

TRANSCRIPT

Season 1 Episode 1: Close Encounters of the Colt Pixie Kind

Katherine Moore and Aiden Summers begin their first fieldwork case of the season: investigating the myth of the Colt Pixie in the New Forest, UK. Strange happenings, witchcraft, and unexpected phone calls.

Content Warnings:

Depiction of grief and loss, recreational alcohol use, and alcoholism.
Discussion of the death of a loved one, victim blaming, and police.
Mention of death, and becoming lost in the wilderness.

Cast:

Finn Cresswell as Aiden Summers
Alexandra M. Barrow as Katherine Moore
Dee Thorne as Mary Tallywell
Robyn B Pelling MSc as Lou
Eddie Chapman as Brian
Andrew Varndell as Albert Lockton
S. J. Monalith as Rowan

Written and produced by Finn Cresswell and Alexandra M. Barrow.

INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO

Stormy night: heavy rain, rustling of leaves, howling of distant wind.

AIDEN: Your legs ache after a long day of walking. Rain drips into your eyes, down the collar of your raincoat, your clothes cling to you, damp and cold. You pause for a moment, trying to get your bearings. Is that the same lonely oak from an hour ago, leaning wind-bent on a low hill? Have you not already passed that marshy mire? No. You're lost, alone on the moors. *[pause]* But there, a light, flickering in the distance, beckoning you to safety, maybe a torch, or the headlights of a distant car? You run towards this promise of safety, only to find yourself waist deep in clinging mud. Rapidly sinking. Another victim of the Will-o'the-Wisp.

Soft silence of The Wyrd Side recording room.

KATHERINE: Welcome. This week, we're looking into the Colt Pixie, a local variant of the Will-o'the-Wisp, a trickster spirit known for luring the unwary off the road and into danger. But, before we begin, we need to address some changes that we're making this season.

AIDEN: Yes, this entire season's focus is a little different from what we've produced in the past. Previously, we went over folklore and stories, delving deep into the myths and legends surrounding these various ghosts, goblins and ghouls.

KATHERINE: We'd offer some insight into how this folklore came about and any possible explanations. But, as we were researching these next few episodes, we came across some interesting information.

AIDEN: First hand sightings-

KATHERINE: -Alleged sightings.

AIDEN: Alleged sightings, as my co-host rightly pointed out, of mysterious lights and sounds. All focused around a sleepy village nestled deep in the heart of the New Forest, with a long history of paranormal activity.

KATHERINE: This was an unprecedented opportunity to bring you local stories that haven't previously been recorded. So, we're going to take you with us on our journey to find a British Legend. Welcome to The Wyrd Side,

AIDEN: I'm Aiden Summers -

KATHERINE: And I'm Katherine Moore. Join us as we investigate the paranormal side of the British Isles. Let's step out of the studio and into the wild.

THE WYRD SIDE MUSIC

EXT. BURLEY HIGH STREET - DAY

Small village centre, distant muted conversations, wind through the trees, occasional cars pass. Footsteps, rustle of waterproof jackets and backpacks

KATHERINE: We're in Burley, a small village near the centre of the New Forest national park in southern England.

AIDEN: It's a characterful collection of tudor cottages and small red brick houses. I can see a few thatched roofs here and there, and many of the trees surrounding the village are in full turn.

KATHERINE: It is beautiful in autumn. I've actually been here once before, but it was summer and there were crowds all over the place.

AIDEN: Makes sense, lots of tourists flock to Burley to visit the multiple shops that cater to the supernatural and spiritual.

KATHERINE: Case in point.

AIDEN: Yeah, it's a real hotbed for believers in the occult.

KATHERINE: Not that everyone's a believer, we've already seen several groups of hikers setting off from the main car park.

AIDEN: I wonder what the locals think of all the grockels coming around and tramping over hill and dale?

KATHERINE: Grockels?

AIDEN: Local word for tourists.

KATHERINE: Hm. I like it. Take a left up here.

AIDEN: Okay, we should be seeing the Scalded Cauldron round the next corner.

AIDEN: There it is. Pretty distinctive eh?

KATHERINE: It's something. Hard to miss.

Katherine and Aiden arrive outside The Scalded Cauldron.

AIDEN: I can't believe we're finally here. Look at those crystals!

KATHERINE: And for our listeners? Why are you so excited?

AIDEN: It's kind of like the Hard Rock Cafe for people like me. And, it's one of the oldest buildings in Burley, fourteenth century.

KATHERINE: I wouldn't be surprised if those beams are original. What about those broomsticks?

AIDEN: I don't think so. Though, knowing what I do about the owner, there is probably more than one that might actually fly. Mary's apparently quite the master of hosting seances and all things occult.

KATHERINE: Mhmm. Then let's meet her.

Katherine and Aiden enter The Scalded Cauldron, the bell jingles as they pass through the door. A low singing bowl is ringing out and New Age music is playing in the background.

INT. SCALDED CAULDRON - DAY

AIDEN: Oh. Look at those. *[walks over to table, footsteps fade]* I've never seen tarot cards done like that before.

KATHERINE: Aiden? *[Aside]* And he's off.

LOU: Sorry, can I squeeze by you.

KATHERINE: Of course. Oh. Do you know if Mary is in today?

LOU: Yeah. She's just over by the incense.

KATHERINE: Thanks. Uh...

LOU: Over there.

KATHERINE: Right. Thanks again.

Katherine moves across the shop.

KATHERINE: Hi, Ms Tallywell? I'm Katherine Moore.

MARY: Hello. How can I help? And it's Mary, darling, please.

KATHERINE: I emailed you on the fourth to see if we could come in and talk to you about your business and some local legends?

MARY: Oh yes, I remember. Lovely to put a face to a name. *[beat]* Did you not say you had a companion?

KATHERINE: I did. I lost him over there. Aiden?

MARY: Strange he got lost in the divination section.

KATHERINE: Sorry, let me just. Aiden?

AIDEN: Oh! Sorry! Just coming!

Aiden joins the group. Footsteps cross the wooden floor.

MARY: And what did you see in the cards?

AIDEN: I was just having a look, not doing a full reading or anything. They are such beautiful cards, I've never seen a wooden set before.

MARY: Those are a special set, hand carved from local alder trees. What card did you pull?

AIDEN: Oh. I didn't really... The five of wands.

MARY: Hmm.

KATHERINE: Am I OK to record?

MARY: Of course, please go ahead.

KATHERINE: Thanks. Why do you think Burley's such a hotspot for paranormal and occult activity?

MARY: Well, Burley is famous for her witches. Sybil Leek is probably the most renowned from the area, with her raven familiar, but there've always been legends of the New Forest Witches.

KATHERINE: Is that what makes this village so special?

MARY: In a way.

Pause.

AIDEN: Could you expand on that at all?

MARY: I don't think I can.

KATHERINE: Well how about your shop? How does it fit into all of this?

MARY: Ah, well. This shop represents both the continuation of ancient traditions and the celebration of modern perspectives in Burley. Those who want a souvenir can buy a bauble or two and those who want to explore their beliefs can find ways of doing so. Which one are you?

AIDEN: Oh, uh, I-

MARY: I know. I was asking her.

KATHERINE: Ah, um... Neither. I'm just here on business. But if I were one of your customers, what would I buy from your shop?

MARY: These charms are always popular with tourists and locals alike. Kids adore the little dragon statues and drawings over there. You know why we have those right? *The Dragon of Bisterne*?

AIDEN: Oh, the fifteenth century legend, apparently slain around here. Didn't it fly from Burley Beacon?

MARY: Indeed.

KATHERINE: And your practising customers. What would they buy?

MARY: They have a better idea of exactly what they're looking for and come in for specific items, like these candles. But we have pretty much anything occult that anyone would need.

AIDEN: Are those pine wood athames over there?

MARY: Yes, that's right. And those to their right are copper. You see, some like to work without the cold touch of iron.

AIDEN: Huh. I never thought of that. So have you found the lack of iron helps in communicating with spirits?

MARY: Those who attend my seances agree the messages are far clearer.

KATHERINE: Do you have many people searching out the paranormal in Burley?

MARY: There are a few now and then, but most locals tend to keep to themselves about that sort of thing. I'm happy to talk, of course, but many would rather that grockels, as they see them, didn't pry.

AIDEN: Understandable.

KATHERINE: We've recently received a report on alleged sightings of something resembling a Will-o'-the-Wisp up by the camping site near Holmsley.

MARY: You did mention that you were going to ask. Yes, I have heard the same from Albert.

AIDEN: Albert?

MARY: A long time resident of the village. He... reports sightings of this sort, and stranger, to the local paper. He'll be in the green pub up the road by now. It's past noon.

INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO

KATHERINE: After our conversation, Mary took Aiden through their selection of protective charms.

AIDEN: So, knowing we were going to be facing some strange encounters-

KATHERINE: Knowing?

AIDEN: Hoping?

KATHERINE: *[unconvinced]* Mm.

AIDEN: I wanted to be prepared and got us both a little charm pouch. A pinch of beech shavings, a small crystal or two. A talisman more than anything.

KATHERINE: Beech for any particular reason?

AIDEN: It symbolises strong friendship, and protection growing from that.

KATHERINE: Hm. Nice thought. Meanwhile, I stepped outside to get some air. *[leaning into the wordplay]* The incense was getting a bit... intense.

Aiden groans in mock pain.

KATHERINE: I decided to use the time to do a little investigating of my own.

EXT. BURLEY HIGH STREET - DAY

KATHERINE: Hi. Excuse me?

LOCAL: Aight.

KATHERINE: Are you local to the area?

LOCAL: Aye

KATHERINE: Could I ask you a couple of questions? I am recording for the Wyrd Side Podcast, and-

LOCAL: -The what?

KATHERINE: The Wyrd Side, with a y. We investigate local folklore.

LOCAL: Aight.

KATHERINE: Have you encountered anything strange in your time here?

LOCAL: Aye?

KATHERINE: Such as lights on the hills, or in the woods? Any unusual sounds? Have you seen anything here that you might describe as paranormal?

LOCAL: You from round here?

KATHERINE: No, I'm not.

LOCAL: Then you shouldn't be asking these sort of questions.

INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO

KATHERINE: It obviously wasn't a huge success.

AIDEN: Hmm, he didn't seem eager to chat. Though, you went straight for the paranormal angle.

KATHERINE: I was getting to the point.

AIDEN: Well at least we have Albert.

Recorder clicks off.

INT. GREEN PUB - DAY

The sound of a pub interior, empty, the distant clink of glasses and crackle of a fire. Low conversation of a couple of people.

AIDEN: This looks almost as old as Mary's shop.

KATHERINE: Ah no, much more recent.

AIDEN: Really?

KATHERINE: Early eighteenth century.

AIDEN: How can you tell...wait... Window frames?

KATHERINE: Nope.

AIDEN: The fireplace?

KATHERINE: The date above the door. Est. 1704.

AIDEN: Ah. Good eyes.

Aiden looks around the pub.

AIDEN: Oh actually, over by the fire. Do you think that could be Albert?

KATHERINE: Not too many others in here. I'll go grab us a drink, you make the introductions?

AIDEN: Sure thing.

Aiden walks over to Albert's table.

AIDEN: A good day for a fire.

ALBERT: Aye, there's a chill in the air. Won't be long before the first frost I reckon.

AIDEN: Glad I packed my warmest socks. Do you mind if we join you?

ALBERT: Well, there are free seats aren't there?

AIDEN: Thanks - are you Albert by any chance?

ALBERT: Yeah, who's asking?

AIDEN: I'm Aiden, nice to meet you.

ALBERT: Do take a seat and who's your girl?

Sound of scraping as Aiden sits down.

AIDEN: *[stammering]* Oh, no no, we're not, no, I mean we work together but we're not... I'm recording this for a podcast, is that ok?

ALBERT: Oh yeah? I listen to one about the footie, yeah that's fine.

AIDEN: Great.

Aiden places the recorder on the table between them.

ALBERT: So you know my name, you're here about a podcast. I'm guessing someone pointed you in my direction because you're after a tale. Mary?

AIDEN: Yep.

ALBERT: Ha. She knows I love a keen audience. So lad, what sort of story you after?

Before Aiden gets a chance to answer, Katherine rejoins group, scraping of chairs, clink of glasses being set down.

KATHERINE: That's your cider, my lemonade, and here's another pint of what you were drinking.

ALBERT: Cheers love. What's your name then? Your "friend" didn't get around to telling me it.

KATHERINE: Katherine Moore, nice to meet you. You must be Albert.

ALBERT: The very rogue. Cheers.

Clink of glasses.

AIDEN: Albert was about to tell us a story.

ALBERT: Yeah I sure was. Hmm. Let me think. *[Beat]* Oh. Did you ever hear of the Colt Pixie?

AIDEN: It's a type of Will-o'-the-Wisp isn't it?

ALBERT: Aye. Then you'll know that they are not to be messed with. So, I saw something strange the other week at night on the moors. Well. Let me start at the beginning. Out I was, a bit worse for wear, taking in the late summer night air. I was on one of my usual routes, getting my feet under me and my head the right way round. Out Holmsey way. When I saw a path that I'd never come across before. Now I'm a local, like my father was before me and his father was before him, and I've been wandering the forest for years now, I know the place like the back of my hand. This was entirely new! So being the brave man that I am...

Pauses, and takes a long drink.

ALBERT: I naturally went down it didn't I? And no sooner did I set foot off that main road, did I lose all sense of direction. But then... I realised that it was not my sense of direction that I'd lost - it was the road. It had disappeared. Stretching back behind me, was more of the same track, overgrown, wild-like. So, says I, I said I'd start forwards, and I'll continue forwards. I walked for nigh on three hours. I'd sobered up entirely by this point. Getting a bit worried you see, there are tales of folks disappearing into thin air around here.

KATHERINE: But you made it back.

ALBERT: Who's to say I'm not a ghost telling this story?

KATHERINE: Says that pint of bitter you've just drunk.

ALBERT: Aye, well, that's a fair cop. Any chance of another?

AIDEN: Same again, coming right up.

Aiden scrapes back his chair and walks over to the bar.

KATHERINE: So you know Mary quite well then?

ALBERT: We grew up together here, I still remember chasing her around the maypole fifty years back.

KATHERINE: Right... Well. As a local, someone who knows their way around the place, where do you stand on Burley's occult reputation?

ALBERT: We have a reputation now? Well, I should hope so, I've reported enough strange happenings. Especially with what went on ten years ago and all.

KATHERINE: What happened ten years ago?

ALBERT: The Colt Pixie.

KATHERINE: A disappearance?

ALBERT: Three deaths.

Aiden comes back from the bar with a pint

KATHERINE: Here in the New Forest?

ALBERT: Thanks lad.

AIDEN: No worries.

Albert takes another long drink.

KATHERINE: What happened? Was this also around the Holmsey area?

ALBERT: Now I've wet my whistle, where was I? Ah. Lost, and quite alone in the middle of a fairy path. And then.

Albert slaps the table.

ALBERT: My foot gets proper stuck in some bog. I thought I was a dead man. Then I remembered my manners, and asked: "Please, can I go home?". That probably saved my life as a few moments later, I saw something. It's always a good idea to stay polite around the

pixies, they're mindful of that stuff. I saw a light. Some ways off, in the distance. It seemed to blink on and off. It was calling me like a moth to a flame. So, I got my foot unstuck, and headed back up towards the light. I trusted them to show me the right path. Either side of me the ground was boggy, but up ahead on a little hillock I could see a shape. Like a little shaggy pony. That was the Colt Pixie you see, he'd taken pity on poor old Albert. He led me right back to the main road. But when I got there, he weren't. Just a few bays and a little chestnut foal cropping on the verge.

AIDEN: Good thing you got out.

KATHERINE: But you mentioned that some other people died?

ALBERT: Ah yes, some grockel kids, down from London-way, a few years ago. Disappeared on a hike and turned up... dead. Fell afoul of the pixies.

AIDEN: Did anyone make it back?

KATHERINE: How did they die?

ALBERT: Yeah poor Rowan, I think their name was. They stumbled in, delirious, rambling about a sudden fog and about their phone. Couldn't tell you exactly. It's been too long and too many pints.

Albert takes a long, pensieve drink.

ALBERT: But I tell you what, folk say they also saw lights.

BRIAN: Can I get you another drink Albert?

ALBERT: *[change of tone, withdrawn, clamming up]* Ah no thanks, I'm alright. I should be heading off.

KATHERINE: Not before you tell us more...

ALBERT: Oh, well I can't really remember much more than that... Aye I've got to get going. The footy and all that. Cheers for the pints.

AIDEN: Wait-

Albert stands up. Chair scrapes and footsteps fade. Recorder clicks off.

INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO

AIDEN: Albert left immediately after what you just heard. I'm not sure what we said to scare him off.

KATHERINE: He finished his story. Said all he wanted to say.

AIDEN: Hmm. And it was an intriguing one. Did you have any thoughts on his Colt Pixie encounter?

KATHERINE: It's an interesting first-hand testimony. But we only have his word to go on.

AIDEN: He did mention that he'd reported these sightings to the local paper a few times. On one hand, that is a high concentration of sightings and encounters, on the other, if they are all from one person...

KATHERINE: Yes. That is an issue.

AIDEN: Unfortunately.

KATHERINE: Now, terms like Colt Pixie and Will-o'the-Wisp have been brought up throughout the episode. We should provide some context.

AIDEN: Well, it's fingers and thumbs.

KATHERINE: *[confused]* Sorry?

AIDEN: All thumbs are fingers, not all fingers are thumbs.

KATHERINE: That's an odd way of putting it.

AIDEN: The Colt Pixie is a Will-o'the-Wisp, not all Will-o'the-Wisps are Colt Pixies.

KATHERINE: It's a local variant of a global phenomenon. Reported in the south and south west of the UK.

AIDEN: Unlike a lot of other Will-o'the-Wisps, instead of merely being floating lights in the dark, it takes the form of a pale shaggy horse that fits in well with the hardy ponies that roam the New Forest.

KATHERINE: So Albert's description matches up.

AIDEN: Almost exactly.

KATHERINE: Where's that etching you found?

AIDEN: I've printed a copy off. It's in my bag, uh, give me a sec.

Aiden stands up and moves over to his bag, unzips it.

KATHERINE: Victorian right?

AIDEN: *[As he takes out the folder from his bag]* Yeah, they were really into the occult. Ah, okay.

Aiden returns to his seat. He's sitting on the kitchen chair this time, it scrapes on the floor.

AIDEN: There we go, one depiction of a faerie horse luring a poor traveller off the road and into trouble.

KATHERINE: Trouble being the marsh he's about to drown in.

AIDEN: A common ploy by Will-o'the-Wisps the world over.

KATHERINE: Except apparently for Albert's encounter.

AIDEN: Oh?

KATHERINE: The Colt Pixie led him to safety, not further into the marsh. Counter to their MO.

AIDEN: That is true. But that's not entirely unheard of in these sorts of stories. Will-o'the-Wisps are capricious, sometimes, if the victim is polite, then they'll help rather than hinder.

KATHERINE: And Albert did tell us to be polite.

AIDEN: Mhmm.

KATHERINE: In any case, while there's no evidence for these spirits existing, we can't understate the importance of these stories to the communities that created them. How do you keep vulnerable people safe? You create stories that people will remember, stories they'll respect. Like Jenny Greenteeth and water hags being used to keep children away from dangerous stretches of water.

AIDEN: *[interrupting]* Let's not get sidetracked into those too much. Okay. Do what you do best, take us through other explanations. How can we rationalise a glowing pony luring travellers off the road?

KATHERINE: I'll start with the Will-o'the-Wisp. Depending on the circumstances there's a variety of natural phenomena that could explain these sightings. For example, bioluminescence, or the oxidation of certain compounds that offput light.

AIDEN: If you were alone at night, encountering a strange glow, you could see it as a paranormal being.

KATHERINE: Exactly. Well, nowadays, we might not. We're less likely to be lured away by strange lights, if we even looked up from the bright screens designed to hold our attention. Now onto the thumb.

AIDEN: Go on.

KATHERINE: I've got two theories. One. The New Forest coast has historic ties to smuggling - and they'd often use a system of lights to signal to co-conspirators on the coast. An

untrained observer could have seen these floating lights amongst the many herds of ponies, and conflated the two.

AIDEN: It only takes one sighting to spark a myth. And your other theory?

KATHERINE: It's a pony. Nothing more. Nothing less.

AIDEN: The first one's more compelling. Some of the place names down in the New Forest call back to that history, it seems these links aren't easily forgotten.

KATHERINE: It's clear the New Forest's proud of its history and its folklore, and I'm sure we'll have listeners write in with their own stories of other variations of the Will-o'the-Wisp myth.

AIDEN: Agreed, we'd love to hear about any regional folklore, whether you're in the UK, or abroad. Now, there's one thing we haven't touched on yet.

KATHERINE: The deaths.

AIDEN: Mhmm. Our next step is to find out a little more about the event Albert mentioned and maybe contact this Rowan if we can.

KATHERINE: Leave it with me. I'll do some digging.

INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO

AIDEN: We tracked down Rowan, the only survivor of what's been called the Moors Tragedy, which happened 10 years ago.

KATHERINE: They agreed to talk to us about their experiences and what they remember about the ordeal.

AIDEN: They're now living on the edge of the South Downs, west of London. So, on a slightly drizzly Thursday afternoon, we went to have a chat.

EXT. OUTSIDE ROWAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Crunch of feet on gravel. Doorbell chimes. Sound of a large dog pressing up against the door. Excited barks.

ROWAN: *[From behind the door]* Hey. Back. Sit.

More excited panting from the dog.

ROWAN: *[From behind the door]* Leo. Sit. Sit boy.

Rowan holds Leo back as they unlock and open the door.

ROWAN: Sorry about that.

KATHERINE: Hi, Rowan?

ROWAN: Yup, that's me.

KATHERINE: I'm Katherine Moore, and this is my colleague Aiden.

AIDEN: Hi.

ROWAN: Oh, hi. You're right on time.

AIDEN: Is that alright? Is now a good time?

ROWAN: You're good. Just give me a second to put this one out the back. Please, come in.

INT. ROWAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Rowan leads Katherine and Aiden through the house to the kitchen, and takes Leo outside.

ROWAN: *[Returning]* That's him sorted for the next few minutes.

AIDEN: How old is he?

ROWAN: About 15 months. It's very full on. Can I get you a cup of tea? I've just put the kettle on.

KATHERINE: Yes thanks, just milk for me.

AIDEN: Milk and one sugar for mine please.

ROWAN: Sure thing.

Rowan bustles around the kitchen, kettle put on, chairs scrape as they take a seat.

AIDEN: Thank you for agreeing to talk to us. We're aware that this must be difficult conversation to have, so do let us know if you need time or want to take a break, please don't hesitate.

ROWAN: Yeah, thanks. *[pause]* I'll admit, when you first got in touch, I was dead set on ignoring your message.

AIDEN: What changed your mind?

ROWAN: Time.

AIDEN: Oh?

ROWAN: I just got thinking. After the police investigation closed with no leads, it just got swept under the rug. I never had the chance to process it. Not really.

AIDEN: I'm sorry to hear that. It's difficult to have something in your life that you can't move on from. I hope... I hope this can help to give you some closure.

ROWAN: I hope so too.

They have a moment. Rowan takes a sip of tea.

ROWAN: I'm not quite sure where to start if I'm honest.

KATHERINE: Why don't you start with your friends? Can you tell us about them?

ROWAN: There were four of us; James, Francis, Rebecca and well... me.

KATHERINE: How did you know them?

ROWAN: School. Back in Surrey. I can't remember the exact moment we started hanging out, but we'd wander around the village on weekends, bunk off PE every so often, you know. Pretty typical small village kids.

AIDEN: Would you like to tell us a bit about them?

ROWAN: Sure, they... *[Rowan takes a moment to gather themselves]* Oh. I just haven't thought about them in so long. It might be good to remember them properly.

AIDEN: You don't have to tell us any more than you want to. We can stop anytime.

ROWAN: I'm okay. It's just been a while, you know? *[pause]* James was... really easy going, always up for a laugh. He lived on the same street as me so we were real tight. I'm pretty sure he considered himself the leader of the group, and he was one of its main troublemakers. Becca. Becca was sweet, really short. She always remembered special occasions and went out of her way to help. Her and James dated for a little while, but it didn't work out. We were still solid despite that. Francis joined our school a year or two after everyone else. He was the youngest of the bunch, but he always knew a guy. If we wanted anything, like a fake ID or the latest gossip, he knew who to talk to. Anyway.

AIDEN: They sound like quite the friends.

ROWAN: I couldn't have asked for any better.

AIDEN: And why the New Forest?

ROWAN: It was our last summer together, before we all moved away to different unis and possibly lost contact. I was just getting into hiking and wanted a change of scenery, so I convinced the group to join me. We took the train down to Lymington and the plan was to hike up across the New Forest to Salisbury. It should only have taken a couple of days, and Francis' dad had agreed to come and pick us up at the end.

A pause as Leo starts barking at a rogue squirrel encroaching onto his territory.

AIDEN: What was the start of your journey like?

ROWAN: We came down on a morning train from our local station, James had to sneak out of his window because he hadn't told his parents we were going. That or he'd been grounded again.

AIDEN: Do you remember much about the walk to Burley?

ROWAN: I remember we stayed up way too late the night before, we almost missed our train down. That first day we stopped off in Brockenhurst at a really quaint BnB. Hang on, I dug out a photo of us.

Rowan rummages in a file, moving papers and eventually slides out an old polaroid. Shuffle of a kitchen chair on wood as Aiden scooches closer to take a look.

ROWAN: Yeah. I rocked the whole shaved head look back then.

AIDEN: It looks like you're all really happy there.

ROWAN: We were. We took this before we set off across the forest to Burley. Francis had realised his trainers were not suited to this amount of walking and was complaining with almost every step. I wish we had turned around and fixed that, he might still be here.

AIDEN: You couldn't have known. You were just kids.

ROWAN: Yeah... Yeah, I know.

KATHERINE: Did any of the others have issues with the hike?

ROWAN: No, everyone else was okay, as far as I could tell.

KATHERINE: And you? You mentioned you were fairly new to hiking.

ROWAN: Yeah, I did my D of E awards the previous couple of summers - hiking, orienteering, basic camping skills - and was really eager to it show off. For once, James didn't mind me taking the lead. He was pretty focused on getting drunk and ignoring the fact that he didn't get into Bristol Uni. Oh, yeah, that's why he snuck out. Keen to escape the parents.

AIDEN: Was there a specific route you were following?

ROWAN: Yeah, I'd planned out most of it. But we walked at a slower pace than I had planned for, so we reached Burley at about two in the afternoon. We went to the pub. Spent a good few hours in there nursing pints of shandy, and our blisters. I don't think the locals were too pleased to have four kids crashing their party.

KATHERINE: But you still had a few miles to walk that day?

ROWAN: Yeah, down Smuggler's Road and into Ringwood. But we needed a break.

KATHERINE: The report mentions that the weather took a turn for the worse on that second day.

ROWAN: When we set out it was clear. No forecast of any sort of bad weather. We sat down for a quick break on a hill about a mile in, and before we knew it this really thick fog came rolling in.

KATHERINE: Did that catch you off guard?

ROWAN: Very much so. The police said afterwards that the sea fog rises pretty quickly along the coast, and around the rivers. It was bizarre, almost like a watercourse itself, pooling in hollows and dips all around us. Surrounding us.

KATHERINE: It's not too uncommon down by the coast, but you were miles inland.

ROWAN: Yeah, it was creepy. A tide of white that just swallowed everything it touched. It was... well, it was horrible.

AIDEN: Hmm. And did you feel anything unusual when you were in the fog?

ROWAN: Not at first. But something weird did happen, Francis was checking his messages and all of a sudden, the signal dropped out. We hadn't moved from the hill, no change in wind or anything. And I know a lack of signal's not unusual when you're out in the countryside, but then, his phone died. And James' phone did the exact same thing thirty seconds later. *[beat]* It was getting pretty cold and miserable, so rather than struggle on, we decided to backtrack and wait it out.

KATHERINE: A sensible decision.

ROWAN: Didn't help us in the end. I had my map saved offline, so I knew where we were and we hadn't moved, so it should have been simple to get back to Burley. But when we set off again, I'm not sure. Everything was... so quiet, so lifeless. Not even the birds were out in the fog. There was nothing.

A pause.

AIDEN: Are you okay to continue?

ROWAN: Yeah. I'm okay. I want to finish the story. You were asking about the unusual. Well, we heard a phone ringing. Out in the fog. I couldn't tell where it was coming from at first. We ignored it. Then, it rang again. And closer this time. I know you shouldn't leave the path. But there might have been someone out there, they could have also been lost. The others were pretty freaked out, but I convinced them we needed to help.

AIDEN: You were trying to help, that was incredibly brave of you.

ROWAN: I didn't feel brave. I still couldn't work out where it was coming from, but then, I saw the light. Not too far from the path.

KATHERINE: Did you find anything?

ROWAN: A phone. Lying there on the bank. I remember that the screen was lit up and as we reached it, it stopped ringing. We couldn't see anyone else, so James picked the phone up

and made some stupid joke about how someone must be rich to leave the latest gen phone behind. There wasn't even a password.

Pause.

ROWAN: Then, my phone died. I'd been using it as a compass, and for the map, but I should have still had plenty of battery.

KATHERINE: Could it have been the cold? It would drain more quickly than normal.

ROWAN: I was looking right at it when it happened. Sixty to zero in two seconds. I asked Becca for hers, but when she took it out of her bag it wouldn't turn on. And with that we lost any hope of getting back to the path.

AIDEN: I can only imagine how scary that must have been.

ROWAN: I don't think we realised right then how bad it had gotten. I was trying to remember what my orienteering instructor had said, but all I could think of was navigating by the North Star, which obviously wouldn't have worked. I was drawing a blank. James was messing around with the phone we'd found, flicking through the open apps, when he realised there was not only a map open, but it had signal. I asked him to call for help, but he refused. When I tried to grab it, he pushed me over, saying that he'd take over and get us out of this mess. He shouted for us to follow him, before running off. Becca followed. I yelled after them, but they were already swallowed by the fog. That was the last time I saw those two alive.

KATHERINE: And Francis?

ROWAN: He'd stayed to help me up. He couldn't have run after them anyways, his blisters hurt too badly. We stuck together for the next hour or so. He was so scared. I tried to keep a level head, but fear's really infectious. There was no plan, or any actual way to get out of this situation. We had to keep pushing forwards, to try and find James and Becca before... well... I guess I felt responsible for them, for having brought them out here. When I heard another noise over to the right in the mist, I thought it could have been them. Maybe we'd all somehow wandered in the same direction? But it wasn't them. It was another phone, ringing, in the distance. It sounded off. Something about the reverb, it all sounded hollow. I had my hand on Francis' arm, so we didn't get separated. But, as I turned around, I... I let go. *[beat]* When I looked back for Francis I couldn't see him, couldn't hear him. It was like he just vanished. I yelled, I shouted, tried to look for footprints, retrace our steps, he couldn't have got far. I only took my eyes off him for a second. But there was nothing. Just me, alone. In the fog.

Long pause.

KATHERINE: How long did you look for your friends?

ROWAN: If I'm entirely honest, I'm not sure you could call it looking. How could I look for them when I had no clue where I was, let alone where anyone else could be? It was a

miracle I ended up back near Burley, where I literally ran into a local walker. Albert I think his name was.

AIDEN: Albert?

ROWAN: Yeah. He was so kind. He calmed me down and called the police. Then, stayed with me on the edge of that fog for nearly an hour, calling the names of my friends. Nothing answered.

KATHERINE: And the police? What did they do?

ROWAN: Absolutely nothing, they gave me an emergency blanket, told me to calm down and then... Well, you read the reports. They found my friends. Dead. Identifying them was the hardest thing I have ever had to do. They even pinned it on us being stupid kids.

KATHERINE: In my experience, they tend to go for the easy answer. And it's easy to blame these things on kids not being prepared.

ROWAN: Yeah, this was a hike where you were no more than an hour or so from a road at any point. How can you be prepared for phones dying out of nowhere, fog springing up with no warning? How can anyone be prepared for such a strange situation?

INT. THE WYRD SIDE RECORDING STUDIO

KATHERINE: Thoughts on Rowan's experiences?

AIDEN: It was really brave of them to discuss it with us so openly. It can't have been easy, especially with the media scrutiny at the time.

KATHERINE: Agreed.

AIDEN: I think it's also important to mention that Rowan was the victim of a tragic accident.

KATHERINE: The deaths were ruled as non suspicious, the victims died from exposure. Aiden, do we have a story here? What happened ten years ago was tragic, and incredibly traumatic for Rowan. But they didn't see a Colt Pixie. Just a phone in the fog.

AIDEN: Whilst that is true, there are some links.

KATHERINE: Such as?

AIDEN: The group being lured off the path by lights.

KATHERINE: Eh, was it the light or the sound that drew them off the path?

AIDEN: Isn't that just semantics at this point? They still left the path and headed into danger.

KATHERINE: Yes, granted. Although no phone was ever recovered, so we have no leads there. Is this something we want to get involved with?

AIDEN: I think there's a thread here. Albert seems more connected to this than he let on at first.

KATHERINE: We should have another conversation with him.

AIDEN: If he'll talk to us again. But, whilst there was no obvious Colt Pixie in Rowan's experience, there are enough possible paranormal events throughout to warrant a closer look. If it isn't the Colt Pixie, what else could be lurking out there?

KATHERINE: Okay. That's an angle. What if we retrace Rowan's hiking route from that day? Check if they passed through any supposedly paranormal areas, perhaps figure out if anything links it with the Holmsley sightings?

AIDEN: Sounds like a plan. Before we go I want to pick up an extra portable charger for our phones. Just in case anything weird happens.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF BURLEY - DAY

AIDEN: We left Burley an hour ago. The weather is mild for the time of year, albeit slightly overcast. We checked multiple forecasts and are not expecting any bad weather.

KATHERINE: We've come prepared with both offline and good old fashioned paper maps. Extra chargers, lots of layers, backup recording equipment, the lot. If a Colt Pixie so much as snorts, we'll be there to record it.

AIDEN: We'll be following Rowan's route as exactly as we can. First to the north, across Castle Hill and then into the scrubby hills of the New Forest. Okay.

Birdsong is fading to the background, borderline not in the soundscape.

AIDEN: We didn't have any luck finding Albert today, he wasn't in the green pub and Mary didn't know where we had gone off to.

KATHERINE: I'm sure we'll buy him another pint soon. You did some reading on Castle Hill last night didn't you?

AIDEN: Yeah! The local Iron Age Hillfort we are headed to.

Pause, where Kitty waits for Aiden to expand and he doesn't, he's busy checking the map for the right path.

KATHERINE: So...?

AIDEN: Oh! Unfortunately, there haven't been any excavations, but there are some spectacular views. It's pretty remarkable that it has mostly survived intact, the bank is still really steep.

KATHERINE: Wasn't there a sighting?

AIDEN: There was one third-hand story about a civil war ghost, but even I took that one with a pinch of salt.

KATHERINE: Hm. So nothing.

AIDEN: Nothing.

KATHERINE: Take a right here?

AIDEN: Yup. That's the one.

Quick jogging across tarmac and road surface, hiking gear jingling, turning to mud underfoot, squelching and sucking at their feet. Birdsong has faded almost to nothing. Slowly more and more sounds of nature get plucked out of the soundscape, no wind, no rustle of trees, only the movement of the two remains constant.

AIDEN: Gah, watch out there.

KATHERINE: Thanks.

AIDEN: We should be seeing the summit any time now. There's an ordnance survey marker up here somewhere. Keep an eye out. *[to himself]* We must be on the leeward side of the hill.

KATHERINE: What?

AIDEN: Barely any wind.

KATHERINE: Hmm. There's the marker.

AIDEN: Great! We're still on track. We just need to cross the hillfort and then we'll be in more open ground.

KATHERINE: So. What are we looking for here? Colt Pixie evidence or other paranormal activity?

AIDEN: A little bit of both I guess.

KATHERINE: Is that not going to confuse people? If we suddenly change tack halfway through an investigation?

AIDEN: Well, not everything can be neatly tied up and answered every time we investigate.

KATHERINE: Shame that. I'd be happy if we tied up even just one thread!

AIDEN: Well, one way or another, we'll end up answering some questions by the end of this.

KATHERINE: I guess we'll muddle through.

Aiden snorts. A moment of silence as the pair continue their trek, shoes crunching scrubby grass and thick mud. At this stage there is no birdsong.

AIDEN: Kitty...?

KATHERINE: Yes?

AIDEN: When did the birdsong stop?

THE WYRD SIDE MUSIC

The Wyrd Side will return. If you enjoyed the programme, please help support the podcast by giving us a follow on social media @thewyrdside on Twitter and Instagram, leaving a review on Spotify or wherever you are listening to this, and sharing it with anyone who might enjoy it! As a small production, this really helps us out.

Thank you all for listening.