

THE FOREST LINE

Written by  
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1st Draft

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FADE IN:

INT. FRONT ROOM - COTTAGE - NIGHT / INT. LAWYERS OFFICE

A grubby small room. Rain patters lightly on a window pane.

Loose papers are strewn across the carpet of the room, many of which are partially crushed. The word 'COLLECTIONS' is written on them in large red letters.

The only furniture is a single armchair, outlined by roaming yellow BEAMS from car headlights coming through the window.

A HAND rests on the chair arm, limp and turned palm-upwards.

Its fingers TWITCH slightly.

Next to this hand is a small table, a half-empty glass and a bottle of inexpensive whisky.

An old fashioned rotary dial TELEPHONE, partially hidden by the whisky bottle, starts to RING loudly. The hand REACHES out, KNOCKING the glass off the table.

There is much offscreen cursing, as TOM picks up.

TOM (O.S.)

Yeah?

An authoritative, middle aged MALE VOICE answers on the other side, Tom's lawyer, ALAN.

ALAN (O.S.)

Did I wake you up?

TOM

Yeah.

Tom is in his late twenties and sits slumped in his armchair, still recovering from another hangover. He looks gaunt and in need of a shave.

TOM

Any news?

ALAN (O.S.)

Some. Good, and not so good.

TOM

Spit it out then.

ALAN (O.S.)  
The good is the cops are off your  
back, for the time being. The bad is  
their official search is ending.

TOM  
When?

ALAN (O.S.)  
Tonight.

TOM  
I see.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Doesn't mean they won't come knocking  
again.

TOM  
Anything else?

ALAN (O.S.)  
Can I expect a cheque in the post?

TOM  
Sure.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Won't hold my breath, I know how it  
is. Tom, before you hang up?

TOM  
Yeah?

ALAN (O.S.)  
Don't be a hero. There's really no  
reason to go up there again.

TOM  
No promises.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Mate-

TOM  
(interrupting)  
Thanks.

Tom hangs up, slumps back into his chair, exhausted. His  
hand CLENCHES into a fist.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tom sits in his underwear on the side of an unkempt bed. It is still raining hard outside, pattering on the roof above.

He swallows a pill and swigs a glass of water.

The bedroom door is open and the window in the bathroom can just be seen.

A BLANK PALE FACE appears behind the window, just out of Tom's view.

The vague shape of a pale HAND can be seen momentarily, tracing across its surface, then it fades away silently.

Tom has not noticed. He sighs and lies back on the bed.

CASSIE (V.O.)  
Have you packed everything?

Tom IMMEDIATELY sits up. The UNSEEN VOICE is just a whisper.

TOM  
Yes, of course! I have-

He stops himself and looks through the door, out onto the landing. There is nothing behind the window now.

CUT TO:

Tom's eyes suddenly FLICK OPEN! He fell asleep. The bedside clock says 2.30am.

He can hear a noise, like CRUNCHING FOOTSTEPS on gravel, right outside the door.

Tom strains to listen. Just his imagination?

Then there is another crunching FOOTSTEP!

Tom gets up quick and reaches for the door handle. He grips it and PULLS!

INT. UPPER LANDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

There is no-one there.

When he looks down there are several wet BOOT MARKS across the carpet, leading towards the bathroom. Tom RUBS his eyes, reassuring himself this is not a dream.

The boot marks are still there. He TRACES them across the landing with his own bare feet. They are smaller than his.

Then Tom WINCES suddenly in pain. Within the last damp boot print is a single PINE NEEDLE, which he has stepped on.

He picks it up and-

JUMP CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST HILL TRACK - DAY

-finds himself on a FOREST TRACK!

The track leads up through a thick PINE FOREST which stretches on forever towards the horizon.

Tom straightens up, utterly confused and shocked.

At the top of the track he can just see something.

Or SOMEONE?

TOM

Cassie?

When Tom calls out his voice sounds MUFFLED and strange, like he was underwater.

He tries to jog up the track towards the figure in the far distance, struggling and pushing against an UNSEEN FORCE!

At the edge of the tree line he stops.

Deathly pale FINGERS are holding on to the rough bark!

As Tom approaches, the fingers RETREAT out of view.

TOM (cont'd)

Come out! You don't need to hide!

He steps up closer to the trees, trying to see inside.

To his horror, a NAKED ARM stretches out towards him from the tree line. It is sodden and covered in dirt.

Pale, emaciated fingers caress Tom's face, passing across his cheek, leaving a dark SMEAR of dirt on his skin.

Tom stumbles back in shock, his face screwed up in pain.

The arm retreats back into the trees and-

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. UPPER LANDING HALLWAY - NIGHT

-Tom finds himself back in his cottage.

He winces and gasps again. When he looks down at his hand, that single pine needle has PIERCED the flesh of his palm.

He pulls it out.

Those wet boot marks have VANISHED.

INT. CONSERVATORY - NIGHT

Tom sits at a small desk in his cottage's old conservatory.

Outside it is still dark and that relentless rain never stops. Tom turns a small lamp on, which illuminates a framed PHOTOGRAPH on his desk.

It shows Tom holding hands with a WOMAN.

They both wear hiking gear and Tom is grinning widely. The woman's own face remains OUT OF FOCUS, obscured.

Tom works on a number of DOCUMENTS, writing quickly.

At the bottom of the current one the name 'Cassie' can be seen on the dotted line, below the words:

'DEATH BENEFIT CLAIM'

Cassie's surname is obscured by Tom's hand.

Tom sighs, folds the document and places it in a dog-eared paper folder.

There is a soft KNOCK on the conservatory glass.

He LOOKS UP in alarm.

That BLANK WHITE FACE is staring back at him, obscured partly by the twilight and the distortions of the pouring rain. Tom stands up, his gaze never leaving that face.

Again the sound around Tom seem muffled. Tom steps closer. The face does not move.

From behind the glass a WRAITHLIKE HAND appears, its bloodless PALM pressing against the window pane.

The palm is full of soil, PINE NEEDLES and a single wet EARTHWORM, writhing and squirming.

Tom reluctantly holds out his own hand, as if compelled to, also pressing his palm on the glass.

Suddenly the pale SPECTER evaporates and FADES away into the ether.

Tom is alone again.

When he looks down at his own hand it is full of that same soil and pine needles!

He also holds an earthworm. A dead, desiccated husk!

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Tom stands at the sink, frantically WASHING his hands. His face CRACKS in grief as he sees himself in the mirror.

As he does he sees a BLACK SMEAR crawl across the skin of his cheek. Tom CLUTCHES frantically at the side of his face, trying to wipe it off!

He SCREAMS!

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Tom's pained WAIL can be heard outside, then it fades away in the night. The only sound left is a distant owl.

INT. FRONT ROOM - COTTAGE - DAY / INT. LAWYERS OFFICE

Tom picks up the telephone receiver and dials.

Alan answers.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Hurst and Aitken?

Tom looks over at the photograph of himself and Cassie on the conservatory table. He TURNS it away, towards the wall.

TOM  
It's me.

Alan's voice changes from professional to personal.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Tom? How you doing?

TOM  
Managing.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Can I help?

TOM  
I'm going back up to the forest. I  
wanted to let someone know.

ALAN (O.S.)  
What's up there for you now?

TOM  
I just...I need to try.

As Tom talks he holds up that single PINE NEEDLE, rolling it  
back and forth in his fingers.

ALAN (O.S.)  
You're going alone?

TOM  
That's right.

ALAN (O.S.)  
If you wait a day I can find-

TOM  
No.

ALAN (O.S.)  
OK. I hope you find some peace.

TOM  
Alan...thank you. You've been a huge  
help.

ALAN (O.S.)  
Just doing my job.

Tom hangs up.

EXT. FOREST HILL TRACK - DAY

Booted feet CRUNCH on rough scree of the forest track,  
surrounded on both sides by those endless pine trees.

Tom walks the track, in his outdoors gear, carrying a large  
rucksack.

He nears the place where he saw the naked arm reaching out  
from the trees and stops.



VOICES drift in and out of memory.

TOM (V.O.)  
 Cass, why don't we hike through the  
 forest? Might cut down on our time.  
 It's getting dark already.

CASSIE (V.O.)  
 Gives me the creeps in there.

TOM (V.O.)  
 Come on. Whats the worst that can  
 happen?

CASSIE (V.O.)  
 If you say so---

Cassie's voice fades.

LONG SHOT of Tom STARING as if in a trance, into the dark  
 interior of those endless trees.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP on a steel tent PEG being thrust into the earth as  
 Tom sets up his tent at the edge of the forest.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP on a thin NAKED ARM, limp and pale. It FALLS. A  
 hand HITS the earth with a dull, barely heard THUMP!

It throws up a small CLOUD of pine needles and loose soil,  
 then it comes to a rest.

Its dirty wax-like fingers TWITCH slightly.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

A distant owl hoot can be heard.

Tom's eyes SLIDE OPEN!

It is the dead of night. As he looks up at the inside of his  
 tent, a breeze ripples across its surface.

He sits up, leaning on his elbows. There IS another sound,  
 apart from that owl.

A VOICE. Just the slightest, merest WHISPER.

CASSIE (V/O)  
 (whispering)  
 If you say so--

TOM  
Cass? Cass!

EXT. TENT - NIGHT

Tom unzips the tent and looks out. No one there.

TOM  
I'm here! Tell me where you are?

He GRABS a torch from his rucksack.

EXT. THE FOREST LINE - NIGHT

Tom steps up to the edge of the trees. The whispering is definitely coming from inside.

TOM  
Tell me where you are?

He switches on the torch beam and starts to STRAFE it across the trees.

There is a SHAPE in there, a dark body just visible in the murk. Then it slips out of view. Tom enters inside.

As he searches frantically among the trees, he TRIPS up on something poking up through the soil.

FINGERS!

A withered HAND is partially buried in the ground, its upturned palm full of dirt and more pine needles!

Tom kneels down and desperately starts to WIPE away the dirt. Underneath there is just blank, bloodless flesh, partially decomposed.

A FACE is buried in there, a FEMALE FACE! Then the head TURNS and an EYE comes into view, sunken, dark.

The eye OPENS!

Inside the socket is only a tangled ROTTEN MESS, within which a single EARTHWORM WRITHES!

Before Tom can react, the desiccated hand REACHES OUT and SEIZES hold of his cheek!

Gnarled rotten FINGERS puncture his flesh!

EXT. FOREST HILL TRACK - NIGHT

A faint, hopeless SHRIEK OF TERROR drifts out from the forest, down across the lonely hillside track.

It FADES away till just the sound of the breeze shaking the tree branches can be heard, and the distant owl.

INT. FRONT ROOM - COTTAGE - NIGHT

Tom's front room.

The phone is RINGING off the hook.

An answerphone switches on.

ALAN (O.S.)

Tom, it's me! We've just received your message. I haven't heard back so I'm calling the Police. They should be there shortly, so please just stay put. I can't reach your mobile so-

Through the front room the windows of the conservatory can be seen. It is still raining hard out there.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CONSERVATORY - NIGHT

ALAN (O.S.)

-just let us know you are OK.

In the gloom behind the turned photograph of Tom and Cassie, and just behind the windows of the conservatory, is a vague, dark SHAPE.

The shape of a MAN AND WOMAN holding hands in the rain.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END