

Only In The Night

by

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EXT. WOODS - 1671 - NIGHT

Twigs snap in a dense, dark patch of trees and grass.

SARA-ANNE KETTERMEY, 22, a stern-faced colonial girl, stumbles through the trees into a circular clearing of grass.

She pulls herself to her feet and turns in all directions.

FOOTSTEPS draw near.

MAN (O.S.)

Witch! You'll burn!

Sara-Anne backs into the center of the circle. A COLONIAL MAN lunges from the trees behind her. He yanks a burlap sack over her head.

INT. AARON'S APARTMENT - BATHROOM - 2020 - DAY

A faucet SQUEALS through the steam-filled room. The shower curtain flings open.

AARON DWYER, 34, all-American-handsome with a diamond jawline, emerges from the shower. He yanks a towel from the rack and dries himself.

He postures himself in front of the fogged mirror. He wipes it down. He flexes in the mirror and studies his physique.

AARON

Perfect. Unstoppable.

EXT. PARK TRAIL - DAY

Bright sun blazes down on a wide, paved trail through an overgrown nature preserve. Aaron, drenched in sweat, turns a corner.

EXT. TRAIL ENTRANCE - DAY

The sun hangs low in the sky and casts golden light across the expansive preserve. The trail feeds into a small, gravel parking area. One car sits in the lot.

Aaron shuffles to his car and retrieves a bottle of water. He gulps down a mouthful.

He tosses the water bottle into the back seat and retrieves a pair of tennis shoes. He slips off one shoe. Branches CRACK.

SARA, 22, Midwest-pretty, with an eternal soft smile, emerges from the treeline of the nearby woods. She jogs towards the lot.

SARA

Turning in for the night?

Aaron stares at Sara. Sara shrugs and approaches Aaron.

SARA

There's a pretty good like -- natural obstacle course in those woods. You should try it.

Sara points behind her. He cranes his neck to follow her gesture.

AARON

It's almost night. I'm good.

SARA

Even better. More fun. Doesn't an unstoppable guy like a challenge?

Aaron cocks his head. Sara winks at him. He ducks down to pull his tennis shoe on.

AARON

I'm sorry? Who are you?

Aaron straightens up. Sara is gone.

AARON

Uh.

Aaron turns a full circle.

AARON

Hello?

He steps around the car and stares at the woods. A crow SKWAKS. Aaron slips his tennis shoe off and puts his running shoe back on.

AARON

Fine. Fuck it.

EXT. WOODS - TREELINE - DAY

The sun has almost sunken from the sky. Crickets and birds CHIRP from in the woods. A soft breeze WHEEZES through the treetops.

Aaron stands at the edge of the woods. He bobs his head around. The treeline is dense and tangled.

Aaron crouches and waddles his way under thick branches.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Aaron runs towards a downed tree and hops onto it. He weaves between the branches, up to the hilt of the trunk, then hops down. He bounces up from the landing and turns off into the thicker growth.

Aaron ducks under a massive pine tree. He pivots on his heels and launches himself up to swing from a branch. He comes down with a THUD.

He turns back towards the direction he came. He ducks under a branch that was not there a moment ago. He pauses at the branch.

There are two teeth embedded into the branch. Aaron leans in to look closer. A crow SKWAKS. Aaron jumps back.

He scans the trees. No crows anywhere. He runs back towards the parking lot.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

The woods are cast in total darkness. Aaron lights his way with the flashlight on his phone. Light from the parking area shines in the distance.

Aaron ducks under branches at the treeline. The parking area appears further away than a moment ago. A twig SNAPS behind Aaron.

Aaron turns towards the sound. He turns back. The trees stretch out in endless black in front of Aaron. The parking area is gone.

AARON

What?

Aaron shines his light ahead. Nothing but dense woods. Aaron shoves sticks and thin branches out of his way.

The crow SKWAKS - loud and harsh. Aaron stumbles back. He trips over a log and turns mid-fall. A PALE FIGURE darts past in the trees.

Aaron strikes the back of his head on a rock. He pushes himself off the ground and shines his light on the rock. He squats down to investigate.

Huge, unseen wings FLAP towards Aaron. Aaron tumbles forward. A crow SKWAKS, erratic and staccato. Aaron scurries to his feet.

Aaron feels the back of his head. Blood smears his hand. He shines his phone in front of him - no crow.

A HOODED FIGURE stands a few feet away through the trees. Aaron jerks back from the figure. His phone dies.

AARON

No. No no no. Come on.

He taps his thumb on the side button.

AARON

You piece of shit come on!

He smacks the phone in his hand. The screen lights up.

AARON

Yes!

The phone dies. FOOTSTEPS rush towards Aaron. He turns to confront whoever approaches.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey.

The voice sounds like it's right next to Aaron.

AARON

Hello?

A WOMAN's face leans in from the darkness, right next to Aaron's head. She sighs - her breath visible in the faint light of the moon. She recedes into the darkness.

Aaron shivers. He stuffs his phone into his pocket. He pushes forward.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

A light shines in the far distance. Aaron jogs towards it. He hears the sound of children LAUGHING.

His foot rolls into a burrow. His ankle CRUNCHES as he folds to the ground.

AARON

Fuck!

Aaron rolls onto his back. He grasps at his ankle. He moves his foot forward and winces.

He digs into his pocket and aims his phone at his ankle. The screen is cracked. The phone does not turn on.

A child LAUGHS near Aaron.

AARON

Hey! Hey! Kid!

Small, rapid FOOTSTEPS circle Aaron.

AARON

Kid. Please help. Go -- go get your parents. Please.

CHILD'S VOICE #1 (O.S.)

Fatty!

Aaron sits up. He grasps at his ankle.

AARON

What?

More FOOTSTEPS close in around Aaron.

CHILD'S VOICE #1 (O.S.)

Unstoppable Aaron!

CHILD'S VOICE #2 (O.S.)

Can't ya get up? You hurt? You scared?

CHILD'S VOICE #1 (O.S.)

Un-stop-a-ble! Good for the wood. Good for the bones, strong man, strong man can't get home!

CHILD'S VOICE #2 (O.S.)

Un-stop-a-ble! Good for the wood. Good for the bones, strong man, strong man can't get home!

The children LAUGH. The footsteps BOOM on the ground. Dirt kicks up in plumes around Aaron.

Aaron wobbles up to his feet. The children LAUGH louder. Their laughs mutate into sharp, crackling SHRIEKS.

AARON

Shut up! Stop!

The laughter stops. The dirt settles. The crow SKWAKS.

Something RUSTLES in the brush. Aaron backs away. A small lump of black hair rolls out from the brush into the dirt.

The lump of hair twitches towards Aaron and unravels as it goes. A thick strand traces through the dirt and back into the brush.

The hair nudges against Aaron's feet. It trembles and SQUELCHES. Aaron squints at it.

A severed human finger twitches under the last few strands of hair. Aaron backs away. The finger wriggles out of the hair and oozes black sludge from its open wound.

Aaron turns and runs as fast as he can. He limps on his bad ankle and barrels into the trees. The wind SCREAMS through the canopy.

A black object WHOOSHES past Aaron's face. The Hooded Figure appears through the trees. Every where Aaron turns, the figure is near.

Twigs and branches SNAP and POP around Aaron. A massive, THUNDERING CRASH forces Aaron to turn into dense overgrowth. Twigs and branches lash at Aaron's face.

Aaron plows through the growth. He splashes through a stream. The crow SKWAKS, close to Aaron but never seen.

He stumbles to the side. He gulps down air. Unseen wings FLUTTER at Aaron.

He swings a wild fist and knocks a black something out of the air. He slides to a stop. Nothing on the ground.

All of the sound stops. The wind settles into a soft breeze. Frogs CROAK, crickets CHIRP, a nightingale SINGS.

Aaron doubles over. He gasps for air. His ankle has swollen, splotched with purple bruises.

Countless tiny lacerations make an abstract pattern across Aaron's face. He wipes rivulets of blood from his eyes. He falls back into the dirt and cries.

The WOOSH of traffic on a road moans through the trees. Loud MUSIC pours from a passing car. Headlights illuminate the woods as a car passes.

AARON

Hey! Hey!

Aaron jumps to his feet and waves both arms. He hobbles toward the road. He clears the treeline and lunges forward.

His foot comes down onto mud. The tress tower over him, close and tight around him.

The crow SKWAKS.

SARA (O.S.)

Hey! You! Please help me!

AARON

(Shouting)

Hello?

Aaron turns in place.

SARA (O.S.)

I can't find my way.

The mouth of a trail splits between the trees. Aaron hobbles to it. The trail leads to a wide circular clearing edged by trees and dead brambles.

SARA (O.S.)

I wanted to find you.

Aaron stumbles across the circle to the opposite side. He pokes around the brambles. He cuts his hands on the thorns.

He digs in and pushes dead vines aside. The thorns slice into his flesh. His blood drips into the dirt.

SARA (O.S.)

Please help me.

A gurgling MOAN oozes through the woods. The sound of trees LURCHING from their roots.

Aaron falls back and crawls towards the entrance of the clearing. Only a wall of brambles and trees where the opening was.

A low, wet MOAN fills the air. Aaron folds into himself.

SARA (O.S.)

(Screaming)

Please!

All sound stops. Aaron turns over.

Sara stands opposite Aaron. Her naked body stark white against the darkness of the trees. Aaron scrambles back in the dirt and pushes himself against the brambles.

Sara approaches Aaron. She smiles and holds her hands out.

SARA

Stand.

Aaron shakes his head. He scurries to the left. Sara closes in.

SARA

Boy. Stand.

Aaron's body is pulled forward by an unseen force. He resists. He slides along the dirt on his knees to Sara.

Sara takes Aaron's head in her hands and stands him up. He clamps his eyes shut. She wipes dirt and blood from his face.

She leans in, as if to kiss him. She pulls his chin down. She blows a slow breath into Aaron's mouth.

Aaron gags and convulses. His body thrashes. Sara releases his head as he crumples to the ground.

Sara smiles. Aaron's back arches. His limbs go rigid.

The wind HOWLS through the trees. The crow SKWAKS.

EXT. WOODS - WINTER - DAY

Snow blankets the forest floor. Vibrant morning sunlight reflects off the snow, casting a warm, white glow across the environment.

Birds SING. A rabbit hops across the frozen stream. The crow SKWAKS.

Aaron's shoeless feet shuffle through the snow between trees. His hair is matted with twigs and leaves. His clothes are tattered and torn to reveal countless cuts, bruises, burns and bite marks.

He pauses and looks up into the trees. His eyes are wild and sunken. His beard is ratty and uneven, his face smeared with dirt and scabs.

The crow SKWAKS. Aaron follows the sound.

A wooden cabin awaits Aaron through the trees. Glass bulbs, wooden figures, jewelry, water bottles and countless other everyday objects hang from twine in a patternless array outside of the cabin. Smoke billows from the chimney.

A soft, out of tune dulcimer PLINKS from within. Aaron rubs his arms as he approaches. The dulcimer stops.

The cabin door opens. Sara appears in the doorway.

She is dressed in an elaborate, purple velvet robe adorned with trinkets that dangle from her wrists and neck. Aaron stumbles towards her.

Sara wraps Aaron in an embrace and kisses the top of his head. She clings to a burlap sack, stained brown with dried blood. She smiles.