

The Executioner
(inspired partly by real historical characters)

Written by

Petey F

FADE IN:

EXT. NORTH OF BOSTON - RAIL LINE - DAY

A commuter train slices through a brilliant autumn forest, blowing a scattering of colored leaves in its wake.

INT. TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

RAFTI and CHRISTINE, early 20s, seated towards the middle of the half full car, both look like they haven't slept in days. Christine watches the entrances nervously.

The entrance door RATTLES suddenly, and Christine gasps. They watch in terror as the door shakes, finally opens...allowing an OLD LADY to enter.

Rafti comforts Christine with a hand on her leg.

RAFTI

You have to sleep, Christine. We need more instructions. Try to sleep.

She looks at him with terror still in her eyes.

CHRISTINE

What if you fall asleep?! It's been two days since you slept. He could be on the train, waiting for us both to just close our eyes a moment!

Rafti looks in his wallet. Only two fives. He takes one and offers it to a TEENAGER listening to an Ipod across the aisle.

RAFTI

Hey, I need a favor. Can you watch both entrances, and wake us if you see a really tall man, dressed in black.

The teen takes the five.

TEENAGER

What's his face look like?

RAFTI

We don't know. Just wake me if anyone suspicious comes on. Our stop is Abbotsville, will you--

TEENAGER

I'll wake ya.

RAFTI

It'll be ok, honey. Get some rest, and try to remember everything she says this time.

CHRISTINE

What if he is there?

RAFTI

He can't hurt you there.

Rafti puts his arm around her. She gives an appreciative look, then glances out the window at a sign on a highway crossing:
"Salem, 29 miles".

EXT. WOODS - SUNSET - DREAM

Christine runs in terror. Dogs bark in the distance. Through the shadows of majestic trees she runs and runs.

She trips and stumbles on a hill, slides to the bottom, recovers quickly, glances back up the hill behind her.

Framed by the red sun, an extremely tall HOODED FIGURE looks down on her, his outline a shadow in the glare. He holds a long medieval axe in his hand.

TALL FIGURE

My blade is a tool of mercy, fear it
 not, child.

She turns and runs in a panic. Ahead is a crude cabin, smoke snaking from the chimney. She runs toward it.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

A hand on Rafti's shoulder startles him awake.

TEENAGER

Your stop.

Rafti shakes Christine gently. She jolts awake.

RAFTI

We're here.

She looks frantically around a second, then pushes them out of the seats urgently.

CHRISTINE

Hurry, we must hurry!

EXT. ABBOTSVILLE - MOMENTS LATER

The train moves behind them as they walk from the platform.

A typical old New England town: a square, a war memorial, a small post office. Gray skies contrast an explosion of color from the surrounding foliage. Thunder sounds from the heavy sky.

CHRISTINE
Did anyone else get off the train?

RAFTI
No one to worry about. What'd she say?
What next?

CHRISTINE
I didn't see her. I woke up too soon.
But he was there, and he almost
reached me this time!

RAFTI
Christine--

CHRISTINE
Reverend Osgood. She put that in my
head.

A short distance away stands an ancient church built of white painted wood. They run in that direction as the sky bursts.

INT. CHURCH - MOMENTS LATER

A few weak candles dispute the darkness of the empty church. The silence is broken as Christine and Rafti, soaked, burst through the unlocked door chased by thunder and wind.

They move into a pew near the back, huddle for warmth.

CHRISTINE
I don't know what I'd do without you.

He kisses her on the top of the head.

RAFTI
We're 'bout outta cash. I don't know
what we're gonna do.

CHRISTINE
She will guide us. I can feel it.

RAFTI
Maybe you should rest your eyes again,
until the storm clears.

EXT. WOODS - SUNSET - DREAM

Christine hides behind the remnants of an ancient stone chimney. Charred timbers lie around her on the ground.

A short distance away, the hooded figure passes, carrying his giant axe. He stands close to eight feet tall.

The figure stops, turns toward her. A glimpse of a pale face.

TALL FIGURE
His blood was forever my stain. I
cannot be washed of it.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Run to me, daughter, run!

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

A door BANGS towards the front. Alarmed, Christine awakens in Rafti's arms. They sit frozen in fear as someone approaches.

Deliberate footsteps. A black attired figure, a pale face emerges in the gloom. Eyes too close together, slender features, a wisp of reddish hair; REVEREND OSGOOD, late 40s.

He stands before them, expression stern, eyes timid, shifty.

OSGOOD
Caught in the storm?

RAFTI
We're looking for Reverend Osgood.

OSGOOD
You've found him then. How may I help
you?

Rafti and Christine look at each other, unsure how to begin.

CHRISTINE
My life is in danger. Someone, or...
someone is after me.

The storm blows the door open with a BANG, startles all three of them. Osgood moves to close it, locks the doors, returns.

OSGOOD
No one shall bother us now.
(beat)
What is it you expect I can do? What
about the police?

RAFTI
They wouldn't take her story seriously.

CHRISTINE
About a month ago I began having
dreams of a woman in the woods. She
warned me that my life was in danger,
that I must come to her. At first I
didn't take it seriously, but then he
appeared in my dreams, and the woman's
warnings became more urgent.

OSGOOD

He?

CHRISTINE

A giant man in dark robes chasing me with some kind of medieval axe.

OSGOOD

That sounds like...well, it is just a dream, sister.

CHRISTINE

It's more than a dream. She's told me things I could not otherwise know.

RAFTI

Your name was given, reverend.

CHRISTINE

She's been guiding me, all the way from Chicago. She led me to Boston, and then to Abbotsville. And she brought me to you.

OSGOOD

It's not always wise to follow one's dreams. I'm afraid I cannot help you.

Osgood blows out a candle near the door. Darkness expands its domain as the storm howls outside.

RAFTI

What were you gonna say before? When she mentioned the tall man?

OSGOOD

There's a local legend 'round these parts, a tale for children, passed on from generation to generation. About a man called the Executioner. Eight feet tall and wielding a giant axe. He's somehow connected to Goody Morgan, a local woman hung as a witch.

CHRISTINE

The woman in the woods! Goody, that is her name!

Osgood flushes in anger.

OSGOOD

The trials are over, sister, but do not think that witchcraft is welcome in this town.

CHRISTINE

Reverend, I am no witch. I just wanna be left alone. Can you not help me?

OSGOOD

Perhaps Reverend Dane could be of more help, though he's not well. Where are you staying?

Rafti becomes embarrassed.

RAFTI

We ran outta money, reverend. We're kinda desperate.

OSGOOD

I suppose you could stay in the Abbot house out back. Oldest building in town, owned by the church now. That's where Reverend Dane lives. Perhaps he is well enough to talk to you.

EXT. ABBOT HOUSE - DUSK

Osgood leads them to a colonial house of solid wood with multiple gables and chimneys. Lighting cracks the distant clouds.

INT. ABBOT HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Osgood shows them into a living room of antique furniture. Paintings of scenes from the old town adorn the walls.

OSGOOD

Reverend Dane? I have guests.

A SQUEAKY WHEEL, ever louder, draws closer, ever closer. Rafti and Christine eye each other uncomfortably.

A frail old man, skin stretched tight over a sunken face, enters the room in a wheel chair: REVEREND DANE.

DANE

One of our daughters has returned, I see. Good.

INT. ABBOT HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Reverend Dane, in his wheel chair, makes tea on an ancient stove. Christine and Rafti sit at a small table.

DANE

Goody Morgan was declared by Cotton Mather himself to be the queen of hell. Several of her neighbors, mostly Abbots, gave sworn testimony against her.

(MORE)

DANE (cont'd)
 And on the day she hung for
 witchcraft, her empty cabin somehow
 caught fire and burned to the ground
 all on its own.

CHRISTINE
 What has this to do with me, though?

DANE
 You are her descendent. I've known
 many Morgans, and you have the look
 about you.

CHRISTINE
 But why am I in danger?

DANE
 I couldn't say. But I would, however,
 be careful in trusting the guidance of
 Mrs. Morgan.

RAFTI
 Mrs.?

DANE
 Why, yes. You have already met her
 husband. The Executioner.

CHRISTINE
 He is her HUSBAND? The Executioner?

DANE
 That is what they called him then and
 ever since.

CHRISTINE
 But why's he after me? What am I to him?

DANE
 The past is always with us, my dear.
 To them, we are the ghosts, the ghosts
 of the future. They see us no more
 clearly than we see them.

Rafti stands.

RAFTI
 Come on, Christine. Let's turn in.
 Maybe you'll learn more.

EXT. WOODS - DAY - DREAM

Christine runs through the woods, a shovel in hand.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
 Hurry, child!

She reaches a stream, turns north, eyes searching.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Beneath the ridge, near the boulder.

She reaches the spot, examines it.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Did, child, dig for your life!

A distant HORN sounds, then dogs. The sun sets on a distant rise, reveals the dark outline of the watching Executioner.

INT. BEDROOM - SUNRISE

Rafti, fully dressed, wakes Christine.

RAFTI
You dreamt of diggin' a hole?

CHRISTINE
How'd you know?

RAFTI
I had the same dream. We must go to it. Can you remember where it is?

CHRISTINE
I don't want to go into the woods.

RAFTI
It's the only way. We've trusted her so far.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

They walk through a forest painted in color. Rafti carries a shovel as they reach the stream.

RAFTI
Which way?

CHRISTINE
This way.

She leads them to the spot near the boulder.

CHRISTINE
Here! It is here!

LATER

Rafti drips in sweat as he digs several feet down. Christine leans against a tree asleep.

EXT. WOODS - DAY - DREAM

Smoke from a cabin chimney. Christine runs toward it, glances back. The Executioner lopes down the hill towards her.

She reaches the cabin in a panic, tries the door. Locked.

CHRISTINE
Hello? It's me! Please!

She looks back. Steady he strides, closer, axe in hand. She pulls at the door, and it opens. She hurries in--

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

--slams the door shut, and turns to see GOODY, 40, dressed in colonial clothing, sits in a rocking chair knitting.

GOODY
I am pleased to see you, daughter.

CHRISTINE
You must help me!

GOODY
All will be well. Either your visit will be short or long, but all will be well.

A tremendous BANGING at the door.

TALL MAN
Martha!

GOODY
Yes, dear.

The POUNDING continues, the door rattles on its hinges.

CHRISTINE
Please, do something!

GOODY
We intend to.

The door kicks in. The giant Executioner enters with his axe.

TALL FIGURE
Does she know the danger?

CHRISTINE
You're the danger!

TALL FIGURE
Me? I am your grandfather.

CHRISTINE
You're the Executioner!

TALL FIGURE
Must everyone use that name? I took no
pleasure in the deed.

GOODY
Before my husband came to this land,
he was in the Royal Guard. When
Charles the King was sentenced to die,
Thomas insisted it be by his blade.

TALL FIGURE
I was ever loyal to my king. I would
not trust another man's blade, and
neither would he. I was rewarded
handsomely by the king himself.

GOODY
But he was hated for it. When a new
king came to power, he was forced to
flee. And that's how I came to be his.

TALL FIGURE
(smiling)
And thus I too was condemned.

GOODY
Shush now, dear.

TALL FIGURE
A king's treasure I brought with me. A
proper ending to my troubled tale,
until the judges in Salem put a rope
around my love's neck.

GOODY
We continue to watch our children. When
they're in danger we come to them.

CHRISTINE
But...I don't understand.

EXT. WOOD - CONTINUOUS

Christine stirs in her sleep against the tree.

RAFTI (O.C.)
Christine!

She wakes, runs to the hole, now the depth of a tall man.
Rafti, within, pulls at an old chest, still half buried.

He picks at the chest with the shovel til it opens, pulls out
a heavy sack. He gazes within.

RAFTI
 Gold coins!
 (extending his hand)
 Help me out.

She pulls him out of the deep hole.

CHRISTINE
 The king's treasure!

RAFTI
 Yes.

CHRISTINE
 So I was never in danger.

Rafti pulls out a small derringer, points it at her.

RAFTI
 I wouldn't be too sure about that. Get
 in the hole.

CHRISTINE
 Rafti...

He pushes her into the hole.

CHRISTINE
 I don't understand. Why?

Still holding the derringer, he shovels dirt into the hole as she stands at the bottom.

RAFTI
 I came across the stories of other
 Morgan descendents in my research.
 Thomas, the Executioner, buried his
 gold in various locations at the
 instruction of his dead wife. Whenever
 one of their descendents comes into
 mortal danger, they attempt to lead
 them to the gold to help them out.

CHRISTINE
 You were the danger!

RAFTI
 I looked for the perfect descendant,
 someone helpless and trusting.

The dirt piles past her knees.

CHRISTINE
 Rafti, please!

He points the derringer at her.

RAFTI

You see, I am a descendent of the Abbots.
It was us who condemned Martha Goody
Morgan as a witch. You Morgans'll never
learn.

A rustling in the woods. Rafti, alarmed, looks around.

A crow CAWS.

FOOTSTEPS in the bed of leaves. Rafti drops the shovel, points
the derringer.

CHRISTINE

Grandfather comes for you.

The Executioner appears from behind a tree. Rafti fires at
him, and the Executioner is gone.

Rafti searches fearfully. Leaves stir in the breeze.

Off to the side, closer, the Executioner moves. Rafti fires
again at thin air, no sign of the tall man.

Disoriented, Rafti turns, frantic.

Suddenly, the Executioner towers before and over him, axe
raised. Rafti empties his gun into the shadowy form.

CRACK. Rafti tumbles to the ground dazed. Christine stands
over him with the shovel. No sign of the Executioner.

CRACK. She hits him square on the temple.

CHRISTINE

(crying)

My blade is mercy, fear it not!

She uses the shovel to push him into the hole.

Face down, he squirms ever slightly as she shovels dirt.

LATER

Christine sits on the now filled hole, the shovel and the bag
of coins on the ground next to her.

Brilliant leaves of orange and red rustle in the wind, work to
cover the spot.

CHRISTINE

Can you hear me, Rafti? You should've
left the past buried. Now you belong
to the Executioner.