

Burgundian

by
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EXT. CITY SKYLINE - DUSK

Roseate sunlight hangs heavily behind a stretching patchwork of dark clouds across a city sky.

INT. APARTMENT - DUSK

TIGHT ON A DOOR

opening and someone, A WOMAN, walks in. All we see are the door and her dirty hands.

*NELL (V.O.)
Mom always used to give me shit.*

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

THE WOMAN'S DIRTY HANDS

at the sink. Her fingers calmly rub together under running water, scrubbing themselves clean of grime.

*NELL (V.O.)
... When I was a kid and I'd lose a coat or forget a book at school, and every time I left a doll at Daddy's restaurant, she used to bitch at me and say, like a lotta mothers probably, that I'd lose my head if it wasn't stuck to the rest of my body.*

THE WOMAN is NELL(20s)

standing at the sink, looking up reprovngly towards her reflection in the mirror. She is beautiful, with the subtle facial lines of a chain smoker. Her long blonde hair a fevered pitch of golden lustre.

*NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
... That was her favorite line.*

We close in on her amber eyes-- eyes eluding to the knowledge of something dark, painful, impure... perhaps, a secret unknown, even to herself.

*NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
... And sometimes I'd cross my arms and retort that I bet I will lose my mind one day, and won't we all be sorry when I do... and I'd act like I didn't care.*

From her reflection, she notices a spattering of dark red flecks staining the collar of her white T-shirt and red patch of it just under her chin.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nell pulls on a clean, burgundy T-shirt. The change of clothes provides a sense of relief. The red stains under her chin have been wiped clean.

*NELL (V.O.)
... These days, though, the more I
think about... things I've done.*

She takes a deep breath.

*NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
... I think we both might've been
right.*

CUT TO BLACK:

TITLE CARD IN BIG WHITE FONT: **BURGUNDIAN**

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Stark white walls illumined by pools of orange duskligh spilling through white linen curtains over high windows. The room is quiet, with an Art Deco, minimalist vibe-- the furniture, paintings, the walls too-- their lines molding form with force and purpose. We hear the TICKING of a clock somewhere nearby.

A BROWNING TULIP
droops low from inside a waterless vase.

BOOKS AND MAGAZINES
scattered everywhere. Flannery O'Connor and Truman Capote among the authors. It's heavy on Southern Gothic.

A COMPUTER MONITOR
shows an open picture of an it's-so-ugly-it's-cute Chocolate Pitbull. We hear TYPING NOISES. Watching the monitor is:

NELL
biting her lips, concentrating on the image ahead.

HER FINGER
clicks a computer mouse.

A PRINTER
shoots off paper after paper into a stack of what must be
hundreds of copies-- flyers.

THE STACK OF FLYERS
getting neatly shuffled together in perfect alignment.

A SINGLE FLYER
headlined: "**LOST DOG**"-- with the picture of the Pitbull thumb-
tacked underneath to a bare wall.

A beat. Then an identical flyer is thumb-tacked right next to
the first.

THE FLYERS MATCH CUT ON NELL'S EYES
examining the flyers and she fires up a cigarette. She takes
a long drag.

CUT TO:

NELL
sits on an enormous leather couch. A neat, four inch STACK of
"LOST DOG" flyers rest on a sleek coffee table in front of
her. She relieves the chamber of smoke in her lungs, looking
out the window. She bites her nails too-- an old habit.

THE DOOR LATCH
of the front door lock lets out.

Nell's caught off guard. She wants to ash her cigarette. No
ashtray. Her only recognition is to put it out into a nearby
cereal bowl.

Entering the apartment is JAMIE(30's). Tall. His rugged
facial features contrast a cultivated look of slacks, shirt
and tie. He ambles into the living room, limping, steadying
himself on the back of a chair when he notices:

The twin "Lost Dog" flyers on the wall. But that's not as
important as what he SNIFFS... and sniffs again. He grows
irritated.

Jamie limps to the window, brushing passed Nell. He slides
the window open. Hard.

NELL
(under her breath)
... Sorry...
(looking at Jamie's leg)
... What happ--

JAMIE
Twisted my ankle at work.

Jamie regards her. His countenance confused and irritated. An awkward silence ensues. He throws his coat over another chair.

JAMIE (cont'd)
... So, Bernie's missing?

A beat before -

NELL
I don't know.

Jamie studies Nell's affect.

JAMIE
My god. You're being serious?

He regards the stack of flyers.

JAMIE (cont'd)
And what are you doing? You're just spending time firing off fuckin' flyers? Instead of looking for him? Are you being serious?

Nell's fingers running through her hair. Her emotions overcoming, her eyes watering.

NELL (V.O.)
... When did we stray from sweet intoxication to tragedy, you and I?

JAMIE
(zero sympathy)
Where the fuck is my dog, Nell?

Jamie steps towards her and-- TWEAKS-- his ankle. He winces in pain. Nell's own anger gaining some momentum.

NELL
Excuse me? Bernie's my dog too.

JAMIE
(angrier, in pain)
Where the fuck is my dog, Nell!?
Why are there posters tacked into the fucking wall, Nell!?

NELL
 We bought him together. He's our
 dog. Okay?

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 ... Do I burden you with too much
 of me?

JAMIE
 Where the hell is he!

NELL
 (vexed)
 I don't know, Jamie! I lost him!
 He's just gone!

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 ... Do I need you too much?

Jamie points to the two hung flyers.

JAMIE
 So your plan is to alert everyone
 in the apartment? Is it clicking
 how fucking stupid that is? This
 isn't what a normal person does.

NELL
 ... After I made the flyers, I just
 knew that... I don't know, that
 they weren't gonna do any good, but-

Nell breaks down crying.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 ... I never meant to become so
 useless and unattractive to you...

Jamie is beside himself. Does he fight her or console her? He
 limps to get his coat, but the ankle's hurting.

JAMIE
 (in pain)
 Goddamnit...

NELL
 You shouldn't go out with an injur--

JAMIE
 Shuddap!

Jamie takes a breath. Calms himself.

JAMIE (cont'd)
 ... Where did you see him last?

NELL
 Over at Cafe Luna's. I left him for
 a moment when I went in...

JAMIE
 (condescending)
 Okay?... So... did you tie him up
 this time or -

NELL
 Yes! I tied him up! Someone must've
 taken him!

JAMIE
 Right... Someone took him...

He thinks about it some more.

NELL (V.O.)
... I admit, the self-loathing can
be a real bitch, and you know I'm
prone to these selfish, boo-hoo
cycles and... I think this one's
gotten really bad...

JAMIE (CONT'D)
 ...I'm just saying because that one
 time you thought you looped the
 leash through, and you didn't do it
 right, so he was just standing
 there and could have--

NELL
 That was two years ago... Or
 more... Jesus, if I said I tied him
 up, why is that not good enough?!

JAMIE
 Because it's not unlike you, and
 because your memory's often
 viciously selective.

A beat. Nell takes offense to this.

NELL (V.O.)
... Do you see this darkness in me?

She instinctively grabs for cigarettes.

NELL (cont'd)
Turn on me in a heartbeat.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
... Does it show on my face?

She pulls a smoke out.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
... Does is it even matter to you?

JAMIE
There it is. And Nell gets to be
the victim again.

She sets it between her lips.

JAMIE (cont'd)
And I'm the horrible, accusatory
big bad wolf-- You're actually
gonna light that shit in front of
me?

With spite in her eyes, Nell fires up the end of a Camel
Light.

NELL
Here's how, dribble dick...

Before she can pull another drag out, Jamie pinches the
cherry between his finger, yanks it out of her mouth and
FLINGS the cigarette out the open window...

JAMIE
I'm not dealing with your shit
anymore.

He takes out a cell phone.

JAMIE (cont'd)
So, I'll call the police and figure
it out like always.

NELL
You don't call the police, you call
Animal Protection and they've been
called. I've already been out, and
I have Lisa and her new roommate
AND Dina out looking for him.
Everybody's keeping an eye out.

JAMIE

Except for you... What did Animal Protection say?

NELL

Not much. He said they're sorta understaffed at the moment, so I grabbed the fucking bull and asked if any positions were open, because I thought, ya know, I'm good with animals. I'm usually really good with animals. So he gave me his email, and I'm gonna send over a resume and cover letter.

JAMIE

Fabulous. What did they say about my dog?

NELL

He's not just yours.

JAMIE

And what are you doing now? Sitting there.

A beat... Nell's cheeks flushing with anger.

NELL

... I was waiting for y--

JAMIE

Shut up...

He picks up the phone and dials. We hear RINGS.

JAMIE (cont'd)

Why even try and find work? Between your jobs and now Bernie, all you seem to be good at doing is losing shit.

Nell, nervously running her fingers through her hair. Her eyes racing.

An indistinct VOICE answers on the other end of Jamie's phone.

JAMIE (cont'd)

(to the phone)

Hi. I'm following up on a report of a missing dog--

Nell can't control it anymore. Her fists clench and she charges at Jamie, attacking him. She HITS HIM VIOLENTLY-- One blow after the other.

NELL

You asshole! I've been trying! I did a lot! I've been looking for him! I spent my entire day looking for him! You never believe me!... I fucking hate you!

Jamie fends her off. Holding down her flailing arms. His crippled ankle making it difficult. She breaks his hold, ruthlessly hitting him, increasing in intensity.

JAMIE

Stop! Nell, stop!... Stop it!

Jamie puts his arms up, blocking blows, holding back.

NELL

I hate you, fucker! You can't control me--

CRACK - He slaps her hard. She stumbles back-- shocked. Both are in unfamiliar territory. She took it there. He took it further.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

... Once upon a time, you wanted me to feel better...

They back into opposite walls of the room, staring back at one another. Nell slowly slides against the wall to the ground, her tears flowing.

Jamie holds a conciliatory hand out. Winded.

JAMIE

We... I'm sorry. I...

NELL (V.O.)

... But every passing day finds you caring less...

A wave of heavy remorse on Jamie's face. He's unsure what to do with his hands. He sturdies himself against the wall-- TWEAKING his ankle again in the process..

JAMIE

(in pain)
Shit.

A beat. Nell's cell phone BUZZES. She wipes her tears away and checks it. A text message from *Dina* says: ***Hey! Drinks @ the Hive. Where hv u bn lately?***

NELL
 (reading the phone)
 Text from Dina...
 (looking up)
 ... Still looking.

Both of them searching into the other's eyes. Nell's stare steady. Jamie's wavering, looking down, around. A long beat.

NELL (cont'd)
 ... What's happening, Jamie?

JAMIE
 I don't know... I just...

NELL (V.O.)
 ... *Each day you look at me less...*

NELL (cont'd)
 What?

JAMIE
 I don't know...

NELL (V.O.)
 ... *speak to me less...*

NELL (cont'd)
 I love Bernie so much. Why do you think I would do this on purpose?

JAMIE
 I know you wouldn't. It's just you... It's who you are...

Nell, still staring at Jamie, trying to understand, but...

JAMIE (cont'd)
 I'm just not here... with you anymore... I haven't been for a long time.

NELL
 As in what? Like -

JAMIE
 - Like I don't love you anymore.

Nell. A deadened stare now. Her eyes wet but dull-- twin portraits of unraveling devastation.

NELL (V.O.)

... You and I were supposed to grow old.

JAMIE

I mean, you have to've felt this coming?

NELL

... I guess... more than you know.

Jamie sighs, not sure what else to say.

NELL (cont'd)

For me, it's that YOU have to've known that I've been hurting for so long. Your attraction to me's apparently withered and fucking died. How awesome for you--

JAMIE

Nellie, I asked you to move in... more than two years ago. I tried to take you in, make it work. And I bankrolled your whole life since then. Took you out, paid for docs and meds and meds and meds... And now you're--

(making quotes)

"off them", which can't be a good idea... But, Nell, we haven't grown... as a couple. It's been a flat-lining plateau and, ya know... It ain't me, baby.

NELL

I'm sorry...

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)

... Is this hell?

NELL (cont'd)

I'm sorry I'm just your mooch with a fuck-hole, Jamie. What else could you have possibly been getting out of this, then? Was it ever about love?

Jamie looks away.

JAMIE
 (under his breath)
 Of course it was...

NELL
 Is it someone else?

He won't say. Shaking his head.

NELL (cont'd)
 (knowing)
 Is it?

JAMIE
 I don't know. I don't care
 anymore... about this. Any of this.

Nell. A fire building in her eyes.

NELL
 That's why you'd buy condoms.

JAMIE
 ... What?

NELL
 I'm on birth control, dumb-ass.
 You're paying for it.

JAMIE
 Why did y-- I didn't buy condoms.

NELL
 (mocking Jamie)
 I didn't buy condoms. But I found a
 receipt for Trojans in your crushed
 velvet, shitty black hipster pants,
 and I hate them.

Jamie can't respond. The way he looks at her, we know she's caught him raw. A sense of satisfaction across Nell's face.

NELL (cont'd)
 Guess it's who you are.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 ... I'm disaster with a smile.

Finally, Jamie limps a few steps in her direction. To console? To pick her up? Then he stops.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
 ... And this, my dear, is war.

Another beat.

JAMIE

I don't know what to say. Maybe you
can stay with Lisa or... We'll find
you something.

Nell can't bare to take what she knows she's about to hear.

JAMIE (cont'd)

You should move out.

He grabs his coat and limps to a back bedroom. Silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - SUNSET

Rush hour. Cold air.

Nell walks quickly, bundled in a scarf and puffy coat. Her beautiful face running with tears. She smokes. A stack of flyers under her arm. She walks, looking ahead, but attentive to nothing, focusing on dire thoughts. She bumps into passersby along the busy city sidewalk.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - LATER

Jamie finishes wrapping an ice pack around his leg. His phone BUZZES. He checks the caller ID and answers.

JAMIE

(on phone)

Lisa... How's the search going?...
For Bernie... No... Bernie's
missing. Nell said you guys were
looking for her...

(realization)

You have no idea what I'm talking
about, do you?... How long've you
been outta town?

EXT. CITY STREET - LATER

Nell walks along the city sidewalks. The stack of flyers still under her arms-- not one sheet less than before.

*NELL (V.O.)
Just know that I do love you, and
I'm sorry for finishing this all
off at such a distance...*

With every passing moment, Nell's movements and urgency seem to grow more desperate until...

Passing a COFFEE SHOP, she looks towards a show window and sees:

RED VELVET CAKE
encased in a glass cover, rippling with buttery, cream cheese frosting. It floats atop a plate.

Nell's interest is piqued.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - MOMENTS LATER

At a corner table by the window, Nell sits down to a decadent slice of the red velvet cake.

*NELL (V.O.)
... What happens next with us is a
mystery to me, but if I know you,
Jamie, it'll matter all of five
minutes before you move on.*

HER FORK
slides into the white frosting.

Nell serves herself a mouthful of cake, savoring all of it. Tears still collecting in her eyes, a few drops spilling onto the table.

*NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
... And that hurts.*

A PHONE BUZZES. She pulls out her cell. It says: *J'aimie*. She answers, but doesn't speak. We hear tinny, angry HELLO?s and NELL?s on the other end of the line.

A beat, then she hangs up.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Dusk has settled into night across an under-whelming downtown skyline. Lit, storefront windows intermingle with street lights and bare-knuckled trees.

Nell walks slowly down a broken sidewalk.

NELL (V.O.)
*... To confess, I haven't really
 been myself lately, but the truth
 is, it's been years since I've been
 myself...*

The flyers Nell carries start falling to the ground, one by one, a couple more, then several at once, then all the rest. They fly away, curling and flapping in the wind.

INT. APARTMENT KITCHEN - MEANWHILE

Jamie limps into the kitchen, taking an ice-tray out of the freezer. A fly BUZZES out. Surprised, Jamie swats it away.

NELL (V.O.)
*I guess that's someone we'll have
 to leave in the past.*

He places the ice-tray on a kitchen counter and places ice-cubes into a ziploc baggie. But he lifts his gaze to a large window just above the counter. He stares out the window, seeing a blend of his own reflection and the enclosing night. He's confused and vulnerable, the next steps in his life a total fog-- until something outside attracts his eye:

JAMIE'S POV

looking outside to the back of the apartment. Garbage bags pile up outside of a small, wooden shed. The overflow of bags hold the shed's door wide open.

NELL (V.O.) (cont'd)
*But it's a fallen world we live in.
 It's always been... And I accept
 that, now.*

JAMIE
 Goddammit, Nellie.

He limps over to pull a trash bag out from under the kitchen sink.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING STAIRWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie limps down a stairway, holding a filled plastic trash bag.

EXT. SIDE OF THE APARTMENT BUILDING - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie limps towards the small wooden shed. FLIES BUZZ all over the place. He SWATS them with his free hand. He opens the shed door revealing:

Aluminum trash cans and sloppy, torn trash bags are strewn around. FLIES BUZZING everywhere.

*NELL (V.O.)
So long, Jamie... no doubt you'll
find Bernie...*

Jamie slings his trash bag in, but... something is on the floor in front of him.

EXT. TRASH DUMP - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie pulls some dirty trash bags aside and-- GASPS in horror:

A DEAD PITBULL-- It's clearly Bernie. His body partially wrapped in white muslin, decorated with chunky spatters of dark red blood.

The BUZZING of the flies lifting to a frightening crescendo.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END.