

IF You Go Down to the Woods Today

Evelyn Roberts turned onto the tree-lined road which led to Auchmithie village on the east coast of Scotland. She checked the rear-view mirror of her blue Vauxhall Corsa and sighed in relief at the empty road. She had left her husband, Colin, and two sons watching television in their semi-detached council house in Arbroath telling them that she was off to see her friend Jaz. Her heart-rate began to increase as a muddy lay-by came into sight with a dark green Rover 25 parked at the far end.

Evelyn carefully parked at the near end of the lay-by and turned off the engine. She again checked her rear-view mirror and waited until a white van passed before leaving the car and entering the woods.

The late August Saturday evening was warm, and the setting sun threw golden rays at the clouds as Evelyn left the woodland path and pushed her way past a thick bush into a small clearing. She surveyed the area and was about to leave when a hand shot out from behind a tree and tapped her on the shoulder.

“All right, come out Alan,” she said calmly with a smile.

“How did you know it was me?” Alan Harrison, a tall, thin man with thick, brown hair, asked as he stepped out from behind the tree.

“Who else would be hanging around here at this time?”

They embraced and kissed.

“When are you going to leave that guy and come with me?” He asked when they stopped kissing.

She stared into his eyes and caressed one of his cheeks with the back of her hand.

“I’ve told you before – it’s difficult. There’s the two boys to consider.”

“They could come as well.”

She laughed as she fell back onto the soft mixture of moss and long grass pulling him down on top of her. They rolled about in each others embrace before he settled on top of her. He kissed her passionately and stuck his hand up under her t-shirt and caressed one of her breasts.

“Hey! What the hell!” Alan shouted as he stopped what he was doing and looked toward his feet.

“What’s up Al?” Evelyn asked dreamily.

“It’s... oh shit, another one!”

Evelyn screamed and jumped up as Alan was pulled away from her by two gnarled, thick roots which were wrapped tightly around his ankles. Paralysed with fear, she could only look on helplessly as he struggled and grasped at the thin branches of bushes, which came away uselessly in his hands. In an instant he was dragged into a gaping hole, which had opened on the periphery of the clearing. The last Evelyn saw of her secret lover was his hands grasping at the air as the ground enclosed around them.

Shocked out of her paralysis, Evelyn ran over to where he disappeared and fell to her knees and thumped the re-formed ground. “Alan! Alan! Oh what’s happened?” she shouted through loud sobbing. Then, after a minute, she calmly stood up and looked around while brushing pieces of moss from her jeans. Confident there was no one around Evelyn left the clearing the way she came in.

The sound of an engine made her pull back into the bushes as she was about to leave the cover of the path for the openness of the lay-by. She watched as a white Ford Focus passed. After the sound of the engine disappeared into the distance she left the cover of the bushes and ran to her car. With shaking hands she turned on the ignition and the sound of the radio made her jump. *This is ridiculous* she thought, *why am I*

running away? I've done nothing wrong! Cheated on my husband maybe – hardly a crime – or is it? Oh, but how could I explain Alan's disappearance? Negotiating a quick three-point-turn she then gunned the engine and sped toward Arbroath.

Driving through the streets of the town Evelyn's mind was a mess. What would she do? Who would she confide in? She was going to tell her husband about Alan eventually, but how could she explain what happened? No, she would have to bluff it out; after all, no one else knew about her affair apart from Jaz, who would say nothing to anyone as they had been friends since childhood and had stuck-up for one another many times, but... did some one spot her car parked beside Alan's? "Now I'm getting paranoid," she told herself.

She turned into her driveway and switched off the engine then, after checking her makeup in the rear-view mirror, she opened the driver's door and left the comforting safety of the car.

"Hello! It's only me!" Evelyn shouted as she closed the front door.

"Hi mum!" the two boys shouted in unison.

In the kitchen, Evelyn switched on the kettle and then filled a mug with two heaped teaspoonful's of instant coffee.

"How was Jasmine?" Colin, her husband, asked as he strolled into the kitchen.

"Oh, she was fine."

"There's a movie just started," he said as he left with a packet of crisps.

"Yeah, there's always a movie starting," she said under her breath with a sigh. `

Evelyn stared up at her Aunt Cath. "Please, I want to go out and play?"

"There are green men out in the backdoor at this time of night that will come out of the ground and carry you away," warned her aunt with a stern look.

"But it's only seven o'clock; mum lets me go out at this time!"

"Well. I'm not your mother. Now go and get ready for bed."

The telephone rang as Evelyn made her way upstairs, and she heard Cath pick it up and start speaking. Then, with the knowledge that her aunt stayed on the phone for ages, she dashed back down the stairs. She then ran through the kitchen and unlocked the heavy back door and strolled out into the semi-dark garden of the small, two-storey building on the edge of town.

She watched as shadows fell across the path she walked on towards the small lawn where her skipping rope lay. She screamed as a bird flapped its wings and flew off from a near-by tree. The light had almost gone as she picked up the rope and started to skip, but her heart wasn't in it, so she threw it back onto the grass and was about to head back towards the welcoming lights of the house when a noise from an empty patch of soil beside the lawn captured her attention.

Through the gathering gloom Evelyn watched in amazement as a round, green object thrust its way up through the soil. After a few moments she froze in horror as she realised her aunt was right, for the green head of a man was protruding from the surface and was still rising.

She shook herself from the paralysis and grabbed a spade that had been left in the earth and swung it, blade edge-on, at the green head. The spade completely chopped it off at the neck and left green ooze spurting from the neck as the head rolled away into the dark. Evelyn screamed as she threw the spade away and ran back to the house.

"What's wrong?" said Colin as he woke Evelyn up in the darkness of their bedroom. She looked around with beads of sweat rolling down her forehead. "Oh, it's that dream again."

“You should see someone about that. It happens every other night,” he said as he rolled over.

Who was she to see? Did it actually happen all those years ago?

Monday morning, after dropping her sons off at school, Evelyn drove to her work at a bottling company on an industrial estate near the sea where she worked part-time along side Jasmine. The traffic was heavy and she found herself shouting at a driver who was slow at leaving traffic lights after they had turned green. “Whoa there Eve baby!” Evelyn exclaimed. “What’s happening? I’m letting this whole thing take over my life – I got to get a grip!”

After a few hours of mind numbing work Evelyn was sipping coffee during her lunch break and staring out at the sea through a plate-glass window. “What have you been up to Eve?” Jasmine asked as she sat down beside her.

“What do you mean?” she asked brusquely.

“Oh touchy- eh! I *mean* Alan Harrison has been reported missing. According to the local radio he hasn’t been seen since Saturday night.”

“How would I know?”

“Well, you know, I just thought...”

“Well, don’t think Jasmine,” interrupted Evelyn.

That evening, while Evelyn was preparing a meal, Colin strolled into the kitchen.

“How are you doing Evie?”

“Oh, okay.”

“I see some guy from the town’s missing. Jim next door says the police found his car beside the woods on the Auchmithie Road and that they’re all over the area.”

“Oh,” she replied nonchalantly betraying the sinking feeling in her gut.

After the meal she ran to the toilet and violently threw-up and then sat on the edge of the bath and wept. “Why me?” she asked herself between sobs, but deep down inside she knew the answer.

Sleep that night for Evelyn was impossible like the other nights except for when she lapsed into that dream. She tossed and turned, but couldn’t get the image of Alan being dragged away from her out of her mind, and then suddenly, she sat up and knew where she had to go.

Evelyn shivered as she pushed her way through the bushes and into the darkened clearing where

Alan had disappeared. An owl hooted in the distance and small animals rummaged around in the undergrowth which surrounded the area. Evelyn was about to turn and run when someone said: “I couldn’t sleep either!”

Evelyn spun round in the direction of the voice, “Alan,” she said breathlessly.

“I’m Detective Inspector Marshall,” said a man dressed in a light-coloured rain coat with the collars pulled up topped off by a brown trilby, which made it difficult to see his face. “I was drawn here as you were.”

“I don’t know what you mean!”

“Then why are you here?”

Suddenly the man stared directly at Evelyn and she stared into totally black, hypnotic eyes and began to helplessly relieve her burden: “I never did anything. Alan was snatched by two roots, which dragged him under the ground.”

“Come on now; surely you don’t expect me to believe that?”

“That’s what happened,” pleaded Evelyn.

“What we can’t figure out is what you did with the body. We found traces of his blood in this clearing, also there’s evidence of a struggle.”

“I never killed Alan - I loved him.”

Suddenly the bushes at the back of the clearing began to shake violently as two uniformed police officers appeared followed by two plain clothes officers.

“Okay Miss, I’d like you to come with us back to the station to help with our enquiries,” said one of the plain clothes men.

After Evelyn was taken away one of the officers turned to where Marshall was standing and said: “Okay sir!” But there was no one there; so he shrugged his shoulders and left.

Marshall exploded with laughter as he walked further into the woods while casting off his clothes revealing a totally green body. His ploy to hypnotise the human keepers into thinking he was one of their masters worked perfectly. Getting them to hide in the undergrowth while she told her story, which sounded ludicrous, was then easy.

As he walked he sank into the earth as if he was walking in quicksand, and before he disappeared, said: “Rest peacefully my brother. The murderess will be dealt with by human rules and renounced by her family. Even if she is released, I will have something that was dear to her as you were dear to me!”