

BIRDWATCHING

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

An alarm RINGS from its place on a cluttered nightstand in an equally-cluttered room.

Dirty clothes and half-eaten plates of food litter the floor. Light spills in from half-closed blinds illuminating dusty surfaces of furniture.

BETH, a woman in disheveled lounge wear with messy hair, lies in her bed; eyes closed but not asleep.

After the alarm rings for a few seconds, she opens her eyes and stares at the ceiling in no rush to turn off the noise.

She runs her hands over her face before finally rolling over and turning off the alarm.

Beth drags herself upright and looks over at the nightstand.

Next to the alarm is a picture of her and another woman smiling. She picks up the picture and holds it for a minute then puts it back facedown.

With the same tired, heavy-limbed movements, she stands up and makes her way to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The kitchen is just as messy as the bedroom.

Dirty dishes pile in and around the sink and stacks of mail litter the counter.

Beth shuffles through the mess on the counter and finds her phone. She swipes through it and plays through a long list of voicemails.

She sets the phone on the counter barely listening.

MOM (V.O.)

Hi Beth. I'm just checking in with you, honey. We haven't heard from you in a while and your father and I are getting worried. Call us back when you get a chance.

Beth goes to the cupboard for a clean dish. Nothing.

She checks the dishwasher. Nothing.

Another message plays on her phone.

BOSS (V.O.)

Look, Beth, I know you're going through a tough time and I said I'd give you some time off, but you haven't returned my calls in weeks. You can keep ignoring me but if you don't return my call, don't expect to have a job waiting when you get back.

Beth shifts over to address the stack of dirty dishes. She fills the sink and moves a couple dishes from the counter into the water.

That's as far as she gets she stops and places her hands on the sink, hanging her head.

The messages keep playing.

BANK TELLER (V.O.)

Good afternoon. We are trying to reach Beth Woods in regards to three overdue payments for-

Beth stops the voicemail and deletes the remaining un-played messages.

Instead, she enters the number from a pizza shop menu pinned to the fridge and waits for an answer.

BETH

Hi, can I get one small pepperoni pizza...yes Please...1440 Magnolia Lane. Thank you.

After ordering, she hangs up and reaches for a mostly empty bottle of wine, not bothering to grab a glass.

She goes to another bedroom, different from the first.

INT. ROOMMATE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

In this room, boxes line the walls, some tightly taped up and other half open in various stages of packing. Photos of the same woman from the picture on Beth's nightstand litter the walls.

Beth stands in the doorway and takes a sip from the bottle, looking around, then sets it down on the floor next to some of the boxes.

She takes one of the emptier boxes and places it on the bed with a pile of clothes.

One by one she folds the clothes and places them in the box holding some items longer than others.

When she picks up one particular sweater, she stops. Beth holds it up to her nose, taking a deep breath and closing her eyes. She pulls it on over her own clothes.

Just then, there is a KNOCK at the door.

INT. FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Beth goes to the front door and peers quickly out of the glass while keeping her body hidden from view.

An old man, DENNIS, stands at the door holding her pizza in hand.

She waits for him to set it down and walk back to his car, but he just stands there for a moment, then rings the doorbell again.

Finally, Beth gives in and opens the door just enough to reach out. She grabs at the pizza hastily.

BETH

Thanks.

Startled by her eagerness, Dennis steps back just out of reach.

DENNIS

Whoa there.

Beth recoils, then reaches for the Pizza again, this time slower.

BETH

(softly)

Sorry.

Dennis smiles and hands her the pizza.

Beth begins to close the door, but he reaches his arm out to stop her.

DENNIS

Hang on a minute. My name's Dennis,
I own the pizza shop you order
from.

Beth says nothing in response, so he continues.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
I wanted to invite you, if you'd be
so inclined, to come in and dine
with us, free of charge.

Beth squints at him and tilts her head.

BETH
...Why?

DENNIS
You order from us everyday. You're
one of my most loyal customers, if
not *the* most loyal. We'd love to
have you in.

Dennis waits awkwardly as Beth stares at him.

BETH
No thanks.

She doesn't let one more word leave his mouth before SHUTTING
THE DOOR in his face.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Beth marches in to the kitchen and tosses the box on the
table, then goes over to the fridge and pulls the pizza shop
menu off the door.

With a look of disdain, she crumples the menu and tosses it
in the trash.

INT. BETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Beth wakes up to the sound of her BLARING alarm. It's past
mid-day again.

She sits up and looks over at the picture on her nightstand,
still facedown from the day before.

This time, she picks it up and shoves it in a drawer.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Beth enters the kitchen. It's just as dirty as the day
before.

Her phone still sits on the counter.

She scrolls through her voicemails: one from dad, two from mom, and another from her boss.

She deletes them all without bothering to listen to even one.

Beth looks at the sink and sighs, then pulls the pizza shop menu out of the trash and calls the number.

BETH

Yeah...one small pepperoni
pizza...that's correct...just leave
it at the door. Thanks.

She hangs up, rolling her eyes.

INT. FRONT DOOR - LATER

There's a KNOCK at the door.

Beth goes over and looks out the glass to find Dennis standing there, again.

Like before, he waits patiently for her to answer, not budging from his spot.

Beth throws open the door.

DENNIS

Hi again.

He smiles at her. She scowls back.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

I wanted to come let you know the
offer to dine with us still stands.
Like I said, we'd love to have you.

BETH

Dude, I don't want to eat at your
stupid restaurant.

Dennis looks at her with hurt in his eyes.

DENNIS

Are you okay, hon?

BETH

(apologetically)
I'm sorry. I'm really not in the
mood.

Dennis nods.

DENNIS

I know I'm just some old man, but
if you need to get anything off
your chest...well, you have my
number.

He smiles and walks back towards his car parked on the road.

Beth watches him until he leave, then closes the door.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Beth lies in her bed, staring at her alarm.

Before it has a chance to ring, she rolls over and turns it
off.

Beth looks over at the drawer holding her picture. She opens
it, takes the picture out, and goes over to her closet.

She pulls out an old shoebox from the top shelf and places
the photo inside, then shoves it back onto the shelf.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Beth sits at her kitchen table, her phone in one hand and the
pizza shop menu in the other.

She fidgets with the menu for a moment then calls the number.

BETH

Hi...yeah, small pepperoni...yeah.
Could you send Dennis?

She hangs up the phone and waits.

INT. FRONT DOOR - LATER

There's a KNOCK. Beth doesn't hesitate to open the door this
time.

Dennis is there, but this time he hands her the pizza quickly
and turns to leave.

BETH

Dennis, wait!

He stops and turn back to her.

BETH (CONT'D)
I was wondering if maybe you wanted
to sit here for a minute.

Dennis smiles.

DENNIS
I'd love too.

Beth sits just inside the door frame. Dennis follows suit,
taking a seat just outside.

Dennis is relaxed in the comfortable silence while Beth goes
back and forth between looking awkwardly at him, then at her
feet.

Finally, she opens the pizza box in her lap and holds it out
to him.

BETH
Pizza?

Dennis takes a slice.

BETH (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I called your shop stupid
the other day. I do like it.

DENNIS
(chuckling)
No hard feelings.

There's another moment of silence as they eat.

BETH
You know, my best friend was the
one who introduced me. She loved
your food.

DENNIS
Loved? She didn't find somewhere
better did she?

Beth looks away sadly.

BETH
Uh, no. She...she actually passed
away.

Dennis looks at her dumbfounded. Beth picks at the corner of
the pizza box continues with averted eyes.

BETH (CONT'D)

I don't know why I say passed away.
I hate when people say that. She
was killed.

DENNIS

Oh hon, I'm so sorry.

Beth shrugs and goes back to eating her pizza.

BETH

I know I was a kind of mean about
going to your shop, but I haven't
been out much since— or really at
all.

DENNIS

When did she...how long has it
been?

BETH

Almost 3 moths.

Dennis' eyes widen. Beth notices the change and shifts
uncomfortably in his gaze.

DENNIS

That's a long time to be alone.

Beth furrows her brow.

BETH

(defensively)

It's not like it was some accident.
She was shot and killed in a drive-
by on her way home from work. I
guess I'm not exactly anxious to go
back into a world like that.

Dennis nods slowly.

DENNIS

Hey, I understand. I didn't leave
the house for months when my wife
died.

Beth stops eating but doesn't look up to meet his eyes.

BETH

How did you get through it?

Dennis smiles wistfully.

DENNIS

My wife loved birds. She used to wake up every morning just as the sun was rising to feed them. Let me tell you, those birds made the most beautiful sounds.

Beth looks up at him.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

When she died, I couldn't be bothered to feed them. I couldn't be bothered to leave the house. Well one day the birds stopped coming and I stopped hearing that beautiful music.

He chuckles.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Now, I didn't think my wife would've liked that very much. So one morning I got up and I fed the birds. Sure enough, they came, and I swear they sounded sweeter than ever. I like to think they were singing for my wife.

Without warning, Beth leaned forward across the invisible divide between her and the outside world and wraps her arms around Dennis's neck.

She lets him go and retreats back through the doorway, then wipes a tear from her eye.

BETH

I'm sorry. I really needed that.

Beth draws her arms across her body and averts her eyes.

DENNIS

Don't be sorry. I think I needed that too.

As they sit there, a cardinal lands on a nearby tree. Dennis points excitedly.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Look over there.

Beth follows his point to the bird. Dennis stands up slowly and Beth follows suit leaning slightly out of the door frame.

DENNIS (CONT'D)
They say cardinals are the sprit of
lost loved ones looking out for us.

Beth, enraptured, leans out a little more and then, ever so slowly, places one foot out of the door.

Dennis is now more focused on Beth then the bird.

He reaches out his hands to her and, without even noticing, she takes them and steps fully out the door.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

They slowly walk into the middle of the yard, Dennis holding both her hands and leading her gently.

They stand there watching the bird flutter from branch to branch.

Suddenly, another cardinal joins the first in the tree.

This time it's Dennis's turn to cry.

Beth squeezes his hands tightly.

BETH
(whispering)
Thank you.

Dennis squeezes her hands back, a silent return of thanks.

FADE OUT.

THE END