

COPROPHAGIA

by

Chris Shamburger

Registered, WGAe

cshamburger@live.com

FADE IN:

INT. VET'S OFFICE - DAY

JEFF REYNOLDS, late 20s, composed and well-groomed, sits in an exam room across from DR. GEORGE WILLIAMSON, 60s, thinning gray hair haloing around an omnipotent bald spot.

Between them sits BUDDY, Jeff's golden retriever.

JEFF

I've tried everything. Checking for parasites. Changing his diet. I even fed him crushed breath mints. I read that online somewhere.

DR. WILLIAMSON

It may be hard to believe, Mr. Reynolds, but this isn't uncommon behavior. Dogs eat their own feces for a number of reasons. Genetics. Anxiety. Buddy could've picked up the habit after seeing another dog do it. You said he was at a kennel for two weeks.

JEFF

Yeah. I had to visit my sister.

DR. WILLIAMSON

And in those cases, dogs do it simply because they're bored.

Dr. Williamson retrieves a white medicine bottle.

DR. WILLIAMSON

This isn't an unusual case of coprophagia, but I'm going to recommend something a little unorthodox. This is a bottle of Merdapin. It came into my hands during a mission trip to Somalia.

Dr. Williamson hands the bottle to Jeff, who looks at the label. It's written in a foreign language.

JEFF

What's it do?

DR. WILLIAMSON

Years ago it was used by the people of Somalia to treat malnutrition.

(MORE)

DR. WILLIAMSON (cont'd)
Today it's used in animals to treat coprophagia. Give one of these to Buddy with every meal. When he relieves himself, his stool will contain a repelling odor. He'll refuse to eat it, and over time, he'll lose interest completely and just grow out of the habit. No refills. No prescription.

Jeff looks at his dog, then back at the bottle.

JEFF
You think it'll work?

DR. WILLIAMSON
I think both of you are perfect candidates.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

A dog dish sits on the counter.

Jeff stands in front of it, holding the bottle of Merdapin. He unscrews the lid, shakes a pill out and examines it. He places it in the dog dish and sets it on the floor.

JEFF
Alright, Bud. Dig in.

Buddy eats.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A quaint street with small but attractive homes. Jeff stands on his front porch with Buddy. He attaches the dog's leash and starts the walk.

JEFF
Just a quick one, Bud.

They head down the driveway.

EXT. STREET

Jeff walks Buddy along the side of the road.

A car turns the corner. Jeff pulls Buddy to the side as the car decelerates. The driver rolls the window down.

Inside is RACHEL, late 20s, Jeff's neighbor. She wears pink scrubs and speaks with a nasally voice.

RACHEL

Hey you.

JEFF

Rachel. Hi.

RACHEL

(to Buddy)

Hey, cutie!

JEFF

Say hi, Bud.

Jeff pulls the dog closer. Rachel smiles.

RACHEL

Listen, I finally have a night off
this Friday. You wanna get together
for dinner or something?

JEFF

Yeah, that'd be great. Am I coming
over there or...?

She shakes her head.

RACHEL

My house is a mess. Better make it
yours.

JEFF

Alright. My place. You name the
time.

RACHEL

Is sex okay?

Jeff cocks his head.

JEFF

What?

RACHEL
Six...o'clock?

JEFF
Oh. Oh! Yeah, six is perfect.

RACHEL
What'd you think I said?

She smiles coyly.

RACHEL
See ya, Jeff. Bye, Buddy!

She drives off. Jeff regards her thoughtfully.

Jeff SNIFFS. A long, deep inhale. He closes his eyes.

JEFF
I don't know if that's just dinner talk, but something smells good.
You smell that, Bud?

Jeff looks down.

Buddy has defecated on the grass.

Jeff instinctively pulls the dog away, but Buddy doesn't appear interested in it. In fact, it looks like the dog's avoiding it.

Jeff removes a bag from his pocket and bends down to pick it up.

Jeff stops just short of the pile and SNIFFS. He exhales. Sniffs again. Holds it. Closes his eyes. His lips curl into an unsettling smile.

Lightning streaks the sky.

Buddy tugs on the end of the leash.

THUNDER.

Jeff FLINCHES. He blinks a few times and stands up. Buddy continues to pull.

JEFF
I hear ya, Bud.

Jeff finally follows, leaving the pile, glancing back one last time.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jeff is on his cell phone. In his free hand is the bottle of Merdapin.

Jeff shakes a tablet into the dog's food bowl and places the dish in its usual spot. Buddy quickly digs in.

JEFF

(to phone)

Yeah, I've been looking at the label for this medicine, and I can't make out what any of it says. I was hoping somebody there could tell me what the side effects are.

(beat)

Can't I speak to Dr. Williamson?

(beat)

No, that's okay.

Jeff ends the call and watches Buddy finish his meal.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER

Jeff has just gotten out of the shower. He buttons up his shirt and suddenly freezes. He looks down. Then up.

Jeff SNIFFS. He turns to the door.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Jeff enters, his nose in the air, SNIFFING.

Buddy watches him from across the room, titillated.

Jeff moves past the couch. Around the coffee table.

On a hunt.

Jeff freezes, smiles, and looks down.

Below him is a fresh pile of dog shit.

Jeff bends down. Observes the pile for a moment. He reaches out to it. Extends his index finger.

Jeff slides his finger into the pile and hooks out a chunk. He brings it to his nose.

Jeff breathes in deeply. His eyes roll over white. His tongue creeps out of his mouth. Closer and closer to the shit. Just as the tip of his tongue reaches--

Buddy BARKS!

Jeff FLINCHES and bites down on his tongue. His eyes return to normal as saliva dribbles down his chin. Jeff looks at the shit on his finger and narrows his eyes.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jeff stands at the sink. He runs scalding hot water over his finger. He winces.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - LITTLE LATER

Jeff's nose is pinched shut with a clothespin. An inside-out plastic bag covers his right hand.

He scoops up the dog droppings on the floor and places it in another Piggly Wiggly bag. He ties it off.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Jeff opens his trash can and tosses the bag in. He closes the lid, removes the clothespin from his nose, and walks back to the house.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The lights are out. Jeff is in bed, tossing and turning. Beads of sweat cover his cheeks and forehead.

He continually breathes deeply through his nose, SNIFFING, his eyes darting to the open bedroom window.

Jeff yanks the bed covers away and slams the window shut with a deafening BANG.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

The digital clock on the nightstand reads "3:47." Orange rays of light sneak in through the window.

Still in bed, Jeff's eyelids twitch. He slowly wakes up.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - LITTLE LATER

Jeff walks down the driveway in house slippers and a robe. He stops just short of the mailbox and stares.

His trash can has been overturned, its contents spread across the driveway and lawn. He looks around, then back at the trash.

The Piggly Wiggly bag is nowhere in sight.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LITTLE LATER

Jeff drops a Merdapin capsule in Buddy's bowl. He walks to the back door.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

The backyard is of decent size, well-kept, surrounded by a six-foot wooden fence.

Buddy paces the small patio as Jeff sets the dog bowl in front of him. Buddy eats.

Jeff checks his watch.

JEFF

Shit.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - LATER

Jeff's sedan pulls into its spot. He quickly jumps out of the car carrying a paper bag of groceries.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jeff dumps the food onto the counter. He lights the gas burner.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Rachel, looking quite charming in a tasteful black dress, stands at the front door, illuminated by a single porch light.

She pulls out a tissue from her wallet and dabs at her nose.

The door opens. Rachel places the tissue back in her wallet and steps inside.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LITTLE LATER

Dinner has already been set up. Grilled chicken. Green beans. The works. Rachel sits across from an empty chair.

RACHEL

You know, I never get time off like this anymore.

JEFF (O.S.)

Uh-huh.

Rachel looks at the kitchen doorway. There's the sound of a cabinet closing. A drawer opening.

RACHEL

I feel like I live in my scrubs.
Probably explains why I get sick so easily. I'm around disease enough.

Rachel grabs her wallet and pulls out another tissue. She pats her nose. Puts the tissue back.

Jeff enters, a bottle of red wine in one hand, two glasses in the other. He wears jeans and a black blazer over his white dress shirt.

JEFF

Red wine's okay?

RACHEL

Sure. I probably can't taste anything anyway.

Jeff has a seat and begins pouring her glass.

RACHEL

So spring break. No class to teach.
What's Mr. Reynolds been up to?

JEFF

Oh, you know him. Real party animal. I graded some old quizzes and took Buddy to the vet.

RACHEL

Nothing serious, I hope.

JEFF

Nah. Just a harmless checkup.

RACHEL

If I recall, his last checkup
wasn't so harmless. You said he bit
the guy, right?

JEFF

Yeah.

(laughs)

I forgot about that.

RACHEL

I'm sure the vet didn't. So
everything's okay?

JEFF

Yeah. Buddy's just been having
some...dietary problems.

RACHEL

Eating crap out of the trash?

Jeff looks up.

RACHEL

I saw a bunch of it scattered
across your lawn this morning.

JEFF

Oh. Yeah. That.

Jeff smiles, then freezes. He looks to the left. Then up.

Jeff SNIFFS.

RACHEL

You okay?

JEFF

That smell.

RACHEL

What?

JEFF

Something...

He inhales deeply through his nose.

JEFF

You don't smell that?

Rachel pulls out another tissue. Wipes her nose.

RACHEL

I'm sorry, but I really can't smell
anything, Jeff.

JEFF

It's just...

He sniffs again. Closes his eyes. Shakes his head.

JEFF

It's nothing.

Jeff picks up his wine glass and starts to chug. Rachel observes him curiously.

Jeff finishes off the wine and finally notices Rachel's chagrined stare.

RACHEL

Am I making you uncomfortable?

Jeff lowers his glass.

JEFF

What? Oh, God, no, Rachel. Not at all. I just -- I need to get some water. Excuse me for one second.

Jeff stands and walks to the kitchen.

Rachel pulls out the tissue again and holds it to her nose.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Jeff approaches the refrigerator. He places both hands on the surface and leans his weight into it.

JEFF

(whisper)

Get it together.

Finally, he stands straight and opens the refrigerator door.

Jeff's face turns pale white.

Inside the refrigerator is the missing Piggly Wiggly bag.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Rachel places the tissue back in her wallet. She grabs her fork. Twirls it in her green beans. After a moment, she looks at the kitchen doorway.

RACHEL

Jeff? You okay?

Suddenly, BARKING. From outside, and it doesn't stop. Rachel rises from her chair and moves to the window.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Buddy cowers at the back of the fence, nervously barking at
FOUR PEOPLE

standing in the darkness, their noses high in the air,
resembling dogs.

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM

Rachel backs away from the window, a puzzled expression on
her face.

RACHEL

Jeff, there are people in your
backyard.

Jeff doesn't reply. The kitchen is eerily quiet.

RACHEL

Jeff?

INT. JEFF'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Rachel enters.

The color drains from her face. Her jaw drops.

Jeff sits on his knees in front of the open refrigerator. He
digs through the shredded Piggly Wiggly bag, scooping up
handfuls of shit, shoving it feverishly into his mouth.

Rachel backs against the wall, horrified.

RACHEL

Jeff!

He looks up. His eyes are pure white.

JEFF

Rachel...

RACHEL

What the hell are you doing!? Is
that--

The realization hits her. She covers her mouth in shock.

Jeff reaches out his shit-stained hands. Rachel shrinks to the corner of the kitchen, trembling.

Jeff grabs her by the shoulders. Shit smears onto her arms, from shoulder to elbow.

JEFF

It smells so good, Rachel...

Jeff sticks his index finger into his mouth and rakes the shit off between his teeth. He grins.

JEFF

...and tastes even better.

Rachel SCREAMS and pushes him away. She takes off for the back door.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - BACKYARD

Rachel runs out of the house. She stops at the patio. Her eyes bulge.

Four neighbors fight on the grass, their hands and faces smeared with fresh dog shit. Their white eyes burn with ferocity -- with hunger.

FIGHTING NEIGHBOR #1

It's mine!

FIGHTING NEIGHBOR #2

I smelled it first!

Buddy continues to BARK from the corner of the fence.

Rachel SCREAMS and runs for the gate.

EXT. JEFF'S HOUSE - DRIVEWAY

Rachel bolts out of the backyard. She runs across the driveway, then stops dead in her tracks.

Half a dozen people stand in the street, their noses in the air. Rachel watches them, unblinking, and timidly backs away.

In unison, the people lower their heads, their eyes locked on Rachel. She doesn't move as they close in and circle around her.

RACHEL

No...

Rachel looks down at the excrement on her arms, then back at the white, ravenous eyes staring her down.

RACHEL

Please...

Tears stream down Rachel's cheeks as the crowd moves in.

Rachel drops to her knees, SCREAMING mercilessly, until the darkness of the looming shadows consumes her.

BLACKOUT!

FADE IN:

INT. VET'S OFFICE - DAY

The hallway is empty and quiet. From one of the exam rooms, a dog YELPS.

DR. WILLIAMSON (O.S.)
Mrs. Carmichael!

MRS. CARMICHAEL, early 50s and pinch-faced, storms out. She's the type of woman who wears more accessories than she does actual clothing.

Her biggest accessory is WINNIE, the Jack Russell Terrier she cradles in her arms.

Dr. Williamson exits the exam room. He holds a small towel over his left hand and chases after Mrs. Carmichael.

DR. WILLIAMSON
Please, Mrs. Carmichael, stop!

MRS. CARMICHAEL
You startled my little Winnie!
Goodbye, Dr. Williamson!

Mrs. Carmichael shimmies past the receptionist's desk, high heels CLACKING.

The RECEPTIONIST watches her curiously as she disappears out the front doors.

Dr. Williamson stops at the desk. He releases the grip on his left hand and removes the towel. He glances at the BLOOD spiraling down his fingers.

RECEPTIONIST
You okay?

Dr. Williamson turns to the receptionist.

DR. WILLIAMSON
Schedule a follow-up appointment
for Winnie in three weeks.

RECEPTIONIST
Pretty sure Mrs. Carmichael just
left for good, Dr. Williamson.

Dr. Williamson stares at the front entrance.

DR. WILLIAMSON
She'll come back.

Outside, a DELIVERY MAN approaches the front entrance. In his arms is a box labeled "MERDAPIN."

Dr. Williamson furrows his brow and smiles.

DR. WILLIAMSON
We'll be ready when she does.

FADE OUT.

END