

NELL

Written by

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. HOLLYWOOD SIGN - MORNING 1

We widen out to an establishing shot of the sign in its entirety.

NARRATOR V.O.

Hollywood...a whore so craven
she'll never show her tits, no
matter how many times you buy her
dinner. And yet, for a select few
she will deign to smile; leaving
all that cross her threshold to
wonder, will she let me fuck her in
the ass? Or am I destined to die in
obscurity? An ugly, nothing,
loser...

We boom down/fade to...

EXT. ROOFTOP - CONTINUOUS

...An APARTMENT BUILDING sitting directly below the sign.
Through the window we see a WOMAN.

2 INT. BEDROOM - MORNING 2

The WOMAN sits cross-legged on her bed, texting with an
ONLINE SUITOR.

CLOSE ON: COMPUTER SCREEN

Suitor: When can we meet?

Woman: Soon <3

Suitor: How will I recognize you?

Suitor: Pics?

Beat. The Woman recoils from her computer screen, suddenly
horrified. She opens her photo booth, arching her back into
an attractive position. She attempts to take several lusty
photographs of herself. She's dissatisfied with all of them.

The camera pans to see the curve of a cello in the adjoining
room, peeking out through the ajar door.

WOMAN

I don't hear play-ing!

We hear the offscreen cellist stomp her feet on the floor, counting herself in as she starts to play.

3 INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS - NOW MID MORNING 3

We are close on the CELLIST as she plays. We don't see her face, focusing on her torso, hands and feet. She's dressed modestly, in a long black mumu and white turtleneck underneath. White socks. We see she wears SPARKLY NAILPOLISH.

INTERCUT WITH:

4 INT. APARTMENT - EARLY AFTERNOON 4

(The cello suite carries us over the action. We watch in quick cuts as the Woman, who we will come to know as the MOTHER of Nell...)

-Waxes her upper lip, examining the contents.

-Does sit-ups.

-Examines her butt in jeans

-Looks at her zits

5 INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON 5

Nell's Mother is speaking to the booker for a DAYTIME TALK SHOW. We can hear the Cellist playing in the other room.

BOOKER (V.O.)

Well, Mavis would love to have her on the show...we're thinking this Wednesday but we just wanted to know your avails, we know it can be difficult with school...

MOTHER

Amazing! She's actually homeschooled so we're totally flexible.

BOOKER (V.O.)

Okay perfect. It'll probably be like a ten minute spot. Nell can play something and then Mavis will just like ask her a few questions, which we'll run by you beforehand obviously-

The Mother reaches into the oven, extracting a large tray of chicken fingers and fries, which she places on a pre-laid dinner tray.

MOTHER
(getting off the phone)
Great! Yeah just send them over and
let us kn-

The Mother takes a carton of milk out of the fridge and begins pouring a healthy serving into the mason jar on the dinner tray.

BOOKER (V.O.)
Oh also, just quickly, just to
gauge comfort level, how would Nell
feel about showing her face?

The Mother's face darkens, her hand frozen in the 'pouring milk' position. All we hear is the milk glugging out of the glass for a beat.

BOOKER (V.O.)	MOTHER
(backtracking)	No, yeah...
Totally no worries if not, we just wanted to open the door to that conversation-	

BOOKER (V.O.)	MOTHER (CONT'D)
In case that was something she'd be open to-	Right-

BOOKER (V.O.)	MOTHER (CONT'D)
Just cause Mavis is all about like unapologetic just <i>living</i> <i>and like-</i>	Of course...

The milk is about to spill over the lip of the mason jar.

BOOKER (V.O.)
But again, *not* a big deal. Always
just a *conversat-*

The Mother slams the carton down on the counter with finality.

MOTHER
-I'll talk to her.

6

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

6

The Mother, wielding the dinner tray pokes open the door to the living room. We see the glass doors have been covered by TRASH BAGS, obscuring the inhabitant from view.

Nell (the Cellist) abruptly stops playing at the intrusion. This is the first time we've seen the room (and Nell) in entirety.

The room is barren except for a cello, cello stand, bookshelves, a fold-out table and a chair (where Nell sits.) Nell, a lanky pre-teen has her face completely obscured by a BLACK HAT AND VEIL.

(NOTE FOR EVERY SCENE: Nell's face is always obscured, either by the hat or the angle, until otherwise stipulated.)

MOTHER

Guess which fat singer wants to have you on her talk *shooooow?!*

NELL

(through hat-veil)
Really?

The Mother places the dinner tray on the piano.

MOTHER

She's a *huge* fan.

Nell grabs a fry, slipping it underneath her veil. The Mother 'tsks' reaching to remove Nell's hat. Nell swats her hand away.

NELL

Don't!

WOMAN

You'll get grease on your veil.

NELL (CONT'D)

So, do the curtains.

The Mother sighs, walking around the room to draw the drapes.

MOTHER

(like 'it's a shame')
Such nice light in the afternoon...

ANGLE ON: STREET

The Mother spots COUSIN SUZANNE (50s) frantically crossing the street down below.

NELL (O.S.)

So, I was thinking, you know...what if I play the Bach in D minor? The cello suite, just the courante-do you think the Mavis viewers will appreciate a courante? Or are they more a sarabande-type-crowd?

(beat)

Mom?

The Mother turns, regarding Nell.

MOTHER

I'm worried you're not getting enough Vitamin D...

NELL

What?

MOTHER

Why don't you let some sun on your face?

(beat)

Ya know? Live out loud!

ANGLE ON: Nell's veiled head. The Mother rolls her eyes and commences drawing the curtains.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Finish your lunch and then you can have a break.

The Mother draws the final drape as Nell takes off her hat. (We remain OTS, her face is obscured. We see she wears her hair in braids.)

NELL

Don't forget, Cousin Suzanne's coming over.

The Mother pauses, shutting her eyes dramatically.

MOTHER

Ugh...

(repeating)

I totally forgot-

The Mother opens the door to greet Cousin Suzanne (who we recognize as the Woman on the street in the previous scene.) Suzanne blows right past her.

MOTHER
Cousin Suzanne!

COUSINE SUZANNE
 Oh, fuck off.

MOTHER
 Wh-

COUSIN SUZANNE
 You're always pretending like you forgot I was coming over, but you *didn't forget*, I called ahead, we made a plan, and I know you're glad to see me.

MOTHER
 Of course I'm glad to-

Cousin Suzanne tromps through to the kitchen, collapsing into a chair.

COUSIN SUZANNE
 Spare me, okay?

Beat. Suddenly, she smiles, amused by her own histrionics. The Mother smiles too. Then...

MOTHER
 What's *wrong*?

CUT TO:

8 INSERT: SCREEN

8

We're looking at a SERIES OF NUDES on SUZANNE'S PHONE. The nudes feature a busty blonde 20-something with a lot of filler (Suzanne's daughter.)

COUSIN SUZANNE
 I told her to get a *job* after college...hm? A *job...like* in an office...this is *not* what I meant-

MOTHER
 (impressed)
 Woah.

COUSIN SUZANNE
 And she's got a *huge* following...I had to *pay for these pictures...*

MOTHER
 (too amused)
 D'you get a discount?

Suzanne doesn't hear the quip.

COUSIN SUZANNE
 She came to see me after the
 surgery...the Doctor spent the
 whole time looking at *her nipples!*
 When it was *my* hysterectomy! Can
 you even *be-lieve-*

MOTHER
 That's very unprofessional-

COUSIN SUZANNE
 -the *ingratitude.*

MOTHER
 ...the ingratitude of...?

COUSIN SUZANNE
 Showing up all young and perky like
 that with those perky pouncy
 bazungas like some...some...some-

MOTHER
 -bitch?

COUSIN SUZANNE
Whore!

MOTHER
 Mmm.

COUSIN SUZANNE
 I mean I gave her *life...* *I gave her*
 those areolas...the *least she could*
do is... be ugly while I'm at
 death's *freaking door-*

MOTHER
 I think you're overexcited...would
 you like some tea?

The Mother stands to make tea.

COUSIN SUZANNE
 (hopeful)
 Will you have some?

MOTHER
(scoffs)
I can't afford the water weight.

COUSINE SUZANNE
You're so lucky *your* daughter
actually has *talent*...

MOTHER
(proud)
She's going to be on the Mavis show
next week...they're doing a feature
on prodigies.

COUSIN SUZANNE
Brag.

MOTHER
(*'tsks'*)
Suzanne, Nell has a lot of
struggles as you well know. And
it's been very difficult for me,
parenting such an exceptional child
on my own.

COUSIN SUZANNE
At least you have a *boyfriend*.

MOTHER
I'd hardly call him my boyfriend.

COUSIN SUZANNE
Why not? He broke up with you?

MOTHER
I'm not sure I want to make it
official yet. I have to see what
our connection's like in person.

COUSIN SUZANNE
So you haven't met?

MOTHER
(defensive)
No.

COUSIN SUZANNE
Does he know what you look like?

MOTHER
What's that supposed to mean?

COUSIN SUZANNE

I'm just saying, women our age have to *manage* their expectations...he might be disappointed.

The Mother turns towards the glass, anxiously regarding her reflection as Suzanne prattles on.

COUSIN SUZANNE (CONT'D)

Just wait till Nell hits puberty. That's when it *all starts*...they get these funny ideas in their heads. Suddenly, they think you're *evil*, they think they know a thing or two...then, one day you look up and they've taken your place.

The Mother starts to scheme...

MOTHER

(re: photographs)

You know? I don't think it's healthy for you to be looking at these anymore. I think you should delete them.

COUSIN SUZANNE

But what if I feel like seeing them again? Then I won't have them, and I won't pay for them twice that's *insane*.

MOTHER

I can keep them, as a record.

Cousin Suzanne breathes a sigh of relief, gratefully pressing her phone into the Mother's hands.

COUSIN SUZANNE

Ugh...you are a lifesaver.

She grabs her purse, standing up.

COUSIN SUZANNE (CONT'D)

I'll be right back, I've just gotta go change my urine.

Cousin Suzanne exits to the bathroom. Long beat as the Mother greedily sends the nudes to herself. Then-

Cousin Suzanne emits a BLOODCURDLING SCREAM from the next room. The Mother rushes to her aid.

9 INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

9

The Mother enters. Nell is cowering in shame, frantically trying to put her hat back on, steadying her cello as Cousin Suzanne backtracks.

COUSIN SUZANNE

Nell honey, I'm sorry-I just wasn't expecting to see you...you just startled me!

NELL

(through tears)
Mom!

MOTHER

What's going on?

COUSIN SUZANNE

I forgot where the bathroom was!
She caught me by surprise! I didn't-

NELL

(weeping)
I'm disgustiiiiing!

COUSIN SUZANNE (CONT'D)

(to Mother)
I didn't mean to-

MOTHER

(snarling, to Suzanne)
Get out...

V.O. (PRELAP)

The Mavis show! How may I direct your call?

CUT TO:

10 EXT. ROOFTOP - EVENING

10

The Mother paces on the phone, smoking a cigarette.

MOTHER

Oh, hi there, I'm Nell's Mother, I spoke with Greer earlier? I was wondering if she-

We hear another line cut in as-

BOOKER (V.O.)

This is Greer.

MOTHER

Greer! Hi, sorry to bother you again-

BOOKER (V.O.)
No *worries*. Twice in one day. Lucky
me!

MOTHER
Ha! Yeah...listen, um...I just
wanted to touch base again.
Umm...first of all, we're all set
for Wednesday.

BOOKER (V.O.)
(like "I know...")
Uh huh.

MOTHER
But just wanted to let you know, I
spoke with Nell and she's not gonna
be comfortable showing her face,
actually.

BOOKER (V.O.)
(sour)
Okay yeah...that's...*fine*...
(beat)
And you're *firm* on that?

MOTHER
Yes. That's...what *she'll* feel most
comfortable w-

BOOKER (V.O.)
So she'll be wearing that
hat...thing?

MOTHER
Yeah.

BOOKER (V.O.)
Okay. You know, let me just check
with Mavis, just to make sure
Wednesday still works and we'll get
you back.

MOTHER
Oh...

BOOKER (V.O.)
Okay?

Click.

CUT TO:

11 INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

11

Nell is ensconced in the bed, shrouded in darkness. Her Mother enters. The light from the next room casts a beam through the ajar door.

MOTHER

...honey?

NELL

Go away.

Her Mother sighs, sitting on the foot of her bed. All we see are Nell's arms peeking over bedclothes.

MOTHER

Cousin Suzanne is...pathetic. I've always thought so. Always. Sometimes when I orgasm I pray she gets hit by a bus.

NELL

...She *screamed*.

MOTHER

Hiding makes people think we have something to be ashamed of. So they react in strange ways, when they see us.

No response. The Mother sighs, switching on the light, she starts to pace.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

So *dreary* in here. Let's...lighten up a little bit! C'mon, what are we grateful for?

NELL

I want to die.

MOTHER

Well you can't, you're alive. And I won't have this anymore. You're not some *ogre*...you're an *angel*.

NELL

I'm a freak.

MOTHER

Hell yeah you are!

NELL

Mom!

MOTHER

Like in a *good way*! You're an *except-ion*. You know how many people want to be special? ALL of them. And you've GOT IT baby, you're a GENIUS! You're a *fuck-king* FREAK!

NELL

Please stop.

MOTHER

You know what would be *hilarious*? I mean you know what would just be the living end...? You should go on the Mavis show just...in *all your glory*, ya know? Exposed. As God made you. Like: "*Hey world! This is me!*"

Her Mother holds both middle fingers up, making a face in example.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Like punk rock.

NELL

What?

MOTHER

Listen to me...*anybody* can be beautiful. You are in direct dialogue with God.

ANGLE ON: NELL, her face EXPOSED to us for the first time. She's certainly strange-looking, but cute.

NELL

Why are you doing this? You want people to point at me?

MOTHER

I want you to be *happy*!

(beat)

I'm gonna call the Mavis show and tell them you're showing your face.

NELL

MOM!

Her Mother snaps.

MOTHER

Well, you either show your face or
you're off the show. Which is it?
You want to be famous? Or do you
want be dead?

Nell bursts into enraged tears, grabbing the pillow and
comforter and stumbling off the bed.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Oh yeah, *I'm the abuser...you're
being dramatic.*

Nell makes a beeline for the living room, slamming the door.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

*It's not exactly easy for me either
you know. Need I remind you that I
don't have any skills?*

The Mother starts fake crying.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(blubbing)

*I'm not as smart as you, honey, how
am I supposed to know when you're
going to get upset? I try sooOoo
HARD to predict your MOODS!*

NELL (O.S.)

You're not *crying* Mom.

The Mother suddenly drops the act, too furious to perform a
smooth transition.

MOTHER

Well *excuse me* for trying to eke
out a *fucking living!* It's an
uphill battle *let me TELL YOU!*
...DAUGHTER THAT'S TOO GODDAMNED
VAIN to FEED THE FAMILY!

The Mother bangs on the door, finding it locked.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Nell!

CUT TO:

12

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

12

Nell shuts her eyes, making a nest for herself on the floor
as she tries to tune out her Mother's shrieks.

MOTHER (O.S.)

NELL!

FADE OUT.

13 INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

13

The light peeks in through the drapes, waking Nell. She looks up at her cello.

TIMECUT.

Nell has assumed her position at the chair. She begins to play the cello with an arresting style. We are reminded of her skill as an artist.

She ends the piece with confidence.

14 INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

14

Nell stands outside the bedroom door.

NELL

Mom? I'll do the Mavis show. I'll
show my face.

No response. Nell knocks softly, opening the bedroom door to reveal...

ANGLE ON: Nell's Mother, face down on the bed. Her pants are off, a vibrating VIBRATOR next to her sweaty hands. Crusty spit stains her mouth.

Half a bottle of COUGH SYRUP sits on the nightstand, and, on the blinking computer screen...

An obscene TEXT EXCHANGE with the aforementioned online suitor. As Nell approaches the blue light we see the nudes of SUZANNE'S DAUGHTER.

Nell is horrified but can't look away as we intercut between her face and the conversation. Her Mother has used the photos of Cousin Suzanne's daughter to CATFISH her online suitor.

Nell reaches a shaky hand towards the cough syrup stained CELLPHONE. She snaps a photo of her passed-out Mother in all her un-adorned glory, before FORWARDING IT to the Suitor...

DISSOLVE TO:

15 EXT. STREET CORNER - MID MORNING

15

We zoom out of the apartment window, as a bare-faced NELL looks upon her passed-out Mother in disgust.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In a town that favors the sick,
it's all we can do to pray for the
sinner. Pray for their humanity,
and hope they'll see sense. Will
Nell keep being a bitch?

CUT TO:

-SHOT OF NELL waving at the camera.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Or is there no hope for this
Godless brat, born of Hollywood's
rotting vulva? Thanks, and have a
good day.

CUT TO BLACK.