

HEART'S DESIRE

by

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EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

A beater of a car sits isolated beneath the shade offered by the hemlock trees at the edge of the faded pavement.

INT. BEATER CAR - DAY

CASS (17) sits in the driver seat. Underneath his unkempt exterior is a good looking, albeit weary, young man.

He clutches his smartphone in one hand as his other hand wrings the steering wheel.

He listens to the female voice on the other end of the phone, his expression seething. He waits for his moment, then pounces.

CASS
No, Shan. You listen. I don't give
a shit. I. Don't. Give. A. Shit.

The female voice erupts in anger. Cass' expression shifts from seething to gloating. He interrupts.

CASS
You think I don't have things I
wanna do? He's your kid, too. I
shouldn't have to-

Her turn to interrupt. He lets her rant for a moment, then jumps back in.

CASS
It wasn't my idea either!

Silence.

CASS
Fuck it. I'm done.

He ends the call before Shan can reply, then tosses the phone on the floor. He grips the steering wheel with both hands.

He takes one breath, two, then starts POUNDING on the steering wheel.

CASS
FUUUUUUUUUUCK!

Panting, he stops beating up his car and plants his forehead on the steering wheel. In the stillness, a TINY VOICE pipes up from the back seat.

(CONTINUED)

GABE (O.S.)

Daddy?

Cass looks up into the rear view mirror. The baby blues of 3-year old GABE shine back at him.

GABE (O.S.)

Can I go play now?

Cass looks out the windshield. Nothing but trees as far as the eye can see.

CASS

Sure, Gabe. Let's go play.

A beatific grin settles on Gabe's lips. He scrambles to open the door, then takes off running.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Reluctantly, Cass follows Gabe across the parking lot, toward the entrance sign of a STATE PARK.

SUPER: HEART'S DESIRE

From the shadows beneath the hemlocks, an imposing FIGURE watches Cass and his son.

The figure is dressed head to toe in dark greens and browns. A wide brimmed hat shields his eyes. It's impossible to tell where his clothing ends and his skin begins.

This is THE GREEN MAN

A BLACK COYOTE sits at the Green Man's feet, obedient. The coyote licks its lips.

EXT. STATE PARK ENTRANCE - DAY

Squealing with delight, Gabe rushes past a metal sign planted on a stack of rocks. It reads: OLD MAN'S CAVE, VISITOR CENTER.

Cass trundles after his boy. He glances at the faces of the other visitors.

An OLDER COUPLE, senior citizens, shuffles down the trail. They hold hands, perfectly content with one another.

A MIDDLE-AGED MOTHER calls after her pre-teen daughter and her friends as they race toward the trails.

(CONTINUED)

MOTHER
Becca! Slow down!

Becca doesn't. She and her friends giggle, then run faster.

Her mother grins, too, despite herself.

Cass' eyes settle on another family. A MIDDLE-AGED HUSBAND and his MIDDLE-AGED WIFE tug at either side of a park map, gently disagreeing over which trail to explore first.

Their SON (10) tosses small rocks from the trail deep into the trees on the far side of the path, grinning impishly as he listens for them to land.

Their DAUGHTER (17) stands off on her own, wearing shorts that show off long, athletic legs. Her long brown hair hangs straight, covering the bare shoulders displayed by her loose-fitting blouse.

She smiles at Cass, waves.

When Cass realizes she's waving to him, he straightens up, tries to look cool, waves back.

Her smile widens.

GABE (O.S.)
Daddy!

Gabe rushes up to Cass, beaming. He's clutching a DEAD BIRD.

GABE
Look what I found.

Cass looks back at his admirer. Their eyes meet for a heartbeat, but her smile fades. She looks away. Her family is heading toward one of the trails, and she hurries to catch them.

Cass deflates. He looks at his son, who is still beaming, still holding out his prize for his dad.

Cass snatches the carcass out of Gabe's hands and chucks it into the trees. The boy's disappointment is plain on his face.

CASS
That's gross, Gabe. Come on.

Cass starts walking. Gabe forgets the bird, follows.

Cass stops at a pair of wooden posts with three signs between them. Top to bottom, they read: VISITOR'S CENTER, UPPER FALLS, OLD MAN'S CAVE. Each is accompanied by an arrow.

Cass picks the path that leads to the Upper Falls. Gabe rushes past him, leading the way.

EXT. UPPER FALLS - DAY

Cass stands at the edge of a shallow pool of water that's fed by a tiny waterfall. Trees surround the pool, their roots crawling over the surface of the ground.

A handful of families circle the pool. Some of the kids wade in the water.

This place is serenity realized.

Gabe rushes into the water, shoes and all. Cass raises a hand in a half-hearted gesture of protest, then lets it fall.

FAY (O.S.)

He's a real bundle of energy, huh?

Cass turns and finds himself face-to-face with a girl about his own age. High cheekbones, thin lips, dark hair in a pixie cut... she's a vision.

Cass wants to reply, but he can't find his voice.

FAY

What's his name?

He glances at Gabe, splashing in the pool. The reminder of his parenthood brings him back.

CASS

Gabe.

FAY

Gabe.

Her repetition of the boy's name is filled with wistful admiration. She turns her attention to Cass.

FAY

Little brother?

CASS

Son.

(CONTINUED)

FAY

Oh.

(beat)

Cool.

No judgment. Cass relaxes.

FAY

First time?

CASS

(awkward)

Uhhh...

FAY

Here, silly. Have you been here before?

CASS

Sorry. Yeah, first time. I got stuck... it's my weekend to have Gabe, but I'm short on cash. Figured I could keep him occupied here for a few hours without spending any money. Everything costs something in the city, but here...

(beat)

How about you? Ever been here before?

FAY

I'm here all the time. Truth be told, there's nowhere I'd rather be. This place... it's magical.

EXT. UPPER FALLS - POOL - DAY

In the pool, Gabe notices a figure at the edge of the water, watching him: the Green Man.

He stops splashing.

He looks to his dad, but Cass is entirely focused on Fay. He looks back at the Green Man, and the man gestures for him to come closer.

EXT. UPPER FALLS - DAY

Cass continues his conversation with Fay.

CASS
I'm Cass, by the way.

FAY
Fay.

CASS
Fay? That's a new one.

FAY
An old one, actually. Family name.

CASS
You live nearby?

Fay nods.

FAY
Country girl, born and raised.

Cass can't take his eyes off Fay. He's clearly attracted to her, and he's making no effort to hide that attraction.

Fay can't help but notice the way he's looking at her. She averts her eyes as a blush rises in her cheeks.

FAY
So... you like being a dad.

Cass laughs, a harsh bark.

CASS
I'm seventeen. What do you think?

Fay's smile fades for the first time.

CASS
He's a good kid and all, but I'm not ready to be a dad. I don't know if I'll ever be ready. It's just... it's too much, you know?
(beat)

Gabe's mom and me, we're not together anymore. I'm just watching Gabe for the day, but I'll be dropping him off later tonight. If you wanted to get together-

(CONTINUED)

FAY

Cass.

She looks at him and steps closer, close enough that he can feel her breath on his neck. She leans in.

FAY

Where's Gabe?

Confused, Cass turns back to the water.

Gabe is nowhere to be found.

EXT. STATE PARK - TREES - DAY

The Green Man leads little Gabe off the trail, into the woods. They walk hand-in-hand.

The black coyote follows close behind.

EXT. UPPER FALLS - DAY

Cass rushes to the edge of the water, calls out.

CASS

Gabe! Gabe!

A few bystanders look up, but no one moves.

CASS

Gabe!

(beat)

Shit.

(beat)

Shit. Shit. Shit.

He looks around frantically. He's on the brink of shouting again when he spots them.

In the distance, deep within the woods, Cass catches a glimpse of Gabe's t-shirt just before the boy disappears over the crest of one of the park's rolling hills.

CASS

Gabe!

Cass takes off at a sprint.

EXT. STATE PARK - TREES - DAY

Cass races through the foliage, dodging rocks and trees. His eyes dart left and right, scanning for any sign of his son.

His breathing becomes labored. Sweat trickles down his temples. He calls out between panting breaths.

CASS

Gabe! Gabe!

Cass jumps over a fallen tree, tears through a thicket of sticker bushes. He squeezes between enormous fallen rocks, splashes through a shallow stream.

CASS

Gabe!

Cass stops abruptly in a small copse of trees. He spins around, but there's no sign of his son. What's worse, he's lost and entirely alone.

He doubles over, hands on his knees, and struggles to catch his breath.

A HAND lands on his shoulder. He jumps.

Fay stares back at Cass. She holds her hands up in a calming gesture.

FAY

It's just me. Calm down.

CASS

Calm down? I can't find Gabe. How the fuck am I supposed to-

FAY

Calm. Down.

CASS

Stop saying that! Do you have any idea how much trouble I'm going to be in if...

His words trail off. He studies Fay, as if seeing her for the first time.

She's not sweating. She's not panting. Most importantly, she's perfectly calm.

(CONTINUED)

CASS

What's going on?

FAY

You said it yourself, Cass. You're seventeen. You're not ready to be a dad.

Cass doesn't know what to say. Fay steps closer. She circles him as she continues, her fingertips grazing him as she speaks.

FAY

Raising a child is hard work, Cass. Not everyone is up for the job. You'll give everything you have... everything... to make sure that child is clothed, fed, and taken care of. You'll take your child to school, to the doctor, to play with friends. You'll watch from the sidelines as he plays music and sports and enjoys the youth that was stolen from you.

(beat)

And when your child grows, when your child is no longer a child, he will leave, Cass. He will move out, move on, and leave you entirely alone with an empty wallet, an empty house, and an empty life.

(beat)

Is that what you want, Cass? Is that what you truly want?

CASS

I...

FAY

It doesn't have to be that way, Cass. You can leave Gabe here, with us.

Her eyes flit to the trees. Cass follows her gaze and finds the Green Man staring back at him, the black coyote sitting at his feet.

The coyote snarls at Cass.

FAY

We'll take good care of Gabe, Cass. We'll raise him as one of our own, give him a life full of magic and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

FAY (cont'd)
wonders that most people will never
know.

(beat)
And the best part?

She leans in to whisper in his ear.

FAY
We'll give you your life back.

She plants a gentle kiss on his cheek before she pulls away.
She takes a step toward the Green Man, turns to face Cass.

FAY
All you have to do, Cass, is walk
away. Tell the park rangers that
your son wandered into the forest.
They'll search, of course. They
always do. But they'll never find
him. In a few weeks, the search
will end, and you can move on with
your life.

Conflicted emotions play across Cass' features. His eyes
dance from Fay, to the Green Man, and back to Fay.

CASS
What do you expect me to do?

FAY
Choose.

Cass scans the woods, but there's not another soul to be
seen. No one is coming to his rescue.

The weight of the decision, the appeal of the temptation,
all play across his features in the span of a few seconds.

CASS
You promise he'll be okay? He'll be
happy?

Fay meets his eyes, her expression unchanging. She doesn't
say a word.

Cass' gaze shifts from Fay to the Green Man. The Green Man
stares back, unblinking, from beneath the brim of his hat.

Cass turns away, walks back the way he came.

He takes a few steps, chewing on his lower lip, then stops.
Something at his feet catches his eye.

(CONTINUED)

A dead bird.

CASS
He's my son.

He turns around, calls to Fay and the Green Man.

CASS
Gabe is my son.

They don't respond. He steps toward them.

CASS
I didn't plan on being a dad, but
that doesn't matter. He's my son,
and you're going to give him back
to me.

Still no response. Cass balls his hands in fist. He takes
another step, then another.

CASS
Give me back my son!

Cass ROARS in anger as he breaks into a run, his fists
clenched. The black coyote BARKS as the Green Man steps
between Cass and Fay.

Cass swings at the Green Man as hard as he can. When the
punch connects, the Green Man EXPLODES into a cloud of dust,
twigs, and leaves.

Blinded, Cass staggers back, coughing. He rubs his eyes,
clearing them, then looks.

Fay, the Green Man, and the black coyote are gone.

Cass is alone.

GABE (O.S.)
Daddy?

Cass turns. Gabe stands behind him, at the base of tree.

Cass rushes to his son, picks him up in a bear hug. Tears
trace rivulets in the dust on his face.

He loosens his grip enough to look into Gabe's face. Gabe
notices his father's tears, pats Cass on the shoulder.

GABE
It's okay, daddy. It's okay.

Cass laughs.

CASS

Yeah, Gabe. It's okay.

Cass sets Gabe down on the ground beside him. He takes his son's hand and leads him back the way they came.

As they walk away, the black coyote emerges from the underbrush.

The coyote sits on the ground and watches Cass and Gabe disappear over a hill, a strange glint in its eyes.

FADE TO BLACK.