

Terrence brought his bike to a halt right at the start of the passage, and looked anxiously down into the morning gloom that had settled. The sporadic overhead lights were flickering and illuminating sections of the path, but the end was still shrouded in mist. He was also late for work. He sighed deeply and blew into his hands, hot breath escaping through his fingertips, fighting against the December cold that had settled around him.

A factory worker nearing forty-five, Terrence knew that once he had navigated the gauntlet that was this passage, the aptly named Hollywood Fields lay beyond and offered a shorter path to the factory and hopefully the avoidance of another bollocking from his line manager, who'd been a real arsehole lately. This alone should have made Terrence swallow his fear and head down the shortcut towards the grassy fields, but still he stood peering into the depths, his mind casting back to two weeks previous.

"Oi, you old prick." The voice snapped him out of his thoughts. It belonged to a hooded youth with an acne riddled face. Despite the late hour, his face seemed to stand out in the murky night. It looked familiar, one of the faces from the estate potentially? His thoughts were shrouded.

Terrence had just finished a night shift and had risked the fields on the off chance there wouldn't be the usual lurkers hanging around that had plagued the fields over the past few months. His luck was out. Terrence's path was blocked by the youth; he yearned for a cup of tea and his bed, knowing he had to do it all over again in twelve hours. He made to head past the youth without engaging with him.

"Oi, I'm talking to you, you knob. Don't ignore me." The menace in his voice was there. Terrence picked up his pace and climbed onto his bike, heading down the passage. He could hear the boy following him; his footsteps reverberated in the morning silence.

"Mate, seriously, I'm trying to fucking help you. Come down here in the dark on your own and you'll die, get me? The trees are mysterious man; they'll close in on you and swallow you. You're lucky I'm here, pal!" The youth was jogging alongside now, they were nearing the end. Terrence sped up and the youth stopped at the end of the passage, shouting after Terrence. "BE CAREFUL, this passage is funny. Stay out of the dark." The youth's words stayed with him until he got home.

Every day since he took the longer route; it took him through the industrial estate and down the main route in an unnecessary loop. Terrence hadn't given it a second thought. He hadn't seen the youth lurking around, not until the teenager's picture was on the front of the paper a few weeks after their encounter, the headline staring back at him, the eyes familiar and his own disbelieving..

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The paper seemed to stare back at Terrence. The youth's name was Marvin Edwards, he was sixteen. His body had been found at the entrance to Hollywood Fields the night before. The officers on the scene had immediately opened a murder investigation down to the strangulation marks on his neck. Terrence looked in stunned silence at the paper. The youth's voice filled his ears again.

"This passage is funny..."

He still stood with his bike, peering down the passage. The cold permeated around him, he was layered up but to no effect. The gloomy stretch of the pavement stared back at him, seeming more and more eerie under the flickering fluorescent light. The sun showed no sign of coming up anytime soon, but the minutes ticked by slowly.

"Fuck it," Terrence said aloud, his breath floating in front of his face. He couldn't afford to be late.

He was halfway down the passage when he heard the dead kid's voice in his head. "Turn back. Get the fuck out of here, man. They're coming. I fucking warned you."

He peddled faster and faster, seeing the end of the passage and the train tracks that would take him to the fields, and safety. It was to no avail, ahead he spied a limb of a tree reaching out, and wrapping itself around his front tyre. Terrence went flying onto the pavement and felt his nose explode as his face hit the floor, the warm trickle of blood down his face felt oddly relieving against his cold face. He rolled over onto his back and saw the limbs of the trees flailing in all directions. They all seemed to be coming for him.

"Told you," the voice said... they were the last words he heard before it all went black.

The trees now overhang the passage, creating a roof for coverage from the pounding rain that was falling. In Summer and Autumn the colours of the leaves make for an eclectic wash of colour, a picture of vibrancy. In the wintery rain it just looked fucking depressing; a pothole ridden obstacle course of puddles, mud and dogshit. The passage had gone long neglected by the council after the spate of incidents had called for an enquiry which never materialised and fell victim to more important issues. The trees had been left to grow out of control, plunging the passage into an almost permanent gloom. The potholes widened with the seasons and the graffiti at one end only seemed to grow, he stand out piece reads "Don't come down here after dark. Enter at your own risk" the words were lazily scrawled and semi prominent amongst the bed of graffiti.

They were all pissed out of their trees. A concoction of cheap, watered down lager and jaeger bombs on an empty stomach had left them all feeling merry as they walked across Hollywood Fields in the direction of the estate that lay opposite. Joe couldn't help but need a piss. The four of them all moaned when he decided to stop. Eventually they carried on towards the tracks, leaving him behind. As he pissed up the tree, he felt the relief washing over him. In the distance he could hear them laughing down the passage. Jake, Jacko, Jim and Joe had grown up together and their friendship thus far looked like it was surviving the post school transition. Despite this, Joe still thought of himself as the least popular and always but of their jokes.

"Fuckers," Joe whispered to himself, not wanting to feel scared by the darkness around him. He felt a little uneasy being alone with the fields stretching behind him.

He jogged over the tracks and peered down the passage. Into the darkness, he heard the voices but they seemed so far in the distance. The passage seemed to be narrower; Joe looked down at the low hanging trees, in the night they looked menacing. As he started to walk down the passage slowly and hesitantly he felt something squidgy underfoot. He searched for his phone frantically, eventually grabbing his phone. He shined the light on his shoes. He'd trodden in dog shit. His brand new white trainers were ruined.

"Fuck sake!" Joe cursed.

A shout came from the other end of the passage. "Joe, hurry up you melon. It's arctic monkeys out here!" It was Jake shouting from the other end.

If he'd been more aware of his surroundings, he would've seen the trees, the limbs, the branches all coming to life. He was almost free and within reach of the group when something swept him off his

feet. A tree branch tightened around his neck and he felt the life being squeezed out of him, it was harsh and bare and the splinters pierced into his neck, he heard what sounded like the breaking of bones and knew they were his own. He tried to scream but a bunch of leaves found their way into his mouth, choking out any noise he was trying to make.

After a few minutes Jake took a slow walk back down the passage. Joe was nowhere to be seen, he stood pirouetting on the spot for a second calling for his buddy without response. He wrinkled his nose against the smell of shit as he walked back along the passage towards home, calling Joe as he went. His phone went directly to voicemail.

“Joe, where are you buddy? Call me ASAP! I am going to wait outside my Uncle’s house.” He said, walking out into the dim streetlights. If he’d looked down he’d have seen the specs of blood that were dotted around his white Converse.

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The Have You Seen Our Dog posters were stapled to the trees along Park Lane, along with a lazy promise of a reward if found. The line above read ‘last seen heading towards Hollywood Fields on the evening of March 19th around 10pm’.

As Winter changed into a pleasant Spring the council finally took action after a string of complaints and a petition from the locals, nervous about the disappearances that were linked to the passage. The trees were pruned and the passage repaved, all of the graffiti washed away. Footfall through the passage grew and the fields were in bloom.

After the sun had gone down people would wander down the passage alone, blissfully unaware of the sensation of the trees closing in and round.

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