

PACKAGING

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. RURAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

A large spider spins out her web below the glare of a humming parking lot light perched high on a pole. She retreats to one edge of it and awaits a quick dinner from a swarming cloud of moths. Below her:

A small, run-down mini-mart tucked against the flank of a dark mountainside. Shreds of fog settle upon the gas pumps. A row of parked cars and SUVs line the storefront, lights on, engines running.

A hint of headlights bathes the deserted highway. The purr of a Volvo's engine as it pulls into the lot and parks next to the other vehicles.

BURKE, 20s, opens the driver side door. Soon as he does, the din of chirping crickets overwhelms him. He climbs out. Burke doesn't like the mountains and it shows.

He heads right over to the passenger side. CATHY's already opened her door and swung out her legs. 20s, very pregnant.

CATHY

Whew! Cold!

She zips her sweatshirt up over her swelled belly. Burke grasps her outstretched hand.

BURKE

I think we missed our turn. GPS isn't worth a damn...

CATHY

Just as well. I have to pee really bad. Not to worry, my sister said she'd wait up.

BURKE

With hot apple cider like last time?

CATHY

For sure...my bladder's gonna burst--

BURKE

In we go, Cath.

Burke walks hobbling Cathy past the parked cars. No one sits in any of them. He turns, looks up...

WHAT BURKE SEES

The chunky spider feasting on a silk-spun moth. She's had many, judging from all the empty husks.

BURKE

grimaces in disgust. He leads Cathy inside.

One SUV engine shuts down, headlights still blazing. All the warning lights come on in the dash.

INT. MINI-MART

The double doors swing shut behind them. Burke releases Cathy to the ladies room.

He heads for the coffee counter. Plucks two cups from a stack of them. About to dispense coffee, he frowns.

Burke inspects the cups. Hefts them up and back into his palm. They're light as air. He shrugs and fills them, and the strangely quiet store is filled with gurgling. Burke reaches for the creamer.

CATHY

This place is deserted.

If the ceiling of this creepy mini-mart was high enough, Burke would have jumped ten feet. He yelps. The creamer bottle slips from his hands.

Both of them watch it, fascinated, as it takes way too long to drop lazily to the floor.

Burke picks it up. The cap's already open. He inverts the bottle.

BURKE

It's empty.

CATHY

Try another one. The hazelnut.
You know I like hazelnut.

Burke goes for the hazelnut. Shakes it.

BURKE

This one's empty too. First the GPS,
now this. Service these days...

CATHY

Burke?

BURKE

You scared the shit right outta me,
you know that?

CATHY

You were already scared. That's why
you jumped, Burke.

BURKE

Okay you're right. I admit it.
Something's very off here...

CATHY

It starts outside, Burke. There's eight
cars out there besides our own! Where's
the people?

BURKE

Maybe there was a robbery. The crooks
locked everybody in the walk-in.

CATHY

I don't think there was a robbery.

BURKE

I'll check the register.

Burke glances about...

...at the cash register counter. The drawer is closed.

He turns back to Kathy. She stares at him, hands in
pockets, freaked out.

BURKE

Better idea. Wait here.

Burke heads for the front door. Cathy watches him.

CATHY

Can't we just leave?

BURKE

(O.S.)

One minute. I promise.

OUT IN THE PARKING LOT

Burke peers inside cars and SUVs one by one. He comes across the SUV that stalled, headlights still blazing.

Hesitant at first, he opens the driver side door. Sees a woman's pocketbook on the passenger seat. Peers at the instrument panel.

The gas gauge reads empty.

Burke bolts upright so fast he hits his head on the doorframe. His hand goes up to his scalp.

BURKE

Fuck!

BACK IN THE MINI-MART

Cathy plucks a box of cereal off a shelf. Examines it, lips pursed.

BURKE

(O.S.)

You're right, Cath. We have to get out of here--

Cathy pitches the cereal box at Burke. It sails toward him in a gentle arc, like she's tossed an empty sachet.

Burke catches it. Examines the cereal box.

His fingers probe the crude, colorful lettering. The image of a bowlful of milk heaped with cereal.

It's all stitched in.

BURKE

What the hell? Is everything made of--?

CATHY

Silk. Everything. Check the shelves,
Burke.

BURKE

You're shitting me!

CATHY

Think I'm lying? Here! Here! Here!

Cathy grabs grocery items off the shelves at random. Throws them at Burke, half in anger, half in fear. One by one he grapples with the almost weightless boxes and jars.

And stares at them. Silk imitations of pickle jars. Relish jars. Jelly jars. Spaghetti boxes. Everything.

BURKE

Is this a museum we walked into?
A roadside attraction? That's it!

CATHY

Then where's the admission booth?

BURKE

Hell if I know...

CATHY

And why is it so quiet in here?
The coolers and freezers. Nothing
works, Burke. It's a charade!

BURKE

Why go through all this trouble?

Burke ponders. Cathy urgently pulls on his hand.

CATHY

Please?

BURKE

Okay we're done.

Burke quickly leads Cathy to the front doors. They pass the silent ice machine there. Turn and peer through the clear sliding doors at the shelves of bagged cubes...

The sheer bags, like big silk cocoons, are churning...

Each ice cube actually a sac, with a black-legged thing squirming around inside it...

Hundreds of them.

A loud gasp from Cathy. Burke whirls around to see why.

Cathy's just standing there, face ashen, eyes glazing.

BURKE

Cath? What's wrong? CATH!

Tears fill her eyes. An infinite sadness wells out of them. She looks down, at the belly she clasps. Back up to Burke.

Then finally, shocked Burke sees...

...the two large holes punched through the shoulder of her sweatshirt, welling with blood...

...and the thick silk lasso looped around her neck...

...suddenly yanked up...

Cathy is gone.

All life drains out of Burke. Face grim, he slowly zips open his sweatshirt, baring his shoulder and neck.

Burke closes his eyes and waits.

OUT IN THE PARKING LOT

Past the cars and SUVs as they run out of gas one by one. Up to the light on the pole, where the fat, hideous spider meticulously takes in her web...

FADE OUT.