

The Forest
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The edge of a dark and dense forest, so dense that the distance is swallowed by shadows. Beyond the forest is a large, dead field that crackles with the wind. The fast setting sun makes the shadows of the woods and the field longer and deeper than they would be during the day.

Along the boundary between the forest and the field is a drainage pipe that emerges from the grass into a small ditch within the first few feet of the woods, the ground along the mouth of the pipe has more mud and dirt than grass.

Running as hard as they can from the pipe are two men in dirty prison uniforms. Their skin is streaked with grime and sweat. Bundles, made from torn bed sheets, are tied around their chests.

PADON, a deeply flawed forty-something ashamed of his past mistakes and desperate for the freedom the drainage pipe promised, is in the lead. He huffs with the effort, dodging around trees and leaping over the forest debris along the ground.

Behind him runs ALVIN, a smart and pragmatic man who looks out for the people that look out for him, who groans in pain as he runs. Padon turns to see him holding at a stitch in his side as he hurries behind him.

ALVIN

Don't slow down! Run!

PADON

But-

Behind them, several dogs bark in the distance and it causes them both to skid to a stop, Alvin tripping and his pack coming undone. Several packets of pepper, beef jerky, and a worn photograph of him and an older woman fall out. Alvin curses as he scrambles to gather his things while Padon takes a moment to catch his breath.

ALVIN

(Climbing to his feet)

This isn't going to work... we need to split up. Hopefully they can't catch both of us.

Padon nods, turning to look at the trees. However, there isn't much to see before darkness obscures the rest.

He pauses to think, trying to figure out what the best course of action would be.

PADON

Alright... I'll go this way, you go
that way... we try to run in a
circle and meet back up on the
other side.

Alvin grins and reaches out to clap Padon on the shoulder. He starts to jog into the trees, but turns to call back to Padon as he goes.

ALVIN

Remember what I told you about
evading the dogs! If you're not in
the city in two days I'm going on
without you.

Padon nods, reaching into his own pack to grab his packets of stolen pepper. He waves them confidently at Alvin, who gives him a thumbs up before turning and disappearing into the trees. Padon turns and runs in his own direction.

2

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

2

Padon runs and behind him the dog's barking grows louder as they seem to get closer. Breaking into another sprint, Padon tries to find obstacles to climb or jump over as he runs. The dog's barking only grows louder.

Scared, Padon rips the pepper packets open with his teeth, sprinkling the contents along the ground behind him as he runs. The packets themselves flutter to the ground, empty.

As the setting sun makes the area grow darker and darker, the sounds of the dogs don't let up even as the sounds of the guards calling fade. The sound of many dogs seem to combine in to one large dog chasing after him, getting closer and closer.

The dog's barking is accompanied by the sound of heavy breathing. The animal begins growling and snuffling as they run closer and closer.

Desperate and finding it harder to see in the dimming light, Padon runs straight at one of the largest trees he can see, scrambling up the trunk. Below him, there's the sound of a dog howling as he climbs out of biting range.

The tree begins to shake as the sound of claws against wood make it clear something is scratching furiously at the tree, and apparently has the power to do some damage.

Padon climbs higher, finding a relatively safe spot to pause and look down.

The sun has fully set by now, leaving the woods pitch black. He can barely make out anything on the ground, but can tell that something much bigger than a normal guard dog is prowling below.

Padon swallows and climbs higher. Eventually, he reaches a spot wide enough to sit and settles himself best he can. He peers down at the ground again, only to see a single pair of eyes staring up at him.

Unnerved, Padon settles back against the tree and prepares to see what the night brings.

3

EXT. THE TREE - DAY

3

The sun fights to break through the trees, only managing to make the area dim rather than dark even at midday. The trees in the far distance seem to twist and move, like they were alive. Fog in the distance obscures the ground.

The area is completely silent.

Padon startles as he wakes up. He looks around frantically for signs of prison guards or whatever had chased him up the tree last night. However, the ground around his tree is clear except for deep gashes in the dirt.

After waiting a moment or two for signs of life nearby, Padon decides it's safe to climb down.

As he descends, his fingers trail along deep claw marks in the wood that reach about halfway up the tree. He pauses to study them, finding the marks almost three times as big as his own hands.

As Padon reaches the ground, he also studies the claw marks in the ground, finding them just as big.

Padon then rises and turns back to the tree, trying to remember exactly which direction he'd come from last night.

Swinging his arms in the various directions he remembers taking last night, he calculates which direction he has to go next. Satisfied he knows where he's going, he starts jogging further into the woods.

4

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

4

The forest is much the same in every direction, with fog covering most of the ground and trees so thick it's hard to see into the distance.

All the animal sounds, birds and critters, don't sound quite right. Almost like something else is trying to imitate them.

As Padon slows to a walk, he digs into his bundle for breakfast. He pulls out a packet of beef jerky, pulling the wrapper open and taking a bite.

He pauses as he spots a LITTLE BOY, possibly seven or eight and with his emaciated face and hair streaked with mud. He's poking his head out from behind a tree, staring mournfully at Padon, who stares back.

PADON

Hello?

The boy continues to stare at Padon. Padon looks around for signs of anyone else being around, and finding none steps towards the kid, kneeling down to be at eye level.

PADON (CONT'D)

You on the run too?

The boy watches Padon settle himself in the mud. Padon studies him in return, trying to look around the tree, and the boy moves back in order to remain hidden, spooked.

Padon offers him the beef jerky in apology.

PADON (CONT'D)

Are you hungry? You can have this
if you don't tell anyone you saw
me.

The child's eyes widen at the food. They open their mouth, as if to reply, and the barest breath of a death rattle sounds as he inhales.

A twig snaps in the distance and the child throws their head back to look behind them. They then take off from the tree, running as fast as they can further into the forest.

As they emerge, the rest of their body is revealed to be just as mud-caked as the rest of them, their clothes torn and ragged. Part of their shirt sleeve has been ripped away to show off an emaciated arm with deep scratches trailing down it and there are deep red stab wounds along their back.

PADON (CONT'D)

Hey! Are you okay?

As the child disappears into the trees, Padon stands with a sigh. He turns to continue walking, pauses, then glances in the direction the child ran before returning to his own escape.

5

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

5

As Padon runs, he keeps an eye out in case the little boy starts following him. However, all he hears and sees is more forest, the sounds of animals trying to sound like other animals sounding in the distance.

Cresting a small hill riddled with trees and exposed roots, he stops short as he hears someone whistling "Take Me Out to the Ball Game".

He turns his head and realizes he's been spotted by a woman wearing a large black hat and a very worn out dress. THE HAT WOMAN, someone with the air of a caretaker, smiles wide at Padon with waxy yellow teeth and beckons him closer.

THE HAT WOMAN

Well good day to you stranger, are you looking for someone?

Padon takes a step back, suspicious that she's treating an obviously escaped convict so amicably.

PADON

(guarded)

Not particularly.

The Hat Woman brings her hands up to rub together. They're stained red, with small, faint scratches along the skin that continue up to her arms. Her nails are torn and ragged, with black dirt caked underneath them.

THE HAT WOMAN

Just out for a casual stroll then?

PADON

Yep. In fact, I should get back to it... you know, before the sun goes down.

THE HAT WOMAN

Well then I wish you well stranger. I was just wondering if you could answer one question for me?

PADON

Yes?

The Hat Woman smiles again, although this time the smile is much more predatory. She eyes Padon like a school teacher eyes a child they expect an answer from.

THE HAT WOMAN

I live nearby. I like to take little ones out for some fresh air when the weather's good. Let's them get their energy out and explore. I was wondering if you'd seen any scurrying around?

Padon, put off by the hungry look in her eyes, the predatory smile, and the general air of smug superiority she's exerting, shrugs his shoulders while shaking his head.

PADON

Can't say that I have, no.

The Hat Woman sighs and cracks her neck before raising her arms to stretch her back. The shifting causes a long and red stained handle sticking out of her pocket to become noticeable to Padon. The Hat Woman notices him staring and adjusts her dress to hide the handle away again.

THE HAT WOMAN

Well, I guess that's the one downside to letting children play in the woods... they're so good at disappearing. Huh?

PADON

That... must be really frustrating.

Padon takes another step back, trying to pull out of the conversation. The Hat Woman seems either unbothered or oblivious. She grins, and Padon focuses on her eyes, which seem empty and lifeless.

THE HAT WOMAN

After all, children are so good at going places they're not supposed to and ending up in just a heap of trouble.

Padon, sensing something is deeply off about this woman, starts to slowly walk backwards. The Hat Woman watches him go, her smile now bordering on a sneer.

THE HAT WOMAN (CONT'D)

If you should see him again, tell him I'm out looking for him. We do have to be getting home soon, it's almost time for supper... and I'm sure he's getting as tired of running as I am.

PADON

Good... good luck with that. Sure.

As Padon reaches the top of the hill, the Hat Woman waves goodbye and turns to walk away. She begins whistling "Little Lost Child" as she goes, the sounds growing distant and faint.

Padon waits until he's completely on the other side of the hill before he turns and runs.

6

EXT. FOREST MEADOW - DAY

6

Padon only stops running once he can't hear the whistling any more in order to catch his breath. He stops, panting, and looks around at the small meadow in the middle of the woods he's found.

PADON

How big are these woods?

The grass is thick here, several tall weeds and wildflowers sprouting along the ground. The trees surrounding the area are thicker as well, almost walling off most of the meadow.

Because of the lack of trees, it's brighter here, the sun able to properly shine on the grass.

Padon walks to the middle of the meadow, looking up into the clear sky and taking a moment to appreciate it. He closes his eyes as he enjoys the sun on his face, breathing in free air.

A twig snapping nearby makes him jump and look around. A few slow, heavy footsteps have him quickly walking towards the other edge of the meadow.

PADON (CONT'D)

Little boy? Or his... freaky mom?

When no one replies Padon stalks cautiously forward, peering slowly around one of the trees.

The fog is much thicker on this side of the meadow, obscuring everything further than two feet away. Padon can barely make out a small, hunched figure in the distance.

PADON (CONT'D)

Hello?

He begins walking forward.

PADON (CONT'D)
Alvin? That you? This isn't exactly
the other side of the woods.

As he gets closer and the fog recedes, Padon comes across an older woman. She turns slowly to stare Padon down, her face covered in injuries and streaked with tears. Her clothes are streaked in oil, dirt and blood.

Padon screams before turning and running away.

The old woman stares angrily after him, a large animal growl sounding behind her in the distance.

7 EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

7

Padon runs as fast as he can through the woods until he has to stop to catch his breath again. He leans against one of the trees, jumping back when he feels what he believes to be wet sap soak into his uniform.

As Padon inspects the new stain, his fingers come away coated bright red. He rubs it between his fingers, then sniffs at it, cringing at the metallic smell. Then his eyes widen with realization.

Padon gags, rubbing his hand clean on his prison uniform as he realizes the trees are bleeding. He takes off running again, trying to put as much distance between him and the discovery as possible.

As Padon runs, he realizes he can hear whatever was chasing him last night catching up. It's growls and footfalls grow closer. However, when he looks behind himself, he sees nothing, though he can still hear it fast approaching.

Padon, not seeing the sudden drop in front of him, falls into a fairly deep ditch. Bouncing his head off the ground, he rolls to a stop at the bottom, landing hard upside down on his back.

As Padon groans, Alvin walks to stand at the lip of the ditch. He licks his lips and grins down at Padon, who smiles back.

PADON
Alvin!

ALVIN
I see you're not dead yet.

Padon scrambles up the wall of the ditch, throwing his arms around Alvin in a tight, relieved hug. Alvin gently pats him on the back.

ALVIN (CONT'D)
Affectionate today, are we?

PADON
I've decided nature sucks.

Alvin nods in understanding.

ALVIN
I don't think I was ever that good at camping either.

Alvin points to their left, directing Padon to follow him.

ALVIN (CONT'D)
You're almost through the worst of it though. I think the trees are starting to thin out over here.

He points ahead of them.

ALVIN (CONT'D)
This way to the end.

Padon, relieved, follows Alvin's lead.

8 EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

8

The sun is beginning to set, making the shadows and general gloom of the forest deeper and darker by the minute.

Padon and Alvin make their way through the woods, Alvin at a relaxed pace and Padon forcing himself to match him. Every once in awhile Padon looks around, on the lookout for any more horrific surprises.

PADON
I never knew the woods could be so freaky.

ALVIN
Of course they're freaky. Why else would so many fairytales and urban legends center around them?

PADON
I mean... I guess you're right. I just know I'm ready to be out of here, as quickly as possible.

ALVIN

Are you sure that's a good idea? It might be better to stay in here a bit longer.

PADON

I don't care if the National Guard is out there looking for us by now, anything is better than another night in here.

As they walk, the trees begin to thin out. In the distance, with less and less trees, Padon realizes he can see the end of the woods.

PADON (CONT'D)

Thank goodness...

ALVIN

Wait-

Padon takes off at a run, crowing in delight as he runs to the edge of the woods. The fog parts and he stands at the edge of a field.

In the distance stands the prison.

PADON

What?!

He looks back at Alvin, then further into the woods. Looking to his left, he spies the drainpipe they escaped from.

PADON (CONT'D)

But how? We've been walking for so long!

ALVIN

We must have gone in smaller circles than we realized.

Padon collapses to the ground, groaning and pulling at his hair.

PADON

I can't go back in there... it's not fair...

ALVIN

I mean, it's that or back to your cell.

PADON

What if.. what if we just skirt
along the edge of the trees and go
the long way? Or go around the
field and try to take the highway
home?

ALVIN

They'll spot you in seconds.

Padon looks up to plead with Alvin and stops as he spots the Little Boy staring at them through the trees again. There are more children with him, all just as mud-caked, emaciated, and bloody. The trees they're clinging to are streaked with red.

Alvin follows Padon's gaze to see what he's staring at, then crouches down to block the children from view.

ALVIN (CONT'D)

Just ignore them. They didn't
matter when they were alive and
they don't matter now.

PADON

What?

ALVIN

Focus. We just have to try again,
alright? We survived a night in
there, we can survive a couple
more.

Padon shakes his head.

PADON

How can you want to go back in
there?

Alvin shrugs, almost dismissive of the situation.

ALVIN

Darkness attracts darkness, so it's
not so bad in there. Especially
when we're just as bad as what we
might find.

PADON

Bleeding trees? Creepy kids and
some weird broad walking around
whistling for them? I saw people
who shouldn't be alive right now,
Alvin! Something was chasing me,
and it sounded big!

ALVIN

All in the name of freedom right?

Padon stares at Alvin, studying him, before turning his head to try and study their surroundings.

PADON

Is this real?

ALVIN

What?

PADON

No one sane should be willing to go back in there. Especially if what I saw was just a taste.

Padon starts to get up, slowly backing away from Alvin who just frowns at him from the ground.

PADON (CONT'D)

And what do you mean we're just as bad? If the judge who sentenced you had actually done his job, you wouldn't have even been in prison.

Alvin smirks as he stands.

"ALVIN"

How sweet. Although, I guess that's easy to say when being compared to a drug dealing murderer.

Padon blinks as he comes to a realization.

PADON

You're not... Alvin are you?

The creature wearing Alvin's face smiles, his teeth razor sharp and eyes bright and hungry as he sizes Padon up.

"ALVIN"

He was delicious. Far too good for anyone around here to tolerate. Far too good for you, right?

PADON

He just wanted to see his mom again...

"ALVIN"

Just wanted to see his mom again, just became your friend while you were stuck in prison...

(MORE)

"ALVIN" (CONT'D)
sounds like he was a regular saint
among swine, huh? Probably saw
right through your sins and thought
you should be given a chance.

Padon snarls, preparing to argue, but "Alvin" continues,
sneering as he taunts him.

"ALVIN" (CONT'D)
And what were you going to do once
you were home free, huh?
Go home to that crack house since
it's the only place that would take
someone like you? Keep selling
drugs and hoping one of your deals
go wrong?

PADON
Stop.

"ALVIN"
Maybe run over another old lady?

PADON
That was an accident-

"ALVIN"
Well she certainly wasn't the one
you were hoping would die that
night, you're right. But you're not
sad she's dead, just that you were
the one who killed her. It's okay
though, I don't think anyone was
sad someone like her died...

PADON
I didn't mean to hit her. I was
hoping to hit a light pole or
something... maybe drive into a
really deep ditch...

"ALVIN"
But you didn't, did you?

Padon takes a few more steps back, freezing when he hears
dogs barking in the distance. He grits his teeth, swallowing
as he turns to look towards the sound.

"ALVIN" (CONT'D)
You know that way means you're
gonna be locked up in a concrete
box forever, right? The small taste
of freedom you got here will be the
last one you ever have.

Padon begins to tremble, the fear and adrenaline too much for him.

PADON
Stay away from me.

"ALVIN"
Just come back. The forest is the
best path for redemption,
especially for worthless sacks like
you. You go that way, you're not
getting out until you're too old
and gray to even have a life.

Padon backs up until he's right on the forest's edge. He
glances behind himself towards the prison, looming ominously.

He looks back at "Alvin", whose moved a few steps closer and
is staring at Padon hungrily. Behind him stands The Hat
Woman, sneering, and surrounded by several emaciated and
filthy children. Further back, the old woman, still covered
in mud and injuries glowers angrily at him.

"ALVIN" (CONT'D)
What's it gonna be, friend?