leads Maddy, well off the hiking trail, towards his house.

FARMER

Maybe you can stay for supper. My wife's cooking, she always make too much --

MADDY

That's quite fine --

FARMER

Be dark real soon. Too dark to search. I insist.

Maddy sighs and keeps following him.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - NIGHT

The woods have opened up to an expansive property, pastures surrounding a quaint wooden HOUSE at the centre of the lot.

The Farmer leads Maddy to the front door.

FARMER

Come in, come in.

INT. FARM HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The Farmer, smiling, leads Maddy towards an old-fashioned and fanciful kitchen.

FARMER

Baby? Sweetie? We have a guest.

Reveal: the WIFE (early 20s) as she turns from the stovetop towards to the Farmer and Maddy, a wide smile on her face.

Maddy pauses, dumbstruck. The Wife is Aurora. Her face and her features are identical to the face we saw on the poster.

MADDY

Aurora?

WIFE

I'm Mary, nice to meet you.

The Wife wipes her hands on her frilly housewife apron. Holds her hand out to shake.

MADDY
(struck)
You're Aurora.

WIFE
Pardon me?

The Farmer watches Maddy curiously.

FARMER
Is everything okay?

WIFE
Let's get her some water...

They lead Maddy to the kitchen table and sit her down. The Wife hands her a glass of water with a lemon slice in it.

FARMER
She was walking -- looking for her missing sister, actually. Must be dehydrated.

WIFE
Oh, that's terrible. Drink up. I'm sorry to hear --

MADDY
You're my sister.

The Wife smiles warmly, bemused, but dismissively.

WIFE
We've never met before, dear.
(to the Farmer)
Y'know, I've heard of this before. Someone exerts themselves too much, not enough water -- they go a bit...loopy. For a moment.

FARMER
Here, Maddy, rest for a spell.

Maddy sits and sips the water, confused, staring at the Wife. The Wife returns to the stove-top.

WIFE
(to Maddy)
Sorry, I have to babysit this braise for a few more minutes.
(MORE)

WIFE (CONT'D)

(then)

Your sister is missing?

MADDY

My sister --

FARMER

She went missing out on the hillside, Maddy says.

MADDY

The hiking trail.

WIFE

Hiking trail...?

The Wife looks to the farmer, confused. He shrugs.

WIFE (CONT'D)

Oh! Charlie, can you turn the radio on? It's nearly six.

The Farmer leaves the room. A moment later, a radio is audible playing *Blue Velvet* by Bobby Vinton. The Wife, while cooking, sways lamely to the music.

LATER

The Wife serves the Farmer and Maddy bowls of stew, then sits with them at the table.

WIFE

It's nice to have guests.

MADDY

Thank you for the...

WIFE

Not that I don't like having Charlie to look after, but sometimes you long for new company outside the radio.

FARMER

She makes it sound like we don't see anyone.

WIFE

Oh, no, I just mean we're so far from town out here.

FARMER

Hm.

WIFE
 (to Maddy)
 You're probably wondering about the
 age gap, I bet. Between Charlie and
 I.

Maddy is stunned. It wasn't what she was thinking.

WIFE (CONT'D)
 Well, y'know, I had my debut in the
 spring when I was sixteen and some
 girlfriends and I went to the diner
 afterwards -- in our big puffy
 dresses.
 (laughing)
 And Charlie was there, just eating
 pie. And we got to talking --

FARMER
 Rest is history.

Maddy nods, silent. Eats her stew timidly.

SPARE BEDROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Maddy watches the Wife make up a bed with clean linen. The
 room seems like it was decorated for a 1963 *Architectural
 Digest* spread.

WIFE
 You probably think Charlie and I
 are...I don't know, *rubes*.

MADDY
 Sorry?

WIFE
 That we're simple people.

MADDY
 No, I --

WIFE
 I suppose we are simple.

The Wife straightens the duvet and then sits on the bed.

WIFE (CONT'D)
 I know I'm much older than you --

MADDY
 What?

WIFE

-- but something about you makes me
feel like a child.

Maddy looks deeply confused.

MADDY

You're not older than me. Aurora,
you're --

WIFE

(laughing)

Well, then, you're the most
youthful forty-something I've ever
met!

MADDY

I don't understand...

The Wife shakes her head.

WIFE

It's all so confusing. I can't stop
thinking about this thing I heard
recently, on the display television
at Richard's White Goods --

MADDY

Aurora.

WIFE

-- I think it was the television,
or maybe I read it somewhere...I
don't know. It was talking about
atoms. When you take something
apart, make it smaller and smaller,
atoms are the smallest possible
part. And they were talking about
how humans are just atoms.

MADDY

Aurora?

WIFE

And it made me think what would
happen if you took all the atoms
that made a person...

(then)

Anyway. I'll leave you to sleep.
Have a good night.

MADDY

Wait. Let me show you something.

Maddy roots through her bag, removing the string of ribbon she took from the tree branch. She hands it to the Wife.

WIFE

What is this?

The Wife studies it closely, confused. Her faces changes, as if struck by a thought. A memory. She closes her eyes...and hands the ribbon back to Maddy.

WIFE (CONT'D)

You keep it.

MADDY

Is it...?

WIFE

I don't know what it is. Goodnight.

The Wife stands, awkwardly, and exits.

LATER

Maddy lays in the bed, in darkness, weeping with confusion.

LATTER - MORNING

Sun-light filters through curtains. Maddy sleeps in the same position.

A SCRATCHING at the door. A dog's whine. Maddy stirs and gets out of bed. She approaches the door.

Opens it: the collie DOG, Georgia, sits patiently at the door and turns it head at her. Maddy frowns.

HALLWAY - SOON AFTER - DAY

Maddy steps out of the spare bedroom and FOLLOWS the dog down the hallway. It's dark, the morning light doesn't reach here.

The dog leads her towards the front of the house. They pass the master bedroom, door open. Maddy poked her head inside. It's empty of people. Furnished, but untouched. Curious.

The dog leads her to the...

KITCHEN

...and to the front door. It scratches at the door to be let out. Maddy opens it and the dog exits.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

Maddy walks across the property. Corporeally unchanged, with the same paint-job and brickwork, but somehow alien and more quiet. The grass is not overgrown, but less manicured.

Up ahead, the dog treks towards the woods and trail. Maddy furrows her brow.

EXT. FORESTED AREA - DAY

Maddy walks the same unofficial path towards the trail, illuminated by the sun rising. The dog is nowhere to be seen.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - CAVERN - DAY

Maddy approaches the cavern. There's a stillness as she steps into the entrance.

She traces a finger along the rock, more confidently this time. She rests both hands on the cavern wall, facing it.

She takes a deep breath.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - ENTRANCE - DAY

Maddy emerges from the trail towards the marked entrance.

Hiker 1 and Hiker 2, the middle-aged couple, enter from the street, crossing her path in the opposite direction. They give her an empty, polite smile.

 HIKER 2
Trail busy today?

 MADDY
No, not really.

 HIKER 2
Thanks.

EXT. HIKING TRAIL - PARKING LOT - DAY

Maddy walks towards the empty parking lot, an area of packed gravel near the trail entrance. A single sedan is parked across the lot.

Maddy approaches the parked car. Aurora stands next to the car's driver side, dressed in exercise clothes and doing cool-down stretches.

Aurora smiles upon seeing Maddy.

AURORA
Ready to go?

Maddy nods.

INT. AURORA'S CAR - DAY

Maddy sits shotgun while Aurora drives them out of the parking lot towards the street.

AURORA
Was warmer than I expected.

MADDY
Yeah.

AURORA
Do you still wanna get a coffee?

The car exits the lot onto the road.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The sisters exits a storefront, coffee in hand.

The pass by a telephone pole and disappear out of the frame.

We STAY on the telephone pole, bare. An unseen PASSERBY breezes through and affixes something to the pole. A missing persons poster. It reads --

"Tiffany Quall, 21, last seen September 16 on the Jester's Court Hiking Trail at 2pm", atop a photo of a fresh-faced YOUNG WOMAN in happier times.

CUT TO BLACK