

The Rabbit

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SNOWY WILDERNESS - DAY

A blanket of snow stretches across a dense forest. The world is quiet, save for the soft crunch of boots.

CHARLES, a rugged, exhausted man trudges through the snow, his rifle slung over one shoulder. Beside him, his loyal dog, MAGGIE, sniffs at the ground, her breath visible in the frigid air.

CHARLES (V.O.)

*Marla,
Here's another letter I have no
hope of sending nor you of reading.*

*It's been two weeks now, two long,
cold weeks.*

Charles glances up at the pale winter sky. The sun hangs low, casting long shadows across the frozen landscape.

CHARLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*You speak of keeping the children
warm, but warmth can't fill their
bellies.*

He pauses, looking around the vast wilderness. Maggie stops beside him, her tail low and eyes scanning the horizon.

CHARLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*All the traps have been empty, but
we ain't giving up. I'll find
something yet.*

Charles sighs and pats Maggie gently on the head.

CHARLES

C'mon, Maggie. Let's try the ridge.

Maggie wags her tail faintly, and the two press on, disappearing into the trees.

Charles and Maggie climb a steep incline. The snow grows deeper, their movements slower and more labored.

Maggie stops suddenly, ears perked, nose to the ground.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

What is it, girl?

Charles crouches beside her, squinting into the trees. A freshly killed RABBIT lies in a small clearing. Its fur looks pristine, and the blood is easily seen in the snow.

Charles looks around cautiously.

He hesitates, scanning the tree line for any sign of predators or another hunter. A hunter never takes from another hunter.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(yells)

Is someone out there?

His voice echoes through the forest, but there's no response.

Maggie whines softly, nudging his leg.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I know, I know. But this don't feel right.

After another moment of deliberation, Charles grabs the rabbit by its back legs and tosses it over his shoulder.

He adjusts his rifle and then whistles for Maggie to follow.

EXT. SNOWY TRAIL

The sun is now starting to set, casting long, blue shadows. Charles trudges onward. Now, a look of optimism on his face.

Maggie barks suddenly, rushing to face the direction of the clearing they came from.

Charles stops, gripping his rifle. He stares into the trees, scanning for movement.

The forest is unnaturally quiet.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Come on, now. Let's go.

Reluctantly, Maggie turns and follows forward towards their cabin.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

A small hermit-like cabin is dimly lit by the flickering light of a fireplace. Charles sits at a modest wooden table, sharpening a pencil with deliberate strokes. Maggie lies curled up near the fire, enjoying its warmth.

On the table lies an open journal and the cooked remains of the rabbit—partially eaten. Charles spends his nights writing letters to his wife, Marla, even though he has no way of sending them.

CHARLES

(quietly, to Maggie)
It ain't much, but it'll keep us
goin'.

Maggie perks up, ears swiveling. A faint CRUNCH outside breaks the stillness.

Charles freezes, his pencil suspended mid-stroke.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(whispering)
You hear something, girl?

Maggie growls low, her gaze fixed on the door.

Charles grabs his rifle—standing slowly. He moves to the window, peeking out into the darkness. The forest beyond is still painted in snow.

The CRUNCH comes again—closer this time.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Hello?

Silence.

Suddenly, a distant SCREAM pierces the night. It's high-pitched and unearthly, cutting through the wind like a blade.

Maggie bolts upright and begins barking.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Maggie, stay.

Ignoring his command, Maggie races to the door and scratches at it frantically.

The scream sounds off again, closer now. Charles flings the door open to investigate.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Maggie rushes out the door and darts into the snowy woods before Charles can stop her.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Maggie!

The scream continues, louder and sharper. Charles steps onto the porch, rifle at the ready, eyes scanning the tree line.

He hesitates, torn between fear and the instinct to go after Maggie. The banshee-like yells surround him. It's impossible to determine where from exactly.

Finally, Charles slams the door shut, locking it behind him. He presses his back against the door, clutching his rifle tightly.

INT. CABIN - NIGHT

Charles sits rigid, now on the other side of the cabin, facing the door. His eyes dart toward the window as shadows from the firelight flicker across the walls.

The CRUNCHING sounds outside circling the cabin—sounding like footsteps.

Charles lifts the rifle, aiming it at the door. His breathing is shallow, his finger hovering over the trigger.

CHARLES

Who's there?

The crunching of the snow continues, and Charles's grip tightens.

With no immediate threat present, Charles slumps against the wall—his rifle still clutched tightly. The fire crackles softly.

Charles rubs his face, exhaustion settling over him.

The wind howls outside, the footsteps have stopped. All that can be heard is the occasional pop of the fire.

Charles exhales, the anxiety refusing to leave him. His hands flex around the rifle, the tension gripping his body just as tightly. The fire casts shifting shadows along the cabin walls.

His attention shifts to the table—to the bones of the rabbit, picked clean. Alongside tonight's meal sits his journal. His stomach churns, and he swallows hard.

With a sigh, he makes his way over and picks up the journal, taking it to the same spot as before where he can sit and keep a close eye on the front door.

Charles puts his pencil to the page, scraping the nib lightly against the paper, struggling to focus completely as he writes.

His hand moves slower than usual, the stress of the night weighing down every motion.

CHARLES (V.O.)

*Dear Marla,
Still no game, but something's
happened. Maggie's gone. Ran off.*

He pauses, his hand trembling as he grips the pencil.

CHARLES (V.O.) (CONT'D)

*I reckon I'll try Gabe. Maybe he
can help me find her. If there's
anyone who knows these woods, it's
him. He'll know what to do.*

As the words trail off, he pauses, staring at the flickering fire. The wind rattles against the cabin walls, but he forces himself to breathe, to steady his thoughts.

Finally, his eyelids grow heavy as he leans his head back against the wall, the rifle still across his lap.

Sleep overtakes him.

EXT. CABIN - DAWN

The first light of morning spills over the snowy forest. The cabin now lit by a cold light.

INT. CABIN - DAWN

Charles stirs awake, his rifle still in his lap. His eyes flutter open, bloodshot and heavy.

The fire has burned down to glowing embers.

He listens— silence.

Charles slowly stands, his joints creaking from the cold. He makes his way over to the window and peers outside.

The morning brings a sense of peace, and safety.

Knowing this is the best time to search for Maggie, Charles grabs his gear and heads out the door.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Charles steps outside, his boots crunching on the snow. He shoulders his rifle and begins to yell out for Maggie.

CHARLES

Maggie!

His voice echoes into the emptiness.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(whistles)

Here girl!

Nothing.

Charles walks to the edge of a clearing, his breath puffing in the frigid air. He crouches and looks over the endless landscape in front of him.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Charles hikes up a narrow, snow-covered trail, the wind biting his face. The trees close in around him as he makes his way toward Gabe's campsite.

As Charles ascends a small ridge, smoke from Gabe's fire comes into view.

EXT. GABE'S CAMPSITE - DAY

Charles approaches a small, weathered camp nestled among the trees. Smoke curls from a campfire.

Charles approaches the site.

CHARLES

Gabe?

A man turns to the sound of the greeting, revealing GABE, a stoic Native American man with weathered skin and piercing eyes.

Despite Gabe's difficult-to-read demeanor, he greets Charles kindly and invites him towards the fire.

GABE

Charles... cold out here. Sit yourself down.

The camp is modest. Animal pelts hang on the outer walls of the tent, various homemade tools decorate the area.

Charles blows his breath into his palms and rubs his hands together.

Gabe gestures to a chair. Charles sits, the stress and exhaustion of the previous night easy to see with his slumped posture.

Gabe pours Charles a warm cup of coffee and hands it to him.

GABE (CONT'D)

How's the hunt been?

CHARLES

I found a dead rabbit yesterday.
Fresh kill. Took it.

Charles' point quickly shifts to the more important one.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Look, I need your help, partner.
It's Maggie. She's gone off. Ran
into the woods after... something.

Gabe's expression remains neutral, but his eyes flicker with interest.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

There was a sound... a scream.

GABE

Maybe it was a fox.

CHARLES

Couldn't have been a fox. That
yell... never heard anything like
it.

Gabe leans back, arms crossed. His jaw tightens

GABE

And the rabbit. What do you mean
you *found* it?

CHARLES

Out in a clearing... just lying
there. Something else killed it.
Maybe a wolf got to it.

GABE

I see. So you took something that
didn't belong to you?

Charles stares at him, confused and defensive.

CHARLES

It wasn't anything like that. It was just a rabbit...I called out, but no one answered.

Gabe shakes his head, his voice low and deliberate.

GABE

Doesn't matter, brother. That rabbit belongs to the land. You didn't have the right.

Charles leans forward, desperate.

CHARLES

What are you saying? What does this have to do with anything? Look, I gotta find Maggie.

Gabe sighs, standing to stoke the fire.

GABE

There are... *things* in these woods. Spirits. Old ones. Judges. You took what wasn't yours to take. Now they seek retribution.

Charles shakes his head, scoffing.

CHARLES

You're goin' on about ghost stories? I don't have time for folk tales.

Gabe turns, his gaze sharp.

GABE

That scream you heard...It wasn't an animal. It wasn't human.

Charles freezes, the memory of the sound sending a chill down his spine.

GABE (CONT'D)

A Skadegamutc. A witch. It hunts those who disrespect the balance. It doesn't forgive. It doesn't forget.

CHARLES

I didn't mean—

GABE
(INTERRUPTING)
Intent means nothing.

Charles stares at Gabe, his chest rising and falling with growing panic.

CHARLES
Maggie... she's still out there. I need your help.

Gabe's face softens, but he shakes his head.

GABE
This is not my burden to carry, Charles. I cannot help you. I'm sorry.

CHARLES
Gabe—

Gabe cuts him off, moving to the door.

GABE
You'd do well to leave these woods. Immediately. Forget about your animal.

He gestures towards the direction Charles came.

CHARLES
I can't just leave Maggie out there. Gabe... please.

Gabe doesn't answer, his expression unreadable.

Charles stands, his face a mix of anger and fear.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Fine. I'll find her myself.

Gabe softly responds as Charles exits the camp.

GABE
Charles... be well.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL - LATER

Charles trudges back down the trail, the wind biting harder than before. His rifle hangs loosely at his side, and his breath comes in intense puffs.

As he walks, he looks around with a sense of paranoia. Remembering what Gabe told him. The forest around him feels heavier now as if something is watching.

EXT. CHARLES' CABIN - EVENING

The sun dips below the horizon, casting long shadows across the snow. Charles approaches his cabin, exhaustion etched on his face.

As he nears, he stops dead in his tracks.

The cabin door is ajar, swinging gently in the wind. The surrounding snow is disturbed, tracks crisscrossing in chaotic patterns.

CHARLES

Maggie?

He raises his rifle, stepping cautiously toward the door.

INT. CHARLES' CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The interior a mess. Chairs overturned, and belongings scattered across the floor. The fire in the hearth has long since gone out, leaving the room cold and dim.

Charles steps inside, scanning every shadowed corner. He softly calls out again.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(softly)

Maggie?

A faint sound catches his ear. A soft, pitiful *whimpering*.

He whirls around, his breath hitching.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Maggie!

The sound is faint, coming from deep within the woods. He rushes back outside.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Charles moves quickly, the rifle clutched tightly in his hands. The whimpering grows louder, guiding him deeper into the trees.

The moonlight reflects off the snow, giving Charles some light to navigate.

He stops suddenly, hearing footsteps. They circle him, crunching the snow deliberately.

CHARLES

Who's there?

No reply follows. His breath clouds in the frigid air as his eyes dart around.

A *snap*—a branch breaks behind him. Charles spins, raising his rifle.

The footsteps grow faster, closing in on him. The whimpering fades, replaced by an unnatural, guttural growl.

Charles stumbles backward, his heart pounding.

Suddenly, an unseen force *SLAMS* into him, knocking him to the ground.

He thrashes, clawing at the snow as something drags him deeper into the woods.

His rifle slips from his grasp, vanishing into the darkness behind him.

Charles kicks wildly—his squirming surprisingly has an effect. The grip loosens, and he scrambles to his feet, gasping for air. He turns around, and standing before him is a monster only nightmares could muster up.

A ghoul-like woman with the blackest of eyes and palest of skin locks eyes with Charles for a few seconds before slowly backing up and disappearing into the woods.

The banshee screams start up again. Charles' eyes dart around frantically, doing his best to think of a solution. Anything to stop the terror.

His breath comes in ragged gasps as the shrill scream cuts through the night. Charles once again thinks of what Gabe said. He took what wasn't his. Suddenly, an idea comes to him.

He turns and sprints back toward the cabin, the weight of the situation pushing him faster.

EXT. CABIN - MOMENTS LATER

Charles reaches the cabin, out of breath, his pulse racing. Outside the cabin, hanging high up from a branch, is what remains of the rabbit.

He grabs the scraps—the bones and pieces of fur—and gathers them all in his arms.

CHARLES

I can fix this.

Without hesitation, Charles bolts back into the dark woods.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

The clearing where the rabbit was originally found comes into view, just as it did earlier. Charles drops to his knees, trying to hold onto the pieces of the rabbit. The wind howls around him, the scream still echoing through the trees.

CHARLES

(softly)

I'm sorry...

He places the remains of the rabbit back where he found it, trying to line it up as best as he can. The snow is still stained with blood, a haunting reminder of what he took.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(voice trembling)

Please... take it. Here it is...
Take it back.

His eyes scan the surrounding forest, but there's no answer. The scream comes again, louder this time, a banshee's wail that shakes him to his core.

He falls to the ground, hands over his ears.

The scream crescendos, almost deafening, as the wind picks up around him. Charles curls into himself, his breath shallow, unable to escape the painful sound.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - MORNING

The night's terror lingers in the cold morning air, the forest now eerily quiet. Charles is gone. The clearing, untouched, save for the bloodstains that still mar the snow.

The stillness is broken by the soft crunch of snow.

Maggie emerges from the tree line, weary, limping slightly. She moves slowly toward the clearing, sniffing the air.

MAGGIE

(somber whimper)

She approaches the spot where Charles knelt. Her eyes scan the now empty space, then lower to the ground, where the rabbit's remains still lay. Maggie's body sinks onto the dent in the snow Charles had just occupied. She rests there, curled up, her eyes heavy with the weight of what could have happened.

MAGGIE (CONT'D)
(soft whine)

Her whimpering a mournful sound that cuts through the silence of the forest. Her tail flicks weakly at the snow, eyes searching, waiting for Charles to return.

But he never will.