

WINTER PASSAGE

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EXT. FOREST PATH - DAY

Early autumn. A 70-ish couple, CLAIRE and PETER, walk down the path. Peter carries a garden spade and a small box.

EXT. CLEARING BY STREAM - CONTINUING

They arrive at a shady, intimate glade.

PETER

This the place?

CLAIRE (70)

You know it is. Right there.

Peter puts down the box and begins to dig.

EXT. CLEARING BY STREAM - LATER

Peter has dug a narrow hole about two feet deep. Claire sits by the stream, watching tadpoles in the shallows.

PETER

This do?

Claire rises, inspects the hole.

CLAIRE (70)

Yes.

Peter snaps out a pocket knife, opens the box, and dumps a plastic container of CREMATION ASHES into the hole.

CLAIRE (70)

No! Open it, pour them in!

Peter sighs. He opens the container, slits the bag of ashes, and pours them into the hole. He looks at Claire. She nods.

Peter fills in the hole, then stands looking at the ground.

PETER

That's it.

Claire nods. A bird song gets her attention.

CLAIRE (70)

Wood thrushes are still here.

Peter stares at her.

PETER

That's it. Aren't you supposed to...  
cross over now? Go into the light or  
something?

CLAIRE (70)

I don't know.

She shuffles her feet. A sudden smile.

CLAIRE (70)

Hey, remember that time when we--

She moves to embrace Peter, but he backs away.

PETER

--You're gone, Claire! You're gone!  
Now let me be. Please. Just let me  
get on.

Peter strides off, heading for the path. Left alone by the  
stream, Claire watches him a moment, then slowly fades away.

EXT. CLEARING BY STREAM - DAY

Early December. The forest floor is thick with dead leaves.  
Peter approaches the clearing. A young woman in a green party  
dress stands by the stream, looking into the water. She  
turns, smiles and waves. It's Claire, 25 years old.

Peter walks up, confused. Claire twirls, modeling for him.

CLAIRE (25)

I bought this for the Abramson's  
Christmas party, remember?

PETER

...What's happening, Claire?

Her face falls. She steps away, then turns to face him.

CLAIRE (25)

At first, I could see the whole  
world, everything all at once. And  
every moment of my life felt like it  
just happened. But then I started  
slipping back. It's all pulling in.  
Now I can't see past the edge of the  
woods. And I'm forgetting things.

She shivers, hugs herself.

PETER  
Are you cold?

CLAIRE (25)  
Maybe a little.

Peter takes off his jacket. He holds it toward her. She hesitates, then wraps it around her shoulders.

CLAIRE (25)  
How is everyone?

PETER  
Fine. Cassie Owens just had her baby. Jennifer Alice.

CLAIRE (25)  
Oh, that's wonderful! What else?

PETER  
Claire--

CLAIRE (25)  
--Just talk with me a while, Peter. Okay? Just a little while.

PETER  
Well... uh. Greg passed out during the delivery...

They both laugh, and walk off through the woods, talking.

EXT. CLEARING BY STREAM - DUSK

January. Snow blankets everything, and more is starting to fall. Peter glides into the clearing on cross-country skis. The forest is silent. He seems relieved. He turns around...

Claire, age 10, stands right in front of him. She's crying, shivering, hugging herself.

CLAIRE (10)  
I'm lost.

Peter unbuckles his skis and drops down in front of her.

PETER  
Claire, it's Peter.

CLAIRE (10)  
Peter... Oh God! Peter, I didn't know you! I didn't know who you were!

She throws her arms around him. A thrill goes through Peter.

CLAIRE (10)  
Peter, I'm so cold.

PETER  
Come on, over here.

He carries her under an evergreen, where the snow is thinner. He unzips his parka and bundles her inside.

PETER  
Just stay close. That's it.

CLAIRE (10)  
Peter, I'm afraid! Something's going to happen! Please don't leave me.

PETER  
I won't. I won't.

He holds her close. She's still crying, shivering. Peter looks at the falling snow, the darkening sky.

EXT. CLEARING BY STREAM - MORNING

Bright sun. Water drips everywhere. Peter wakes with a start. VOICES are calling his name. A SEARCHER comes into view, sees him.

SEARCHER  
HE'S HERE! HE'S HERE!

The searcher rushes over. Peter begins to straighten, then feels the bundle inside his parka. He pulls the zipper down: a tiny baby peers up at him. The searcher sees it.

SEARCHER  
Holy Christ! HE'S GOT JENNY OWENS!

Other SEARCHERS and a DEPUTY rush into the clearing.

DEPUTY  
Pete, you two okay?

Peter is in shock. CASSIE OWENS rushes over. She bursts into tears, and lifts the baby from Peter's coat.

CASSIE  
Oh, Jenny! Thank you...

DEPUTY  
We'd about given you up, Pete.

PETER  
What do you mean?

DEPUTY  
Nobody's seen you in five days.

PETER  
The baby...

DEPUTY  
Sunday morning, Greg hikes up the ridge with Jenny in a Gerry Pack. With all the fresh snow, he wanders off the trail onto a blow-down, drops right through, busts his leg. The whole pack, Jenny and all, goes flyin down the hill. Must be three miles from here. Freakin amazing you found her.

PETER  
But that's not Jenny Owens, that's... it's--

CASSIE  
You think I don't know my own daughter? I bought her this snowsuit last week.

DEPUTY  
What are you talkin about, Pete?

They're all staring at him.

PETER  
Nothing. Just... Could sure use some hot coffee.

A searcher produces a thermos, pours Peter a cup. They collect Peter's skis and poles, and begin moving away down the path. Peter pauses, turns back. He surveys the area.

DEPUTY  
Forget something?

PETER  
No. That's it.

They move down the path, and disappear into the trees.

THE END