

BLUE LULLABY

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FADE IN

INT. JAZZ CLUB NIGHT

Fingers caress the keys of a saxophone. Light glints off the golden surface of the instrument. MUSIC plays: low, sweets blues.

ROGER MCAULY, with long, tangled hair, performs a blue version of *I Ain't Got Nobody*.

INT. CLINIC NIGHT

Harsh lights illuminate a room with a gynecological examination table. The door clicks open. SUSAN LEWIS enters.

JAZZ CLUB

Roger finishes his introductory solo. A TRIO behind him begins to play. After a moment, Roger joins in but screws up the tempo. The DRUMMER whips out each downbeat, trying to get him back on track.

CLINIC

MUSIC continues. Susan, now dressed in a hospital gown, waits on the examination table. A DOCTOR and NURSE enters, snapping on the bright examination lights. We never see their faces.

JAZZ CLUB

The PIANO PLAYER starts a solo. Roger plays over him. The Piano Player shoots him a dirty look.

CLINIC

MUSIC continues. Susan now lies on her back, her feet in the stirrups. The doctor sits hunched with his head between her legs.

JAZZ CLUB

Roger wails on, his MUSIC growing wilder. His tangled hair flies about his face as he flails his instrument up and down. The Piano Player throws up his hands in frustration.

Several CUSTOMERS get up and leave. A sinewy OLD MAN sitting at the bar watches them go, displeased.

CLAIRE, dressed as a waitress, stands at the bar loading drinks on a tray. Another WAITRESS comes up beside her.

WAITRESS

What is your boyfriend doing up there?

CLAIRE

He's not my boyfriend.

CLINIC

MUSIC continues. Susan lies on her back. The Nurse lays out instruments on a tray, including gleaming steel forceps and a speculum. The Nurse opens a specimen cup.

JAZZ CLUB

Roger plays his MUSIC wilder, his face red with effort. The saxophone squeaks with sour notes.

More CUSTOMERS rise and leave.

The Drummer can't keep up and stops playing. The BASS PLAYER stops, too.

CLINIC

The Nurse hands the Doctor a syringe big as a turkey baster. Susan turns her head away.

JAZZ CLUB

Roger plays on, wildly. He rocks back and forth, veins standing out on his forehead. The music builds to a climax.

CLINIC

Susan's face. She gasps.

JAZZ CLUB

Roger finishes with a flourish. The few remaining CUSTOMERS offer scattered, unenthusiastic applause. Some of them get up and leave.

INT. JAZZ CLUB BAR

The sinewy Old Man talks quietly with the Piano Player. Roger approaches. The Piano Player leaves. The Old Man turns to the beefy BARTENDER.

OLD MAN

Give him twenty bucks.

The Bartender opens the register and takes out a twenty.

ROGER

You said fifty.

OLD MAN

Squealing pigs sound better than you.

ROGER

You son of a bitch.

OLD MAN

Fuck it. Don't pay him.

The Bartender stands with the twenty in his hand. Before he can turn away, Roger snaps up the bill.

ROGER
You know what a bitch is, don't you? It means
your father fucked dogs.

The Bartender grabs Roger's lapels and pulls him across the bar.

OLD MAN
Easy, easy. He's not worth the broken glassware.
(to Roger)
Get out of my club.

The Bartender releases Roger.

INT. JAZZ CLUB STAGE
The Trio performs alone, a soft blue BALLAD. Roger puts his saxophone into a battered case. Claire comes to the table next to him and clears the empty glasses.

CLAIRE
I stuck my neck out for you. I told him you
were good.

ROGER
He's an asshole.

CLAIRE
He's my boss.

ROGER
Let's get out of here.

CLAIRE
Roger, don't call me anymore.

She turns to leave. Roger grabs her arm.

CLAIRE (cont.)
You're gonna need that hand to play.

Roger releases her. Claire leaves.

EXT. JAZZ CLUB NIGHT

Rain comes down in torrents. Roger appears in the doorway, carrying his battered saxophone case. He turns up the collar of his raincoat and trudges up the street.

A TAXI drives by and sprays him with water from the gutter.

INT. MARVIN'S BAR NIGHT

Cozy and comfortable: the kind of place where a lonely soul can find a good drink and a kind word. Roger enters, soaking wet and looking miserable.

COBB, a black man Roger's age, stands behind the bar cleaning glasses. Seeing Roger, he picks up a bar towel and tosses it at him. Roger catches it and wipes his face.

Roger sits at the bar. Cobb pours a draft beer.

COBB

Thought you had a gig.

ROGER

Had. Past tense.

COBB

How'd it go?

ROGER

Back that up with a shot.

Instead, Cobb produces a brightly wrapped package.

COBB

Happy birthday.

ROGER

Aw, man. You didn't have to do this.

COBB

It ain't gonna open itself.

Roger opens the gift: a bottle of good scotch.

ROGER

Get some glasses.

Cobb does and Roger pours for each of them. They touch glasses and sip.

Susan Lewis sits at the end of the bar, a full glass of wine beside her. She gazes out the window at the pouring rain. Roger notices her, then looks at Cobb.

COBB

Been turning down guys all night.

Cobb tosses Roger a Nerf basketball and goes to serve someone at the other end of the bar. Roger tosses the basketball at a toy hoop hanging behind the bar. The shot bounces off the rim.

SUSAN (O. C.)

I used to play saxophone in high school.

Roger looks up, sees Susan smiling at him.

ROGER

Band was the only class I didn't sleep through.

SUSAN

Can I see?

Roger opens the case.

SUSAN (cont.)

Can I hold it?

Roger assembles the instrument.

SUSAN (cont.)

We won the state championship my senior year.
The band went to Trenton on a bus for the playoffs.
I had more fun on that trip than I've ever had since.

Roger hands her the saxophone.

ROGER

Go ahead. Have some fun now.

SUSAN

Here?

Roger shrugs. Susan plays MUSIC, a high-school fight song, loudly and badly. Roger cringes. Cobb comes running.

COBB

Hey, hey, hey.

Roger gently takes the sax away from her. She's grinning like a Cheshire cat.

ROGER

Let's do a normal bar thing. I'll buy
you a drink.

SUSAN

I already have a drink.

MARVIN'S BAR

LATER

Roger and Susan sit together, burgers and fries before them. Susan eats voraciously.

ROGER

Life can be disappointing. Music makes it
at least bearable.

SUSAN

I hate what I'm doing.

ROGER

What's that?

SUSAN

Macy's. I'm a buyer.

ROGER

This place downtown has an open mike. You
can play whatever you want.

SUSAN

I couldn't.

ROGER

Nobody cares what anyone sounds like.

SUSAN

No, I... thanks for dinner.

Susan suddenly gets up and puts on her coat.

ROGER

Wait a minute.

SUSAN

I had a nice time talking to you.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE MARVIN'S NIGHT

The rain has stopped. Susan stands in the wet street, waving for a taxi. Roger catches up with her.

ROGER
When can I see you again?

SUSAN
I can't.

ROGER
Coffee. That's all. I know a place that
makes cappuccino smooth as a lover's kiss.

SUSAN
I have to go.

A TAXI stops.

ROGER
Tomorrow then.

SUSAN
No.

Susan opens the Taxi door. Roger stops her.

ROGER
Then when? Come on. Please.

SUSAN
Okay. Wednesday.

ROGER
Marvin's. Eight o'clock. Here, take my
number.

He presses a crumpled business card into her hand.

SUSAN
Fine.

Roger releases the taxicab door. Susan gets inside. Roger closes the door.

EXT. NEW JERSEY STREET CORNER NIGHT

The sparkling skyline of Manhattan shines across the river, above the dark rooftops of Union City. A bus stops at the corner and Susan gets off. She walks past overflowing garbage cans and into a graffiti-covered building.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Susan enters. JOCK, a burly man wearing a garage work shirt, sits watching television. The room features cheap furniture and colorful children's toys.

JOCK

How'd it go?

SUSAN

Okay. What did you feed them?

JOCK

Doughnuts.

Jock offers her a box of Krispy Kremes. Susan just shakes her head.

INT. CHILDREN'S ROOM

Susan opens the door. Light falls across two children, fast asleep. CHRIS is six years old and LISA is four.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Susan reenters and confronts Jock.

SUSAN

You have to give them decent food.

Jock grunts. Susan walks past into another room.

INT. KITCHEN

Susan flicks on the light. The switch plate is covered with greasy finger marks, the walls with old stains and new spills. The sink holds a mountain of dirty dishes. Susan calls back into the other room.

SUSAN

You said you would clean up.

JOCK (O. C.)

Leave it. I'll do it tomorrow.

With a sigh, Susan runs water and begins to wash dishes.

INT. UPTOWN CLUB NIGHT
 SAXOPHONE MUSIC plays. A CLEANING MAN polishes brass amid chairs overturned on tables. Roger plays alone on stage, his musical style assaulting the ears.

The UPTOWN CLUB OWNER stands at the bar with a beautiful HOSTESS. He whispers something to her and they both laugh.

Roger finishes his audition.

UPTOWN CLUB OWNER
 I'm set through the end of the summer. Sorry.

INT. CLINIC NIGHT
 Susan sits once more on the examination table dressed in a hospital gown. She looks up at the SOUND of the DOOR OPENING. The DOCTOR enters.

DOCTOR'S VOICE
 Good evening Ms. Lewis. Ready to try again?

INT. MARVIN'S NIGHT
 Roger sits at the bar, shooting and missing with the Nerf basketball. He has shaved, combed his hair and wears a nicer shirt. Susan enters.

SUSAN
 Sorry I'm late.

Roger pulls a rose from inside his raincoat. Susan smiles.

SUSAN (cont.)
 Thank you. I see you shaved.

ROGER
 A band of wild Indians did it in the night.
 Come on. Let's go downtown.

EXT. GREENWICH VILLAGE STREET NIGHT
 The street teems with life. A STREET MUSICIAN plays a guitar. Roger and Susan emerge from a subway entrance. A gang of EMO TEENAGERS passes by with tattoos and wildly colored hair. A group of HARE KRISHNA, with shaven heads and bright orange robes, come around the corner singing and beating tambourines.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE
 Hot espresso sizzles into cups. An excessively pierced EMO WAITRESS brings cappuccino to Roger and Susan's table. They chat and laugh, having a good time.

EXT. SEX TOY SHOP

The window features a display of bondage equipment: handcuffs, chains and leather masks with zippered mouths. Roger and Susan walk past. Susan stops.

SUSAN
Why do people wear those?

ROGER
Do you like that?

SUSAN
No.

ROGER
Life has enough pain, if you ask me. C'mon.

He takes her hand and leads her away.

INT. PORT AUTHORITY BUS STATION

Roger and Susan stand in line at a ticket window.

ROGER
At least give me your number.

SUSAN
Not yet.

ROGER
Then I'll buy a ticket and follow you home.

SUSAN
Don't you dare.

ROGER
All right.

SUSAN
Don't even joke about it.

A PASSENGER in line in front of Susan accepts a ticket and steps aside. Susan approaches the window.

SUSAN
One for the 735.