

BEAST

Written by

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INT. HOUSE - DAWN

Notebooks dot the bedroom landscape with pages ripped and crumpled on the floor. A bottle of whiskey sits half-finished on the dresser. PAUL swings his legs over the side of the bed and walks to the dresser.

He opens the top drawer of the dresser. In the drawer are multiple pairs of socks, stacked semi-neatly along with a faded photograph of a woman and a bin of miscellaneous trinkets and jewelry.

Resting atop the bin is an old crucifix. Paul reaches for the picture of the woman and child, and holds it for a moment. Quickly he rests the picture on top of the dresser and uncovers a box of Mossberg Patriot Rifle ammo underneath a bundle of socks.

Paul opens the box of ammo for an inventory check. 5 rounds are in the box. Paul closes the box and the old crucifix catches his eye.

He walks out his front door while sliding the silver-chained crucifix around his neck and climbing in his truck. He is dressed in a dingy, green flannel shirt with an worn, white t-shirt underneath and old, stained work jeans.

He pulls the door closed and as he turns the key in the ignition, the DING of a diner bell can be heard.

INT. DINER - MORNING

Paul is sitting at the counter of the local diner, cradling a cup of coffee in his hand. A waitress, DORRIS, on the opposite side of the counter approaches him, greeting him in a friendly voice. The sudden sound breaks his distant stare.

DORRIS

I see you've chosen to join the outside world today. Thought I was gonna have to call the sheriff to go coax you out of that den you been in.

PAUL

Sorry, Dorris. It's been a long week.

DORRIS

It's alright, darlin'. Here, I had Charlie cook you up some scrambled eggs and toast, just how you like 'em.

Paul smiles thankfully.

PAUL
Thanks, Dorris.

As Paul begins to pick at his food, Dorris continues to clean around the counter and pour coffee for customers. Noticing Paul's unusual behavior Dorris edges closer and attempts to start a conversation.

DORRIS
You hear about the new movie
theater they're building in town?

PAUL
No, haven't been payin' much
attention.

DORRIS
Well... I was thinking about
catchin' a flick after work. Wanna
go? I heard the new Tare--

PAUL
No thanks, Dorris.

DORRIS
Oh...uh...alright.

Dorris turns to leave Paul to his thoughts and then thinks better of it.

DORRIS (CONT'D)
Listen... Paul, if you want me to
go with you to visit them, I can
ask Tony if--

PAUL
I'm fine.

Silence falls over the pair. Dorris searches her mind for the right words.

DORRIS
I know you're fine, and you're
handling it, but it's just that I
don't think you should be left
alone up there in that place. Why
don't you come have dinner with us
tonig--

PAUL
I said, "I'm fine." Thanks for the
eggs.

Paul gets up from his seat, sliding a twenty dollar bill across the counter to Dorris.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Keep the change.

DORRIS
Oh okay. I'll see you around?

PAUL
Yeah.

DORRIS
Okay.

Dorris watches Paul walk to the door, her heart aching for her friend, and then returns to work behind the counter. As Paul reaches the door he has a sudden change of heart and turns back towards Dorris.

PAUL
Hey, Dorris?

DORRIS
Yeah?

PAUL
I'm sorry.

DORRIS
It's okay, Paul, I understand.

Dorris nods softheartedly, absolving any wrong doing. Paul feels a warmth from the sentiment and slowly turns and walks out the door. Dorris watches sympathetically as he climbs into his truck.

INT. PAUL'S TRUCK - MORNING

Paul somberly stares down the open road. The backseat of the truck has a Mossberg Patriot rifle laying across the seats and a plastic bag carrying multiple ammo boxes on the floor. Over the radio, slightly muffled by the sound of the speeding car and the slight clanging of empty beer bottles, plays a local talk show.

RADIO
--and we hope the investigation ends quickly and with closure for all involved.

(MORE)

RADIO (CONT'D)

Now turning to our resident wildlife specialist, Chuck Daniels, who is reporting on the return of predatory animals to the foothills nearby. Chuck what can you tell --

Paul quickly throws his hand at the dial to change the station. He stares ahead, determined, as his hands firmly grasp the steering wheel.

EXT. FOREST OPENING - MORNING

The Sun is visible over the tree line as Paul's truck rolls to a slow stop and Paul climbs out. He walks to the bed of the truck, a slight breeze rustling the leaves near his feet. Paul grabs a hiking backpack, throwing it over his right shoulder.

Paul opens the back door of the truck revealing the rifle as well as multiple boxes of ammo along with a receipt in a plastic bag. He hurriedly but decisively unloads the boxes of ammo from the plastic bag and packs them in the bag hanging from his shoulder.

Paul grabs the rifle feeling the weight of it in his hands, seemingly waging a conversational struggle in his head. Shaking off feelings of uncertainty, Paul zips up the hiking backpack and slings it over both shoulders.

As he walks to the edge of the forest, as if on cue, a rustling can be heard in the brush only feet away from he truck. Displaying frayed nerves, Paul nervously points his rifle at the source of the disturbance. He lowers his weapon.

Staring into the forest before him, he reaches into his pocket and takes out a battered cigarette box, lifting the lid to take the last cigarette out. Paul is slightly amused by the coincidental metaphor.

PAUL

Figures.

Taking a Zippo from his pocket, Paul lights his final cigarette, savoring the last few puffs before stomping it out on the ground defiantly. Paul steps forward but hesitates, giving one last glance to his truck, remembering Dorris' offer.

Once again shaking off the morning's events, he tightens the rifle's strap on his shoulder and walks with conviction into the forest.

EXT. FOREST - LATE MORNING

The forest is dense and flourishing in the early summer. The trees provide ample shade, keeping the weather bearable on an otherwise hot day. Barring the trail, the forest is overgrown with vines latching onto the endless patch of pine trees.

Paul soon comes to a point where the trail doubles back. A sign in front of him reads "Warning: Dangerous Wildlife Ahead. Proceed at Your Own Risk!" Glancing at the sign Paul walks on swinging his rifle around his shoulder in anticipation.

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

The Sun has begun its descent through the sky as Paul approaches an opening in the brush where he finds a sturdy tree to sit against. Wiping sweat from his brow, he checks his compass and map graffitied with multiple X's and markings indicating searching through the process of elimination.

After consulting his navigational instruments, Paul takes a long drink from his canteen and unpacks his lunch from the hiking backpack. As Paul is about to begin his meal a sudden rustling in the trees to his left causes him to jump up, drop his food, and take cover behind the sturdy tree with his rifle in hand.

Paul takes aim at the origin of the noise. Breathing deeply, he holds his aim for a few moments until the rustling subsides. Suddenly, voices can be heard coming from a similar direction.

The voices are conversational and faint at first but grow louder as they increasingly become proximal. Within a few seconds, as if instigated by the voices, the rustling resumes, but now with more ferocity.

A deep growl, with the cavernous bass of an alligator and the reverberative snarl of a lion, can be heard by Paul emanating from within the dense vegetation.

As the voices grow closer, Paul can make out two hikers approaching the clearing, a man and a woman. Both hikers are oblivious to the rustling in the brush as well as Paul's presence.

FEMALE HIKER

(Playfully)

Oh, would you quit whining? We're almost there.

After ascending to slightly higher ground, the female hiker offers a helping hand to her out of breath boyfriend. He grabs her hand and she helps pull him up.

MALE HIKER

I'm just saying that not all of us can be so acrobatic.

FEMALE HIKER

Hey I didn't MAKE you trek out here. You have no one to blame but yourself.

MALE HIKER

Yeah, yeah. How much farther to th--

The male hiker sees Paul in the distance waving his arms and yelling something indiscernible. Something moves quickly through the bushes near the hikers. The hikers remain oblivious.

MALE HIKER (CONT'D)

What's that guy's deal?

FEMALE HIKER

Huh?

The Female Hiker turns to face Paul.

FEMALE HIKER (CONT'D)

I'm not sure... does he have a gun?

Paul waves his arms frantically.

PAUL

Run! You have to get out of here!
Go!

Camera returns to hikers.

MALE HIKER

Babe, we should probably get goi--

A large mass pounces from the bushes tackling the male hiker as the female hiker looks on in horror. Paul's expression turns to shock as he struggles to cope with what he's seeing. Blood curdling screams can be heard from both hikers, the female's petrified and the male's visceral and tortured.

Gathering his wits, Paul raises the scope of the rifle to his eye and aims the barrel at the Beast.

The male hiker's agonizing scream is accompanied only by the sound of Paul's heart thumping loudly as he sets his cross hairs on the Beast's back, largely obscured by the dense brush surrounding it.

The female hiker is paralyzed with fear as she is splattered with blood from the Beast's relentless, vicious clawing. A shot rings out as the male hiker's blood gargling scream is abruptly extinguished.

A silence dominates the woods. The only thing that can be heard is the heavy breathing of the Beast. The breathing is steady and deep and lingers until the female hiker takes a step backwards, crunching dry branches beneath her boot. Immediately, the breathing stops.

Paul, the hiker, and the Beast remain motionless. In a split-second decision, the female hiker darts away from the Beast and Paul. Reacting to her sudden movement Paul launches forward running towards the Beast. The Beast pursues the hiker.

As Paul approaches the area the Beast occupied only a few moments prior, he readies his rifle to take aim. Paul forces his way through the thick foliage already looking through his scope.

Walking forward, searching for any sign of the Beast or the female hiker, Paul stumbles and falls, dropping the gun which sends it skidding across the forest floor. Reacting quickly, Paul scrambles on the ground and backs against a tree expecting to see the Beast bearing down on him.

Instead Paul is greeted by the haunting image of the male hiker's bloodied and gored body. The male hiker's arms are splayed out and his throat gouged. His lifeless eyes stare into Paul's.

The male hiker's face is twisted in pain, and above his right eye a single bullet hole oozes dark crimson blood. Paul, mortified, stares at the broken man. The female hiker's distant scream wrenches him back to reality and Paul rockets to his feet.

Facing the direction of the shriek, Paul hesitates. His mind prevents his body from charging towards the origin of the noise.

Paul runs in the opposite direction of the Beast and deeper into the forest. The screams of the female hiker cut through the evening air echoing in silent forest.

EXT. FOREST - DUSK

The Sun is resting on the tree line as Paul runs into frame. Breathing heavily and sweating profusely he falls to his knees exhausted and scrambles to the cover of a nearby tree. Paul clutches the rifle with shaking hands as he sits against the tree listening to the forest around him.

He slows his breathing and listens for the Beast. A slight breeze sways the treetops above his head as the sky turns a dark orange. Paul checks his ammo. 5 rounds left. Slowly he pokes his head around each side of the tree, scanning for any signs of movement.

Nothing. The forest is silent, and the spaces between each tree grows darker and darker as the sun begins to set. Paul gathers himself and sets the rifle beside him on the ground. Careful not to make noise, he reaches in his back pocket taking out the picture of the woman from his dresser.

He manipulates the crucifix around his neck mindlessly as he stares at the photo in admiration, the woman smiling warmly back at him. He begins to weep quietly, dropping the crucifix and letting the photo dangle in his hand. Paul crosses his arms resting them on his knees and hangs his head.

Paul sits in this position as the sun sets farther and farther in the east, canvassing the entire forest in an eerie darkness.

As Paul sits alone, his head resting on his crossed arms supported by his knees, the wind, the only thing audible in the empty forest, continues to blow through the trees.

A WOMAN gently approaches; Paul remains unaware. The woman is dressed in a plain, white flowing gown. Her hair dances in the wind as she walks silently, growing closer and closer to the broken man supported against the tree.

She kneels and places a hand on his arm. His body instantly eases and they both rest for a moment as the forest becomes still around them. Slowly she leans into Paul's ear and whispers,

WOMAN

Are you ready?

She kisses him softly on the head. Paul lifts his head from his arms. He looks around, this time composed and filled with peace.

Paul softly places the crucifix on top of the photo, both lying on the ground propped up by the tree, as he heads into the darkness, rifle in hand.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

It is pitch black outside now. The lack of vision only seems to heighten every crunch of twigs and branches.

Suddenly, the crunching slows and stops. A spark dances in the darkness and becomes a flame. Holding the lighter at just above eye level, Paul walks forward cautiously and listens intently. The blue light of the moon mixes with the orange light of the flame to illuminate Paul.

The crunch of the dry forest floor matches the beating of Paul's heart as he treads along. While Paul is adjusting his grip on the rifle, the lighter extinguishes.

MAN

(out of breath)

Shit. No, no, no, no. Not now.
C'mon!

Paul flicks the lighter desperately trying to reignite the flame. In the darkness, the shadowed silhouette of the Beast can be seen staring at Paul, breathing heavily. Miraculously, Paul rekindles the flame and the light from the flame continues to keep the beast at bay.

After walking for a distance Paul spots a slick dark trail, about 2 feet in width, winding off into the darkness. He bends down and hovers the lighter over the ground.

Illuminated by the lighter, it becomes clear that the trail is thick, dried blood. Paul rises to his feet, craning his neck and holding the lighter above his head to improve his vision.

The trail goes on for some time and then hooks around a tree. Ready his gun as well as he can while still holding the lighter, Paul edges forward following the trail. As he nears the tree trunk where the blood trail turns, Paul steels his nerves and holds his breath.

Now right on top of the tree Paul can see a pair of legs on the ground jetting out perpendicular to the tree. The legs are scratched and bloody. A pool of blood has formed at the base of the tree. Paul realizes the female hiker's fate.

A loud snap comes from behind him.

Whipping around, Paul frantically tries to locate the source of the sound. Another snap comes from his right and Paul quickly turns to meet it. Paul fires a single shot into the darkness, illuminating the forest briefly. He waits in silence.

A third snap comes from behind him. Frightened, Paul turns, firing a second shot from the hip. The bullet sends a flash of light through the dark and the bullet hits a tree with a thundering crack. Paul swivels around looking for any sign of the Beast.

For a second time the flame of Paul's lighter dies out, shrouding his vision in darkness. In defiance of Paul's frenzied flicking, the lighter refuses to ignite. Exasperated, he throws the lighter on the ground with a thud and fixes both hands on the rifle.

Paul backs against a tree, struggling to see in the dark. All he hears is the shaking of his rifle and the pounding of his heart. His heart races faster and faster as crunching of the forest floor surrounds him, the two sounds competing for domination of his eardrums.

Paul breathes rapidly as the breeze returns and settles the forest in silence. His heart beat slows until it's metronomic thumping is the only thing that can be heard.

Over Paul's right shoulder a nightmarish maw, hanging heavily with blood soaked fur, comes into view, breathing slowly and matching his heartbeat.

The Beast breathes heavily and Paul freezes feeling the moist air run down the side of his neck. With a viscous roar, the Beast claws at the tree narrowly missing Paul's neck. Paul throws himself to the ground rolling and slamming into a nearby tree.

The Beast stalks out from behind the tree, its soulless black eyes looking through Paul's. The Beast snarls and then lounges at Paul. Paul fires a shot grazing the Beast's shoulder as it yelps, stunned.

The yelp rapidly turns into a spine chilling howl as the Beast bares down on Paul. With a primal yell Paul fires again. The flash of the muzzle creates a strobe effect as the last two rounds ring out illuminating the Beast's horrific teeth as they come down on Paul.

INT. DINER - MORNING

A diner bell dings.

Paul sits alone in the booth with just a cup of coffee and a near empty plate littered with bacon and egg crumbs.

DORRIS

All done?

PAUL
(Cordially)
Yeah, thanks, Dorris. The eggs were
amazing.

DORRIS
I'll give your compliments to the
chef.

They share a small laugh as Dorris walks back towards the kitchen.

Paul sits at the booth comfortably, gazing out the diner window. His hand is clasped gently around a cup of coffee.

He takes a sip, continuing to look out the window. Suddenly as Paul replaces the cup on the table, a child can be heard laughing as a woman's soft inviting voice says,

WOMAN
Are you ready?

Broken from his reverie, Paul turns his head to see the woman from the photograph holding a young boy's hand. Paul smiles contently.

PAUL
Yeah... yeah I'm ready.

Paul gets out of the booth and walks towards the door with his family. He waves to Dorris as he and his family leave the dinner, hand-in-hand.