

WATERY NELL

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST OF BOWLAND, COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Pouring rain. A car SPLASHES by.

ALEX, 17, soaking wet, in anorak and jeans, crouches concealed by the side of the road. A sodden magazine in his anorak pocket snags in a bush. He pulls himself free, throws the mag to the ground, crosses the road.

CLOSE ON the ripped cover of his discarded SOFTCORE magazine laying in the ditch.

EXT. FOREST OF BOWLAND -- DAY

Various shots: a swollen river, the fells and valleys dark with rain.

Alex trudges along an invisible hiking trail with the daylight almost gone. LIGHTNING. Distant THUNDER. Alex stops. He looks up at the sky.

A lighted window, some way off. Alex sees it, hesitates. He turns off the trail, walks towards it. The storm continues.

EXT. COTTAGE -- DUSK

MISS NELL, an old woman in a yellow slicker, repairs the dry-stone garden wall. She sniffs the air.

NELL

I know you're out there. Come here where I can see you.

Alex edges nearer.

NELL (CONT)

Break out the best china, Simon, we've company tonight!

(to Alex)

You'll catch your death out in weather like this, a young lad like you. Fetch in some of those sticks there and you can start a fire.

Alex grabs an armful of split logs from under a tarp.

NELL (CONT)

Keep them dry then!

(to herself)

Boy has no more sense than a moorhen.

INT. COTTAGE -- NIGHT

Alex lights his fire with coals from the range where Nell warms a stew.

NELL

Take them wet things off, then.

She watches as he strips down to his skivvies.

NELL (CONT)

There's a blanket in that cupboard.

ALEX

Who's Simon? Who were you talking to?

A BLACK CAT stalks into the room.

NELL

There, Simon, he wants to know who you are -- although he's not told us who he is yet.

Alex wraps himself in the blanket, sits at the kitchen table.

ALEX

Sorry. Alex. My name's Alex.

NELL

Cagey bugger, aren't you, Alex?
City boy are you?

ALEX

Yes.

NELL

Preston way?

ALEX

No, London.

NELL

Ah, that would explain it, then.

ALEX

Explain what?

NELL

Why you don't speak right. Long way from home aren't you? Does your ma know you're out? And where were you going this fine spring evening?

ALEX

Blackpool.

NELL

The bus not good enough for you?

ALEX

I thought I'd find work there for the summer.

A CRASH of THUNDER. Nell is suddenly right behind him. She speaks into his ear.

NELL

You're not afeared of the thunder, are you?

ALEX

It made me jump, that's all. I haven't thanked you for taking me in...

NELL

You can call me Miss Nell.

LIGHTNING. The same FLASH lights up --

EXT. VILLAGE STORE -- NIGHT

The shop sign reads: MISS NELL'S.

BACK TO SCENE

NELL (CONT)

Oh yes, even today, there's still
a few of us Nells surviving in
these parts.

She moves back to the range, brings their dinner to the
table. Alex picks up his knife and fork, about to tuck in.
She puts her wizened hand on his.

NELL (CONT)

You still haven't answered my question.

ALEX

What question?

NELL

What you're doing up here, in the
middle of nowhere.

ALEX

Hiking. I got lost.

NELL

You don't look much like a hiker
to me. Does he, Simon? Those aren't
hiking boots on your feet and you
come up here with no map, no
backpack, no food...

Another CRASH of lightning/thunder.

NELL (CONT)

This isn't London, Alex.

ALEX

I know.

NELL

But you understand, don't you, that
you're not here by mistake.

(she frees his hand.

Alex eats)

We don't believe he's lost at all,
do we Simon? Not yet he's not.

She fetches a bottle of brandy and two glasses. She pours them each a generous shot, takes a swallow of hers, then pushes the other glass towards Alex.

INT. SAME -- LATER

The glasses empty. The food eaten. Nell pours two more brandies.

NELL

Have we loosened your tongue yet?
Because Simon still wants to know
how you got here.

ALEX

I turned off the road, came up the
valley, followed the footpath.

NELL

That's not what we're asking, is
it, Simon?

ALEX

What then?

NELL

He's pretending he doesn't know.

ALEX

Know what?

NELL

We can go round and round, or you
can tell us about the shop.

ALEX

What shop?

NELL

Shall we show him, Simon?

ALEX

Show me what?

A crash of THUNDER. The lights go out.

NELL

We saw you in the shop.

ALEX

That's impossible.

NELL

Then running, running, running.
Something to hide? Someone to catch?

EXT. VILLAGE STREET -- DAY

Alex runs out of the village store. A parked car pulls away, drives past him. Alex runs after it.

BACK TO SCENE

The lights come back on.

NELL (CONT)

Tell me: where was your friend going?

ALEX

He didn't say. Away. Away from me.

NELL

Why did he do that? Wasn't he your friend?

ALEX

Yes.

NELL

Then why would he run away from you like that?

ALEX

How should I know?

NELL

Simon knows, don't you, Simon? Simon says that Alex knows too, he just won't say. It makes Simon so upset when people are rude, and there's no telling what Simon might do when he's upset.

Simon dozes and purrs on her lap.

ALEX

Kitty, kitty.

He reaches to stroke Simon. Simon slashes his hand.

INT. VILLAGE STORE -- DAY

A tussle: JOHN STARKEY (Alex's friend: mid 20's, movie star good looks) pushes the OLD LADY shopkeeper backwards. Her arms flail. She scratches John's face.

BACK TO SCENE

Alex sucks at his bleeding hand.

NELL

Remind you of someone, does he?

ALEX

No.

NELL

Here.

She tips brandy over Alex's hand. Alex gasps with pain, surprise, confusion.

NELL (CONT)

We have all the time in the world, dearie, all the time in the world. You know why Simon never says anything?

ALEX

No

NELL

Because he's a cat! But you never say anything either, although there are things you want to tell me, aren't there?

ALEX

You know all about it.

NELL

Why don't you tell me anyway?

ALEX

Why should I? It's got nothing to do with you. I'm not ashamed of anything. I didn't do anything wrong except take some sweets and a magazine.

NELL

We were all young once, Alex. Even me.

EXT. COTTAGE -- DAY (circa 1820)

Young Nell in her rustic finery backs provocatively against the wall of the cottage. A rear view of her Regency BEAU as he closes in on her...

ALEX (VO)

It all -- I don't know. Everything happened so fast.

NELL (VO)

Yes.

Nell's beau lunges at her. She dodges, screams -- but all in play.

INT. VILLAGE SHOP -- DAY

The shoplady watches in the security mirror as Alex and John shoplift. They giggle as they put stuff in each other's pockets: a magazine each, sweets, small stuff.

EXT. COTTAGE -- DAY (1820)

Sounds of a QUARREL inside the cottage. Nell's beau flings the door open, but before he can leave -- and before we see his face -- Nell grabs him, clings to him. He beats her off with his cane, stalks away.

Heartbroken, sobbing, Nell collapses in the doorway.

INT. VILLAGE SHOP -- DAY

The shoplady comes out from behind her counter and confronts John. John crowds her, pushes her back. She resists, flails, scratches his face.

John smacks her with vicious backhanders until she drops to the floor.

Alex watches in shock.

NELL (VO)

It feels like love. Like true love.
But the only thing real is the pain.

John empties the till. He turns to Alex. A beat. John runs out. Another beat and Alex follows.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET -- DAY

Alex runs out of the village store. A parked car pulls away, and as it drives past him, John (the driver) blows Alex a kiss. Alex runs after the car.

EXT. RIVER -- DAY (1820)

A struggle at the river's edge: young Nell's beau on top. He pushes her under the water. When Nell stops moving, the beau turns away -- and is revealed as John Starkey.

Young drowned Nell, eyes wide open, a silent scream under the crystal water.

NELL (VO)

They say the dead don't grow old.
But why wouldn't they? Why wouldn't
they grow old and tired like
everyone else?

INT. COTTAGE -- NIGHT

NELL

You'll not want to go back through
the village. Come morning, you're
best to follow that footpath
upstream until you come to
Mallowdale Fell. Bear left there
and keep the crags to your right.
You'll see another river. That
river'll lead you out of the forest.

She rises, fetches Alex an old knapsack and a hiking stick.

NELL (CONT)

Here. Now you look the part.

ALEX

Why are you helping me?

NELL

Call it vengeance. Choose your
company with care, my lad. Some
day perhaps you'll understand.
(she pats his shoulder)
Come on, Simon.

Nell and Simon retire to another room.

INT. COTTAGE -- DAWN

Sunlight angles through the window. Alex still at the
table, slumped in his chair. He wakes.

EXT. COTTAGE -- DAWN

Alex exits the cottage, quietly shuts the door. He goes to

THE GARDEN

He pulls a carrot, wipes off the dirt, is about to eat. A shadow passes overhead.

Alex looks up: the sun slips behind a cloud.

He looks back: instead of the carrot he holds a tuft of bracken.

The garden is a wasteland of weeds and nettles.

The cottage is a tumbledown ruin.

Alex stands, backs up. He stumble-runs away, down towards the river.

EXT. RIVER -- DAWN

Alex walks away along the footpath with an occasional nervous glance behind him.

THE CAMERA MOVES TO REVEAL: a body in the shallows.

John Starkey lies face up, drowned, held under by stones from the garden wall. The magazine in his pocket ripples in the current. A few banknotes drift away downstream.

THE END