

Shadow River

Synopsis:

A young married couple buy a cheap old houseboat off ebay; Soon to realize, they have bought more than they bargained for.

EXT. PETER'S STUDY - COMPUTER SCREEN - EBAY SITE - PRESENT DAY.

ON SCREEN - Auction - Used - Houseboats. Below it a full blown image of an old weather worn houseboat, moored by a riverbank. Below that...You are the winning bidder!

PETER SMALL, 25, sits in front of the computer.

PETER
(Excited)
Got ourselves a boat.

SUSIE SMALL, 22, pretty, long blonde hair, nears Peter, glances at the screen.

SUSIE
(Disappointed)
A boat? What for? I hate boats.
And you hate water.

EXT. SHADOW RIVER - HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT

TITLE OVER: 30 years before.

A full moon illuminates the dimly lit houseboat, moored by the riverbank.

Forty metres away, a fisherman, THOMAS, 50s, sits in a dinghy, fishing, small torch in hand, baiting his hook, humming.

The houseboat's two port side windows, heavily curtained, reveal two silhouette, a male and a female, struggling. The male, JOHN HARRIS, 40, plunges a knife repeatedly into a female, JULIANNE BAINE, 25.

Blood curdling screams (O.S.)

Startled by the scream, Thomas drops his torch and accidentally hooks his finger.

THOMAS
Ow!

Spooked, he looks towards the houseboat; the silhouettes, no longer visible.

He picks up the torch, shines it on the houseboat, observes a moment longer, switches off the torch and places it on his lap.

He grabs hold of his oars and diligently rows for the boat.

John's silhouette re-appears in the port window. He stands with a load on his shoulder and heads for the stern.

John steps out onto

THE DECK

And drops the blanket wrapped bundle; long blonde hair protrudes out. He ties an anchor and chain around the bundle then pushes it into the water, through the opening of the deck.

A child silhouette, MARK BAINE, 3, nears the deck, crying.

MARK AS A CHILD

Mommy... Mommy.

Thomas, 20 metres away, stops rowing, switches on the torch, alternates his aim between John and Mark.

THOMAS

Is everything alright?! Is
someone hurt?!

MARK AS A CHILD

Where's mommy?

John looks to the dinghy, ignoring Thomas then looks to Mark.

JOHN

Shut up and go home you little
brat go home.

Mark runs off crying.

MARK AS A CHILD

Mommy.

John enters the boat. His silhouette heads for the bow, crossing both windows.

Thomas, in anguish, rows closer to the boat.

THOMAS

Hello?!

John's silhouette crosses the windows and heads for

THE DECK

steps out, a rifle in hand, cocks it and takes aim at Thomas.

Thomas is shocked.

THOMAS

Whoa! What are you doing?!

John fires a lethal shot.

EXT. SHADOW RIVER - CAMPSITE - PRESENT DAY - AFTERNOON

Peter Small walks away from a two men tent; A white van parked alongside. He walks towards the riverbank, down a small track through the woods.

PETER

I'll meet you down there, Susie!

Susie pops her head out of the tent.

SUSIE

Peter! Wait up!

She steps out, runs and catches up to Peter.

SUSIE

What's the big hurry!

They near

THE HOUSEBOAT

SUSIE

Err yuck! It looked a bit better
on ebay.

PETER

Couldn't expect too much for 500
dollars.

Peter, excited, steps onto the deck. Susie remains on the bank, arms crossed.

A light momentary gust gently uplifts Susie's hair. Placing a hand on her hair, she looks around and shivers.

SUSIE

This place gives me the creeps.

Peter walks around the starboard side - the riverbank side.

MARK BAINE, 33, weather worn, dressed in hunting gear with rifle over his shoulder, nears Susie.

Mark is about to peer through the slits of the curtains.

MARK

Hey! What are ya up to? That's
private property.

Startled, they both turn. Susie, sees the rifle, takes a step back.

PETER

Are you Mark Baine?

Mark alternately looks at them, eyeing Susie a bit more than respectable.

MARK
(to Peter)
Ya the one who bought the boat?

Peter walks off the boat and joins them. Susie stands uneasy.

PETER
Yes we are. I'm Peter.
(Looks to Susie)
This is my wife, Susie.

Peter extends his hand to shake. Mark drops a key in his hand instead.

MARK
It's all yars.

PETER
Thanks. Why sell it so cheap?

MARK
It was my Step-father's. His
pride 'n joy. Called it his
"Hunting Palace". I'm lookin' for
something newer.
(Beat)
Ya might have to fiddle with the
lock. Hasn't been opened for a
while.

MARK
I'll be back later to take his
gear off. Can't stay... traps to
lay.

He turns and walks away.

PETER
Sure, we're here for the weekend.
Our campsite's over there...

SUSIE
What a sleaze bucket. See the way
he looked at me?

PETER
Just a country guy. Wouldn't come
across too many good looking
women in these parts.

Peter winks, pats her on the bottom.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Peter and Susie sit around a lit campfire, drinking coffee.

PETER

I'll drive down to the hardware
and get some bolt cutters. It
pisses me off that key snapping
in the lock like that.

Peter places his cup down and stands.

PETER

Want to come for a ride?

SUSIE

Nah, you go, I'll get dinner
started. It'll be dark soon.

Peter gives Susie a kiss, walks to the van.

PETER

Won't be long.

Susie stands, picks up the cups, walks over to the makeshift sink - a plastic bucket on a stand - and washes the cups.

Places them on a nearby camping table that hosts a portable gas stove and fresh water bottles.

BRANCHES SNAPPING (O.S.)

Startles Susie. She looks around; dead silence.

Wary, she ponders an instant then shrugs her thoughts. She walks over to the tent and steps in.

She exits with a large cooking pot and a grocery bag, walks to the camping table, places the pot down. She empties the bag - containing pre-prepared chopped vegetables - into the pot; opens one of the water bottles, pours the water in, lights the stove and places the pot.

A GUN SHOT (O.S.).

Susie is startled. She looks towards the river.

A MAN'S SCREAM (O.S.)

SUSIE

Someone's hurt.

She runs for the river.

FLASHBACK

INT. HOUSEBOAT - NIGHT

A pretty WOMAN, 22, long blonde hair, lies naked, on a single size mattress, squirming in tears. Her mouth is gagged with tape and her hands are rope bound, behind her back.

Her legs, spread apart, are rope bound and tied to floor hooks. A folded grey blanket by her side.

The mattress is situated on the floor against the

BOW OF THE BOAT

On the wall, above the mattress, timber mounted rifles and hunting knives are on display.

John Harris, his back to the woman, sits at a small round table; A gas lantern centers, providing the boat's interior light. He sharpens a hunting knife with pride, grinning.

JOHN

Don't fret my pretty. The hunt is about to begin.

The port wall displays three long blonde locks of hair, and two windows; below that a sink.

The starboard wall displays stuffed animal heads and trophies placed around it's two windows. A face peers through one of the windows between the curtain slits, unnoticed by John.

John kisses the end of his knife blade, then places it gently on the table.

He stands, turns, unzips his trousers, kneels beside the horrified woman, who tries to scream through her gag.

JOHN

let's go huntin', sweetheart.

John laughs and rapes her.

Finished, John stands, wipes his sweaty brow and zips himself.

He grabs the knife off the table and cuts the rope that binds her feet, then pulls the weak and distraught woman up by her hair.

He places the knife under her chin as he pulls the tape off her mouth. He quickly grabs hold of her hair as he jerks her head back; The woman screams.

He raises the knife and plunges it into her chest, repeating the action a couple of times.

Her limp and bloodied body drops to the mattress.

John wipes the blade clean on his shirt, kneels, grabs hold of her hair and slices a lock.

He looks to his newly acquired trophy, lines it on the wall next to the other three then smiles approvingly.

JOHN
Wonderful catch.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

The campsite fire has died. John's van nears the dark campsite. He steps out, concerned, the headlights on.

PETER
Susie?

He rushes for the tent and looks in, then looks around the campsite, sniffs the air, his attention drawn to the lit stove; pot smoking.

He runs over, turns it off, panicking.

PETER
Susie?!
(Darts around)
Susie?!

He runs towards the river.

PETER
Susie?!

He nears the

LIT HOUSEBOAT

the back door is open. He walks over, steps on the deck, looks through the open door.

The boat is empty. He is momentarily stupefied by its trophy content.

Returning to reality, he hurries off the boat and runs back towards the campsite. Calling Susie's name along the way.

Blinded by the headlights, Peter nears

THE VAN

A figure stands by the passenger side.

PETER
Susie?... Is that you?

The figure steps forward, it's Mark; rifle on his shoulder, torch in hand.

MARK

Gone missin' has she?

PETER

Have you seen her?

MARK

Nope.

PETER

Did you open the houseboat?

MARK

Nope, you have the key. Been out setting traps.

PETER

She might be caught in one of them.

MARK

Plagued by foxes around 'ere.
Wouldn't worry too much about my traps though...This place has a history of young ladies goin' missin'. Should have warned ya.

Peter, oblivious to Mark's comment, hurries over to the driver's side of the van.

MARK

The legend of Shadow river.

PETER

I'm getting the police.

(Looks to Mark)

Can you stay here in case she comes back?

MARK

Yeah sure!

Peter drives off in a fury. Mark switches on his torch then walks to the river.

EXT. HOUSEBOAT - LATER

Two Police OFFICERS, RICK, 50 and MIKE, 55, stand near the houseboat. Peter and Mark are with them, all a torch in hand.

Officer Rick steps on the deck, checks the padlock.

PETER

The boat's door was open.

Officer Rick looks back.

OFFICER RICK
It's locked.

Officer Mike looks to Mark.

OFFICER MIKE
You have a key?

Mark shrugs his shoulders as he points to Peter.

MARK
Nope. He has.

PETER
(irate)
It broke in the lock. Look! I
don't really care about the key
or the boat right now. My wife
is missing.

Officer Rick looks at the lock.

OFFICER RICK
There's no key in the lock.

Peter pulls out the part-key from his pocket, shows officer Mike.

PETER
For goodness sake, here! That's
all that's left of the damn key.

The officers curiously look to each other. Officer Mike looks back to Peter and Mark as he unholsters his gun. Officer Rick, copies.

OFFICER MIKE
(low tone)
OK move back.

PETER
You think she's in there?

OFFICER MIKE
Please move back.

Peter takes a few steps back.

Officer Mike joins officer Rick; Both point their guns and torches towards the door.

Officer Mike angles his gun and aims at the lock and shoots. Officer Rick opens the door. They cautiously enter.

OFFICER MIKE (O.S.)
(shocked)
Fucking hell! Look at this!

Peter steps towards the boat.

PETER
(frantic)
Is she in there?

The officers step out, stunned but composed.

OFFICER MIKE
No she's not.

OFFICER RICK
(to Mark)
Who owns the contents?

MARK
It was my step-fathers.

OFFICER RICK
You have a permit for his gear?

PETER
(Emphasizes)
Hello! My wife is missing.

OFFICER MIKE
We'll do our best Mr. Small but a
night search is almost
impossible.

Peter is distraught.

PETER
You've got to be kidding me.

OFFICER RICK
I'm sorry but we will do a
thorough search at the crack of
dawn. Do you have a picture of
her?

PETER
Yeah, I'll get it.

Peter runs towards the campsite.

OFFICER MIKE
(to Mark)
I'm going to have to ask you to
come back with us at the station.

MARK
What for?

OFFICER MIKE
Can you explain those blonde
locks of hair on that wall?

Peter quickly returns, out of breath, pulls out a photo from his wallet, hands it to Officer Mike.

PETER
Will this do? Forgot. Had it on
me.

SNAPPING BRANCHES (O.S.)

The officers unholsters their guns. Officer Mike looks to Peter and Mark.

OFFICER MIKE
(whispers)
Stay here.

With torches, the officers head for the woods. There out of site only torch beams visible.

MARK
I know these woods better than
they do. I'll be right back.

Mark walks in the direction of the officers.

PETER
Oh great.

Peter, agitated, looks on until the torch lights are out of sight.

FAINT THUMPS, RHYTHMIC (O.S.)

Peter shines his torch on the water; ripples visible. He walks over and steps onto the deck, looks around.

THUMPS, RHYTHMIC (O.S.)

Draws Peter's attention to the bow.

Hugging the walls, he carefully sidles the port-side edge, mortified of falling in. He stops, cautiously shines his torch around.

SUSIE (V.O.)
I hate boats. And you're afraid
of water.

Sidles a few more steps towards the bow.

LOUD THUMPS, RHYTHMIC (O.S.)

just below his feet.

TWO RIFLE SHOTS (O.S.)

Startles Peter. He loses his balance, falls in the water, dropping his torch in the process. It bobs with the ripples, lit.

The depth is Peter's height. He wades towards the makeshift buoy

A RUBBER TIRE

Susie's head leans against it, intermittently shone by the bobbing torch.

She hangs by a rope, wrapped around her body like a cocoon, her mouth is gagged, head thumping on the hull with the movement of the ripples. She is unconscious.

Peter is horrified.

PETER

Oh my God.

Peter caresses her face, takes the gag off.

PETER

Susie.

Peter tries to untie her.

PETER

I need help! I found her! Someone help me!

Susie regains consciousness and moans. Peter can't budge the ropes.

PETER

Hang in there Baby. I'll get you out.

Peter hauls himself up the buoy and steps on the bow's deck, grabs hold of Susie's rope and pulls her out. Susie moans.

PETER

It's OK Darling. I've got you.

Peter pulls out a pocket knife from his pocket, cuts the rope that fully entwines her fully clothed body.

He lifts her torso and hugs her.

SUSIE

(faint)

I'm cold... What happened?

PETER

You're safe now.

MARK (O.S.)

You've found her.

Mark stands at the stern's deck, shining his torch on Peter. Peter looks to Mark, relieved.

MARK
Is she alright?

PETER
I think so.

MARK
Let me give you a hand. I'll get
on the bank. Should be able to
lift her off from there.

Mark steps off the boat, reappears standing, starboard side
of the bow, on the riverbank. Peter drags Susie across.

MARK
Pass her over.

Susie looks to Mark, horrified and clings to Peter.

SUSIE
No, no don't.

Peter confused, alternates stares between the two.

Mark removes the rifle from his shoulder and aims it
towards Peter.

MARK
Pass her over.

PETER
What are you doing?

MARK
Pass her over. She's my prey.

Susie horrified, begins to sob with shallow breaths.

Peter hugs a shaking Susie tight.

PETER
Why are you doing this?

MARK
Doing what, Mr. Small? I'm a
hunter and I hunt. I am very
particular with my choice of
prey. Always have been.

PETER
What the fuck are you on about?

MARK
(composed)
Ever been hunting Mr. Small? Gets
pretty dull running after furry
animals all the time. Need more
of a challenge, ya know.
Something more exciting.

PETER
You're fucking crazy.

MARK
No, not crazy. Just a hunter. I watched my step-father hunt and kill many women over the years including my mother.

(Beat)
I followed him to the houseboat one night. Sneaked up to the window and watched him... watched him hunt his prey and kill them.
(beat)
and I got off on it.

PETER
You're a fucking sick lunatic.

MARK
No, just a hunter. Now, pass her over.

OFFICER MIKE (O.S.)
Drop your rifle Baine!

Mark turns his face towards Officer Rick who stands injured and unsteady, gun aimed at Mark.

MARK
Oops! Not like me to miss-aim.
Looks like you're bleeding to death.

OFFICER MIKE
Drop it Baine! Now!

Mark aims the rifle towards Officer Mike.

MARK
No chance of that.

Two shots are fired one from each piece.

EXT. RIVERBOAT - DAY

TITLE OVER: two weeks later.

Officer Mike, arm in a sling, stands next to Susie and Peter, watching the houseboat burn. He looks to Peter.

OFFICER MIKE
We've recovered 13 skeletons under that boat. All weighed down and bound.
(Looks to Susie)
Glad you weren't the fourteenth.

PETER

I thought only 12 women including
his mother had gone missing?

OFFICER MIKE

We found a male skeleton amongst
them. Dating the bones we know
that Harris killed five people
including the male and his wife,
before he died.

PETER

So Baine killed the rest?

OFFICER MIKE

Yeah!

(Looks to both grinning)

And he won't be killing anyone
else.

PETER

I'm so sorry about your partner.

OFFICER MIKE

Yeah, me too. We go back a long
way.

They look at the burning houseboat.

SUSIE

Officer Mike?

Mike looks to Susie.

SUSIE

How did his step-father die?

OFFICER MIKE

Accidently shot whilst hunting.
Allegedly.

They face the burning boat.

OFFICER MIKE

But why burn the boat?

SUSIE

I hate boats.