

Overtured Stone

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The scientist digging his fingers underneath a rock is TIM PRICE, 20s. He wears a mud-streaked orange safety vest.

Tim tips back the stone, exposing a half dozen roly poly bugs and a twitchy black earwig.

Pulling a soggy notebook from his vest's pouch, Tim takes painstaking inventory of all the scurrying bugs.

TIM  
Five armadillidium. No, six. And  
one really mad earwig. Dermaptera.

After recording the bug totals in his notebook, Tim sets the rock back and apologizes to the earwig for the disruption.

TIM  
Sorry, brother. It's for science.

Tim takes five paces and flips another stone, revealing a writhing millipede.

TIM  
(somewhat disgusted)  
Aw, you guys creep me out.

He scrawls some notes.

TIM  
Too many legs.

Tim puts the rock back in place, grabs a walkie talkie from his backpack, and radios his research team.

TIM  
Hey, Crystal, you around?

A moment goes by before CRYSTAL'S voice crackles on the walkie talkie. She sounds like she's in her 20s.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
You got something for me?

TIM  
I recorded six toads, five snakes  
and four slugs.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
More than we hypothesized.

TIM  
I know. Significant.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
I'll relay that to Doctor Estrada.

TIM  
Remind her that I'm the best rock flipper and bug counter she's got.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
That's a pretty bold statement.

TIM  
And I'm also the smartest.

Crystal scoffs.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
Tim, I think you're breaking up. Your giant ego must be interfering with the transmission.

TIM  
It's not ego. It's my natural magnetism.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
Copy that. You're naturally moronic. I read you loud and clear. Anything else you need to report?

TIM  
Nope. That's all. Watch out for the millipedes.

Tim grins and continues trekking through the woods.

LATER

A mossy stone catches Tim's eye. Deep in the forest shadows.

TIM  
Last one of the day.

His forearms tremble as he turns the deceptively heavy rock.

No bugs, toads, or snakes are under it, but there's movement. Something seems to be scratching its way to the surface.

A flick. Lashes. A quiver. An eyelid--blinking away dirt.

Tim gasps. There's an intact eyeball staring up at him from the ground. Embedded. Trapped. Desperately seeking escape.

The pupil is dusty and withered from many days without sun.

Tim jumps back in revulsion.

TIM  
Mother fuck!

More dirt shifts. A small hole emerges in the ground. But it's not an ordinary hole. It's a mouth. Gasping for breath.

A dirty, blistered tongue slithers out and licks the grime off of ancient black teeth.

The eye stares wildly at Tim. The lips twitch, trying to form words.

Tim shudders with revulsion. He pushes the rock back over the eye and mouth, entombing them.

He snatches his backpack and dashes away.

INT. TIM'S TENT - DAY

Tim throws himself inside and zips up the entrance quickly.

He snatches his walkie talkie and blurts his discovery.

TIM  
Crystal! You're not gonna believe  
this!

Static. Fuzz.

TIM  
Crystal? Can you hear me?

Her voice comes through faintly. A million miles away.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
Tim?

TIM  
I don't know how to say this: I  
found an eye under a rock. And  
somebody's tongue. I know that  
sounds like full-on bullshit...

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
Tim? What? Are you there?

Tim scowls.

TIM

Aren't you listening? An eye in the ground. A mouth. Teeth. A tongue.

No response from Crystal. Just static and feedback.

Tim lowers his head, tries to get a grip. After taking a moment, he speaks to Crystal with a more measured tone.

TIM

Maybe I phrased that wrong. Here's an alternate theory: Aren't there moths that develop patterns on their wings that look like eyes? Kind of a defense mechanism?

CRYSTAL (V.O.)

You're going to have to speak up, Tim. I'm barely hearing you.

TIM

That must be it. Some kind of moth or beetle with eye-like camouflage.

He smiles with relief.

TIM

I got fooled.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)

Tim, you're out of range.

Static. Fuzz. Dead air. Crystal's voice is gone.

TIM

Crystal? Are you there?

The static drags on, filling the tent.

Tim lets the noise continue, listening intently, as if he's attuned to someone whispering just beneath the static.

Eventually, he shuts off the walkie talkie and sits in the uncomfortable quiet of the tent.

INT. TENT - NIGHT (LATER)

Tim tries to complete some scientific paperwork under the dim light of his lantern, but he can barely concentrate.

Outside his tent: the sound of swaying branches, skittering leaves, moaning night winds.

The lantern flickers and casts shadows against the side of the tent. Tim watches them swell and recede.

He sets his paperwork aside and mutters to himself.

TIM  
Hold it together, dude.

He stuffs a giant handful of trail mix in his mouth. Nervous eating. He chews.

TIM  
Eyeballs don't grow in the ground.

The wind whistles. Tim's gaze falls upon the canvas flooring of his shelter.

TIM  
And they aren't under your tent.

He laughs at that idea, but it's not convincing. His lips twist into a frown.

He draws his face closer to the canvas flooring, trying to detect outlines. Is that bulge an eye? Is that dip a mouth?

TIM  
This isn't productive.

He stands. Paces. Thinks.

TIM  
What if that was somebody who needed help? Maybe some guy got stuck under a rock.

He looks around the tent.

TIM  
No way. That's impossible.  
(shakes his head)  
And it's too dark to find out.  
First thing in the morning, you're going back to the rock and clear this up. The moth theory makes perfect sense. You'll see.

After a long moment, he shuts off the lantern.

TIM  
Just get some sleep and clear your head.

He sits in the darkness, listening to the forest sounds.

LATER

As Tim sleeps, the canvas bottom of his tent starts to rise and fall. The movement is restricted to a tiny section near the entrance.

A sickening sound emerges: Someone or something struggles for breath.

Pressing against the dark canvas surface of Tim's floor are quivering lips and an open mouth fighting for oxygen.

The mouth that was under the rock is now beneath the bottom of Tim's tent.

The mouth is desperate to bite through the canvas, to breathe freely, to end this smothering.

Tim continues to sleep.

Then the floor goes completely still. The breathing noises stop.

Tim's walkie talkie crackles to life. It causes Tim to stir, but he doesn't fully wake up.

An ominous voice whispers on the other end of the walkie talkie. The language is indecipherable--some kind of ancient paganism.

After a moment, Tim starts to chant along softly with the voice, but he does it all while asleep. Completely unaware.

The walkie-talkie eventually goes silent. Tim rolls over and continues his fitful sleep.

INT. TENT - DAY

Disheveled Tim throws on his boots and stuffs an energy bar into his mouth.

He swings his backpack over his shoulder and unzips his tent to reveal morning sunshine.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Tim returns to the rock, nervous sweat upon his skin.

He approaches the stone, retreats, and approaches it again.

From his belt he removes a hunting knife. He sets it on the ground by the rock in case things get serious.

TIM  
(whispers)  
Hello?

A sheepish look falls over his face, as if he can't believe he's talking to rock. He slides his hands underneath it.

TIM  
Let me explain something. I'm part of a scientific survey team. We're taking a census of life under forest stones. Just so you know.

Cautiously, carefully, Tim tips the rock back...and screams.

The eye stares back at him: angry, vengeful.

It's definitely not a moth or a camouflage.

The lips writhe and snap, itching to bite.

They begin to chant the ancient paganisms that flowed through the walkie talkie the night before.

Tim listens, mesmerized, unable to run or fight.

He peers desperately at the knife, but he can't move in that direction. It might as well be a mile away.

Eventually, Tim chants along with the strange language uttered by the lips in the ground. A ritual is underway that he does not understand.

After several moments of this, Tim takes one step back. Slowly he pulls the walkie talkie out of his backpack.

When he speaks into it, his voice is full of sorrow.

TIM  
Crystal, this is Tim.

He doesn't pause to let her respond.

TIM  
I just wanted to say goodbye to you. This is the end.

A tear rolls down his cheek.

TIM  
I don't know what I've stumbled into. I can't explain.



He struggles to find the right words, but it finally dawns on him.

TIM  
Some rocks shouldn't be overturned.

He takes a deep breath.

TIM  
You mean a lot to me, but I've never...

He glances at the rock.

TIM  
Whatever you do, don't try to find me. Stay as far away from here as you can.

His voice goes hoarse.

TIM  
I love you.

The walkie talkie spurts to life.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)  
Tim? What's going on?

Tim stomps on the device, crushing it. Crystal's voice is lost.

Tim walks over to the writhing lips in the ground and lowers his head, offering his cheek to the hungry, putrid mouth.

The nasty tongue licks him. The lips and teeth latch on to his skin, just like a leech, a parasite, a bloodsucker.

With his cheek flat on the ground, Tim reaches up and lowers the rock on top of his head.

It's not quite heavy enough to crush his skull. It simply traps him.

On one side of Tim's face is cold, unmerciful stone. On the other: a drooling, gnawing set of mystic lips and teeth.

Tim's screams are muffled by the sheer weight of the slab on top of him. His legs kick with pain.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

The sun has set, but Tim remains trapped under the rock, moaning softly.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

With the morning sunshine comes a few spasms of life from Tim. He has survived the night.

He wiggles and pulls his head from under the rock. He stares groggily at his surroundings.

Half of his face has been eaten away. His gums, tongue, and teeth are exposed to the air.

Awful strings of flesh hang, but that's all that's left of that side of his face.

Tim takes a moment to calmly assess the sun, the trees, the birds. His eyes are dazed.

He takes a deep, raspy breath and coughs up some blood.

Then he lifts the rock once again and offers the other side of his face to the awful teeth set into the ground.

FADE OUT