

PARADISE

an original screenplay by

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EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

Two pieces of cloth flow in the breeze. Carefully etched upon the first is a young, beautiful woman sleeping in a mound of hand stitched quilts. On the second, a seagull perched on a river bank.

Sounds of a fierce struggle fill the soundtrack.

The cloth is nailed to a tree. The camera sweeps down to expose more pictures, all of which chronicle the passage of time. The images depict two young men inhabiting the present location, which is a small body of water.

The harsh, thrashing sounds come to a silence as the camera continues down, finally stopping at the base of the tree to reveal the corpse of a young man, age thirty, floating head up in the shallow water.

His eyes are open, unmoving. They stare straight upwards.

Our central character, DANIEL, early thirties and heavily bearded, removes his hands from the man's throat and brings them, bloodied and clawed, to his mouth, gasping in horror.

DANIEL

It wasn't supposed to happen that way.

EXT. RIVER - MORNING: FLASHBACK

A small bird stands perched upon blade of high grass.

Daniel, clean shaven, leans against a tree on the river bank. He is dressed in colonial garb.

SUPERIMPOSE: ROANOKE, NC 1589

He sketches carefully.

A gust of wind rattles the grass and the bird flies away.

Daniel frowns in dissatisfaction, before lowering his quill.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The door gently creaks open as Daniel silently enters the room.

FAITH, late twenties and lost in a sea of blankets, lies in the bed, softly sleeping. The light streams through the window, bathing her in a halo.

He carefully sits on the corner of the bed, all the time watching.

FAITH

I can feel those eyes.

She opens her dazed eyes and forces a weak smile.

He returns it. Pity overtakes his face.

He lies the picture on the bed, next to many others featuring various images from outside the small room: a bird, a sunset, the river, etc.

FAITH (CONT'D)

It's beautiful. You're getting better.

DANIEL

I'm getting practice.

She slowly nods.

He massages her cheek.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

How are you feeling?

Her eyes linger on the picture.

FAITH

It really is a lovely picture.

She turns to him.

FAITH (CONT'D)

Are you scared?

DANIEL

Are you?

FAITH

I'm worried... About you.

DANIEL

There's no need. Because you're gonna be fine.

She shakes her head weakly and coughs. She doesn't notice, but she coughs up a bit of blood, which lightly paints her lips.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Daniel... everybody dies.

EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

The body lies still in the water, which has been transformed red.

Daniel, with much anguish and physical brute, begins to drag the body ashore. When it hits the land he slips, splashing in the drift.

He begins to try again.

EXT. SHORE - EVENING: FLASHBACK

Daniel sits by a river bed, washing his wife's dirty sheets. They are stained with shades of red and brown.

He begins to tear up. He takes the sheets and cradles them like a baby, rocking back and fourth.

From behind him approaches another man, whom we have never seen alive until now.

ZACHARY

She's not getting any better?

Daniel collects himself, hastily wiping the tears from his eyes.

DANIEL

Some days are better than others.

Zachary looks at the drifting water thoughtfully.

ZACHARY

You know. They call this place the new world. It isn't, is it? It's the same as the old one.

Zachary waits for a reaction, but Daniel says nothing.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

You're a curious man Daniel. Other men, they come here looking for gold. Land. Power. What is it you're looking for?

DANIEL

We lost our first born back home. We thought we could have a new start here... a new life.

He turns around to meet Zachary eye to eye.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

But you're right. It's all the same.
Instead of losing my boy... I'm about
to lose my wife.

ZACHARY

I'm sorry.

DANIEL

Me too. She got sick on the trip
over. She knew before we even landed.

They sit in silence for a moment, lamenting.

ZACHARY

Daniel...

Daniel looks up from the sheets.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

I think I can help.

EXT. WOODS - AFTERNOON

Daniel continues to haul the body across the ground,
eventually sitting him against the tree alongside the
drawings.

Daniel goes to his satchel and takes out his writing quill,
ink, and a small piece of cloth.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT: FLASHBACK

The room is lit by a collection of candles; the shadows of
their flames dance across the walls.

Her breath is raspy; it echoes throughout the room.

Silently, Daniel draws his true love as the wax slowly burns
down.

His eyes become heavy. His head limply slumps.

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING: FLASHBACK

Daniel jumps in fright.

Zachary stands immediately behind him, his hand lies gently
on Daniel's shoulder.

ZACHARY

I'm sorry.

Daniel collects himself.

DANIEL

I hadn't realized I'd fallen asleep.

ZACHARY

I'm sorry to wake you... but it's time.

Daniel slowly raises; his eyes never leave his wife. She hasn't moved since the previous night.

He goes up to her and very slightly kisses her forehead.

Daniel takes a deep breath and purposely paces out the door, leaving Zachary alone, watching Faith.

EXT. WOODS - EVENING

Daniel opens Zachary's eyes one by one, before retreating back to his drawing supplies.

He looks up at the body, which is sprawled out beneath the tree, starring right back at him.

He begins to etch very slowly, in wide, deep strokes.

He only manages a few lines before he brings the quill away from the cloth. His eyes rise with anger.

DANIEL

You fuck.

In a quick burst, he crawls to the body.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

You greedy fuck.

A bird caws in the trees.

Daniel looks up, his rage momentarily broken, his focus returned.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

My God, how long have we been here?

EXT. WOODS - FLASHBACK

Montage of the two walking through the woods. The sun rises and sets, before rising again.

ZACHARY

I met a man once... a native. He told me about this place. This new world, it's magic. With mysteries and wonders you only dreamed of.

Zachary unfolds a map.

Daniel stops in wonder as the two wade into an open field. He marvels at the miraculous sunset.

DANIEL
What is this place?

Zachary walks forward and opens his arms, as if accepting a friend into his home.

ZACHARY
It's where life begins.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Daniel marvels at the water, before taking a single finger and piercing the water's surface. Small circles emulate from his incision.

He looks up to Zachary.

DANIEL
You first.

Zachary carefully takes his hands to the water and in one fell swoop collects a handful. He greedily shoves it to his mouth.

Daniel watches in fear and awe.

ZACHARY
They were right. You can feel it.

Daniel looks down to the water and then back to Zachary.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
To the next life.

Daniel looks down, collects it, and rather than devouring it quickly, he spiritually savors it, as if he were at communion.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Daniel still looms on all fours directly in front of Zachary's departed corpse.

DANIEL
Is this what you wanted? ANSWER ME!

Frustrated, he goes back to his quill and returns to drawing.

EXT. WOODS - DAY: FLASHBACK

Daniel bends to pack his bag. Zachary doesn't move; he's too entranced with the water.

DANIEL
We've got to go back.

ZACHARY
What?

He grabs Daniel's shirt as Daniel makes to pass.

DANIEL
We found what we wanted. We have to...

ZACHARY
Don't you understand, this place is a gift. We have to be careful... and we can't bring the others.

Zachary looks to his surroundings with new understanding.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
These sounds. These colors. Breathe it in...

He moves closer to Daniel.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
Do you feel it? This is it Daniel. This is life. And if you happen to be at the wrong place, at the wrong time, well then, that's it. It's over. But not for us.

He leans in.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
And there ain't no world other than this one.

DANIEL
I'm not going to leave Faith.

Zachary's eyes frown.

ZACHARY
Do you remember... when we left?

DANIEL
Why?

ZACHARY
I thought you knew.

DANIEL
What?

ZACHARY
She wasn't breathing when I oke you.

Shock overtakes Daniel's face.

DANIEL
She was breathing when we left. I
kissed her, I...

ZACHARY
She wasn't.

Daniel's certainty breaks.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

EXT. WOODS - EVENING

Daniel looks up hatefully from his drawing.

DANIEL
You're sorry? SORRY!?!?

He stands.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
You cost me everything!!! LOOK AT
ME WHEN I'M TALKING TO YOU!

The body stares blankly forward.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Daniel sits dazed. He holds the picture he drew of Faith up
to the fire... remembering.

DANIEL
You brought me here based on witch
tales and bedtime stories. When I
should have been home burying my
wife?

ZACHARY
I gave you a gift. To start over.

Zachary creeps close to Daniel. The fire glistens in his
eyes.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

Imagine all the beauty, all the wonder, that those two eyes will see. No death, no pain. Just life. This place... it's paradise.

Zachary smiles.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

It's heaven. But we have to be careful. We can't leave. Who knows if it works if we leave.

Realization dawns over Zachary's face. He returns to the water.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)

We will never leave. No more than a quarter's day walk. That should be safe. (To himself) That should be safe.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The camera falls down the tree, as Daniel tears down the drawings, all of which measure the passage of time.

Daniel rushes to his satchel and pulls out more, hundreds of sheets. Inside another bag he pulls out even more. They all chronicle the length of time spent at the water's edge.

He holds the sheets in front of Zachary.

DANIEL

You promised me paradise!

EXT. WOODS - MORNING: FLASHBACK

Zachary sits by the water. His hand shakes. It is inches from the water.

Daniel watches him. He looks terrible. He hasn't slept, his eyes are weary. He looks down to his paper, and tries to draw. He takes the quill and frowns.

He stands up and takes three steps from the water.

Zachary's eyes cautiously rise to the action.

ZACHARY

Be careful. There's a dip in the ground.

Daniel's feet stop. Zachary looks up in concern.

ZACHARY (CONT'D)
You're fine there.

DANIEL
I can't remember her face.

Daniel tries to urinate, but only a faint drizzle comes out. He takes a step forward. Nothing happens. Zachary stands up, watching in horror.

ZACHARY
Be careful. The ground might be slick.

DANIEL
I'm thinking... as hard as I can.
And I can't remember.

Daniel inhales a deep breath and takes a bigger step forward, waiting for some act of God to occur. But he is safe. One step turns into two, two turns into three.

There is a space of twenty yards between them. Daniel turns.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
I'm leaving.

ZACHARY
You can't.

DANIEL
I won't do this anymore.

ZACHARY
You'll bring them back.

Daniel moves towards Zachary.

DANIEL
Bring who back? Everyone we ever knew is dead.

ZACHARY
This is our gift. IT'S OUR DESTINY!

DANIEL
Destiny? We sit around a spring.
We never leave because we're cowards.
That's not destiny, it's purgatory.

Daniel begins to walk away, but Zachary lunges forward and tackles him in the back. The two struggle.

CUT TO:

Daniel rips the sheets down from the tree.

CUTS BACK TO:

The struggle continues and becomes increasingly ferocious. The two roll over into the water.

CUT BACK TO:

Daniel continues the ferocious ripping.

CUT BACK TO:

Daniel gets the leverage, and begins thrusting Zachary's head under the water.

CUT BACK TO:

Daniel has all the sheets down, and he begins hammering his newest creation.

CUT BACK TO:

Zachary struggles from under the water.

CUT BACK TO:

Insert shots of Zachary's lifeless body.

CUT BACK TO:

Silence. The water is still churning from the fight, but Zachary is gone. Daniel pulls away.

CUT BACK TO:

The picture of Zachary staring lifelessly back is the only picture on the tree. Above the image are the words: ABANDON ALL HOPE, YE WHO ENTER HERE.

Daniel looks down to the dead body, and pats his head.

He lets his hand linger, then he shuts Zachary's eyes.

And for the first time in ages Zachary leaves the site.

EXT. WOODS - DUSK

Daniel wanders through the woods.

He comes to a steep hill, which he climbs. When he reaches the top he is overcome with shock at what he sees below.

He slips, loses his balance, and falls down the hill. We hear his neck break. Daniel lies motionless in the grass, as the camera pulls up to reveal the McDonald's golden arches, as well as a small highway road ten feet away from his sprawled out body.