

PALATE CLEANSER

Written by

Cain Graham

BLACK SCREEN.

MUSIC CUE: An unsettling rhythm rises.

Super: "Palate cleanser:"

"A food item that removes lingering flavors..."

Beat.

"... to prepare for the next course."

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

The profile of two old brown shoes, and behind them, a BRIEFCASE. The shoes are worn by a man in a worn suit, sitting in a chair. He stares at a SMALL POLAROID in his hand. LEWIS, 29, gets lost in his daughter's face.

A CHIME from a GRANDFATHER CLOCK alerts NOON.

He places the picture in his coat and walks to a dormant FIREPLACE. To the left a SIGN reads, "Sorry, emergency gas shutoff". A smiley face accompanies the message.

Above the fireplace sits a single CANVAS, carrying red splatter art. Kinda looks like a blood splatter...

Lewis gazes into the canvas INTERCUT with the canvas looking back at him.

A woman's voice breaks his focus.

CONRAD (O.S.)

Mr. Lewis? Would you come with me,
sir?

Lewis nods and follows CONRAD, in her 50's and dressed in a clean purple suit. They reach a PODIUM across the room.

Conrad searches a LEDGER.

CONRAD (CONT'D)

Apologies. We've multiple prospects
today. Would you mind reminding me
of your scheduled time?

LEWIS

Noon.

The grandfather clock shows 12:02.

Conrad flips through several pages.

CONRAD

Mr. Lewis for... "noon-ish." Ms. Goodwin's lunch appointment. Did you place your order with the kitchen?

LEWIS

(holding up his briefcase)
Brought my own. Is that okay?

CONRAD

And did you fill out your NDA downstairs?

LEWIS

Yeah I was meaning to ask about that-

Conrad SHUTS the ledger.

CONRAD

Care for a drink while you wait?

LEWIS

Uh... no thank you.
(then, jokingly)
Actually, a neat bourbon could be ease the nerves.

Conrad reaches under the podium for a GLASS and BOTTLE OF BOURBON. She pours and places the "request" on a napkin. Reluctant, he grabs his drink.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

A hand with red nails grabs a HOT TEA off a WOODEN DESK. There's an INTERCOM and an open drawer showcasing a FLINTLOCK PISTOL. A deep SIGH. The hand places the tea, shuts the drawer, and presses the intercom.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

The hand's voice comes through an INTERCOM on the podium.

VOICE (O.S.)

Send him in.

Lewis eyes his drink, thinking. A beat goes by, he downs the bourbon, and lets out an awkward cough.

LEWIS

Well, I did 3 years at House of
Yum, year and a half at Bean
Waters, and a good run at Cream On.

Goodwin gives him a look. Cream on?

LEWIS (CONT'D)

(CONT'D)

It was an ice cream shop geared
towards people who are lactose
intolerant... but the owner thought
lactose was a preservative. So he
said "Yeah it's all natural. I
don't put that lactose crap-stuff
in my cream!" He got sued pretty
fast once people figured that out.

GOODWIN

And what was your position there?

LEWIS

The uh... the owner.

The door opens and Conrad enters, holding a PLATTER.

GOODWIN

12:05?

CONRAD

12:05.

Conrad places the platter before her. RUSTIC TOAST, GHERKINS,
and a POT OF CAVIAR. A BOWL OF SOUP. A SLICE OF RED VELVET
CAKE and CUTLERY.

Lewis looks at the display of food. She can't eat it all...

Conrad exits swiftly, and Goodwin picks up a SPOON.

GOODWIN

(to herself)

I love fava bean soup.

She starts to enjoy her soup.

Lewis unclasps his briefcase and withdraws a sad EGG SALAD
SANDWICH. The thing is contained in plastic wrap. He brings
it to his face for a SQUISHY bite.

Its soggy texture catches Goodwin's attention.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)

What is that?

LEWIS
(with a mouthful)
Egg thalad.

He swallows his bite.

LEWIS (CONT'D)
Does this position offer benefits?

GOODWIN
(waving a finger)
No work talk during this part.

LEWIS
Oh. Okay.

GOODWIN
Have you put any relish in?
(off his head shake)
Oh, you must try it.

She pulls out a wet GHERKIN.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)
It's much better, you'll see.

Lewis reluctantly takes the green finger. She waits.

He pushes it in the sandwich. Egg mixture seeps out. Lewis takes a CRUNCHIER squishy bite, and mouths it around. Saving face, he nods.

She nods with him as she brushes toast with the fish bubbles. She takes a CRUNCHY bite. They eat together in near perfect silence. Goodwin pats her mouth with a NAPKIN as Lewis finishes his last bite. She pushes her platter aside.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)
Mr. Lewis, you really think you are
HealthCo's next medical sales rep?

LEWIS
Yes, ma'am.

GOODWIN
Well I don't see anything remotely
credentialing you for this
position. No sales experience. No
hospital or medical experience.
Feel free to grab another bourbon
on your way out.

Lewis unlocks himself from the chair and starts to leave. He pauses after a few steps, and turns around.

LEWIS

Did you know that chemotherapy causes kids to lose their taste? Most kids end up only liking sour foods because it's the only taste they have left. My daughter's nurse actually buys sour candy for her patients. Kali usually can't keep it down though, so she gets a feeding tube, which she hates. It wouldn't be so bad if the equipment wasn't falling apart. The dressings don't stick, the pumps keep breaking, and the tubes get clogged. Cheaper equipment doesn't save money when you have to buy twice as much in replacements. I know I don't have sales experience, but I do have hospital experience. Just not the kind you'd put on a resume.

Goodwin is almost impressed.

GOODWIN

(pressing the intercom)
Conrad, cancel my next appointment, and send our good friend Mr. Ponce in.

Lewis turns back toward her.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)

I really expected you to just quote the plaque, like everyone else.

The snake has started to notice the open door in its home.

The office door opens. In enters PONCE, 40's. He's wearing a nice suit with a gentle smile, and a jovial energy about him.

PONCE

Ms. Goodwin, how are you?

She gives him a courtesy smile. He extends a hand to Lewis, who shakes it.

PONCE (CONT'D)

(to Lewis)
Hey buddy, Keev Ponce.

LEWIS

Bart Lewis, nice to meet you.

GOODWIN

Mr. Ponce, how was your lunch?

PONCE

Wonderful, just wonderful. Scott and I tried out that new ice cream place. Did you know they have dairy-free ice cream? Apparently they take the lactose out.

GOODWIN

Any fun plans for your weekend?

PONCE

Brother got tickets to the comedy club tomorrow. Sunday I think we're Easter Egg hunting with the kids.

(to Lewis)

You have any kids?

LEWIS

Yeah. A little girl.

PONCE

She's gonna grow up so fast, man. Those little moments.

Lewis falters. This hits home. Goodwin opens THAT drawer.

GOODWIN

Speaking of which, Mr. Ponce, how old's your boy?

The snake slowly slithers out of its terrarium.

PONCE

Almost two! Melinda's taken some time off to be at home more. Having her around has been pretty perfect.

She grabs the flintlock, and places it in Lewis's hands.

GOODWIN

Shoot Mr. Ponce. Right below the knot of his tie, if you can.

Both gentlemen look at her with shock, and glance at each other for a two beats. Goodwin waits patiently.

PONCE

(to Goodwin)

What are you doing?

LEWIS
What? Shoot- Is this thing real?

GOODWIN
(to Lewis)
We only have so many positions
here. Sales is very competitive.

PONCE
I have one bad quarter and...
that's it?

GOODWIN
Mr. Lewis, problem finding the
trigger?

She grabs his hands, positioning the barrel of the pistol at Ponce's chest. Lewis starts to shake.

PONCE
Don't point that thing at me, man!

GOODWIN
I haven't even told you about our
benefits.

Lewis's eyes are glued to Ponce, who is rambling inaudibly.

PONCE
(mostly inaudible)
This is ridiculous! I've been
with this company for seven
years! I've been your top
earner more times than I can
count! Now you're giving my
job to this guy? What a joke!
How am I the short straw?

GOODWIN (CONT'D)
A company car.
(a long beat)
Extensive paid time off.

PONCE (CONT'D)
Are you hearing me? If anyone, it
should be Jessica! You hear? Not
me, not my family!

Goodwin leans into Lewis's ear and whispers.

GOODWIN
And incredible health care. Next
day referrals to the best
oncologists.

Lewis lets that sink in. He raises the gun.

PONCE
NO, PLEASE!

The pistol lets out a soft CLICK.

GOODWIN
Oopsie, gotta cock it first.

She COCKS the pistol. Lewis looks at her in disbelief.

Lewis and Ponce lock eyes as-

Smoke EXPLODES out the gun. Ponce reaches for his mouth as red spills out, and down his shirt. He lets out two gurgling coughs before collapsing, revealing the canvas behind him, now "painted."

The snake starts to slither across Ponce's twitching body. Goodwin scoops the snake up.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)
Sweet girl's trying to go on an
adventure?

The snake flicks its tongue, docile in her grasp.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)
No no, not yet.

She puts the reptile back into the terrarium, and shuts the door. Conrad has already started hauling the corpse away.

Goodwin walks towards the canvas with admiration, running her finger on the border.

GOODWIN (CONT'D)
This is going to look incredible in
your office. Can you start Monday?

Lewis is sweating, his eyes open in horror.

CUT TO BLACK

END OF SHORT.