

RATS IN THE CUD

Written by

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INT. LIVING ROOM - VERY EARLY MORNING - PRE-SUNRISE

1. Slow pull out from a painting with dark repeating patterns.

Hissing sound of water running grows.

INT. KITCHEN

2. Close in on TAYLOR who's washing his hands in the sink, staring straight ahead of him in a kind of Kubrick stare.

3:

TAYLOR
(muttering - barely
audible)
They seem like nice people.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Hissing sound continues.

SLOW MO:

4. Continue to pull out from the painting with dark repeating patterns.

5. On the sofa sit three people (20s-30s), chatting, laughing happily - drinking beer.

INT. KITCHEN

7. Blood from Taylor's hands trickles down the sink.

8. Close up on Taylor's face as he thinks.

INT. KITCHEN - VISION

Hissing sound continues.

SLOW MO

9. Close up on: Taylor's hands - he's putting a pill into a bottle of beer.

END OF VISION

INT. KITCHEN - RESUMING

10. Back to Taylor's thinking face, he turns off the tap without looking at it, still in thought.

INT. LIVING ROOM - RESUMING

11. Now the people are seemingly asleep, flopped on each other, mouths agape - so still that they might be dead.

INT. LIVING ROOM

12. TV lights flash on Taylor as he throws beer bottles off the coffee table into a bag of trash while biting his lip and looking at nothing.

13. He picks up a DISTINCT LIGHTER, about to trash it, but then stops and looks at it.

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON:

The DISTINCT LIGHTER

14. EXTREME CLOSE UP ON:

Taylor's face.

TAYLOR
(mumbling - barely
audible)
People are never as they seem.

INT. BALCONY

15. Ross stands on the balcony overlooking the city. He lights a cigarette with the DISTINCT LIGHTER and smokes it. We get up close and observe his natural mannerisms and behaviours: sniffing, getting something out of his teeth with his tongue - seems like an ordinary innocent guy.

16. TAYLOR'S POV: We smoothly close in on Ross from behind, like we're slowly stalking him.

Ross senses us, then spins around, startled, with a touch of defensiveness as he looks dead at us.

Exit POV.

17. Taylor is standing there with a beer.

TAYLOR

Drink this.

He holds out the beer.

18.

ROSS

(soft - untrusting)

No... I'm good.

19. Taylor's offering arm lowers. He walks over beside Ross and looks over the edge.

20. POV: Over Ross's shoulder, we see the treacherous drop behind him.

21. Taylor's predatory eyes return to Ross.

22. Ross looks a little weirded out by Taylor's look.

ROSS (CONT'D)

(cutting the tension)

It's cold out here.

23. He walks past him into the living room - Taylor follows.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

24. Taylor closes the door, muting the wind from the outside and now the air in here is thick, quiet, claustrophobic.

25. They speak in hushed tones, considerate of the people 'sleeping'. There's a palpable tension between them throughout the following scene.

ROSS

So... what time's your flight?

TAYLOR

9.

26.

ROSS

In the morn- this morning?

27. Taylor nods.

ROSS (CONT'D)

Wow, so soon - and you're all packed and everything? I guess you had your boxes sent already.

TAYLOR
No boxes. I travel light.

ROSS
(nodding)
Oh yeah - I remember you saying.

Awkward beat.

ROSS (CONT'D)
And what about that?

He gestures to the painting. Taylor's eyes turn to it, then back to Ross.

TAYLOR
It flies with me.

ROSS
(touch of venom)
Isn't that a burden for you as well?

TAYLOR
(slightly offended)
It's an heirloom.

Ross nods, giving up the point with ease.

ROSS
Well... I better let you get some rest before your flight.
(furrowed brow, sincerely)
It was a good night. Thanks for inviting me.
(As if there was reason not to)

Taylor wince-smiles.

ROSS (CONT'D)
It was nice meeting your friends.

TAYLOR
They're not my friends.

ROSS
Oh. Well, they seem like nice people.

Taylor stares at Ross and lightly shakes his head.

TAYLOR
People are never as they seem.

51-54. He turns to them and while pointing at each he says:

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
Liar, thief, gaslighter.

ROSS
Wow, you really see the worst in
people.

Taylor turns his head and looks at Ross coldly.

TAYLOR
I see people for who they are.

The stare lingers, attempting to cut through Ross - he looks back, seeing what he's doing/infering.

ROSS
Well, soon you won't have to see us
anymore.

Ross smiles with pity.

ROSS (CONT'D)
I should go. We had some good
times, man.

Taylor's face has a subtle bitter scowl.

ROSS (CONT'D)
(sorrowfully)
I won't forget them.

Ross puts his hand out for a shake - Taylor takes a moment to respond, then they shake - Taylor's side totally lacking warmth.

ROSS (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Okay.

Ross turns and walks to the door.

28. A mild look of desperation emerges on Taylor's face (now with TV lights flashing on it)

We pull out and see that Taylor is holding the trash bag again.

29. Shot of the door - Ross is definitely not there.

Taylor turns to the TV and sees:

55. On the TV is a video of mice running through a maze:

Top down, slow pull out from the maze - then different angles of the maze.

56. Back to Taylor's face watching the TV.

ROSS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Something I saw... it made me think
 of you.

Taylor turns his head and is unsurprised to see Ross standing there again.

His vibe becomes a little bit friendly. Taylor is curious, but still guarded.

ROSS (CONT'D)
 There were these rats, in a maze.
 Smart rats and stupid rats.

33. FLASH of people on the sofa on 'stupid rats'.

ROSS (CONT'D)
 Participants in this study had to
 see which ones could complete the
 maze more quickly. Guess which ones
 did.

Taylor stares back at him, unsure where he's going with this.

ROSS (CONT'D)
 Go on, guess.

TAYLOR
 (playing along)
 The smart ones.

ROSS
 Yeah... but here's the thing. The
 smart rats weren't any smarter than
 the dumb ones. The participants
 were just told that. And so because
 they **expected** the 'smart' rats to
 do better, they actually did.

34. EXTREME CLOSE UP on Taylor's face.

TAYLOR
 (mumbles)
 It doesn't make sense.

We stay by Taylor's face for a few moments as TV lights flash on it and he stares straight ahead.

56. Now closing in on the TV showing a guy handling a rat carefully and then another rat less carefully.

34 again. Realization grows on Taylor's face.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
 (figuring it out)
 It's like...

ROSS
 It does! It's like... micro-communications! The way you handle a smart rat is different to how you handle a dumb rat. It's the same for people. Dumb people, smart people, honest people... deceptive people. They become what you see them to be.

TAYLOR
 (bubbling indignation)
 You're saying... that what you did... what they did... was because of me?

Ross sighs and rolls his eyes.

ROSS
 N--

TAYLOR
 That all of this is **my** fault?!

ROSS
Or is it that **everyone** else is the problem?!

35. Taylor smashes the bottle of beer over Ross's head and then lunges at him, grasping his hands around his throat.

They fall to the floor, but we don't follow them.

TAYLOR (O.S.)
 (through grit-teeth)
 I fucking trusted you!

We go over the heads of the people on the sofa (who definitely look dead) and slowly zoom into the painting of the dark patterns as we hear the choking and struggling on the floor.

Flash between painting and choking.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM

36. Taylor is sitting on the sofa by himself, TV lights still flashing on his face, staring at the floor with his hands grasping the air, as if he's in a fantasy about choking Ross.

He stops, wipes his hand down his face. He calms, thinks for a moment, then looks up.

We pan over towards the TV where Taylor and Ross stand again just before the lunge, as if time has rewound.

Taylor is upset and confused, but not angry.

TAYLOR
(genuinely)
It's because of me?

ROSS
(doesn't know how to say)
No... I... listen...

38. Ross puts his hand on Taylor's arm.

ROSS (CONT'D)
I know you're still angry with me.

Taylor's face softens - becomes vulnerable.

ROSS (CONT'D)
I hate myself for what I did to you
- really - but... And I'm not
trying to put the blame onto you...
but can't you see, man?

TAYLOR
What?

ROSS
(reluctantly)
How many times have you left it all
behind, hoping to find a better
life somewhere else?

Taylor takes a moment to digest that.

TAYLOR
(sincere - slight urgency)
You think I'm going to keep
reliving this pattern?

In a sincere look, Ross gives Taylor his answer - yes.

Taylor's eyes well up, he starts to look really worried.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)
(panicking)
I can't escape it.

Ross doesn't know what to say.

ROSS
Aw, dude. Come here.

39. Ross hugs him. Taylor clutches him, and what he had been guarding this whole time comes spilling out. Tears rolls from Taylor's eyes onto Ross's shirt.

TAYLOR
It's my fault, isn't it?

40. Ross is holding back tears as he holds him.

ROSS
Oh, man, it's not, that's not what I meant.

41.

TAYLOR
But it's always the same pattern.

EXT. FAMILY MART - FLASHBACK

42. Ross and Taylor are drunk sitting beside each other on the sidewalk. Ross rests his head on Taylor's shoulder. Taylor smiles, feeling honoured to be trusted in this way.

INT. BAR (OR SOMEWHERE)

43. Ross is acting aggressively defensive, Taylor is confused.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. LIVING ROOM - RESUMING

44. Closer to Taylor's saddened face.

TAYLOR
(gentle)
When did it begin?

INT. BEDROOM - FLASHBACK

45. A motherly-looking woman with a soft and loving expression. It slowly fades to neutral, then anger and disgust.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. LIVING ROOM - RESUMING

47. Extreme close up on Taylor's saddened face - TV lights flashing on his face.

Taylor's expression morphs to a state of deep bemusement and curiosity.

TAYLOR
(whisper)
Does it precede me?

48. FLASH OF THE DARK PATTERNS PAINTING

47 again. His eyes widen, mouth opens and head pulls back slightly as if he's had a profound realization.

We pull out and see that Taylor is actually standing alone with his arms wrapped around himself, one hand holding the bag of trash.

49. We pull out further and see the three people on the sofa aren't there either, nor are the beer bottles.

Taylor returns to a kind of neutral stance, still lost in thought.

He picks up the remote from the table and turns off the TV, then slowly walks up to a mirror in front of him.

50. He looks at himself. The painting can be seen in the background of the reflection.

We slowly close in on the mirror.

Taylor looks at himself with a kind of curious detachment - then at the painting with the same look for few moments. His eyes drift to the floor, still thinking, mouth lightly open. He checks his watch with a hint of urgency, then walks off purposefully, but still partially lost in thought.

FADE TO BLACK.