

THE TRAIL

WRITTEN BY

ERIC D. STUMPF

FADE IN:

EXT. VISTA OF AN ENDLESS FOREST AND MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

The Great Smoky Mountains.

A hiking foursome breaks through the shrubbery, done for the day. Leading the way is PATRICK, 27, wearing a bandana on his head that's drenched in sweat, he's thin, fit, with the beginnings of a beard. His fiancé, ASHLEY, 25, is behind him, brown hair pulled up into a tight bun, equally fit and looking the part of an experienced hiker.

Walking a few steps behind are their friends, Adam, 29, and his girlfriend, Sarah, 28. Adam is sucking air, a little overweight and not used to this kind of workout. Sarah, blonde, with her hair in pigtails, trying to be more "trail cute" than "trail ready". She seems annoyed that they're lagging behind.

They reach their cars, Patrick's - an old pick up and Adam's - a 4-Runner, parked on the side of the dirt road. Unloading their backpacks onto the ground, exhausted from the day of hiking, they drink water out of their canteens as they catch their breaths.

ADAM
(huffing)
I'm so out of shape.

Patrick laughs at his friend.

PATRICK
I told you man, you've got to get
outside instead of playing video
games on your couch all weekend.

Sarah raises her eyebrows to Patrick, silently agreeing.

ASHLEY
Ok, who's hungry?

Patrick raises his hand, delight in his eyes.

They sit in the grass eating sandwiches, rehashing their day on the trail.

SARAH
Were you two hiking buddies in
college?

ADAM
(chuckling to himself)
If you could have seen Patrick in
school, you'd fucking die.

SARAH
Oh?

Patrick shakes his head.

ADAM
He was the biggest shut in. Never
came out of our dorm room. Never
wanted to go to parties.

Ashley rubs Patrick's back.

ASHLEY
Aww, so cute.

ADAM
What do they call that?
Agoraphobic?

PATRICK
Agoraphobic. I didn't have that.

ADAM
Eh...it was pretty close. That is,
until he met the great Ashley here.

SARAH
Is that so?

ADAM
Oh yeah, completely took him out of
his shell.

SARAH
Aww, so sweet!

ADAM
I think she even took his virgini--

PATRICK
Ok!

The girls giggle at Patrick's uncomfortableness.

PATRICK (CONT'D)
Well this has been fucking
enlightening.
(to Ashley)
You ready?
(MORE)

PATRICK (CONT'D)
 (to Adam)
 Adam, thank you as always.

ADAM
 No problem man! Remember, if you
 need help planning the bachelor
 party let me know!

Patrick opens the truck door for Ashley, closing it behind
 her.

PATRICK
 (under breath to Adam)
 You know I wasn't a virgin!

ADAM
 Yeah, but *she* doesn't! I'm scoring
 you points man!

PATRICK
 Unbelievable.

ADAM
 You're welcome!

Patrick, shaking his head, gets in the car and drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. PATRICK'S CAR - DAY

Ashley is resting her head on Patrick's shoulder, holding his
 free hand as he drives.

PATRICK
 I probably stink.

ASHLEY
 That's ok, I like your stink.

PATRICK
 Well you better get used to it,
 this stink is for life.

Ashley laughs.

ASHLEY
 Do you think we'll hike the whole
 trail one day?

PATRICK
 Definitely, I've been saving up my
 vacation hours.
 (MORE)

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Once the wedding is over and we get settled, we'll have to make some time.

ASHLEY

I just can't believe it's so close, we were just in college and now we're getting married.

Patrick pulls her hand to his mouth, kissing it.

PATRICK

Me neither, it's been surreal.

A DEER SCATTERS ACROSS THE ROAD.

Patrick tries to avoid it, turning the wheel sharply, but it clips the deer's hindquarters, sending it flying. He overcorrects the car the other way, but it's too much, the wheels turn too sharply, spinning the car as it FLIPS OVER. Spinning like a toy that weighs nothing, the car rolls and twists grotesquely, metal twisting and glass shattering before slamming against a thick tree, coming to a creaky halt.

Patrick wakes, his head bloody, he's been ejected from the car and lays in the grass twenty feet from the wreckage. He tries to get up and can't. He looks down and sees his lower leg is broken badly, his foot is twisted the wrong way.

Hearing an ungodly screeching, he looks over to see the deer along the tree line, trying to stand, but it's back legs and hips are shattered.

The truck's engine starts to smoke and a fire ignites.

He can see Ashley hanging upside down, suspended by her seat belt.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Ashley!

She comes to, sees the smoke coming out of the air vents. She struggles with the seatbelt, but it's on too tight. She's stuck.

She screams to Patrick.

ASHLEY

I can't get to the seat belt!

Her collarbone is fractured, the bone sticking out of her shoulder, leaving her arm useless and unable to get to the seat belt release button.

Patrick starts dragging himself along the grass, but it's taking too long, the fire has gotten worse, moving into the cabin and igniting the seats.

ASHLEY (CONT'D)

Patrick!

Patrick, helpless and too far away to help, watches his fiancé struggle with the seatbelt as the fire reaches her and she slowly burns to death in the truck's cab.

WE FOCUS ON THE FIRE.

FADE IN:

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

We're focused on another fire and after pulling out, see we're at a backyard bonfire amongst a group of 20-somethings.

Patrick stands alone to the side, staring at the fire, haunted, his beard now full and scraggly and his hair long and tied back.

STEVE, 28, holding a beer, approaches Patrick and slaps him on the back.

STEVE

Hey man, so you're out of here,
huh?

PATRICK

Yep, leaving tomorrow.

STEVE

That's awesome, wish I could do
something like that, but the stock
market don't stop, you know?

PATRICK

Yeah.

STEVE

You know, when you get back and
want to start investing, hit me up,
I'll hook you up, no fees or
anything.

PATRICK

Thanks.

STEVE

Are you doing any investing at the moment?

Patrick's had enough.

PATRICK

With my hundred grand in college debt and my worthless degree? No.

STEVE

Understood, you just got to make some goals and--

Patrick turns to Steve, looking him in the face.

PATRICK

My goal was to get married to my fiancé, we were going to hike the trail together and now I'm doing it alone, because she burned alive right in front of me and I couldn't help her.

(beat)

Now what kind of *goals* were you talking about?

Adam intervenes, grabbing Steve around the shoulder and walking him away.

ADAM

Hey man! Come have a beer with me, let's catch up!

Sarah approaches Patrick, they stand in silence next to each other for several moments.

SARAH

He hasn't changed at all, huh?

PATRICK

Yeah, he's gotten worse.

Sarah laughs. A small break in the tension.

SARAH

Did Adam ever tell you how we met?

PATRICK

At the library.

SARAH

(laughing)

Are you serious?

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

Is that what he tells people? Have you ever seen Adam hold a book in his hands, much less read one?

PATRICK

Now that I think about it.

SARAH

The truth is, we met at a club. A gay club.

Patrick's confused.

SARAH (CONT'D)

It was straight night, don't worry. We were with a group of mutual friends and little did I know Adam and a couple other people had taken ecstasy. Well we're all standing outside and Adam's been checking me out all night, he didn't think I noticed and he's leaning against the wall trying to look cool. When suddenly, he gets a little green behind the gills and starts looking for a place to throw up. All that's around is this white bucket on the ground, so he casually puts his arm up on the wall and throws up in this bucket and when he's done, wipes his mouth and acts like nothing happened. Two minutes later a bar back comes out the door, grabs this bucket, fills it with ice and brings it behind the bar. So anyone that had a drink that night was drinking some of Adam's puke.

PATRICK

And you decided you had to have him after that?

SARAH

Well he was cute, disgusting, but cute.

They both look over at Adam who has successfully diverted Steve, slapping him on the back. He turns to Patrick and Sarah giving them a thumbs up.

PATRICK

Cute.

CUT TO:

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

The fire is out, just embers, smoke drifting off them, empty beer cans lay in the grass.

A LIGHT turns on in an upstairs bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Patrick stands over the bed, everything laid out in front of him that he's bringing on the trail, Samson lays in the corner, watching him.

His cell phone rings, he looks at it and the caller ID says 'MOM & DAD'. He ignores it and the call is sent to voicemail.

He starts picking the things up from the bed and putting them in his bag.

The phone rings again, it's his parents calling back. He picks up, it's his mom.

PATRICK

Hi mom.

MOM

(over phone)

Patrick...we wanted to say goodbye before you left, I know you won't have good reception when you're on the trail.

PATRICK

Thanks.

MOM

Are you all ready?

PATRICK

I'm going through everything now, I think so.

There is some inaudible talking in the background of his parents phone.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

What?

MOM

That was your father, he said to
remember tick repellent.

PATRICK

Ok.

More inaudible talking.

MOM

He said they're bad this time of
year.

PATRICK

Ok.

And more.

MOM

He said he just saw a story about a
guy who had a tick embedded in his
eyeball and they had to pull it out
with tweezers...

Patrick is exhausted with the conversation already, taking
the phone away from his ear, he holds it against his thigh.
We can still hear his mother lecturing. He puts the phone
back up by his ear, his mom is still talking.

MOM (CONT'D)

...he said it "popped" when they
pulled it out.

PATRICK

Ok, mom, I get it!

More inaudible talking from his dad in the background.

MOM

Let me go in another room.

(beat)

Ok, sorry.

PATRICK

It's ok mom.

MOM

You know he means well, it's his
way of telling you he cares about
you.

PATRICK

I know.

His mother's tone changes, gets more serious.

MOM

Patrick, I wanted to tell you..your father and I love you very much and we hope you find what you're looking for out there.

PATRICK

Thanks mom.

MOM

You know I loved Ashley like a daughter....we miss her too..

(beat)

There's nothing you could have done, you know that...

Tears roll down Patrick's cheeks.

PATRICK

Mom, I've got to go, we're leaving really early.

MOM

I understand. We love you.

PATRICK

Love you too...bye.

He hangs up the phone, wiping the tears away and starts packing the things laying on the bed in his backpack.

The last thing on the bed is a SMALL TIN, he picks it up, holding for a moment and then puts it in the front pocket.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Adam's 4-Runner is backed up to the house, the back door open. Patrick and Adam come out of the front door carrying the last of their things and load them in.

Adam grabs Patrick's shoulder, looking him in the eyes.

ADAM

You ready for this?

PATRICK

Yeah, this is necessary. It's the last thing we talked about doing before...