IN THE WOODS

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SHOOTING DRAFT September 17, 2008

1 EXT. WOODS, CLEARING -- DAY

CLOSE ON ELIAS, late teens, staring down at something below. His eyes are wide, his mouth slightly ajar. BEAT. Behind him we hear leaves rustling, preceding the appearance of another guy--DALE, also in his late teens--who slowly makes his way over to Elias, stands next to him. They both stare at the thing on the ground for a long BEAT, before Dale eases into:

> DALE Didn't see anybody. Place looks deserted.

ELIAS

Good.

DALE

Yeah. (beat) Anything happen while I was gone? He move, at all?

Elias gives him a look like "what do you think?".

DALE Guess that's a "no".

He shifts uncomfortably, scratches at his neck. BEAT.

DALE Jesus. So he's really--

ELIAS Looks that way. (beat) Whaddaya think... what *happened*?

DALE How should I know? You're the one who found him.

INSERT:

We get a QUICK GLIMPSE of a dirty, bloody arm, laying still in a clump of dirt and leaves.

BACK TO:

ELIAS I know. I... kinda wish I hadn't. DALE (looks over at Elias) You're spooked? ELIAS (meets Dale's eyes) That a serious question? DALE So, you are? ELIAS Yes. Of course. And so what, you're not? DALE I didn't say that. ELIAS So, you are? DALE (nods) Yeah, sure. It's not every day you, well...

INSERT:

Another QUICK GLIMPSE of a pair of feet, in a shiny, polished pair of shoes. One is caked in what looks like dried blood.

BACK TO:

ELIAS (sickly) I think I'm gonna hurl.

DALE Don't. Least, not *here*.

ELIAS

Why?

DALE If they found him, and saw your lunch all over the place, they could... I dunno, test it, or something. Like for DNA. ELIAS What? How does that even make sense?

DALE You've never watched CSI?

ELIAS I've never seen them run a DNA test on *vomit*, no.

DALE (thinks for a moment, then) ...Okay, me neither. But that doesn't mean it can't happen.

He sees the tense, troubled look on his comrade's face, and quiets up. Resumes staring down at the thing on the ground.

INSERT:

We see a man's upper torso, in a striped dress shirt, stained with blood.

We see a small gold cross around his bloody neck.

BACK TO:

ELIAS ...What should we do?

DALE What *can* we do?

ELIAS

...Right.

DALE (beat) We should jet. Like, *now*.

ELIAS

...Right.

A BEAT. Nobody moves.

DALE I mean, if someone saw us--

ELIAS We'd be fucked.

--In so many words.

Another BEAT. No muscle is moved.

We see the boys from the back now, and can finally see what has them at such rapt attention: a MIDDLE AGED MAN's bloody, unmoving body, lying in a bed of leaves and soil on the ground below. After another BEAT or two:

ELIAS

Should we--

DALE (heavy) Ain't our business...

He looks over at Elias.

DALE (CONT'D)

...is it?

Elias looks over at him. They stare at each other somberly, for a moment.

ELIAS ...No. (looks back down) It's not.

And with that, they both EXIT FRAME, leaving us with one last, sobering view of the body on the ground below.

EXT. SIDE ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

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The boys emerge from a large clearing of trees and foliage out onto an empty two-lane road, on which, opposite them, a CAR is parked. They make their way to the vehicle silently. Dale hops in the driver's seat. Elias goes around to the passenger side, gets to the door, grips the handle. Stops.

He looks back over at the woods, weary look in his eyes. Dale starts the engine. BEAT. "HONK-HONK."

DALE (inside the car) You comin'?

Without taking his eyes off the woods, Elias pops the door open, gets in.

They drive off, down the road and OUT OF FRAME. HOLD. After a few moments a TOWN-CAR comes up from behind, drives past. We can still hear the roar of the ENGINE as we...

FADE TO:

BLACK. BEAT. Then, ELIAS' VOICE quivers:

ELIAS (V.O.) ...We gotta go back.

CUT TO:

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3 EXT. ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON the front right TIRE of Dale's car, coming to a SCREECHING HALT in the middle of the empty road.

4 INT. DALE'S CAR

Dale, behind the wheel, looks at his friend like he's just gone off the deep end.

DALE

What?

ELIAS I'm just... I'm thinking--

DALE

Don't.

ELIAS (ignoring him) --*I'm thinking* that, like... what if we just went to the cops?

DALE And said what?

ELIAS

...Well...

BEAT. He can't think of anything. Dale mimes putting a phone to his ear, offers:

DALE

"Yeah, we were just hanging out in the woods and all, and we found this body. We were wondering if you could come scoop it up, it's kinda fucking up our day a little." ELIAS We gotta tell *someone*, Dale.

DALE What for? (beat) If we go to the cops, you know what they're gonna do? They're gonna try and finger us for the murder. And why not? We just "find" this guy there, in the middle of nowhere, no one else in sight. The body still warm, blood still fresh...

ELIAS Why the *hell* would they blame *us*?

DALE Probable cause. Who else can they pin it on? We'd be the most likely suspects.

ELIAS (excited now) But, we... we wouldn't do something like that. That's <u>nuts</u>.

DALE You're not looking at the bigger picture here.

ELIAS

Yeah, but...

DALE

What?

Elias thinks for a moment, recalculates.

ELIAS

Fine, no cops. But we can't just stand around and do *nothing*.

DALE

Why not? Did we have anything to do with it?

ELIAS

No--

DALE Did we put 'im there? DALE Did we ask to *find* 'im?

ELIAS 'Course not, but--

DALE But what? What the fuck difference does it make what we do?

Elias, exasperated now, looks his comrade dead in the eye, unwilling to be outmatched this easily.

ELIAS Fine, whatever. Do what you want.

He puts his hand on the door handle, stares Dale down.

ELIAS I'm going back.

And with that he pops the door open, steps out, and SLAMS it shut behind him.

Dale sighs heavily, leans his head back against the headrest. Wipes his face with the palms of his hands. BEAT. He steps on the gas.

5 EXT. DESOLATE ROAD - CONT'D

We FOLLOW Elias as he walks back up the way they came, back towards the woods. We hear Dale fumbling with the car behind him, the SCREECHING of tires in short bursts. A few BEATS. As Elias keeps walking, determinedly, the car ENTERS FRAME next to him, drives past. SLOWS TO A STOP a few yards away. Elias stops, too. BEAT. The passenger door is pushed open from within, by a defeated Dale. Elias lingers for a moment, slight smirk on his face, then moves towards the car.

CUT TO:

6 EXT. WOODS - SOME TIME LATER

The sun's already started going down, with only small rays of light coming through the trees. We see Elias and Dale from afar, walking down a long slope towards the clearing.

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DALE And what, exactly, do you wanna *do* with him?

ELIAS I dunno. Give him a proper sendoff, I guess.

DALE (surprised) You wanna *bury* 'im?

ELIAS Or something. I just... I don't wanna just leave him out there, in the open like that. It's not right.

DALE Right, schmite. Just do it *fast*, okay? Damn place is givin' me the *creeps...*

CLOSER NOW. They come upon the clearing, near where the body is. They both stop, take a look at their surroundings.

ELIAS

Where...

DALE (points OFF SCREEN) That way.

ELIAS You sure?

DALE

Positive.

He trudges off. Elias hesitates for a BEAT, takes one last look around, then follows behind.

ELIAS (low) If you say so...

CUT TO:

This is where the body *should* be. But it isn't. The clump of dirt is still there, a small pool of blood, but... no body. Like it simply vanished into thin air.

Dale and Elias look down at this spot, awestruck. BEAT.

DALE (under his breath) For fuck's sake...

ELIAS This is the spot, right?

DALE That's his blood all over the place, so, yeah, I think so...

ELIAS Jesus... Where could he... I mean, he couldna just walked off, right?

DALE With that big ol' gash in his neck? (shakes his head) Not likely.

A BEAT. Something catches Elias' eye. He leans forward, reaches down...

He grabs something next to the clump, half-obscured by dirt. It SHINES in the light as it gets plucked off the earth.

Elias turns to Dale, opens his palm.

Dale looks down, eyes the contents.

It's the GOLD CROSS the man had been wearing around his neck. Speckled in dried BLOOD.

The duo exchange nervous, freaked-out looks. This latest development is, to say the least... unexpected.

CUT TO:

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EXT. WOODS - SOME TIME LATER

The duo walk leisurely through the woods, each brandishing a twig now. They don't speak, both seemingly lost in his own thoughts. Slowly, they come upon another...

CLEARING

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and immediately, the moment Dale looks up, he stops dead in his tracks. Elias, not paying attention, walks right into him. As he catches his footing, he looks up at Dale, quips:

ELIAS

What's up?

No answer. Dale's eyes are locked on something up ahead. Elias notices, slowly guides his glance forward, sees what Dale sees. He tenses right up, lets out a small GASP.

Up some ways away we see TWO MEN, wearing cheap black suits, hauling the missing corpse into the trunk of the town-car (from earlier). They both stop dead, too, look up simultaneously to meet the onlookers' eyes.

A long, tense BEAT. Nobody moves. Nobody speaks.

What we have here is a stand-off, of sorts.

After quite some time, one of the men lets go of the body, slowly reaches for the small of his back.

ANGLE ON THE MAN'S BACK. We see a .9MM PISTOL tucked into his belt. He gets his hands around it, slowly pulls it out into the open. Thumbs back the hammer.

Elias, white as a sheet and trembling now, lets his hand at his side go limp. Something falls from it.

We see that it's the GOLD CROSS, speckled with dried blood, which has once again found it's way onto a small clump of dirt. It SHINES slightly as the sun hits it. We hear the boys high-tail it outta there, hear the sounds of FEET frantically POUNDING the soil.

SLAM TO:

BLACK. We hear FOUR GUNSHOTS, popped off in rapid succession. Hear the town-car's trunk get SLAMMED shut. Hear the REVVING of an ENGINE, leaves CRACKLING under tires.

Then... SILENCE.

Brutal, terrible SILENCE.

ROLL CREDITS.