

schizo

By

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Inspired by true events

(short)
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INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

PIERCING BLUE EYES stare straight at us, practically THROUGH us.

Scratches decorate his shaved head and a splotch of red underneath the bandage over his left eye slowly widens until --

A TRICKLE OF BLOOD escapes from underneath the dressing and slides down his face like a demonic tear.

AARON BASSLER (35), still boyish, doesn't so much as blink as he sits in an ORANGE JUMPSUIT.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
Can we re-dress that cut and get
him a fresh bandage, please? It's
disgusting to look at.

(O.S.) a door opens and closes, but Aaron's stare does not waver.

After a BEAT --

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
Aaron, can you please remind me
again what specifically it was that
you were doing out there?

Another collection of blood begins pooling under his eye.

AARON
(nonplussed)
I was running.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

With his movement segmented by the ANCIENT REDWOODS, Aaron appears to be TRAPPED IN A FLIP BOOK as he runs amid the massive trunks.

Clad in black from head to toe, he clutches a sleek ASSAULT RIFLE in his right hand.

BACK ON:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

The dam has broken and a grotesque RIVER OF BLOOD flows into Aaron's eye, around his nose, and finally off his chin in a steady drip.

And still he gazes at us.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
Mr. Bassler, do you understand why
you're here?

AARON
(muttering)
I understand you're wasting my
time.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
We are here because of the crimes
you've committed. Very serious
crimes. We need to talk about
that.

He has an epiphany and points a knowing finger.

AARON
You're distracted. Your reality
and the things you think
matter? They don't.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
Alright, let's talk about
that. What do you think matters to
me?

AARON
The same things that matter to
everyone.

FLASH TO:

INTERCUT AS NECESSARY:

AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 11 flies headlong into the NORTH TOWER of the World Trade Center: explosion, fire, smoke, etc.

Trapped in the hellish, smoky inferno, SEVERAL DOZEN PEOPLE cling outside of the broken windows until --

ONE WOMAN LETS GO.

She makes her long, tragic descent into oblivion.

(CONTINUED)

AARON (O.S.)
9/11 matters to you. All the
people who died.

As a plethora of other tragic souls leap to their deaths
lest they be engulfed in the fire --

MASSIVE FIREBALLS tear across downtown Baghdad.

AARON (O.S.)(CONT'D)
Shock and Awe. The grand lie of
the Iraq War.

A U.S. Army HUMVEE drives down a narrow road.

The soldier in the passenger seat waves to a group of
children playing soccer when --

A SMOKY EXPLOSION tears the humvee to pieces.

One soldier, ENGULFED IN FLAMES, screams and writhes on the
ground as the children watch.

AARON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
IED's. American soldiers coming
home in body bags.

ROWS OF BLOODY BODIES line an Iraqi sidewalk; loved ones and
onlookers CRY HYSTERICALLY and beckon to the heavens.

AARON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Or the hundreds of thousands of
innocent civilians killed.

BACK ON:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM

Aaron's face remains a bloody mess.

AARON
These things are important to you.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
(obliging)
Guilty as charged. Every good
American that I know considers
those things to be
important. Don't you?

Aaron SPRINGS TO HIS FEET AND LURCHES FORWARD, rivulets of
blood spraying off his face in every direction.

(CONTINUED)

AARON
It's all a big fucking
distraction. ALL OF IT. A trap.

MALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
Mr. Bassler, please sit down. Now.

Aaron stares at us for a beat before regaining his chair.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
Thank you. Now if you don't mind,
I'd prefer if we stay on topic --

AARON
(interjecting)
Red. Communist. Fucks.

Another BEAT.

AARON (CONT'D)
They're coming. We get distracted
and they prepare.

FEMALE AUTHORITY (O.S.)
And I promise we'll get back to the
Chinese. But first, you never did
tell me what you were running from
out there.

Aaron holds a hand to his head and begins SMEARING BLOOD all over his face a la Lord of the Flies.

AARON
Who said I was running *from*
anything?

DISSOLVE:

INT. JAIL - INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Still, Aaron stares straight at us.

The blood on his face has been cleaned -- but his eyes remain WILD.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, we PAN to see the other side of the table where --

The FEMALE AUTHORITY (40s) writes notes in her file as the MALE AUTHORITY (30s) enters the room.

(CONTINUED)

FEMALE AUTHORITY
(motherly)

Aaron, can I ask you a very serious question? And it's not about any of things we've been talking about today. Not exactly, anyway.

AARON
(singing)

Everybody's got somethin' to hide... 'cept for me and my monkey...

The Male Authority guffaws and looks toward the two-way glass.

FEMALE AUTHORITY

It's clear that you have lots and lots of complex thoughts going on in your head right now. Needless to say, we are very concerned for your safety and well-being. If you would be willing to participate in an out-patient treatment program, we have really smart and caring people here who can help you,

Aaron.

Aaron smiles and points a finger at her.

AARON
You think I'm the crazy one.

FEMALE AUTHORITY
Nobody said anything about crazy. It would be out-patient. Three days a week. Please, Aaron.

AARON
Are we done?

Shaking his head, the Male Authority leans in and whispers to his counterpart.

MALE AUTHORITY
Game over.

FEMALE AUTHORITY
(through gritted teeth)
We can't keep doing this... He's hardly fit to rejoin society.

Reaching for his briefcase --

(CONTINUED)

MALE AUTHORITY
You know our hands are tied.

She glares at her partner and closes the file.

FEMALE AUTHORITY
(standing)
Your mother is waiting for you outside. Please take care of yourself, Aaron. And do not forget to take your medication. It's vitally important.

They both watch in silence as Aaron exits the room.

After a BEAT, the Male Authority pats her on the shoulder.

MALE AUTHORITY (CONT'D)
Good luck, doc.

After he leaves the room, she opens her file and begins addressing the CLOSED-CIRCUIT CAMERA in the corner of the room.

FEMALE AUTHORITY
This is Elena Marquez, MD, PhD and today is August 11, 2011. Subject of psychiatric evaluation is Aaron James Bassler, case number 43056. Subject was arrested on August 7th for DUI and destruction of private property when he drove his truck onto the tennis court of Dana Gray Elementary School.

INT. JAIL - MOMENTS LATER

Dressed in REGULAR STREET CLOTHES, Aaron is buzzed through a heavy door to a lobby where his mother, LAURA BRICKEY (50s), is waiting.

As she hugs him tightly --

AARON
You got all my stuff?

LAURA
(wiping away tears)
In the car.

(CONTINUED)

AARON
Let's go.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Aaron opens the passenger door of the YELLOW VOLKSWAGON BEETLE and sees the butt of his NORINCO SKS ASSAULT RIFLE behind the seat.

LAURA
Sweetie, it doesn't have to be this way. You're more than welcome to stay with me at the house. Your father also said...

AARON
(impatient)
I gotta clear my head, mom. Just take me out there.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

LOOKING DOWN on the V.W. Beetle moving along a thin strip of road --

FOLLOWING as it drives parallel to the mighty Pacific Ocean.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)
The subject demonstrated continual perceptual disturbances for the entire duration of the evaluation.

INT. VW BEETLE - CONTINUOUS

Aaron pulls a purple hoodie over his head and leans against the window as redwoods fly past.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)
Disturbances included delusions of persecution, as well as visual hallucinations on at least two occasions. Subject's primary focus was on a special mission to escape an impending apocalypse. On numerous occasions the subject expressed visible fear and antagonism toward the Chinese.

INT. VW BEETLE - LATER

The car is parked on the side of a small road next to a very remote LOGGING TRAIL.

Aaron and his mother sit in absolute silence until --

LAURA

I want to turn this car
around. Drive us back into town...

AARON

Mom, stop.

LAURA

(emotional)

Do you think I want my son living
in the woods? Like some damn
animal?!

He steps out of the car and immediately reaches behind the seat for his rifle.

AARON

When I find what I'm looking for,
I'll call.

Watching her son disappear into the forest, Laura dabs at her eyes and never notices --

The PILL BOTTLE lying on the floor in the back seat.

EXT. REDWOODS - LATER

Traveling below the gyrating redwood canopy, we come upon Aaron trudging through the woods in his dark hoodie.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)

Coupled with his reduced mental state, the subject's avowed militancy toward the Chinese creates a situation of legitimate concern as it pertains to not only his own safety, but also for the safety of those with whom he interacts.

Approaching a clearing, Aaron slinks through the massive trees, silent as a deer.

Setting down his rifle, Aaron digs in his backpack until he produces a baggie of WHITE SEEDS.

(CONTINUED)

With a bowie knife, he begins tilling a section of dirt to plant the seeds.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)
Based on today's psychiatric evaluation, as well as the subject's criminal history, my preliminary diagnosis is paranoid schizophrenia with drug-related hallucinosis.

Seeds planted, Aaron studies the grove of trees nearby.

He selects a sturdy trunk and with the large knife begins CARVING into its crimson bark.

DR. MARQUEZ (V.O.)
Having overtly refused voluntary outpatient psychiatric treatment, the subject was released per state and federal regulations as he awaits further jurisprudence on a DUI charge.

With sweat dripping down his face, his blue eyes never blink as he works.

Finally satisfied, he puts down the knife and we see --

A JAGGED FIGURE "8" carved on top of a spidery CROSS-HAIRS sign, forming a strange symbol.

AARON
(touching it)
Rea, I've done what you've asked.
Please do not forsake me...

The LOW RUMBLE OF A TRUCK interrupts his reverie.

EXT. CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

MATTHEW COLEMAN (45) puts a hat over his ponytailed hair and reaches for a BLACK WEEDEATER lying in the bed of his truck.

Making his way through the thick trees, he FIRES UP the weedeater and stares down at the crab grass and stinging nettles growing freely.

COLEMAN
(to the weeds)
I am truly sorry, my friends. But I'm afraid this is your day of reckoning.

(CONTINUED)

He stops dead in his tracks upon seeing a sizable section of FRESHLY TILLED SOIL.

He runs the weedeater above the soil in a circle and then bends down to investigate.

Scattering the loose dirt with his free hand, he plucks a few SMALL WHITE SEEDS from the earth.

COLEMAN
(inspecting the seeds)
What. The. Hell.

As he moves to pull the cord on the weedeater, he hears a METALLIC CLICK.

Looking up, Aaron stares at him wide-eyed from the edge of the foliage, his rifle aimed straight ahead.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)
Hey now, easy...

Aaron pulls the trigger --

And MISSES.

Coleman drops the weedeater and dashes for his truck.

Aaron steps fully into the clearing and holds the trigger down - POP, POP, POP.

Coleman STAGGERS and SHRIEKS. Looking down, his right arm is a BLOODY MESS.

COLEMAN (CONT'D)
Stop! Please!

He heaves himself onto the seat just as Aaron lets loose another spray of gunfire.

Coleman lurches forward as blood pours from a gaping hole in his chest.

After a BEAT he goes limp and slides out of the cab onto the ground, one foot still elevated on the seat.

Aaron stares down at him, smoke seeping from the barrel of his rifle -- the weedeater still blaring and thrashing in the dirt.

In one swift movement, Aaron drops his pants and defecates all over Coleman's body - marking his territory like a wolf.

CUT TO:

EXT. REDWOODS - DAY

From above the treetops --

The TOWERING FOREST spreads out like a great green ocean with deep swaths of red bubbling up in its midst.

As the trees sway and bend in the wind --

Aaron trudges through the woods - his purple hoodie bouncing up and down like a skiff entering rough waters and the assault rifle slung over his shoulder.

POSTSCRIPT:

16 days after the murder of Matthew Coleman in Rockport, CA, beloved Fort Bragg city councilman Jere Melo was shot and killed by Aaron Bassler as he investigated Bassler's secluded campsite located on private property that he was managing. Immediately after Melo's murder, an unprecedented 36 day manhunt for Aaron Bassler consumed Mendocino County until he was shot and killed by authorities on October 1, 2011.

At the time of the manhunt, Mendocino County was not participating in Laura's Law -- an optional state law allowing for court-ordered outpatient treatment for the severely mentally ill deemed unfit to make informed decisions on their own behalf.

As of 2016, only five of California's 58 counties are participating in Laura's Law. Mendocino County is not one of them.