

**RIDDLE**

by

Shiva Ramanathan

(based on his short film,

"The Portent")

WGAw. 2215737

(949)653 0896

SR1@HOTMAIL.COM

EXT. LAKE FOREST HIGHWAY - NIGHT (VISION)

An ominous, dark sky hovers over the deserted two lane highway. Trees sway viciously on either side of the road as a wind howls.

A flash of lightning breaks up the darkness. Lights up the sky like fireworks on the fourth of July. A thunderous clap follows.

The momentary brightness reveals a baby mule deer on the road. The fawn lies in a puddle of blood. She breathes with difficulty.

The headlights of a car appear in the distance.

The fawn's ears twitch as it watches the car approach. Her eyes scream in fear and pain.

The car pulls over to the shoulder. The driver turns off the engine and takes out her phone.

The phone's light reveals the driver - DAWN PAYNE (32). Dawn has tender eyes and an inexplicable glow.

DAWN

(on phone)

Hi, This is Dawn Payne. I just texted you my location. I have an injured fawn here. She's hurt badly and really needs help. Can you send an officer right away? Thank you.

Dawn hangs up. She pulls a jacket over her nurse gown.

As Dawn steps out of the car, the reason for her ethereal glow becomes clear -- her four month baby bump. Dawn is motherhood personified.

Dawn smiles gently at the fawn.

DAWN

Hey, honey. Someone's coming to help us soon. Ok?

The fawn looks at her nervously.

DAWN

Where's your mama?

The fawn looks towards the trees on the highway shoulder.

DAWN

Is she there?

A lightning bolt splits the sky.

The fawn bleats in fear.

DAWN

Now, now. Don't be scared.  
Everything's going to be fine.

Dawn smiles comfortingly.

DAWN

My name's Dawn.

Dawn pats her baby bump, lovingly.

DAWN

This here is baby Beth. And we're  
staying right here with you till  
someone comes and we find your  
mama. Ok?

Dawn looks around the desolate highway.

DAWN

It may be a little while but  
they'll be here.

Dawn leans against her car.

DAWN

What'd you want to do while we  
wait?

The fawn doesn't have an answer.

DAWN

How about some music. You like  
music? Beth loves lullabies. She  
dances like crazy in here when I  
sing to her.

(chuckles)

I don't know why 'cause I'm a  
terrible singer. I can sing her  
song if you like. You wanna hear  
it?

The baby deer stares at her, quietly.

DAWN

Is that a yes? Mind you, I'm bad.  
Really bad. So, feel free to stop  
me anytime. Bleat, twitch, roll  
your eyes... anything and I'll shut  
up. Ok?

Dawn clears her throat.

DAWN  
Here goes nothing.

Dawn sings in a soft, soothing tone.

DAWN  
(sings)  
*You are my sunshine, my only  
sunshine. You make me happy when  
skies are gray.*

The fawn's ears stop twitching.

DAWN  
(sings)  
*You'll never know dear how much I  
love you. Please don't take my  
sunshine away.*

The raging wind eases up on the trees.

DAWN  
(sings)  
*The other night dear as I lay  
sleeping, I dreamt I held you in my  
arms. And now that you're here, my  
dreams are waking. And I will keep  
you from all harm.*

The trees stand still as they listen to Dawn's lullaby.

DAWN  
(sings)  
*You are my sunshine, my only  
sunshine. You make me happy when  
skies are grey.*

The fawn's eyes are calm. No pain or fear anymore.

DAWN  
(sings)  
*You'll never know dear how much I  
love you. Please don't take my  
sunshine--*

An enormous lightning bolt strikes Dawn, head-on.

White blinds the highway.

The fawn lifts her head in shock.

END VISION

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

MARTIN PAYNE (32) AKA MARTY wakes up in a sweat storm.

Clean shaven and handsome, Martin radiates an innate compassion. There is something childlike about the way his eyes search the room.

Cheery wallpaper and a beautiful cradle brighten the room. Every trinket shouts that a baby is coming to the house.

Martin finds what he is looking for - his wife, Dawn.

Dawn wears her loose nurse gown over her baby bump. She packs her work bag when she feels Martin's eyes on her.

DAWN

Hey, honey.

Dawn's smile vanishes when she sees Martin drenched in sweat.

DAWN

What's wrong?

Martin stares at her in a daze. He is still shaken from his dream.

DAWN

Bad dream?

Dawn wipes his face gently with a towel.

DAWN

Wanna talk about it?

Martin hugs her, tightly.

DAWN

It's just a dream, honey. It doesn't mean anything. Ok?

Dawn ruffles his hair, lovingly.

DAWN

Just thought of something that'll cheer you up. Tomorrow, we stay in and you make me your famous pancakes.

Martin smiles at the offer.

MARTIN  
Chocolate drizzle, blueberries,  
whipped cream - the whole shebang?

DAWN  
Don't forget the candied bacon.

MARTIN  
How could I.

DAWN  
Then, we binge. Halloween,  
Halloween Two, Halloween Three,  
Halloween Four...

MARTIN  
What about Nemo. Don't we have to  
find him for Beth?

DAWN  
Not tomorrow.

Martin kisses Dawn's baby bump.

MARTIN  
You hear that baby? No Nemo for us.

Baby Beth surprises Martin with an energetic kick inside  
Dawn's belly.

DAWN  
Whoa!

MARTIN  
You feel that. You feel that kick.  
I told ya. My girl wants to find  
Nemo.

DAWN  
I guess...

MARTIN  
And Dory.

Dawn laughs.

DAWN  
Now, you're pushing it.

They kiss tenderly. Love fills the room.

Dawn's cell rings. Interrupts their moment.

Martin watches Dawn on the call. A tense voice clamors for help on the other end.

Dawn whispers to Martin.

DAWN  
Mr. Pfaff fell down in the  
bathroom. He's asking for me.

MARTIN  
Is he ok?

DAWN  
I hope so.

MARTIN  
Go.

Dawn grabs her bag. Turns back at the door.

DAWN  
Don't forget. Tomorrow, I want the  
whole shebang. Pancakes, Nemo and  
Halloween. Ok?

MARTIN  
It's a date.

INT. LAKE FOREST MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - DAY

A PARAMEDIC wheels a gunshot victim through the hallway.

The victim is a suburban mom, ZOE BAL (50). Her chest is soaked in blood.

Martin and NURSE SHEILA (55) rush to help the paramedic. Nurse Sheila has compassionate eyes that would make any patient feel safe.

PARAMEDIC  
Fifty-year-old woman. Shot multiple  
times in the chest. Difficulty  
breathing.

MARTIN  
Who called?

PARAMEDIC  
Her daughter.

MARTIN  
Vitals?

PARAMEDIC

Heart rate, one thirty p-m. Blood pressure, fifty over ten. O-two, eighty five and dropping.

MARTIN

What's her name?

PARAMEDIC

Zoe.

MARTIN

She looks familiar. How do I know her?

NURSE SHEILA

She's huge on YouTube.

MARTIN

That's it. Zoe-B, right?

Martin employs the "tap-shout-tap" method as they rush the stretcher towards ER. Taps Zoe.

MARTIN

Hi Zoe, I'm Martin. This is Sheila. You're at Lake Forest Memorial. We're huge fans of your show.

NURSE SHEILA

Love her eye for talent. She finds the most amazing singers.

Martin taps Zoe again.

MARTIN

You hear that, Zoe. Sheila loves your work.

Zoe moans softly as they wheel her into the ER.

INT. LAKE FOREST MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - ER - DAY

Martin directs the team.

MARTIN

Let's start an IV -- HTS. Call OR, get a room ready. Get Henderson here right away.

Nurse Sheila places the electrode on Zoe's chest. The monitor charts her heart beat.



The medical team surrounds the patient.

LATER

Zoe is unconscious but looks much better.

MARTIN

Vitals check. Q-fifteen for an hour. Let's get the blood going. Thousand ml.

NURSE SHEILA

About that. We got an issue, Doc. It'll be an hour before we can start the blood. We're a little short. Called Brookhurst. They're rushing it in as we speak.

Marty checks Zoe's chart.

MARTIN

B positive. I've got some. Hook me up.

NURSE SHEILA

Doc, you can't do that.

Martin smiles.

MARTIN

It's ok. I need the break anyway.

INT. LAKE FOREST MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

ZOE'S DAUGHTER (18) waits outside the ER.

ZOE'S DAUGHTER

Is my mom going to be ok?

MARTIN

Her vitals are stable. We're watching her closely. We'll keep you posted.

The daughter sobs.

MARTIN

Hey, hey. What's your name?

ZOE'S DAUGHTER

Tina.

MARTIN

Tina, your mom will be fine. She'll be fine. You should get some rest.

INT. LAKE FOREST MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - ROOM - NIGHT

Blood drips into a bag through an IV connected to Martin's left arm.

Martin texts Dawn, "How's Pfaff?".

No response from Dawn.

A lightning bolt flashes outside. Martin sees it through the window.

Martin calls Dawn on his phone when the door opens.

EDWARD PAYNE (45) AKA EDDIE, Martin's brother, stands with Nurse Sheila at the door. He wears a police uniform.

MARTIN

Hey Eddie! What're you doing here?

Built like a quarterback, Edward is the quintessential soccer dad. Today, he looks like the world is about to end.

MARTIN

Crappy weather, huh? Been raging outside for hours. Haven't seen lightning this bad in years.

Martin notices the glum look on Edward and nurse Sheila's faces.

MARTIN

What's wrong?

EDWARD

I... just got the weirdest call.

MARTIN

Ok.

EDWARD

It's about Dawn.

Martin freezes when he hears his wife's name.

EDWARD

She was driving through Lake Forest highway when she stopped to help a baby deer. She...

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)  
(voice breaks )  
... was struck by lightning.

Martin is stunned. A deathly silence haunts the room.  
Finally...

MARTIN  
Is she ok?

Edward tears up.

MARTIN  
The baby?

NURSE SHEILA  
I'm sorry, Doc.

Martin looks around the room, dazed.

MARTIN  
The fawn. How about her?

The room spins around him.

MARTIN  
Zoe. We need to check on Zoe. Her  
daughter's really worried.

The room whirls at a breakneck speed. Everything is a blur to  
Martin.

NURSE SHEILA  
Zoe's ok, Doc.

The room explodes into a bright light.

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A pregnant Dawn smiles at Martin. She closes the door and  
exits the house.

END FLASHBACK

INT. LAKE FOREST CHURCH - DAY (PRESENT)

THE PRIEST addresses Dawn's friends and family with a verse  
(Psalm-23) from the Bible.

PRIEST

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

Shock and disbelief plague Martin. The tearful faces that surround him don't register.

PRIEST

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Martin stares at an open casket in front of him.

PRIEST

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Dawn lies in the casket. She looks like she is sleeping. Her glow if anything has multiplied ten-fold.

PRIEST

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Martin touches Dawn's hand. Shock represses his grief.

EXT. LAKE FOREST CEMETERY - DAY

Dawn's casket is lowered into the ground. Edward helps Martin throw dirt into the grave. Nurse Sheila follows.

PRIEST

You want to say a few words, Martin?

Martin stares at the casket with dirt sprinkled all over.

EDWARD

Marty.

Martin doesn't hear Edward.

EDWARD  
May I, Father?

The priest nods solemnly.

EDWARD  
Thanks Father. I've known Dawn for sixteen years. She was... she is an exceptional soul. I'm not saying this because she was my brother's wife. She truly is the kindest person I've ever known. You know what she wanted for her sixteenth birthday? To be an organ donor. She had lost her best friend to kidney disease and she asked her parents to make her an organ donor.

Edward takes Martin's hands, comfortingly.

EDWARD  
When we lose someone we love, we're told they'll always be with us. It is so true in Dawn's case. She will stay with us through the people she loved, helped and saved by being an organ donor. And Beth. That baby... oh she would have been so happy if only she had been given the chance. She would have had the best parents in the world.

Emptiness haunts Martin's eyes.

EXT. LAKE FOREST HIGHWAY - DAY

Edward's truck drives through the open road. Trees line either side of the highway.

Martin stares at police tape sealing off a small portion of the road.

The truck exits the highway.

EXT. LAKE FOREST CITY - DAY

Traffic packs the suburban street. A far cry from the wooded highway they just left.

The city is the perfect mix of nature and metropolis.

Modern buildings line both sides of the street with ample room for gorgeous greenery.

EXT. EDWARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Sunset. Middle class neighborhood. Edward parks his truck in the driveway. Opens the door for Martin.

INT. EDWARD'S HOUSE - DAY

Edward's wife, CLARA PAYNE (42), hugs him. Clara is half the size of Edward. But, her fiery eyes say that she is the woman behind Edward's strength.

Edward's kids, JUDY PAYNE (6) and JOSH PAYNE (10) run to Martin. Their faces are smeared with donut jelly. Judy hands her donut to Martin.

Martin sees her innocent eyes. Something breaks inside. He exits quickly.

EXT. LAKE FOREST HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Martin pulls his car over to the shoulder, sealed off with tape.

Intricate feathering patterns adorn the concrete where lightning struck.

A mule deer stares at him. She looks like the mother of the fawn that Dawn helped.

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Martin's cell beeps.

A text from Edward, "Call me. The kids want to see you".

SUPER: "SIX MONTHS LATER"

The apartment is in shambles. All happiness from before has vanished. What is left is dust and emptiness.

A thick stubble desperately tries to hide Martin's pain. Martin pops a couple of aspirins from the counter. Gulps them down with tap water.

Martin plops onto the bed. Stares at the bleak, white ceiling.

A clock chimes as it moves from 5:59 to 6:00 am.

His cell beeps again. A text from Nurse Sheila, "U gotta listen to this". A voice note flashes on screen.

Martin plays the audio message.

TODDLER (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
Hi, I'm Beth.

Martin sits up.

A woman's voice sounds in the background.

LESLIE (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
Go on. Tell them what you like.

TODDLER (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
I like Nemo... and Dory. Um... bye.

The woman talks in the message.

LESLIE (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
Hi, I'm Leslie. That was my three-year-old, Beth. She's a bundle of joy. My life. I was terrified that I wouldn't see her grow up, play ball... see the world. Thanks to your wife, I can. I got her kidney just in time. It saved my life. Thank you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Martin plays the toddler's message again.

TODDLER (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
Hi, I'm Beth.

And again.

TODDLER (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
Hi, I'm Beth.

Martin grabs his car keys and exits the apartment.

EXT. NURSE SHEILA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Martin rings the bell.

Nurse Sheila opens the door. Hugs him warmly as soon as she sees him.

NURSE SHEILA

It's so good to see you, Doc. Come on in.

INT. NURSE SHEILA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Every piece of furniture in the room radiates serenity.

NURSE SHEILA

Want some tea?

Martin plays the audio note.

TODDLER (V.O.)

(in voice message)

Hi, I'm Beth.

NURSE SHEILA

You got my message. Isn't that something? What your brother said is so true. Your wife... she's still with us. This woman is living proof of that.

MARTIN

You saw her?

NURSE SHEILA

Leslie? No. My friend at UNOS texted me the audio.

MARTIN

Can you talk to your friend? Get me the photos of individuals who got Dawn's organs.

NURSE SHEILA

Why?

MARTIN

I want to see them.

NURSE SHEILA

I can't do that. I can't share their info without their consent.



MARTIN  
I won't contact them. I promise.

NURSE SHEILA  
It's unethical.

Martin plays the audio note again.

TODDLER (V.O.)  
(in voice message)  
Hi, I'm Beth.

MARTIN  
The kid. Her name's Beth. My baby's  
name was Beth.

NURSE SHEILA  
Doc...

MARTIN  
You know me. You can trust me. I'll  
not meet them. They'll never know.  
I just want to see their faces.  
(voice breaks)  
I want to see her. Please.

Nurse Sheila picks up her phone.

NURSE SHEILA  
Gimme some time.

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY

Ding! A message from Nurse Sheila pops up on a laptop.

Martin clicks it nervously.

Photos of organ recipients light up the screen.

-- Leslie Harper, kidney.

-- Melissa Bauer, cornea.

-- Keith Little, liver

-- Jack Pushkin, heart.

JACK PUSHKIN (58) is a tiny, frail man. He is dressed for an  
Arctic winter.

Every noise in the apartment fades.

All Martin hears are his own heartbeats. A calm fills his eyes.

EXT. LAKE FOREST CEMETERY - DAY (VISION)

Martin kneels down beside Dawn's grave. No words. Just silence as he stares at Dawn and Beth's names on the tombstone.

Tears appear in his eyes for the first time. A tear drop falls down his cheek.

When it touches the ground, it turns red -- it is blood. More blood drops onto the grave.

A pregnant Dawn stands before him. The blood drips from her hands. Her glassy eyes tremble in fear. She points to her left.

The cemetery morphs into...

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (VISION)

A room painted in white. Blood creeps through the white floor.

Jack Pushkin slumps against a white wall. His chest is soaked in blood. He gasps for air.

Dawn kneels beside Jack. Tries to stop the bleeding with her hands. She looks directly at Martin. Rasps...

DAWN

Help him.

INT. MARTIN'S CAR - DAY (VISION)

Martin fires up his car. He sweats bullets.

DAWN (V.O.)

Help him.

THE REARVIEW MIRROR

Shows a bloody image of Jack in the rear seat.

Martin brakes hard.

END VISION

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

Martin jolts awake. Sweat drips from his forehead. His eyes dart around the room.

His laptop still shows Jack's profile.

Martin's breathing settles down as the reality of his empty room sinks in.

Martin washes his face. Sinks into a chair in front of the laptop. Stares at Jack's photo, dazed.

Dawn's whisper echoes behind him.

DAWN (V.O.)

Help him.

Martin looks back petrified. His bathroom becomes...

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (VISION)

The white room where Jack bleeds to death.

A pregnant Dawn presses her hand against Jack's heart.

END VISION

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

Martin zooms Jack's photo on his laptop. Jack's phone number comes into focus.

Martin's hands shake as he punches the number on his cell.

JACK (V.O.)

(on phone)

Hello.

MARTIN

(on phone)

Mr. Pushkin?

JACK (V.O.)

(on phone)

Yes.

MARTIN

(on phone)

Jack Pushkin?

JACK (V.O.)  
(on phone)  
Who's this?

MARTIN  
(on phone)  
Are you ok?

JACK (V.O.)  
(on phone)  
Listen. I don't want your  
insurance. I don't want your  
warranties. I don't want anything  
that you're selling. So, stop--

Martin drops the phone.

INT. JACK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (VISION)

Jack suffocates. Dawn mutters something but her words drown  
in Jack's gasps.

As Jack slumps lifelessly, Dawn evaporates into thin air.

END VISION

INT. MARTIN'S HOUSE - DAY (PRESENT)

Martin sinks to the floor.

MARTIN  
Oh God! It's happening. It's  
happening again.