

BITE THE DUST

Written by

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EXT. THE STREETS OF SMALL-TOWN - DAY

We peek down a street of small-town SHOPS with quaint, colorful-but-old-timey charm. The street sign reads "FAIRBURN ST."

EXT. FAIRBURN PARK - DAY

A quaint little park with a GAZEBO and a POND. The sign labels the place: "FAIRBURN PARK".

EXT. THE STREETS OF SMALL-TOWN - DAY

"FAIRBURN". "FAIRBURN". "FAIRBURN". We see the name sprinkled on different signs all over town.

Finally landing on...

EXT. FUNERAL PARLOR - DAY

A SIGN outside the funeral home tastefully reads, "We honor the memory of COUNCILWOMAN JUNE FAIRBURN today at 12:00PM."

With an extra note beneath it in small print: "Yes, pastries will be served."

EXT. FAIRBURN'S BAKERY - DAY

Two stylish but still-small-town-feeling LADIES in their mid-30s are dressed in mourning - varieties of black. One has a veil. They stroll past the bakery, mid-conversation.

LADY #1

...and to leave such an impact on this town? Such a loss.

LADY #2

First Frank from the funeral home, now Councilwoman Fairburn. Old age. What a terror. She did do great things.

LADY #1

Shame she had no one to leave it all to.

LADY #2

Didn't she have a daughter?

LADY #1

Did she? Hm. I never knew.

LADY #2

I'm just glad we were invited to the funeral! There's barely any geriatrics left in this town!

They pass "FAIRBURN'S BAKERY". They laugh in manic merriment past the shop WINDOW. A wide-eyed young woman watches them walk by, nose pressed against the window.

We swoop in to see her rosy, TEAR-STAINED cheek dusted with FLOUR. She wears a ruffled APRON and is holding a TRAY OF FRESHLY GARNISHED CUPCAKES.

INT. FAIRBURN'S BAKERY - DAY

She watches the woman stroll toward the FUNERAL PARLOR across the street. She is ZELDA FAIRBURN (20s), a curious ladybug whose wings are uncharacteristically wilted.

She exhales. We see the inside of her bakery. Quaint - somewhere between cutesy contemporary trendy and grandma's kitchen. Little pots and pans on the walls, jars, decor.

A PICTURE of 7-YEAR-OLD ZELDA, grinning with an apron and a mixing bowl, hangs behind the register.

DING-A-LING! The SHOP BELL snaps Zelda's attention away from the women, and her own wistful melancholy. In walks SOME GUY (20s) wearing all black. He is disinterested in life.

SOME GUY

Hey I'm supposed to help you carry stuff over.

ZELDA

Oh! Hello! It's nice to meet-

SOME GUY

Are you ready?

ZELDA

(Pause)

No, I'm Zelda.

A pause. Then Zelda chuckles at her joke. The guy doesn't.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

Y'know. 'Cuz.

(Pause)

Proper nouns.

Still nothin.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
I'll be right back.

She heads towards the kitchen in the back. She passes by a framed NEWSPAPER ARTICLE on the wall with a smiling picture of her and her mother. The headline reads:

"COUNCILWOMAN FAIRBURN OPENS NEW BAKERY"

And underneath the headline, in smaller script:

"HER DAUGHTER WAS THERE TOO, WE THINK".

INT. KITCHEN - FAIRBURN'S BAKERY - DAY

Zelda tenderly sets down the cupcakes on the counter. She inspects them. They are beautiful. But hmm. Something is missing. It saddens her, reminding her of the day's sorrow.

A thought occurs to her. She goes toward a shelf of a variety of colorful, pretty SPICES and SPRINKLES. She sifts through them, until she reaches the hidden back of the collection.

An almost antique-looking SKULL AND CROSS BONES POISON BOTTLE sits alone.

She stares at it, unsure of how long it has been sitting there. Curiously, she picks it up and examines it.

There's something about this bottle. Almost mysterious.

She uncorks it.

SOME GUY (O.S.)
YOU COMIN' OR WHAT?

Zelda quickly recorks the bottle and returns it to the shelf.

EXT. FAIRBURN'S BAKERY

Zelda struggles to carry loads of cumbersome TRAYS OF PASTRIES in her arms as she shuffles across the street from the cupcake shop to the funeral parlor.

The guy lazily carries a handful of napkins.

ZELDA
(relatively cheerfully)
Thank you for your help...

He doesn't react or respond. She almost trips.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR - DAY

Zelda finishes arranging all the baked goods on the REFRESHMENT TABLE. She looks up toward the VIEWING ROOM. Can't avoid the day's sadness much longer.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR - VIEWING ROOM - DAY

Zelda arrives at the CASKET. She looks at it.

JUNE FAIRBURN, Zelda's mother, lays peacefully inside. Of course, it isn't really her mother. Just her mother's body, you see.

Zelda takes a deep breath in.

COUNCILMAN (O.S.)
Shame, isn't it?

Zelda whirls around to see whence the voice came.

It is THE COUNCILMAN (early 60s). He is the type of man who would have a devious handlebar moustache and a monocle. He doesn't, but he would. He gestures to the room.

COUNCILMAN (CONT'D)
How filthy this parlor is. She most certainly would have found some quality of it to complain about.

ZELDA
Being dead is plenty to complain about. Hello, Councilman.

COUNCILMAN
Have we met? You must be her shopkeeper. Shame about her passing, too, I suppose.

Zelda is baffled by his obtuseness. He barely misses a beat.

COUNCILMAN (CONT'D)
You're welcome.

ZELDA
I'm not just her shopkeeper.

He has a moment of wicked realization, realizing he has gotten under her skin. She tries to hold her ground.

COUNCILMAN

Ahhhh. I see. I must confess, June never spoke much of you. You are the *daughter*, are you not?

ZELDA

How could you tell. Was it my...p-penis?

He looks at her, perturbed and confused. Another one of her dumb jokes didn't land. Ugh.

ZELDA (CONT'D)

As opposed to her *son*. Who would have a...it's...it's funny.

COUNCILMAN

Crude humor at your own mother's funeral? I find that inappropriate.

ZELDA

I think humor is most appropriate in times of sadness.

COUNCILMAN

Your mother accomplished quite a lot in this town. Not that it will last. What have *you* done?

This strikes another nerve in Zelda, of hurt.

ZELDA

It's *my* bakery. I'm running the pastry table. Which I must return to.

She turns on her heels and strides toward the exit.

COUNCILMAN

I'll be taking her seat, you know!

Still walking, she turns over her shoulder and retorts:

ZELDA

She's lying down.

She's gone. He is left alone.

COUNCILMAN

Hm. Well.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR

Zelda stands neatly and quietly next to her table of baked goods. She's been there for some time. She's not too focused.

FOLKS dressed in varieties of ALL BLACK pass by her in a line, chatting happily. Most don't notice her. Most take a baked good. Zelda overhears a couple of them.

FUNERAL-GOER #1

(To his friend)

I find confectionery treats suit a morbid occasion.

THE FRIEND

This isn't so morbid. I heard she has no heirs and is leaving her estate to the town.

FUNERAL-GOER #1

Oh. Then this is a happy occasion. I no longer want treats.

Zelda opens her mouth to speak, but the line shuffles forward. She re-bites her tongue. An OLD WOMAN moves forward in line. She takes a cupcake from the table.

OLD WOMAN

(To Zelda)

June Fairburn was a force of nature. She did important things for this place.

ZELDA

(After a moment)

...are you talking to me?!

OLD WOMAN

Yes, dear. Are you the caterer?

ZELDA

I...yes.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, you must run the bakery!

The Old Woman takes a bite of her cupcake.

ZELDA

I'm also June's daughter.

OLD WOMAN

Oh, my, I forgot she had a child.
Must be such a hard time for you
dear.

A moment of silence. Zelda is struck by her kindness. She
stares at the floor.

ZELDA

Thank you for talking to me, I-

But as she looks up, the line has moved away. The Old Woman
leaves. Zelda is left alone again.

Time passes. Zelda, although surrounded by people, remains
alone. And lonely.

As time passes, we hear the occasional comment to Zelda, but
through it all, she remains alone, and unresponsive.

FUNERAL-GOER #2

Aren't you the reclusive daughter?

FUNERAL-GOER #3

Such a shame.

FUNERAL-GOER #4

I haven't been to a funeral in
ages! I wish I could thank her!

FUNERAL-GOER #5

Are you the caterer?

FUNERAL-GOER #6

These tarts are scrumptious!

FUNERAL-GOER #7

YOUR TALENT IS MENIAL AT BEST AND
YOU WILL NEVER ACCOMPLISH ANYTHING
THAT BETTERS PEOPLES' LIVES.

Zelda is JOLTED into awareness.

FUNERAL-GOER #7 (CONT'D)

...too on-the-nose?

ZELDA

What did you say?!

FUNERAL-GOER #7

I said you have something on your
nose.

Zelda realizes she hallucinated that first bit, and has been snapped back to reality. She wipes away a dusting of flour from her nose.

ZELDA

Oh. How did that get there.

Zelda realizes that a great wash of zoned-out purgatory is finally passed.

Suddenly, she is surprised again: LAUGHTER! At a funeral! Zelda perks up.

Across the room, she sees a group of FUNERAL-GOERS shaking hands and chatting with a handsome man in his late 20s or early 30s.

He is smiling; clearly warm, albeit a bit off-kilter and worn down. He is a handsome vintage suit brought out of the closet after too long. He also wears one. He is THEODORE.

The funeral-goers say their farewells and depart. Theodore slumps a bit, in exhaustion, and makes his way over to the pastry table.

Zelda watches him out of the corner of her eye. He takes a handful of small TARTS. He looks at Zelda, then looks away, munching a pastry. He tries to make casual small talk.

THEODORE

Thank god *this* bitch is dead!

Zelda bursts out laughing, somewhere between genuine amusement and pained shock. Theodore realizes, and corrects.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

Woman! Human woman! Sorry, bad habit. I was doing dog funerals for the last few years.

ZELDA

You wouldn't be the first to find her a bitch.

THEODORE

Not a fan of the deceased?

ZELDA

No, I loved her. But...

THEODORE

Love is complicated.

Zelda smiles. How odd that someone is acknowledging her like this.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
What breed of bitch would she be?

Zelda muses for a moment.

ZELDA
A basset hound.

THEODORE
Hm. I didn't particularly notice her ears.

He hands her a tart. They smile at one another, and she takes it. They snack in silence.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
Been a long day.

Off Zelda's curious look,

THEODORE (CONT'D)
Broken casket machine.

ZELDA
Will you have a hard time lowering that old bitch into the grave?

THEODORE
I shouldn't complain. Hopefully we can afford to repair it, now that we've got a funeral. Been months.
(Wistfully)
Folks just aren't dyin' like they used to.
(Less wistfully)
We're nearly bankrupt, to tell you the truth.
(Pause)
We'll lower that casket down into the ground somehow.

A pause. Zelda seems quietly relieved.

ZELDA
So *that's* why you're glad she's dead.

THEODORE
Oh, of course. I'm sure you gathered I'm not from here, I don't even know the woman.
(MORE)

THEODORE (CONT'D)
Sad for the sake of her loved ones,
of course. Shoot. I always forget
that part. Got to be sympathetic!
How did you know her?

ZELDA
I'm the daughter.

THEODORE
Oh. I thought you were the caterer.

ZELDA
That too.

THEODORE
Oh.

He pauses, and remembers what he's rehearsed:

THEODORE (CONT'D)
"I am sorry for your loss."

ZELDA
Thank you.

They look at one another for a moment. Zelda is suddenly struck with the impassioned will to defend her pride.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
You know, I run that bakery across
the street. My mother got all the
credit but I'm a *really* good baker.
I'm not just "the caterer" or "the
daughter". I'm *great* at
garnishings.

Silence from him.

ZELDA (CONT'D)
I didn't think you thought that, I
just think that. I'm sorry. NO. I'm
not sorry at all. ...sorry.

He looks at her with intrigue - his silence was not judgmental.

THEODORE
You know how most people remind you
of someone?

ZELDA
I guess.

THEODORE
You don't remind me of anyone.

ZELDA
(Pause)
You neither, I think.

They look at one another.

THEODORE
I'm Theodore.

ZELDA
Oh, your Frank's son!

THEODORE
And you're the basset hound's
daughter. Better known as:

ZELDA
Zelda.

THEODORE
Zelda.

They smile at each other. Time speeds up.

Funeral-goers continue to pass by Zelda, but now she's not alone. She and Theodore smile and talk and eat pastries and laugh and do impressions of dinosaurs and blush and joke.

The crowd thins and the sun sets. Time slows back to normal.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR - LATER - NIGHT

Zelda watches Theodore shake hands with the final departing guests of the evening. She smiles as she begins tidying up the scraps of the pastry table.

She sees a tiny tart with a ROSE GARNISH left alone on the table.

She peeks back over her shoulder and sees Theodore smiling and warmly goodbye-ing. She grabs the tart.

And hides it, holding it neatly behind her back.

She walks to Theodore.

THEODORE
(To funeral-goers)
Get home safe! Lots of loonies out
there!

(MORE)

THEODORE (CONT'D)

(To Zelda)

Mrs. Greenwasser, was it? She said she and her husband have been married 43 years.

ZELDA

They're the oldest people left in town! You'll have another funeral soon! Ha! Ha! I'm sorry.

THEODORE

My parents were married 51 years.

ZELDA

We miss Frank and Alice every day. This town isn't the same without them.

THEODORE

I'm wanna keep what they built alive, this old place. My dad.

(Pause)

I've always wanted what they had. Or at least do something that actually mattered.

Zelda's breath hitches quietly, realizing the truth of his words in herself, too. She holds her breath. The rose is waiting behind her.

ZELDA

I get it.

THEODORE

We've got to try.

He walks toward the viewing room. Zelda turns to keep her front facing him, hiding her back.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

Thank you for helping me feel better today, Zelda. I envy your joy.

ZELDA

My joy?

Realizing how melodramatic that sounded, he plays his next words like a Shakespearean actor, though he truly does mean his words.

THEODORE

In the face of sadness. Your
openness. I fear I will never have
that again. Like a wilted rose.

Zelda laughs. She gulps. THE ROSE BEHIND HER BACK IS HEAVY.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

In all seriousness. The parlor is
going out of business.

ZELDA

I wish I could do something,
Theodore.

THEODORE

It's not your responsibility. I'll
never forgive myself if it goes
under.

ZELDA

There must be something.

THEODORE

A funeral home needs customers. No
dead, no customers. Simple as that.
It's probably time for me to do
something bigger. Make an impact.
Probably leave this little town.
Maybe try professional curling. Or
experimental botany.

ZELDA

You don't think you're making an
impact here?

THEODORE

My worst fear is that I'm not.

The truth of this bites them both.

THEODORE (CONT'D)

Thank you again for everything
today, Zelda.

ZELDA

I'll see you at the funeral
tomorrow?

THEODORE

(Suddenly remembering)
The casket machine!

He produces a TOOLBOX almost comically from behind a counter. He puts on a HARDHAT and makes for the door. He stops at the door before exiting.

THEODORE (CONT'D)
Goodnight, Zelda. You don't remind me of anyone.

ZELDA
You don't remind me of anyone!

He's out the door in a jiffy, to repair. Zelda wilts a bit.

INT. FUNERAL PARLOR - VIEWING ROOM

She peeks through the door at the now CLOSED COFFIN of her mother. A longing loneliness returns.

She brings the flower front from behind her back, and looks at it.

EXT. THE STREETS OF SMALL-TOWN - NIGHT

Zelda carries the still cumbersome but now empty trays back from the funeral parlor to the bakery. On top of the pile of trays sits the rose.

INT. FAIRBURN'S BAKERY - NIGHT

The rose sits on the counter. Staring at Zelda.

She heads back toward the kitchen, disheveled and defeated, the pile of trays messily unloaded on the main counter.

DING-A-LING! She turns around quickly.

In struts the Councilman. Zelda bites her tongue.

COUNCILMAN
Well, well. If it isn't...you.

ZELDA
(dryly)
Just the shopkeeper, Councilman.
We're closed.

COUNCILMAN
Oh, now don't be silly. I know the town's laws on business hours of operation.

(MORE)

COUNCILMAN (CONT'D)
Perhaps I'll extend them, just for
privately owned shops.

ZELDA
We're closed.

COUNCILMAN
I'll have a cherry tart.

ZELDA
We're out.

She begins collecting the trays from the counter and piling
them up, the rose on top.

COUNCILMAN
A cupcake, then.

ZELDA
We're out.

COUNCILMAN
Then bake a fresh batch. I'll pay
full price.

ZELDA
You'd pay that anyway.

COUNCILMAN
Shame about the attendance of your
mother's wake today. Not many
patrons.

ZELDA
It was packed all day.

COUNCILMAN
That young man isn't keeping the
place up well, that's for certain.
Fred's son.

ZELDA
Frank. Frank's son. His name is
Theodore.

COUNCILMAN
No matter, he'll be back to
wherever he came from soon enough.
Not enough dying in town to keep
the place afloat. Besides the
conditions of the parlor.

ZELDA
We're closed, Councilman.

COUNCILMAN

I requested a cupcake, Miss.

Zelda suppresses her rage.

ZELDA

My name is Zelda.

COUNCILMAN

I'll have it with buttercream frosting! Or the board will have a second look at your business permit.

They stare at one another.

COUNCILMAN (CONT'D)

Or should I say, your *mother's* business permit.

The last straw. She angrily bites her tongue.

ZELDA

Yes, Councilman.

Fuming, she heads for the kitchen.

COUNCILMAN (O.S.)

And don't spit in it! I'm a paying customer!

INT. KITCHEN - FAIRBURN'S BAKERY - NIGHT

Zelda, still fuming, throws the trays down in the kitchen. She harriedly puts on her apron.

She sees the mess left behind and smacks a row of spices off the shelf.

She looks down at the rose, saddened again. The mess of spices all over the floor. She sighs. She preheats the oven and grabs a muffin tin, defeated.

She begins cleaning up the spices from the floor to replace them on the spice shelf.

She goes to put them away.

THE SKULL AND CROSS BONES POISON BOTTLE STARES BACK.

She catches her breath for a moment after her outburst. The wheels begin turning in her mind.

The ROSE GARNISH.

The MUFFIN TIN.

The NEWSPAPER PICTURE of Zelda and her mother.

THEODORE.

The EMPTY FUNERAL PARLOR PARKING LOT.

The COUNCILMAN.

The POISON BOTTLE.

The MUFFIN TIN.

DING! A baking timer!

INT. FAIRBURN'S BAKERY - NIGHT

A beautiful, artfully frosted cupcake slides neatly onto the counter on a TEENY TINY PINK PLATE.

Zelda stands smiling behind the counter.

ZELDA

That will be three dollars,
Councilman.

DING! The cash register opens and closes as she puts his money inside. He takes a bite of the cupcake.

DING-A-LING! He walks out the door.

Zelda smiles. Sweetly.

It grows wicked.

It grows deviant.

SHE IS BRILLIANT.

AND THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING.

CUT TO BLACK