

LET 'EM LIE WHERE THEY FALL

A ranger at a remote park in southeast Alaska is leading a tour through a totem pole park when he discovers the body of a tourist, missing for days from her cruise ship. An accidental sleuth, the ranger manages to discover not only the killer's identity, but the next target: the ranger's sister.

FADE IN:

EXT. A TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - EVENING

A white and blue bus rolls to a stop in front of a salmon cannery. A few men with lunch pails get on. The bus rolls away.

INT. BUS - EVENING

MERLE (late 40s), staggers and falls into a seat across the aisle from a young couple with backpacks. Aging-rockstar handsome, with salt-and-pepper stubble, he wears cowboy boots and creased jeans. Tattoos poke from the neck and sleeves of his leather jacket.

MERLE

(leaning forward)

You two. Not from around here, huh?

MAN

Just in for the day. Going back to our ship in a few hours.

MERLE

Goin' to see some totem poles?

The couple nods.

MERLE (CONT'D)

(slapping his knee)

Good for you! Most of them folks just stay in town, buy some cheap shit, walk around. But hey, you came all the way to *Alaska*, right? See somethin'!

The man starts to reply, but Merle continues:

MERLE (CONT'D)

City folk?

MAN

New York.

MERLE

(loudly)

The Big Apple! Whataya know!

There's an awkward pause. The couple study their map.

MERLE (CONT'D)

I met a city girl down at the docks yesterday. Detroit maybe, or Chicago. Little slut, that one! Didn't mind

sharin' a few drinks, but then she got all righteous on me. Said I was bein' "a-gress-ive." Shit, I was just *playin'*! I got me an old lady. Didn't mean her no harm. But then get this. The old lady *showed up!* And POW!

Merle claps his hands together loudly.

MERLE (CONT'D)

Shit. Hit. The fan. My old lady—that's Meade—see here?

Merle pulls up his sleeve to show the couple a tattoo on his right forearm: M&M in fancy, swirling script.

Merle and Meade. So Meade shows up just as that little vixen's slinkin' off, and goes double ape shit on me! I mean, she turns the table over, she's got my phone out, scrollin' through it, askin' who's Sheila? Who's Darcy? You know what that crazy bitch did? She threw my phone in the bay! Chucked it right in. Then, like nothin', she's orderin' some shots, cozyin' up to me at the table. She's got her hands in my crotch, whisperin' in my ear that we're soul mates, baby, ain't we meant for each other, baby, don't you be lookin' at those skinny bitches, Merle, the real thing's right here.

The young couple look uncomfortable. Merle tips his head back and lets out a raspy belly laugh.

MERLE (CONT'D)

Man, that bitch is crazy!

The bus's brakes squeal as it pulls to a stop.

BUS DRIVER

Totem Bight.

JAKE (early 30s), wearing a flannel jacket and a ranger's hat, walks past the group, a bag of groceries in one arm.

JAKE

Merle, give 'em a break, will ya?

Merle makes a face and gives a little "oh no he didn't" shimmy, before settling back into his seat. He flaps a hand at the

couple, as if shooing them away.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Folks? You here for the totem poles?
Evening tour starts in 15 minutes.

The man and woman scramble to follow him off the bus.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The moon shines on a small clearing in the woods: a fire pit, a small picnic table, and a pop-up camper. Silence.

A woman's scream pierces the night.

CUT TO:

INT. CAMPER - NIGHT

Jake startles awake, eyes wide, breathing heavy.

A second scream. Shorter but louder.

Jake jumps from the bunk and checks his cell phone. 3:06 a.m. He steps outside, dialing. The screen reads "Sheriff's Office."

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPER - NIGHT

Jake puts the phone to his ear then tosses it to the table. "No Service." He flicks on a flashlight. The light bobs through the trees as he scrambles up to a small office building and pulls keys from his pocket. The door says "staff only."

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. TOTEM BIGHT OFFICE - NIGHT

Another scream. This one loud and lingering. A pause, then another. Jake hurries, fumbles with the keys, finally bursts into the building, and, jumping a small counter, tears the receiver of an old wall-mounted rotary phone from its base.

He's dialing. Breathing hard. Another scream, but this one ends abruptly, the only sound the ratchet of the rotary phone's dial.

Tacked on a cork board is a photo of a red fox and two baby foxes, peering from under the porch of the "staff only" door. Jake's breathing slows. He shakes his head and almost smiles.

WOMAN
(faintly)
Ketchikan Sheriff's Office, How may I
help you?

Jake hesitates. He opens his mouth to speak but says nothing.

WOMAN
(annoyed)
Hello?

Jake hangs up the phone. The little chime echoes through the room. He lifts the bar flap in the counter and walks outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOTEM BIGHT - NIGHT

Jake heads past the campsite and down a groomed trail, passing under a carved sign that reads "Welcome to Totem Bight."

The light from his flashlight reveals totem poles on either side of the path, covered with stylized animal and human forms: leering eyes, gaping mouths, the claws of animals clutching prey.

The path curves around, past an old cedar lodge, and follows the shore of a small lake. Jake shines the flashlight into the trees and stops by the lake before heading back to the campsite.

He sits at the picnic table, listening. An owl hoots. He shines the flashlight up the embankment, revealing the entrance to the fox den under the steps. Everything is still.

Jake turns off the flashlight and steps back inside the camper.

CUT TO:

INT. TOTEM BIGHT OFFICE - DAY

Jake holds the old rotary phone to his ear. He's smiling.

JAKE
Annie, you're going to love it. I have a bunch of stuff planned. Kayaking in the fjords, salmon fishing. My friend runs a whale-watching tour and said he could take us out early one day. What time are you getting in tonight?

ANNIE
(unintelligible)

JAKE

Hey listen, you're breaking up. Cell service is bad up here. I have a meeting in Saxman but should get back before you do. If not, just park in front and let yourself in. There's a key under the mat.

Pause. Jake groans.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Annie, I'm your brother. You know I want to fly right down there and strangle this guy. But you're a big girl. You took care of it. We're just gonna have fun. Like we used to. Okay? See ya tonight.

Jake hangs up, glances at the clock, and heads outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD CEDAR LODGE - DAY

It's misty and overcast. A group is gathered outside the lodge. The front is painted with the face of a giant raven, each of its eyes a staring face. Entry to the lodge is through the base of a totem pole, painted white, black, sea green and blood red.

Jake's wearing brown hiking boots with red laces, pressed khakis, and a fleece embroidered with the logo of the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. A clipboard is tucked under his arm, but he doesn't look at it. He's relaxed, hands in his pockets.

JAKE

Morning, folks, I'm Jake, your guide.

The totem poles you see here are replicas commissioned back in the '30s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, to keep help employ the native craftsmen.

There are 15 poles here at the park. Tlingit and a few Haida. Does anyone recognize the animals in the carvings?

A boy of about 10 or 11 points up at the lodge entrance pole.

BOY

An eagle?

JAKE

Good guess! That's actually a raven. This pole tells the story of how the raven tricked a powerful chief into giving him the sun, moon, and stars. The natives believed they were descended from the raven, who gave them the gift of daylight.

If you follow me back toward the entrance, you'll see a depiction of the Thunderbird. The natives believed it lived high in the mountains and made thunder by beating its wings and lightning by flashing its eyes.

Jake walks to the front of the group and heads down the trail. He pauses for a moment in a wooded area behind the lodge.

JAKE

Folks, take a look as we pass by here. You'll see that we've turned the back of the structure into a carving workshop.

The group draws closer to look through a long display window. A roughed-out totem pole lies on the ground, surrounded by wood-working tools—small saws, bone-handled knives, and hatchets.

The boy from earlier has wandered away and is looking at some old totem poles lying splintered and faded in the tall grass.

BOY

Hey, what's this, a totem pole graveyard?

JAKE

You know, that's exactly what that is. The natives believed that the old totem poles should be allowed to fall and return back to the earth. Although sometimes we'll commission replicas, we try to respect the old traditions.

Jake starts back to the group but something stops him. He turns to look at the kid, who is peering at the bared teeth of a face carved into one of the fallen totem poles. A few feet away, something pale lies twisted in the dirt and saplings.

The kid turns to see what Jake is looking at. They both recognize it at the same time. A human foot.

CUT TO:

INT. TOTEM BIGHT OFFICE - LATER

Jake's sitting on a worn sofa talking to a man (OFFICER HENRY DAVIS, early 50's with a neatly trimmed beard) in a blue state trooper uniform.

JAKE

Who is she, Hank?

Officer Davis hands Jake a missing person notice.

JAKE

(reading)

"Claire Findley, a 32-year-old woman from Chicago, failed to return to her cruise ship on Monday evening. Ms. Findley is 5'7", 125 lbs, with green eyes and red, shoulder-length hair."
Shit, Hank.

OFFICER DAVIS

You ain't kidding.

JAKE

What do you know?

OFFICER DAVIS

Medical examiner's looking at her now. Cause of death is ... apparent. And not too long ago. 8 to 10 hours, probably.

JAKE

Jesus.

OFFICER DAVIS

You notice anything strange around here last night, Jake?

Jake sits forward, elbows on his knees, staring at his feet. He looks up.

JAKE

Yeah. I heard somethin', Hank. It was the middle of the night. Like, 3 a.m.

OFFICER DAVIS

Yeah?

JAKE

It sounded like a woman screaming.

Officer Davis screws up his face and squints at Jake.

OFFICER DAVIS

Are you fucking kidding me, Jake?

Jake shakes his head. His face is pale.

OFFICER DAVIS (CONT'D)

Did you call the sheriff's office?

JAKE

Yeah. But ...

Silence.

JAKE (CONT'D)

You remember when I first got here, last winter? It was too cold to stay in the camper, so I went into town at night to sleep. But a few times I stayed here, just plugged in the space heater and slept on the couch. And that first night, my god, Hank, I heard things. Things rustling around, hooting and yelping. But it's Alaska, right? It's the wilderness. I told myself to quit being a baby.

But then I heard screaming. Like a woman screaming. Full tilt. Over and over. I was totally freaked out. I called the sheriff's office and Arlene sent a guy out and you know what? It was a fox, Hank. A female red fox. I guess when they mate they ... make sounds like that.

OFFICER DAVIS

I've heard it.

JAKE

Yeah, well, we all had a good laugh about it. But then it happened again, a few weeks later. And this time I knew, I *knew* it was a fox. I knew it wasn't some woman getting murdered in the woods. But it sounded so damn real! I called the sheriff's office again. And again. Three times this happened. Finally, Sheriff Howe sat me down, told me that if I wanted to be a park ranger, I'd better get a grip. Said maybe I wasn't cut out for this.

After a few weeks, it just stopped.
 Spring came, the fox came around some,
 dug her den under the steps back
 there, had two little pups, cute as
 hell. Then one day, they were gone.
 All grown up I guess.

OFFICER DAVIS

Kits.

JAKE

Huh?

OFFICER DAVIS

Wolves have pups. Foxes have kits.

JAKE

Okay.

OFFICER DAVIS

The thing is, Jake, foxes mate in late
 winter. It's almost September.

Jake looks up, as two officers pass by the window, carrying a
 stretcher with a black plastic body bag. He winces as the double
 doors of the ambulance slam shut, then walks across the room and
 retches in a waste basket.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOTEM BIGHT OFFICE - LATER

Jake sits on a bench, watching the crime scene techs pack up.
 Officer Davis stops on the way to his patrol car.

OFFICER DAVIS

We're done for now. Call me if you
 think of anything else, okay?

Jake nods, staring at his feet as the cars drive off. A soft
 whining sound makes him look up. Padding toward him is the red
 fox. She looks skinny. She stops a few yards from him and sits on
 her haunches, cocking her head. The fox stares at him. Then it
 scurries back down the drive. Jake is motionless. Thinking.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - EVENING

MERLE

... that little vixen ...

CUT TO:

INT. TOTEM BIGHT OFFICE - DAY

Jake dials the phone.

CARL
(faintly)
Tongass Tap.

JAKE
Carl, this is Jake up at the Bight.
Listen, has Merle Atkins stopped in?

CARL
(faintly)
Nope. Man's like clockwork though. If
he don't walk in here in 20 minutes
I'm a monkey's uncle.

JAKE
Carl, don't let him leave. Do you hear
me? I need to talk to him.

Jake slams the phone into its receiver, grabs car keys from a
hook, and runs out of the office, not bothering to lock the door.

CUT TO:

INT. TONGASS TAP - EVENING

Jake scans the room and spots Merle at the bar, nursing a whisky.

MERLE
Jesus, Jake! You startled me.

JAKE
Merle, I need to ask you something.
That girl you met at the docks the
other day, the one you called a
"little vixen."

MERLE
Yeah?

JAKE
Merle, what color was her hair?

MERLE
Red, man. Fire-engine red.

JAKE

Merle! Do you know that girl's dead?
Sliced up and dumped in the weeds up
at the bight!

MERLE

I'm workin' nights now, Jake. New
rotation. I'm at the cannery or I'm
sleeping. Where'd you hear this?

Jake sits at the bar, ignoring Merle's question. Suddenly he
looks up.

JAKE

What about Meade?

MERLE

What about her? Woman's lost her mind.
She just stormed out of here, not 5
minutes before you came in. Saw me
makin' small talk with some young
thing, up from Oregon, and caused a
big scene. She took my damned truck,
Jake. Who knows where she's gone.

JAKE

(whispering)

Annie.

CUT TO:

INT. WHITE SEDAN- EVENING

ANNIE (early 20s), wearing a University of Oregon sweatshirt, is
singing along to the radio. Her phone lights up in the console
but she doesn't hear it. Raindrops appear on the windshield.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. OLD PICKUP TRUCK - EVENING

A truck speeds down road. A woman's tattooed arm—two M's
intertwined in a Celtic knot—taps along to Led Zeppelin. Thunder
rumbles in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOTEM BIGHT - NIGHT

There's a huge crack of thunder. A flash of lightning reveals a
downed power line, sparking and twisting in the wind. Jake slams
the door of his car and staggers against the driving rain, losing
his balance on the muddy trail. A scream rises up from the bight.

As he enters the clearing, lightning flashes on two figures grappling in the rain.

JAKE
(shouting, his voice carried away by the wind)
Annie!

A bolt of lightning sizzles through the air, striking the entranceway totem pole in an explosion of sparks. Jake squints in the blinding light. Then everything goes dark. There's a deep groaning and a terrible crash.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOTEM BIGHT - MORNING

It's daybreak. The thunderbird totem pole lies cracked in half across the trail. Protruding from beneath it is a woman's tattooed arm, fingers still gripping a bloody hatchet.

Annie stands staring at it, her sweatshirt stained with blood, one sleeve torn, revealing a large gauze bandage. Jake puts his arm around her. Annie rests her cheek on Jake's shoulder.

A large raven alights on the totem pole, caws loudly, and flaps its wings. The sun, just creeping over the roof of the cedar lodge, suddenly illuminates the scene.

Jake and Annie turn, hearing workers and the crime scene crew approach. When they look back, the raven is gone.

A few of the workers slide straps under the pole and lift it slowly off the body. One catches a glimpse of the body and grimaces.

WORKER
(to Jake)
Hey man, where do you want this thing?

JAKE
It doesn't matter.

Annie and Jake turn to walk away. But Jake stops.

JAKE
(to the worker)
Actually, set it down right there. We let 'em lie where they fall.

FADE OUT.

THE END