

NOCEBO

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. CABIN (CIRCA: 1890) - NIGHT

It's a one room home. A large fireplace in the center. To one side of it is a bed, to the other a table and iron stove.

To the far corner on the other side is a work bench of sorts. And in the forth corner some rocking chairs, stools and a small empty wooden cradle.

HUSBAND, 30s, stokes the fire with wood. His bearded, thin face is dirty with soot. His eyes aged beyond his years.

There is a COUGH from behind him. A persistent phlegm ridden HACKING.

The cough belongs to WIFE, 30s, a natural beauty whose looks have been dulled by the rough unapologetic wilderness of the frontier lifestyle. She's thin, almost too thin. And now wet with sweat, her stringy hair clings to the side of her face.

WIFE (O.S.)

You tryin' to boil me? It's hot as hell in here.

She peels off her quilt, her nightgown sticks to her skin with sweat.

The Husband places another couple of pieces of wood in the fire. Gets up and steps towards the bed where he places the blanket back over his wife's body. Then sits on the bed next to her.

HUSBAND

Winter is coming. It's cold.

WIFE

You're tryin' to broil me from the inside like a potato.

The husband retrieves a cloth from a bucket near the bed. Dips it in some water and dabs the sweat from his wife's forehead with it. The wife stares at him with venom.

WIFE (CONT'D)

You're tryin' to kill me.

The Husband shakes his head, more in disappointment than in defense of the accusation.

WIFE (CONT'D)

You want me dead so you can be with  
that witch whore. But they'll know.  
If you do. They'll know.

The husband rings out the cloth then dips it in the bucket  
again. Then continues dabbing his wife's face with it.

HUSBAND

I want nothing more than for you to  
get well my love.

WIFE

You want. You want to be naked with  
her. With that fowl mouth wretched  
devil. The two of you howlin' at  
the moon like animals...

The wife howls in mockery, the exertion puts her into a  
coughing fit. Blood spittles from her mouth and down her  
chin.

The husband wipes the blood away with the cloth, then rinses  
the cloth in the bucket of water. The blood inks the water  
red.

WIFE (CONT'D)

You don't deny it?

HUSBAND

'Course I do. This is the fever  
talking. Not my wife.

The Husband gets up and walks over to his work table. On it  
is a glass medicine bottle. He uncorks it.

The wife watches with an incredulous eye as he pours the  
liquid content into a glass. Then dilutes it with water from  
a jug.

He brings it over for her to drink. She stares at the glass.

WIFE

What's in it?

HUSBAND

The medicine the doctor brought.

WIFE

No. No, no. It's poison. You  
poisoned it.

HUSBAND

You saw the doctor bring it. Now drink. It'll help you get better.

The Wife eyes her husband. Then takes the glass.

The Husband watches her bring it to her lips about to drink-- then she throw the cup into the fire--the flames ignites in a CRACKLE--flares up then settles back down to normal.

The Husband grabs his wife's wrist with a firm grip.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

Why did you do that? That medicine cost us a damn goat! We barely have enough to survive the winter. Don't you want to get better? Huh? Don't you?

The wife struggles to free her arm from his grip but can't. She breaks down and cries.

WIFE

I wanna see her. I wanna see her.

The Husband releases her wrist. Moves over to the fire. Picks up pieces of the shattered glass. Tosses them in the fire. Then puts in a few more pieces of wood. His wife continues to cry behind him.

WIFE (CONT'D)

I wanna see her so much. Hold her in my arms.

The husband, without moving his gaze from the fire.

HUSBAND

She's buried. Ain't gonna see her again. After what you did, doubt you'll even see her in the hereafter neither.

The husband looks over at a small wooden cradle off in one corner of the room. A few small blankets in it but nothing else.

The wife starts HACKING up again, between her sobs.

The husband once again gets another glass, drops in the liquid medicine with the eye dropper. Then brings it over to his wife. Holds it out for her to take.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

It ain't poison. It's medicine. Now drink.

The Wife reluctant at first... finally takes it. Drinks it down while her husband watches. She GAGS on the last bit of it's sour taste, which puts her into another coughing fit.

The husband sits on the bed next to her. Rubs her wet back.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

You'll get better.

Her cough eases. She lies down.

The husband kisses her forehead. He takes the cloth, dips it in the bucket of water and dabs her face with it.

WIFE

Am I going to Hell, for what I done?

HUSBAND

Don't know.

(then)

I didn't mean to say what I said 'bout you not seeing her in the hereafter, n'all.

WIFE

Why won't the Father come see me?

HUSBAND

He's away.

WIFE

You just sayin' that. Sayin' that so my soul be dammed when I pass over. You ain't call for him. You ain't.

HUSBAND

Why you so damn insistent I'm out to do you harm?

WIFE

'Cause you don't want nothin' to do with me. You don't love me. You want to get rid of me and start a new life. With her.

HUSBAND

I don't want no such thing.

WIFE

You want a child. I can't give that to you.

HUSBAND

I want you to get better. We can try for another.

The Wife then leans herself over the edge of the bed where she vomits into the bucket. She RETCHES and COUGHS, as she on-and-off vomits in the bucket.

There's a KNOCK at the door. The husband goes to answer.

On the other side of the door is the DOCTOR (DOC), 40s, dressed for the cold weather. He's a tall gentleman with a beard and spectacles, he holds his medical bag in one hand and a cane in the other.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

Doc. Glad you came.

DOC

How is she?

HUSBAND

Well she's...

Doc can hear her HACKING and the PURGING of whatever little content is left in her stomach.

DOC

May I?

The husband steps out of the way to allow Doc to enter.

HUSBAND

Yes. Of course. Please Doc, come in. Come in.

Doc goes to the wife's side. He helps her to sit upright in the bed. Takes out his handkerchief and wipes her mouth clean of clinging vomit. He then checks her pulse. Opens up his medical bag grabs his stethoscope. Presses it to her chest.

DOC

Breathe in and hold.

She does. Then.

WIFE

Doc, when's The Father gonna be back?

DOC  
What do you mean?

WIFE  
From his mission. When's he comin'  
back from it?

DOC  
He's not on any mission. He's at  
his church. Now breathe in again  
and hold please.

Doc places the pad of the stethoscope against her back and listens. The wife looks at her husband who stands at the other end of the room, fidgeting his hands, they watch each other in silence.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The wind blows up something sharp and cold. A sparse amount of snowflakes whip about in circles.

An axe THWAKS down onto a log and cuts it in halves then quarters.

The Husband yields the handle of the axe. He places another log on a tree stump, then swings the axe down onto it--spits it down the middle nice and clean.

He stops. A sound catches his attention. He looks out onto the woods. Scans the area the best he can in the dark. He then comes upon a small flickering light in the distance. A floating flame at the edge of the tree line.

EXT. CABIN. DOOR - LATER

The Husband with the wood pieces in the crux of his arms steps to the front door just as it opens and the Doc steps out onto the porch.

HUSBAND  
Doc.

Doc fully exits and closes the door. They both stand in the cold. The light through the window from inside is their only luminance.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)  
How's she doing?

DOC

It's the darndest thing about your wife. She's a peculiar case. Fuddles the mind to be honest.

HUSBAND

How so Doc? She gonna get better?

DOC

Don't know. She's vomiting, extreme sweating, fatigue, and her gums are bleeding. But everything else from what I can tell is in fine condition. She's not showing any symptoms of any illness I'm accustom to.

HUSBAND

Could it be something new?

DOC

Could be all up here...

Doc taps his cap with his finger.

HUSBAND

But she's in pain, Doc. Can she really be pretending? Is that why the medicine ain't work?

DOC

She believes it's real. The mind is capable of manifesting itself in mysterious ways. And... hmm... uh... well see the medicine is nothing more than... well it's just sugar and water.

HUSBAND

Sugar... and... water? But I traded you our--our goat for that, Doc. We ain't got milk. And she believes I've been poisoning her with it. And it ain't even real medicine?

DOC

Look now. When I saw her last, I suspected her illness was all a trick of the mind. So I prescribe something that would help, something like... another trick of the mind. But it had to appear real in order for it to work.

(MORE)

DOC (CONT'D)

But for some reason it's having a reverse effect. It's as if she's dying on sheer will alone. Her will.

The Husband drops the wood pieces to the ground. He puts his hand up to his mouth.

HUSBAND

My god. Are you sure? You sure it ain't something else? Something real?

DOC

Could be the devil's doing. But um, I don't subscribe to that way of thinking.

HUSBAND

What do I do Doc? What can I do?

DOC

Keep feeding her the medicine. Pray her spell breaks and she recovers. Continue to love your wife.

The Husband looks up at Doc, who is of little comfort.

HUSBAND

But I... I don't... I don't love her.

Doc puts a firm hand on his shoulder.

DOC

Well... act like you do. Show her you love her. Till she gets better. She needs you. She's slipping fast.

HUSBAND

Ain't nothing you can do?

DOC

Afraid not. Sorry.

Doc walks to his horse and carriage. He calls back.

DOC (CONT'D)

I'll return your goat to you in the morning.

The Doc leaves.

The Husband picks up the pieces of wood and goes inside.

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The Wife lies in bed. She's silent, except for the shallow panting of her quick breathing. She's soaked in sweat.

The Husband places a few more pieces of wood in the fire.

Goes to his wife and stands over her. She looks almost skeleton like. On death's doorstep.

He goes over to the work table pours a glass of water. Places a few drops of the medicine in it.

Brings it over to the bed, sits next to his wife. Brings the glass to her chapped lips.

HUSBAND

Go on, drink... please.

The Wife looks at him with large eyes. Then pushes her head up enough to drink down the cup. Once the contents are gone she lies her head down on the pillow again.

WIFE

(panting)

I know it's poison. I know you lied to me. I know you don't love me. I know I'm damned to hell.

The Husband shakes his head.

HUSBAND

No. No. No. I love you. I love you. The medicine is going to make you better. The Father... well... he'll forgive your sins. And mine. Both ours.

He leans forward and kisses her forehead. Then her lips. But she is non-responsive to his touch.

He leans back again to see her gaunt face in full. Sunken eyes almost lost in the long shadows from the fire. She stares at him, her breathing shallow and quick.

WIFE

I... saw... her. At... the... window. I... saw... her.

HUSBAND

Who?

The husband looks over towards the window, which is next to the door and in the line of sight of the bed and his wife. No one is there. Nothing but a few snowflakes blow by.

As he stares at the window he notices the panting has ceased. He looks back at his wife. She is deathly still. Her eyes wide open but void of life.

He shakes her, but to no effect. She's gone.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

No. Please. Flora. Please. No.

The Husband draws her tight to himself, squeezes his wife's flaccid body with his arms.

HUSBAND (CONT'D)

Please. Flora. I'm so sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

As the Husband weeps into his wife's chest. The front door swings open behind him. A gust of wind teases the air in a whistle.

At the door's threshold is a YOUNG WOMAN, 20's, in a red hooded cloak. She holds up a lamp. Her features are concealed within the cloak's hood, a dark shadow were her face should be. She stands there watching them in silence.

The Husband, his back to the intruder as if not noticing her presence, continues to hold his wife and weep...

Then, after a long moment, the Husband places his wife flat on the bed again and turns towards the Young Woman. They hold their gaze on each other...

THE END.