Buffalo

Written by Hamish Johnson, Daren Magee, And René Pinnell

Producer: René Pinnell 1707 Newton St., Austin, Tx 78704 512.924.5820 RJPinnell@gmail.com

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SETTING

A hundred years ago Buffalo, New York was the second richest city in America. An industrial and cultural center at the mouth of Lake Erie, Buffalo was nicknamed *The City of Light*.

Today, Buffalo is the second poorest city in America. The once bustling waterfront is now littered with empty warehouses earning Buffalo a new nickname, *The City of No Illusions*.

EXT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - DAY

A weathered sign is taped to a soda machine.

"ROOM MATE WANTED FOR <u>SWEET</u> APARTMENT."

SIMON, a lanky kid in his early 20s, rips a phone number tab off the bottom of the sign and pockets it.

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

PETE, an Aussie in his late 30s dressed in dirty chef whites, holds up a handful of Pasta Alfredo.

PETE What the fuck is this?

BRODIE, his face inches from Pete's extended hand, shrugs.

BRODIE Pasta, chef.

PETE And that green shit?

BRODIE

Parsley?

PETE Guess again sunshine. (gets in his face) Cilantro.

BRODIE (nervous laugh) Oh... Cilantro.

Pete shoves the food into the trash.

PETE Do it again. A booming voice off screen yells out "FISH!" TR, a massive 6'5'' fry cook with tatoos running up and down his arms, escorts Simon in a clean cook's uniform over to Pete.

PETE (CONT'D) The name is Peter Abbott Rowley. Me mates call me Rowley, but you can call me chef.

SIMON Chef, I'm Simon.

Pete grabs Simon by the wrist and inspects his baby soft hand, a sharp contrast to Pete's scarred, burned and boiled hands, the marks of a professional cook.

> PETE Do you moisturize?

Pete drops Simon's hand in disgust.

PETE (CONT'D) Give me your keys.

SIMON

What?

PETE Your keys. Give 'em to me.

Simon hands over his keys. Pete throws them blindly over his shoulder to TR. CATCH! The keys just miss a waiter's head.

WAITER Jesus Christ! Watch it guys...

Swearing under his breath the Waiter picks up a tray of hot food and walks into the...

INT. VIOLA'S DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The waiter passes a smokin' hot hipster, LIZZY, with a cellphone attached at the ear. She walks through the bustling restaurant with a determined stride.

LIZZY No, I didn't "go over my limit." I'm telling you THEY cut it off! (pause) I don't know, beg, starve, get a job. Without my card I'm FUCKED. Lizzy arrives at the table where her parents, MR. and MRS. STONE, wait.

LIZZY (CONT'D) God, they're <u>manipulative</u> bastards! Anyway, I'm here. I got to go.

MRS. STONE

You're late.

Lizzy notices her mother has two empty margarita glasses in front of her with a third margarita in hand.

LIZZY Only two empties. What does that make me, five minutes late?

MRS. STONE (downs third margarita) Ten minutes. (smiles) Have you put on weight? You look fat.

Lizzy clenches her fists and growls.

MR. STONE Honey, don't listen to your mother, she still blames you for her postpartum stretch marks. (beat) Sit down, we need to talk.

EXT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - DAY

HARVEY, an overweight security guard in his late 30s, makes the rounds at Central Parking Lot. "Danke Schoen" is playing in his head phones and he joins in loudly replacing the lyrics "Central Park in fall" with "Central Parking Lot."

Harvey passes a car with a smashed out window and doubles back. He gives the "crime scene" a quick visual inspection, then, struggling under the weight of his hefty size and the large number of items attached to his utility belt, jogs back to his booth and calls headquarters.

> HARVEY (out of breath) Afternoon Debra, it's Officer Magee at Central Parking Lot. I got a 10-8-51 here that occurred at roughly 13:20. (MORE)

HARVEY (CONT'D) (pause) If you could be so kind as to send over a black and white, I'll seal off the perimeter.

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

The lunch rush is winding down. Pete takes a long swig from his beer then claps a hand on Simon's shoulder.

PETE Let me give you the tour.

Pete walks Simon over to the dish pit. Steam billows.

PETE(CONT'D) This here is where everything starts and ends and this is the dish-pig who makes it all happen. Meet Satan.

SATAN, a scrawny goth kid with speed metal blaring in his headphones, doesn't look up from his work.

PETE (CONT'D) You'll get along with him fine, just don't look him in the eyes.

Simon chuckles as if Pete is joking.

PETE (CONT'D) Seriously, don't. Follow me.

Pete and Simon walk into the stock room.

PETE (CONT'D) This is the dry goods area. I'm sure I don't need to explain that too much.

STEVE, a skinny but muscular guy with a shaved head, stocks cans. Pete puts his arm around him and playfully slaps him on the chest.

PETE (CONT'D) This here is Steve. He's skinny, but a fuckin' good fighter.

Pete puts up his dukes and Steve does the same. They playfully joust until Steve gets a little too aggressive and starts to panic breathe.

PETE (CONT'D) Alright, that's enough! Remember when you told me to tell you that you were doin' it? (beat) Well you're doin' it.

Embarrassed, Steve goes back to stacking cans.

INT. VIOLA'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Lizzy and her parents sit around half-eaten food.

MR. STONE We had to cancel the card. It was getting ridiculous.

LIZZY Come on, dad, what am I supposed to do?

MR. STONE Elizabeth, the last bill was three times the previous, which was double the one before that.

LIZZY I have expenses, dad.

MR. STONE No, you don't. You have expensive habits.

Mr. Stone holds up a credit card bill.

MR. STONE (CONT'D) Look here. Last month you spent \$447 on belts alone.

LIZZY

That's a legitimate expense. My image and style are part of my product. It's all interconnected.

Mrs. Stone laughs.

MR. STONE We want to help you, but you need to prove to us that you're being productive. MRS. STONE Was that one \$447 belt, or 447 \$1 belts?

Lizzy grinds her teeth.

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Pete and Simon enter the walk-in cooler. An Ecuadorian cook disembowels a strung-up pig, collecting the entrails and blood in a slop bucket.

PETE This here is the walk-in. The boys get a kick out of lockin' the new guy in here 'cause the lights shut off. When it happens, just wait it out 'cause nobody can hear you scream.

A man in a hoodie pushes passed Simon and starts to undress.

PETE (CONT'D) This is also the de facto changing room. And that... That's Tommy Balinski.

The hoodie comes off and Simon is shocked to see the soft curves of a woman's back.

PETE (CONT'D) We call her T. Balls.

In just a bra TOMMY turns to face Simon. She looks tough with her spiky hair and pierced face but also unmistakably feminine.

TOMMY

S'up?

SIMON Nothing. (stares) I mean... Hey.

PETE This way, fish.

Pete pushes Simon out of the walk-in and over to the grill station where several cooks work the line.

PETE (CONT'D) (pointing) Brodie, the vegan. And TR, the fry guy.

BRODIE (giggles) TR stands for "The Rapist."

TR Yeah, that's what's up. Come here bitch.

Reenacting a prison rape, TR grabs Brodie by his dreads and starts to dry hump him from behind.

BRODIE (cracking up) Bro, do you have boner?

TR Shut the fuck up!

TR continues to dry hump Brodie in the background as Pete grabs a cleaver off his immaculate knife rack.

PETE And these are my knives. Make one Crocodile Dundee crack and I'll stab you with every one of 'em.

EXT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - DAY

A police cruiser pulls into Central Parking Lot and two cops get out. Harvey has put up a number of cones and flags around the car with the smashed out window and excitedly waves the police over.

> HARVEY Afternoon, boys.

> > COP #1 AND COP #2

Harvey.

Cop #1 playfully smacks Harvey on the stomach.

COP #1 You losing weight, Harv?

Harvey looks down at his large belly.

HARVEY

No.

COP #1 What have you got for us today?

HARVEY Late model Hyundai. Looks like the perp broke in then realized it was just a factory fitting. Wasn't even worth his time.

COP #2 I know how he feels.

Harvey points things out with his flash light.

HARVEY

No point dusting for prints. I figure the perp was wearing gloves.

COP #1 You know Harvey, we're always looking for new recruits down at the station.

HARVEY (blushes) Yeah, I'd love to but I've got so much going on here. What with the...

HONK! An impatient customer blares his horn and waves for Harvey to let him out of the parking lot.

HARVEY (CONT'D) (flustered) I gotta take care of that.

Harvey pulls a key from a large retractable key chain.

HARVEY (CONT'D) You guys want a soda?

INT. VIOLA'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Completely sloshed Mrs. Stone savors her fifth margarita.

LIZZY

But, dad, my career *IS* taking off. We just sold out a show at the Owl and Don from Don's T-shirt Emporium said he'd put out our T-shirt line.

MR. STONE

Wait a minute, you're working on a T-shirt line, and you haven't recorded an album yet? This is a band, right?

LIZZY

(exasperated) You can download an album for free, but you always have to pay for a Tshirt.

MR. STONE

(pause) Your mother and I want you to go back to college.

LIZZY What?! We've been through this. College is a waste of time!

MR. STONE

You need a degree to support yourself.

LIZZY Name one great rock star who went to college!

MR. STONE Elizabeth, do you want to end up like your brother?

Lizzy is a pressure cooker about to explode.

MRS. STONE Garfunkel!

All eyes turn to the very drunk Mrs. Stone.

MRS. STONE (CONT'D) As in Simon and Garfunkel.

Lizzy pushes away from the table.

INT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - DAY

The phone rings in Harvey's booth. Through the window we see Harvey wave good-bye as the police cruiser drives off. His message machine picks up.

> HARVEY (on the message machine) Hello. You have reached the phone of Harvey Magee. If you're calling about the commemorative Princess Dianna Beanie Babies, they have already been sold.

BEEP.

SIMON

(leaving a message) Yeah, hi, I'm not sure I have the right number but...

EXT. BACK ALLEY OF RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Simon sits on a milk crate and smokes a cigarette. He's holding the "Room Mate Wanted" tab he tore off earlier that day.

SIMON (leaving a message) ...but I'm calling about the "sweet apartment" for rent. My name's Simon and...

BANG! Lizzy bursts through the back door seething with anger. She reaches for a cigarette only to find her pack empty. She destroys it, throws it in the trash, beats up the dumpster and then, arms flailing and legs kicking, SCREAMS!

> SIMON (CONT'D) I'll try back later.

Simon hangs up. Eyes tearing up from rage, Lizzy realizes she's not alone and tries to compose herself.

LIZZY I'm out of cigarettes. (beat) Do you have one? SIMON Yeah, sure. Simon hands her a cigarette. LIZZY Thanks. She lights it and begins to pace. SIMON Are you alright? LIZZY What? SIMON Are you okay? (trying to joke) I mean do you always get that upset when you run out of cigarettes or... He trails off as Lizzy stares at him blankly. SIMON (CONT'D) I'm sorry. Lizzy snaps out of her trance and into salesman mode. LIZZY No, no, don't be. It's just... band problems. When you're on the brink of success and your sponsor pulls out, it's gonna sting. Simon's at a loss for what to say. Lizzy grabs his arm and writes her name and number on it. LIZZY (CONT'D) We're playing a show tonight at the Big Up Club. We go on at one. Call me, I'll put you on the guest list.

> SIMON Okay, cool... (he reads his arm) Lizzy.

Lizzy flashes him a winning smile before she disappears back into the restaurant.

SIMON (CONT'D) (yells after her) I'm Simon.... by the way.

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Simon reads over the menu as he gathers supplies. He looks overwhelmed. CRASH! Simon looks up and sees that Satan has just dropped a plate.

> TR STEVE, KNIFE-UPS!

Steve runs in with a short paring knife. He kneels and holds the knife on the ground pointing up. Satan positions his body over the knife and starts to do pushups.

> SIMON (to Tommy) What's that about?

Tommy cleans the grill with a metal brush.

TOMMY House rules. You fuck up, you pushup. And Steve's there to make it fun.

Steve goes to a chalk board with everyone's name on it and puts a mark under "Satan." Simon swallows as he realizes that there's a space reserved for him, the "Fish."

Tommy squeezes Simon's bicep.

TOMMY (CONT'D) You better pump these babies up. You're gonna be doin' knife-ups tonight.

INT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - DUSK

Harvey sits in his booth sipping on a Big Gulp. He writes something on a piece of masking tape and places it over his "Security" badge. It reads "Police."

He stands proudly saluting his reflection in the mirror but quickly realizes its absurdity. He peels it off.

Out of the corner of his eye Harvey notices a blinking light on his message machine. He hits the "play" button. BEEP.

> SIMON (on message machine) Yeah, hi, I'm not sure I have the right number but I'm calling about the "sweet apartment" for rent. My name's Simon and...

We hear the garbled noises of Lizzy as she attacks the dumpster and screams. It sounds like someone being murdered.

SIMON (CONT'D) (on message machine) I'll try back later.

Pale and slightly trembling Harvey slumps into his chair.

INT. VIOLA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

The dinner rush is in full swing. Pete slams a finished plate down on the counter and rings the bell. Sweat pours down his face.

PETE

Order up!

The Kitchen is frantic, the noise is deafening. Smoke and steam fill the air.

PETE (CONT'D) Alright fellas, let's go on 13. Javier, fire the shrimp. T.R Drop the fries. Brodie, how long?

BRODIE Comin up bro-chef.

The floor manager, NIKO, pushes through the double doors into the kitchen dressed in a suit and tie.

NIKO Peter, what's the story? We've got some rumblin' tummies out there.

PETE

Busy.

NIKO Well obviously not busy enough. Table 15 has been waiting 30 minutes for their steaks.

Dupes continue to spill from the printer. Pete adds them to an already packed display board over Simon's grill station.

> PETE You know that steak is medium, right?

SIMON Medium? Which one?

PETE That one! We're going on it now. Chuck it in the oven!

Simon hurriedly grabs the steak.

SIMON I'm in the weeds, chef.

NIKO Peter, is <u>he</u> our problem?

Simon picks up a hot pan and burns himself. Screaming, he drops it on the floor.

SIMON

FUCK!

Pete immediately reaches down and picks up the searing hot pan with his bare hand. He points to a nearby cabinet.

PETE (to Simon) MEDICINE CABINET! (to Niko) FUCK OFF!

NIKO (shaken, backing off) Watch yourself, Peter. I'm <u>part</u> <u>owner.</u> (as he leaves, trying to save face) Come on guys, let's go. Pressure and heat cooks white meat!

Simon heads for the medicine cabinet.

TOMMY (to Simon) That was worth about 50 knife-ups, Fish.

Pete realizes he's still holding the hot pan and drops it back on the grill. A welt is bubbling up on the palm of his hand.

PETE (under his breath) Fuck.

INT. REHEARSAL STUDIO - NIGHT

Through an open door we see Lizzy, STAX, LUCY, and GARRETT jam.

STAX, the drummer, has a baby face and a receding hairline and is in his late 20s.

LUCY, the keyboardist, is an Asian-American and wears an old T-shirt and jeans.

GARRETT stands out, primped and styled like a generic rocker who has taken it one step too far. He is clearly older and more professional than the others.

The room is dimly lit and full of instruments. Garrett stands behind Lizzy singing back up vocals into her microphone. Lizzy stops the song.

> LIZZY Hold up. This isn't working.

GARRETT Yeah I agree. What about if we put a bridge after the second chorus? Something like...

Garrett plays the beginning of a very good bridge. Stax and Lucy nod in approval. Stax joins in.

> LIZZY New guy, what are you doing?

The band plays on.

LIZZY (CONT'D) This is not how my song goes!

They continue to jam. Lizzy pulls out Garrett's guitar cable.

GARRETT Hey, don't fuck with my gear!

LIZZY Don't "fuck" with my song!

STAX

Lizzy relax, that was a cool riff.

LIZZY We've got a show in four hours and we still haven't gone over all our material with Garrett. Sorry, but this isn't the time for ideas.

Garret plugs his guitar back in.

GARRETT

(to himself) Not like your shit's that hard to learn.

LIZZY Take it from the top. And follow my lead.

The band starts the song over but the energy is lost.

INT. PETE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Simon sits alone in Pete's cluttered office which is no bigger than a storage closet. Between stacks of paper Simon spots a notebook on Pete's desk open to a page entitled "Show Ideas." There's a list; "Kill it and Grill it," "Oven Lovin'," "You Say Tomato, I Say It Right," etc.

In the other room we hear...

PETE (O.C.) What the hell is that? Who told you to do it like that?

BRODIE (O.C.) You did, chef.

PETE (O.C.)

When?

BRODIE (O.C.) Last night. PETE What have I told you? Never listen to me when I've been drinking.

Pete walks into the office holding a beer in his now bandaged hand. Simon quickly flips shut the notebook as Pete awkwardly shuffles around trying to fit into the tiny office.

Pete gets settled into his chair, takes a huge swig of beer then grabs the clip-board off his desk.

Simon checks his watch.

PETE (CONT'D) You got somewhere more important to be?

SIMON No, I just had a...

Pete playfully whacks Simon across the head with his clipboard. They both sit in silence for a moment.

PETE You screwed up, it happens, but it's only gonna happen once. (beat) A few points of concern. A.) Your speed and 2.) Your attitude. You're a bit namby-pamby aren't you? We're gonna have to toughen you up mate, turn those girly hands of yours into something useful. But you've got skill, I can see that. You actually remind me a lot of myself when I was a lad.

Pete puts his feet up on his desk.

PETE (CONT'D) Listen, people see me in the top job and they want to knock me off. Don't even tell me you're not thinking about it right now. You're looking at this...

He points to himself and the not so glamorous things around his office.

PETE (CONT'D) And you're thinkin', this guy's got it and I want it. Pete takes his feet off the desk, scoots forward and gets right in Simon's face.

PETE (CONT'D) Well, I tell you what. You can't have it without a fight.

Pete reclines back in his chair obviously satisfied with his performance.

EXT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Harvey paces in the cold night air, his breath puffing like a steam engine.

HARVEY This is not good. This is not good. I should have never put that sign up. I'm dealing with a dangerous individual. Possibly armed. Definitely psychotic.

SMOKEY, a homeless man wrapped in Indian blankets, sits on a nearby stoop.

SMOKEY I thought he sounded friendly.

HARVEY It sounded like he killed someone. Probably his last roommate!

SMOKEY Let's take a step back, Harvey. All you know for sure is that you heard some funny noises.

Harvey starts to hyperventilate. Smokey pulls the brown paper bag off his bottle of liquor and offers it to Harvey.

Harvey breaths heavily into the bag.

HARVEY This isn't right. It's too soon. I'm not ready.

EXT. BACK ALLEY OF RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Simon struggles as he does pushups over Steve's knife. The kitchen crew counts his reps. 48, 49...

Simon struggles to finish the last "knife-up." 50! He rolls onto his back exhausted. Everyone cheers.

TR

The fish can swim.

Tommy helps Simon to his feet then grabs him by the balls in a sign of camaraderie. From behind, Pete and Steve dump a slop bucket of fatty-bloody sludge all over Simon. Everyone laughs hysterically including Simon.

Pete puts his arm around Simon and gets very close to his ear.

PETE You're part of the family now. Don't let us down.

Pete gives Simon a long kiss on the side of the head covering Pete's mouth and face in blood. Brodie hands Simon a beer.

INT. BIG UP CLUB - NIGHT

Lizzy walks through a packed, smokey club meeting-andgreeting local scenesters. Stax, Lucy and Garrett are on stage doing a sound check.

Lizzy eventually makes it on stage and the band briefly huddles.

LIZZY (to Garrett) No improvising. (to Stax and Lucy) Watch me for the changes.

Lizzy turns and faces the crowd.

LIZZY (CONT'D) Hey everyone. I'm Lizzy Stone and we're The Rockettes.

The band begins to play.

EXT. BACK ALLEY OF RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Most of the kitchen crew has gone home, but Steve, Pete and Simon hang on. Pete exhales a huge plume of smoke and has a coughing fit. He passes the joint to Steve. Simon anxiously checks his watch. It's 1:15 AM. He begins to stand to leave, but Pete grabs him by the shoulder and forces him back down as he chugs the rest of his beer. PETE So, "young Indian brave," where have you worked before? SIMON Well, it was all on my resumé. Pete laughs and Steve joins in. PETE Mate, I didn't even know your name until about 20 minutes ago. SIMON Oh, well I did my apprenticeship in Paris over the summer. PETE Paris? SIMON Yeah. PETE Is Dennis still there? SIMON Dennis? PETE Yeah, Dennis. SIMON I don't think I met a Dennis there. PETE You had to. SIMON No, I don't think so. PETE He signs the paychecks. SIMON What? PETE Dennis. He's the owner.

SIMON The owner? PETE Yeah, of Paris Pizza.

SIMON Oh, no. I meant Paris, France.

PETE (embarrassed) Oh, Pa-ree.

Everyone stands.

PETE (CONT'D) (to Steve) We should get some Pizza tonight after we lock up.

Simon pats his pants pockets and realizes that Pete still has his keys.

SIMON Ah, chef. Do you have my keys?

Pete pulls out an ice-pick from his back pocket. He smiles mischievously and hands it to Simon.

INT. WALK-IN COOLER - NIGHT

Pete opens the thick metal door to the walk-in cooler. In the center of the room are Simon's keys frozen in a solid block of ice. Pete pushes Simon in the room then shuts the door. The lights cut out.

Blackness.

We hear Simon swear as he chips away at the block of ice.

INT. BIG UP CLUB - NIGHT.

The Rockettes finish up their last song. It sounds great and the crowd enthusiastically applauds.

LIZZY (over the music) Thank you everyone for coming out tonight. Give it up for Stax on the drums. Lizzy points to Stax who does a flair on the drums.

LIZZY (CONT'D) On keyboards, the beautiful Lucy. Lets hear it for Lucy.

The crowd continues to applaud.

LIZZY (CONT'D) And our new guitarist, Garrett.

Lizzy condescendingly pats Garrett on the back.

LIZZY (CONT'D) He's doing the best he can.

Garrett pushes Lizzy's arm away and stops playing.

GARRETT I don't need this. I quit.

Garrett walks off stage. Lizzy allows herself only a momentary reaction.

LIZZY (to audience) I'm Lizzy Stone. You've been beautiful!

She blows a kiss as the crowd cheers oblivious to the drama on stage.

STAX How many does that make it, nine?

LUCY

Thirteen.

STAX (incredulous) Thirteen!? Fuck me.

EXT. CENTRAL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The blood dumped on him earlier is now dry and crusty as Simon makes his way to his parked car. A large chunk of ice still dangles from his key chain.

Simon fishes the "Roommate Wanted" tab out of his pocket and dials the number. RING! Simon looks around. It sounds like the ringing in his ear matches the ringing from the parking lot attendant's booth. RING! Harvey jumps. His mouth is dry, his heart pounds. RING! His hand hovers above the phone unsure what to do. RING! Harvey picks up.

HARVEY

Hello?

From outside the booth Simon sees Harvey pick up the phone; however, Harvey is oblivious to Simon's presence.

SIMON Hey, this is Simon. I tried...

In a panic Harvey does the only thing he can think of.

HARVEY

(trembling voice) You have reached the phone of Harvey Magee. If you're calling about the... sweet beanie... things, you've... they've all been sold. Sorry. Please don't ever call back.

Behind Harvey just on the other side of the glass and in all his bloody, horror-film glory, Simon taps on the office window. Harvey spins around.

> SIMON Is that you, Harvey?

Nearly paralyzed by fear Harvey reaches for the brown paper bag as he slowly closes the venetian blinds.

END