EXIT 77

Based On A True Story

Written by

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INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

A warm living room, quiet with anticipation. A family sits around a fire, board games and drinks and snacks litter the cozy room. AUNT T (40s) nurses a glass of whiskey. COUSIN J (EARLY TEENS) tries to catch popcorn in his mouth. DIANE (40s) and EMMA (20s) sit on a sofa, Emma absently shuffling some Uno cards. Everyone's attention is focused on GRANDMA (70s).

GRANDMA
And when your grandfather followed him out to the barn... There was no one there. Just that empty glass, and a full bottle of wine.

A chorus of 'oohs' and 'ahs' come from the family members as Grandma nods. Cousin J scoffs.

COUSIN J
Please, grandpa didn't see a real ghost.

GRANDMA
Believe it or don't, that's what happened.

She shrugs. Aunt T sets down her glass and claps.

AUNT T
Anyone else have any spooky stories? Mom's hogging the spotlight with stories we've all heard before.

COUSIN J
I haven't.

AUNT T
Wait around another ten years and you'll have it memorized.

GRANDMA
Yeah well you can have the spotlight back when I'm dead.

They both chuckle. Diane looks up suddenly.

DIANE
Emma and I told y'all about the exit near the Goldcreek Cult right?

Emma looks at Diane with surprised and slightly accusing eyes.

AUNT T
I haven’t heard it. Why on earth would you ever get near that place?

COUSIN J
I heard they did weird rituals to try to make clones of people. Evil clones.

EMMA
Well, I don’t know if it’s that scary of a story. I mean technically nothing happened.

She looks to Cousin J.

EMMA (CONT'D)
No evil cult clones.

AUNT T
I say go for it, I got nowhere to be.

Cousin J nods and settles back into his seat.

EMMA
Honestly it just makes me feel a little stupid. So we were driving back home from the Shakespeare festival in Centerville.

CUT BETWEEN:

INT. DIANE'S CAR - NIGHT - PAST

Diane drives, Emma sits in the passenger seat. Her hair is shorter, and Diane wears glasses.

DIANE (V.O.)
I wanted to switch drivers because I was tired of doing all the driving. I picked a random exit that didn’t even lead to a town. It kinda just turned into a dirt road and a forest.

They turn off onto a dark dirt round leading into the woods.

LIVING ROOM

Diane speaks casually, though Emma remains a touch guarded, still shuffling the cards.

COUSIN J
Sounds spooky.

EMMA
Nothing happened though, it's really not that scary. I just felt like something was really wrong. Y'all know the feeling. Nothing you can put your finger on just... A bad, bad feeling. And you guys know my mom, she ain't afraid of ANYTHING. Not superstitious, not religious, nothing.

Emma turns a shade paler and stops moving the cards.

EMMA (CONT'D)
But you felt it too, didn't you mama.

Diane nods and stares at the fire as she speaks.

DIANE'S CAR

DIANE (V.O.)
I can't explain it either. I said it that night and I'll say it again; there was something truly evil there. I could feel it. It was a full moon too, which just added to the wrongness of it all.

The full moon shines down onto the black line of trees lurking against the dark sky. Emma is watching out the window, brows knit with concern and fear. Diane is doing the same. The memory gets a little choppy as the tension rises.

DIANE
Listen, on the count of three, we are getting out and RUNNING, and locking the doors as soon as we're back and leaving. Do you understand?

Diane looks terrified, eyes darting out the windows as she speaks.

EMMA
Mama you're scaring me what's going on?

DIANE
Do you understand!

EMMA
Yes!

DIANE
Alright. Three, two...

EMMA (V.O.)
We got out of the car and booked it to each-others sides. I had the biggest urge to look.

They get out of the car. The memory slows and flickers in and out of black.

LIVING ROOM

COUSIN J
Look where?

Cousin J is enraptured by the story. Emma speaks shakily.

EMMA
The woods. We were stopped right on the edge of this really dense dark forest. It was just a back road so there weren't any lights.

DIANE'S CAR

EMMA (V.O.)
I wanted to look out into the dark But there was a voice in my head, clear as day, that didn't even feel like my own thoughts. I went to look and it said "no. You don't want to see it." So, I didn't. I don't know what "it" was or if there was anything at all, and I probably never will.

The choppy memory flashes a look at Emma's face, terror in her eyes. She looks over the car at her mom, rushing out of the car door, then faces the ground as she runs to the other side. Black flashes throughout.

LIVING ROOM

DIANE
We got out of there as fast as possible, and we've both been too nervous to stop there again. I didn't even realize it was exit 77 until we left and saw the Goldcreek sign.

Everyone is silent for a moment. Aunt T looks serious.

AUNT T
Wow guys. That really was... A lame story.

She laughs. Emma puts the deck of cards back on the table and laughs hesitantly.

EMMA
It’s only scary because mama felt it. I’m scared of my own reflection on my own, but we BOTH felt somethin. I barely remember running out of the car I was so terrified.

DIANE
Same here.

AUNT T
Well, as much as I love scary stories by the fire, I think it’s time for everyone to head out. I gotta get my beauty rest after all.

EMMA
No you don’t Aunt T, you’re beautiful as ever!

AUNT T
Tell that to your uncle if he ever comes back. Out!

Everyone laughs at the family jabs and filters out of the cozy living room into the night.

EXT. DIANE’S CAR - NIGHT

Diane and Emma get into the car, Diane driving, Emma in the passenger seat. They drive away.

INT. DIANE'S CAR

EMMA
That story never plays quite as spooky as it ought to. Kinda sucks that it was the scariest moment of our life and nothing really happened. Doesn’t do well for ghost stories around the fire.

Diane nods as she drives.

EMMA (CONT'D)
I do wonder what was out there.

DIANE
Wanna find out?

Emma’s eyes widen and she swallows hard.

EMMA
What?

DIANE
I know we’ve never gone back... But we could.

EMMA
I don’t know.

DIANE
C’mon where’s your sense of adventure! Look, it’s even a full moon again. Besides, we’re gonna pass that exit in about an hour. It’ll just be a five minute detour.

Emma eyes her mother suspiciously, but can’t read anything on her face as she keeps her eyes on the road.

EMMA
Okay fine. I don’t know what I’m more scared of, finding out why that place is evil, or finding nothing at all and feeling silly about the whole damn thing.

DIANE
Guess we’ll see!

They drive on in silence. Emma falls asleep.

FADE TO:

EXT. EXIT 77 ROAD - NIGHT - PAST

The choppy memory plays of Emma getting out of the car. Her vision bobs over to her mother over the top of the car, speeding around to the front as she rounds the back. She looks at the ground as she runs, the memory cutting in and out to black, not seeing Diane again until they are both in the car.

The choppy run to the other side plays again. Seeming to skip steps.

INT. DIANE'S CAR - NIGHT

Emma furrows her brow as she tries to rememnber better.

DIANE
Something wrong?

EMMA
Just nervous. There really was something wrong there mom, I.. I don’t know if I want to go back. I have a bad feeling.

DIANE
Come on kiddo, you can’t conquer your fears unless you face them!

EMMA
Some fears I’d rather just forget then conquer.

DIANE
I’m sure you will. Besides, it’s too late now.

Emma looks out the car window to see the fateful road sign.

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She takes a deep breath as Diane follows the exit off the road. A chill seeps through her bones. Emma shakes her head.

EMMA
Mmm mm no. I don’t like this. That feeling is back. Do you feel it again?

Diane is quite calm despite her daughters obvious fear.

DIANE
I actually don’t this time. Weird.

They take the first right and pull onto a dirt road that loops through a dark wooded area.

EMMA
Mama. Turn around. Please. There is something wrong here.

DIANE
Emma nothing even happened last time.

EMMA
I don’t care. PLEASE. I do not want to be here. I want to go home.

EXT. EXIT 77 ROAD - NIGHT - PAST

The scene plays again, choppy in Emma’s memory. She gets out of the car. Briefly sees her mom over the car, then looks away, the memory blinks in and out as she watches her footsteps around the driver side and gets in.

PRESENT

EMMA
You were right, there’s something evil here. We have to go. NOW.

Diane pulls the car to the side of the road and puts it in park.

EMMA (CONT'D)
Mom PLEASE. Don’t open the door.

PAST

Emma’s memories play more frantically. This time it doesn’t blink out black quite as much. She can see herself start to look up instead of just at the ground.

PRESENT

DIANE
Calm down, it’s just a creepy highway we’re not gonna die. Get out and switch places on the count of three okay?

Emma breaks, tears welling up in her eyes.

EMMA
Mama PLEASE. Something is WRONG. Trust me.

Diane is smiling lightheartedly, like this is all a fun game. Her eyes seem vacant as she puts her hand on the door handle.

DIANE
One-

Emma shakes her head, subconsciously backing against the door as though her mother is scarier than the outside.

EMMA
Please-

DIANE
Two-

She clicks open the door handle.

EMMA
There is something evil out there waitin for us mama I know it please!

DIANE
Three!

She opens and slides out the door faster and smoother than what seems possible. Emma frantically follows suit and scrambles out of her door.

Everything gets slow, similar to the memories. She stands and sees her mom across the top of the car. She is looking not quite at Emma, but behind her.

PAST

The choppy memory replays, lesser and lesser cutting out. This time she looks up a second time after running a few feet.

The choppiness turns into a nearly frame by frame flash between black and images. This time she looks a second time, and this time something comes out of the darkness.

A humanoid FIGURE, faster than any human could ever be, races out from the dark woods behind Diane. It moves unlike any human ever should, it's eyes piercing through the inky black darkness. It grabs Diane, and drags her back into the darkness as she flails and screams.

In an instant it's all over and Emma's vision again bobs with her running as she gets to the other side of the car.

Now on the other side of the car she looks over it and sees Diane, with inhuman speed, running out from the woods and back to the car. From the opposite direction from where she was dragged.

They both get into the car, the memory still hazy and choppy.

PRESENT

Emma stops running. Diane stares with a lifeless grin.

EMMA
You’re not my mom.

DIANE
No.

Diane leans over the car slowly as Emma backs away in horror.

DIANE (CONT'D)
And you were right by the way. You don’t want to see what’s out there.

Before Emma can process what that could mean, out of nowhere a pair of inhuman arms reaches around her waist and grabs her.

She screams and claws and fights, but with impossible speed, she is dragged back into the darkness and is gone in seconds.

Diane gets into the passenger seat of the car. Looking to the left, she sees Emma sitting calmly in the seat.

DIANE (CONT'D)
See? Not so scary.

Emma smiles the same lifeless smile back at Diane.

EMMA
You’re right. Nothing even happened.

They both smile, and pull away from the dark patch of woods and get back on the highway.

Rustling comes from the edge of the woods, and a scream rings out over the growing sound of traffic on the highway, then is silent.

THE END