

DOE

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EXTREME CLOSE-UP OF --

A DEER'S mouth, as it chews on wild berries growing on a tree branch.

EXT. FORESTED AREA - DAY

The deer balances on it's back legs as it reaches up towards the high branch, nibbling. The scene is bucolic; a mist covers the area. Beautiful green forestry, a babbling brook audible in the background, scenic views --

BANG. A gunshot rings. The deer drops to the ground, limp.

CUT TO:

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

A pick-up truck parked outside the rural gas station, the only vehicle.

INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

GARY (mid-thirties, gruff, bearded) sits in the driver's seat, alone. He watches as another truck pulls up and parks on the dirt road next to the gas station. JOHN (30s, handsome, tough) exits the truck and approaches Gary's, entering. John sits shotgun and smiles at Gary.

GARY

Took you long enough.

JOHN

I had to get away. Took a while to convince the old lady. I'm here, okay?

GARY

Mm.

Gary drives off with John.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Gary drives down the dirt road, surrounded by woods. He and John sit in silence.

John reaches over and grabs Gary's hand. Gary wrenches from his grip.

GARY
 What are you doing? At least wait
 'till we get there before doing
 that shit.

JOHN
 There's no one around...

John pouts.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

John and Gary set up camp around a fire, carrying their
 rifles and erecting a tent. They're in thick forest.

LATER

John and Gary, laying on a camp mattress next to the fire,
 have vigorous sweaty sex in the open air. Gary climaxes and
 rolls off John, facing the sky.

JOHN
 (smiling)
 Does Stacey ever ask why we never
 bring home a buck or nothing?

GARY
 What?

JOHN
 Your old lady - she never asks
 questions?

GARY
 (gruffly)
 Don't ask me about her.

JOHN
 Why not?

Gary turns to look at John.

GARY
 None of your fuckin' business.

JOHN
 You don't feel bad lyin' to her?
 Doing this, it...it tears me up.

Gary doesn't reply.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Why don't you ever talk?

Gary narrows his eyes.

GARY
Don't be a faggot.

Gary stands and walks towards the tent. John wipes sweat from his brow.

JOHN
I think I'm gettin' sick or something.

Gary grunts in response, entering the tent.

INT. TENT - NIGHT - LATER

John wakes up in the tent, alone. Gary's sleeping bag is empty next to him. John sits up.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - NIGHT

John exits the tent, confused. The fire's died down.

JOHN
Gary?

No one's around. John walks towards the edge of the clearing.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

John treks through thick woods. It's pitch black. Crickets. A stirring noise ahead -- moonlight peaking through treetops.

John approaches another small clearing. Through thickets...

Gary stands, his back to John, in the centre of the clearing. He stands over something out of sight.

JOHN
What are you doin'?

John approaches. Gary, face out of sight, is standing over a DEAD DEER. The deer's body, rotted and open, buzzes. Finally, Gary turns to John.

Gary kneels beside the deer's body. He reaches into it's open ribcage, which coats his hand in dried blood. John watches.

Gary stands and turns to John silently. Expressionless, he reaches towards John's face, as if he's going to caress him...then reaches into John's mouth with his bloody hand.

Gary removes one of John's teeth. John stands, frozen. Gary removes another tooth. Another. Then pockets them.

Gary smiles cruelly as he slowly removes more and more of John, from inside him.

CUT TO:

INT. TENT - NIGHT

John shoots awake, sweating. Feverish. Gary lays in a sleeping bag next to him, passed out. John stands and exits the tent for a moment, then re-enters, now holding a RIFLE.

John points the rifle at sleeping Gary. He fingers the trigger...then lowers the rifle. He sighs, turns, and exits the tent, zipping it up after leaving. A few noises outside the tent as John audibly walks away. We stay fixed on a snoring Gary.

EXT. CAMPGROUND - MORNING

Gary exits the tent, yawning, and looks around. He's confused.

GARY

John?

No sign of anyone.

GARY (CONT'D)

John?!

He walks towards his pick-up truck and looks in the windows. Nothing. He's starting to worry a little.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Gary stalks through the woods, looking around.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Gary drives back to town, alone. Panic in his face.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Gary walks towards a pay-phone booth on the edge of the lot. He enters the booth and opens a phone-book on the ledge. He pores through the phone booth's pages, find a number. Dials it. The phone rings.

MARLA (V.O)
 (on phone)
 Hello?

GARY
 Mornin'...uh, you seen John?

MARLA
 Who's this?

GARY
 Buddy of John's. You seen him?

MARLA
 He went hunting last night. S'posed
 to be back this mornin' though,
 want me to get him to call you?

Gary hangs up, panicked.

INT. GARY'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Gary sits at the dining table with his kids, HARRY (5) and LEAH (6). They are served dinner by Gary's wife STACEY (30s). Gary sits, meal before him, not eating; face full of anxiety.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Gary stands curb side before a suburban small town house. A few cars parked out front; an OLDER COUPLE leaves the house. Gary approaches the house.

INT. JOHN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Gary enters through an open front door. The house is untidy, lived-in. Trays of lasagnes, casseroles, piled on a table.

GARY
 Hello...?

Gary walks towards the...

KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...and sees MARLA (30s, frazzled, meek), holding a sleeping baby, MIKE, in her arms, whilst also trying to stuff trays of food in the freezer with the other hand.

GARY (CONT'D)
 Let me...

Gary approaches and takes the tray and closes it in the freezer for her.

MARLA

Thanks. I don't know what I'm supposed to do with it all...

Marla sits at the kitchen table and coos at the infant. Gary stands before her.

MARLA (CONT'D)

My mom's on her way to town...says she's going to cook for me. I said, you don't need to cook anything, we don't need anymore food, but she won't listen.

Gary nods.

MARLA (CONT'D)

Who are you?

Gary nervously stands straight, then slowly sits with her.

GARY

I'm Gary. A buddy of John's. I just came to...tell you how sorry I am.

Marla nods.

MARLA

Police said there's still time, y'know. It's only been four days.

GARY

Of course.

MARLA

And John y'know...he's good outdoors.

GARY

He is.

A beat.

MARLA

How do you know him?

GARY

I just...we met through work.

MARLA

You're at the foundry?

GARY

No, no. I used to be, only for a little while, though.

Marla nods. Gary watches her; she's eyeing him, unsure. Is she suspicious?

MARLA

When did you see him last?

GARY

Few weeks ago.

MARLA

Hm.

(beat)

He didn't say anything?

GARY

Say anything?

MARLA

About, maybe, I don't know...going anywhere? Cops ain't taking it seriously 'cause they think he...

GARY

No. No, he seemed totally himself.

MARLA

That's sort of what I'm worried about.

Marla trails off. Gary looks her in the eyes.

MARLA (CONT'D)

Don't get me wrong, John looks after us. He cares. But he always seems so...flighty. With me, at least. I don't know what it is. It feels like...trapping a bird. Like, he might be here right now, but the second someone leaves a door open a little... he'll fly straight out.

(beat)

So, of course, then this happens...

Marla hangs her head.

GARY

I doubt that's what happened.

Marla suddenly looks up at Gary.

MARLA
How would you know?

A pause.

GARY
Guess I wouldn't.

Marla weeps. Sobbing big, wet tears. Gary doesn't know what to do. She looks at him, desperation in her eyes.

MARLA
Please, just tell me where he is.

Gary stands up. All of Marla's polite pretence is gone.

GARY
I told you, Marla...I don't know.

MARLA
I just need to know where he is.

Gary stands, awkward, as Marla heaves with cries and sobs, not composing herself.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Please. I know you *know* my husband.
Just *tell* me.
(gestures to baby)
He needs his Daddy.

Gary exits, uncomfortable, as Marla looks at him pleadingly.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD/INT. PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY

Gary drives out of town, a purposeful look on his face.

EXT. WOODS - TRAIL - DAY

He treks through an overgrown path in the woods.

EXT. HUNTING CABIN - DAY

Gary approaches a small hunting cabin in the clearing. Old, run-down. The DOOR to the cabin is ajar...Gary reaches the door, curious. He enters timidly.

INT. HUNTING CABIN - DAY

There's no one inside -- the opened door has allowed leaf litter to blow inside on the floor. Someone *has* been here -- the primitive cot is unmade, ashes in front of the hearth. Gary studies all of this, takes the scene in.

EXT. HUNTING CABIN - DAY

Gary exits the cabin, unsure what to do next. All sense of purpose lost, he sits on the ground, dejected and hesitant.

He watches birds fly, in a flock, from trees at the edge of the clearing. A breeze flows through the area, bending long leaves of grass.

There is nothing and no one here.

A VIEW FROM FAR AWAY

We remain focussed on Gary in the seated position, but seen from very far away, deep in the woods, barely visible through thickets of trees. Whoever's watching him unseen, off-screen.

Twigs audibly CRACK as the viewer watches Gary, walking away, leaving the scene.

FADE TO:

EXT. FORESTED AREA - DAY

We're back at our opening scene. The deer lays on it's side, gunshot wound in it's chest, in a cleared green field.

From the treeline, the HUNTER who shot the deer approaches the deer. His face remains off-screen as we follow his point-of-view, approaching.

He reaches the deer and leans before it. His hands reach out towards the dead deer --

The deer, in a last burst of life, turns it's head towards the hunter's hand, BITING him. He retracts his hand in shock; the deer having turned on the hunter.

Life finally drains from the deer entirely and it lays, having exacted its tiny revenge.

CUT TO BLACK