

Cień w opuszczonym młynie

Characters: Joe Krawie

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Chapter 1

I step out of the old pickup truck, the gravel crunching under my boots as the engine ticks itself cool in the quiet evening air. The familiar scent of pine and damp earth hits me first, pulling my gaze toward the weathered cabin nestled among the trees. My hand lingers on the door handle a moment longer than necessary, thoughts of the long drive fading as I notice the front porch light is already on, casting a warm glow that wasn't there when I left last month. I grab my duffel bag from the passenger seat, slinging it over my shoulder while scanning the surrounding woods for any sign of movement. The key feels heavy in my pocket as I approach the steps, each one creaking under my weight like an old friend complaining. Pushing the door open reveals the same cluttered living room I remember, with a faint musty smell mixing with something fresher, like recently brewed coffee. I set the bag down by the couch and run a hand through my hair, wondering if the neighbors left that pot for me again. A soft rustle from the kitchen makes me pause, my eyes narrowing toward the doorway. I call out quietly, "Anyone here?" while reaching for the light switch. The bulb flickers on just as I spot a note pinned to the fridge.

The bulb flickers on just as I spot a note pinned to the fridge. My fingers brush the yellow paper, pulling it free with a soft tear that echoes in the empty kitchen. The handwriting looks hurried, loops slanting left like whoever wrote it was in a rush. I tilt it toward the light, reading the first line aloud in a low mutter about supplies running low. A chill runs down my spine when I notice the date scrawled at the bottom matches yesterday. I set the note on the counter and open the fridge door, finding only a half-empty jug of milk and some wilting greens inside. My stomach growls at the sight, reminding me I skipped lunch during the drive. I close the door with a thud and glance toward the back window, where shadows from the pines stretch long across the yard. The floorboards creak under my weight as I turn back to the note, tracing one finger over the unfamiliar signature at the end. "Who the hell is M?" I say to the silent room, crumpling the edge of the paper in my fist.

Who the hell is M?" I say to the silent room, crumpling the edge of the paper in my fist. The crumpled ball drops from my fingers and rolls across the scarred wooden counter as my pulse quickens with the weight of unanswered questions.

I yank open the nearest drawer, rifling through old takeout menus and spare keys until my hand closes around the small flashlight I keep there.

Clicking it on sends a narrow beam slicing through the growing dusk, sweeping over the empty chairs and the dusty bookshelf in the corner.

A faint metallic click from the back hallway makes my shoulders tense, the sound too deliberate to be settling wood.

I step forward slowly, boots scraping lightly on the floorboards while the beam dances ahead of me toward the closed bedroom door.

My free hand hovers near the knob, breath held as I listen for any repeat of that noise.

The silence stretches until I twist the handle and push the door inward with a low creak that fills the cabin.

Moonlight from the window reveals the unmade bed and a half-open closet, but nothing moves until my light catches on a fresh footprint in the dust by the nightstand.

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I freeze mid-step, flashlight beam locked on the clear tread pattern that definitely wasn't mine. My heart slams against my ribs as I trace the outline with the light, noting how the edges still look sharp in the fine layer of dust. Slowly I crouch lower, one knee pressing into the cold floorboards while I study the distinct zigzag sole that matches no shoes I own. A faint creak sounds from the half-open closet behind me, pulling my gaze upward just in time to see the door inch wider on its own. I rise carefully, muscles coiled tight, and sweep the beam across the hanging clothes that sway ever so slightly. The air feels heavier now, carrying a trace of unfamiliar cologne that makes my nose wrinkle. I reach out with my free hand toward the nearest jacket, fingers brushing fabric that feels damp from recent wear. A soft thud echoes from under the bed to my left, and I whirl the light downward to catch the edge of something metallic sliding further into shadow. My mouth goes dry as I whisper hoarsely into the stillness. "Show yourself before I—"

"Show yourself before I—" I lunge forward and yank the closet door fully open, the hinges protesting with a sharp squeal that echoes off the walls. My flashlight beam stabs into the hanging coats and reveals nothing but empty hangers swaying gently. Heart pounding, I drop to one knee and sweep the light under the bed again, catching only dust bunnies and an old shoebox. I grab the box and slide it out, flipping the lid to find a folded map and a small key taped inside. The key glints under the beam as I pry it free, its teeth sharp and unfamiliar in my palm. A low mechanical hum starts up from the kitchen, like the fridge compressor kicking in at the wrong time. I stand quickly, pocketing the key while my free hand tightens on the flashlight like a weapon. The hum grows louder, vibrating through the floorboards beneath my boots. I back toward the hallway, eyes darting between the bedroom shadows and the doorway ahead. The hum cuts off abruptly, leaving only the sound of my own ragged breathing in the sudden quiet.

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I strain my ears for any follow-up noise while my thumb flicks the flashlight off to preserve the battery.

Moonlight filtering through the thin curtains outlines the furniture in pale blue, sharpening every edge in the bedroom.

My left hand finds the doorframe and I ease backward one careful step at a time, boots whispering across the boards.

A new scent drifts past, something metallic and faintly oily that wasn't here moments ago.

I reach the hallway junction and pause, pressing my back to the wall as my pulse hammers in my

temples.

The key from the shoebox digs into my thigh through the pocket fabric, a small insistent reminder.

Slowly I slide my free hand toward the living-room light switch, ready to flood the space with brightness.

Just as my fingers brush the toggle a soft scrape comes from the direction of the front door.

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A low chuckle drifts from the porch shadows, followed by the distinct click of a boot heel on the wooden step. I flip the switch fully and flood the entryway with harsh yellow light that reveals a tall figure leaning against the doorframe. The man straightens slowly, his weathered face splitting into a grin that doesn't reach his eyes. "Easy there, Joe," he drawls, holding up empty hands while his gaze flicks to the note still clutched in my grip. My pulse hammers as I recognize the zigzag pattern on his boots matching the print I found earlier. He steps inside without invitation, the screen door banging shut behind him like a warning. I back up one pace toward the kitchen counter, fingers closing around the handle of a drawer that holds the old hunting knife. The stranger's eyes narrow at my movement, and he tilts his head as if listening to something beyond the walls. "Name's Marek, but you can call me M if it suits," he says, pulling a folded envelope from his jacket and tossing it onto the table between us. The envelope lands with a soft slap, its seal already broken and a corner stained dark like dried blood. I reach for it cautiously while keeping my stare locked on him.

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My fingers close around the stiff paper and lift it free, the dried stain flaking onto my skin like old rust.

He watches without blinking, arms crossed now as if waiting for me to piece together the obvious.

Unfolding the single sheet reveals a list of coordinates scrawled in the same slanted hand, each one circled in red ink.

A sudden gust rattles the porch screen behind him, carrying the scent of pine and distant rain into the room.

I glance at the top line of numbers then back up, noticing how his right hand stays hidden inside his jacket pocket.

The floorboards groan under my shifting weight while I memorize the first set of digits out of pure habit.

He finally speaks in a low rasp that matches the note's hurried style, offering me a half-smile that shows uneven teeth.

Outside an engine coughs to life somewhere down the dirt road, headlights sweeping briefly

across the cabin windows.

I slide the paper into my back pocket and ask him point-blank what those numbers are supposed to lead me to.

Summary: As Wszechwiedzący, I watched the weary traveler return to the isolated cabin after a long absence. The man, whom others called Joe, stepped from his old pickup with a duffel bag slung over his shoulder, immediately sensing that something was off. The porch light burned in welcome, yet the interior carried an unfamiliar stillness. Inside, he discovered a cryptic note on the refrigerator signed only with the initial "M," its hurried handwriting hinting at urgency and hidden danger. The once-familiar space now felt watched, every creak of the floorboards and flicker of the flashlight sharpening his unease.

Tension mounted as Joe explored deeper. A fresh footprint in the dust of the bedroom, not his own, confirmed an intruder had recently passed through. The discovery of a hidden shoebox yielded a mysterious key and a folded map, while strange mechanical humming and shifting shadows suggested someone was still lurking nearby. When he confronted the darkness, demanding answers, a tall stranger finally emerged from the porch shadows. Introducing himself as Marek—or simply "M"—he tossed a blood-stained envelope onto the table containing a list of circled coordinates. The visitor's calm demeanor and hidden hand only deepened the mystery, leaving Joe to wonder what trail these numbers would force him to follow.

The chapter closed on a knife-edge of suspicion and revelation. What began as a simple homecoming had become a gateway into something far more dangerous, with an unknown purpose now pulling Joe deeper into the woods and the secrets they concealed.

Chapter 2

(no content)