

**"THEN SHE WAS GONE"**

Original screenplay by Burleigh Smith.

Copyright. Burleigh Smith. 2009.  
Registered with the Australian Writers' Guild.

**TCHAIKOVSKY: "SWAN LAKE, DANSE DES PETITS CYGNES".**

**FADE IN:**

**EXT. PERTH CITY - SUNRISE.**

The city skyline in glorious black and white.

BASIL (V.O.)

Uh ... Sometimes I feel as isolated as  
the city in which I live. There's so  
much loneliness, heartache, despair ...

**INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY.**

BASIL, thirty, bespectacled and scruffy, is slumped in a chair. SEYMOUR, a decrepit, eighty-year-old shrink, sits nearby. He's barely conscious.

BASIL

... disappointment, broken dreams,  
emptiness, futility.

A long pause. Seymour summons all his strength to speak.

SEYMOUR

We all. Have turning points. In our  
lives.

Seymour catches his breath. Basil looks confused.

**EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY.**

Commuters board.

BASIL (V.O.)

"We all have turning points in our  
lives"? A hundred and seventy seven  
dollars just for that? Who does he  
think he is? The guy wouldn't look  
out-of-place in a morgue.

**INT. TRAIN - DAY.**

Basil sits on his own, looking lost.

BASIL (V.O.)  
I didn't have turning points in my  
life. It was just one long, continuous,  
unrelenting ... grind.

**EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - DAY.**

A bell sounds, a light flashes, the tracks move. The  
oncoming train is diverted from one line to another.

BASIL (V.O.)  
And then everything changed.

**INT. CRAMPED OFFICE - DAY.**

Basil sits at a computer, his eyes glued to the screen.

BASIL (V.O.)  
My favourite pornstar had put on an  
excessive amount of weight overnight.  
She was barely recognisable.

His eyes widen and mouth drops open in shock.

BASIL (V.O.)  
One moment, she's a spirited nymph,  
casually committing the most sacred of  
human acts for the world to see. Next,  
she's a freak show curiosity confined to  
"More Cushion for the Pushin" dot com.

**INT. TRAIN - DAY.**

Basil sits on his own, completely bewildered.

BASIL (V.O.)  
Her change affected me in a way I  
couldn't fully understand. Never before  
did I feel so confident, so focussed.

He sits up straight, smooths his shirt and looks more  
determined.

BASIL (V.O.)  
Never before did I have so great a sense  
of entitlement.

**INT. FLORIST'S SHOP - DAY.**

MIA, cute, early twenties, works behind the counter.  
Basil watches her through the shop window.

BASIL (V.O.)

Her name was Mia. I guess there  
wasn't much point in sending her  
flowers.

Having served a customer, she returns to a stool and  
reads a book titled "History of Ballet" with interest.

**INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY.**

Basil takes a copy of the same book from a shelf.

BASIL (V.O.)

I'd always considered her out of  
my reach. Well ... until now.

**INT. FLORIST'S SHOP - DAY.**

Basil stands at the counter with a nice arrangement of  
flowers. Mia removes a price tag.

MIA

Someone's going to like these!

BASIL

Well, actually I've just broken up  
with her. But I want her to know she  
was special. I'm not a heartbreaker.

MIA

No, you don't look like one.

Basil stalls, then awkwardly sets the ballet book down on  
the counter.

MIA

(broad smile)

I'm reading that book!

BASIL

What a coincidence.

MIA

I love ballet!

BASIL

"The Rake's Progress" is in town  
next week.

MIA

(disappointed)

I know! And it's sold out ...

BASIL

You need to find a scalper.

He picks up his flowers, offers a brief smile and abruptly departs. Mia watches after him.

**EXT. FLORIST'S SHOP - DAY.**

Basil rounds a corner and dumps the flowers in a bin.

BASIL (V.O.)

Of course, I was the one who needed  
to find a scalper. And like all real  
men, I loathed the ballet.

**INT. CRAMPED OFFICE - DAY.**

Back in his office, he studies the book with frustration.

BASIL (V.O.)

Now some might disapprove of me  
being so deceptive.

**INT. LIVING ROOM, FAMILY HOUSE - FLASHBACK.**

An angry MOTHER with a basket of washing confronts a nervous FATHER. She thrusts a business shirt at him and points to lipstick on the collar.

BASIL (V.O.)

But I grew up watching my father lie  
to my mother. Hey, it worked for him.

He manages to calm her down. A five-year-old Basil, wearing the same spectacles he has as an adult, looks on.

**INT. FLORIST'S SHOP - DAY.**

Basil stands with Mia. She has a broom in one hand and a ticket in the other.

BASIL

Only if you want to. We'd bought the tickets a month ago, when we were together.

MIA

(studies ticket)

It's for Valentine's Day.

BASIL

Is that alright?

He waits for what seems like forever.

MIA

Yeah. But I have a friend from Italy staying with me at the moment. I can go if you can help find a date for him. So he's not on his own that night.

BASIL

(smiles)

Sure. Shouldn't be a problem.

**EXT. BEAT - DAY.**

Basil nervously walks through a seedy alley and down stairs that lead beneath street level.

BASIL (V.O.)

So I thought. Until she told me her friend was looking for a man's man with an interest in S&M.

**INT. BEAT - DAY.**

Basil stands amongst half a dozen muscular men, all in tight leather clothing. They tower over him.

BASIL

It's just for Valentine's. One night only.

VICTOR, mid forties, is dressed as a construction worker.

VICTOR

Is it your first time with another man?

BASIL

It's not for me, it's for a friend.

FELIPE

You don't have to be ashamed of yourself.

RANDY

Everyone likes to experiment.

DAVID

It's only natural.

They move in closer. Basil's voice falters.

BASIL

I assure you, it's not for me.

GLENN

How do you know you won't like it?

ALEX

It's a chance to show your manhood!

Alex puts a hand on his back. Basil tenses.

BASIL

Here's his number. Thanks.

He gives him a scrap of paper and pushes past them.

BASIL (V.O.)

So Mia's Italian guest spent the evening with the Village People.

**EXT. HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - NIGHT.**

Basil and Mia, in formal attire, approach the building.

BASIL (V.O.)

And I spent the evening with her.

**INT. CAFE - NIGHT.**

Basil and Mia at a table, clearly enjoying each other's company. The rest of the cafe is empty.

BASIL

I can't believe he walked away from such a good woman. Or danced away.

MIA

Men are like that. They don't know what's good for them.

BASIL

I don't know many men who'd marry a bearded lady!

They laugh. A WAITER approaches.

WAITER

We're closing now.

MIA

(checks watch)

Hey, it's two in the morning!

They exchange a warm smile.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. PARK - DAY.**

A small child approaches a large swan. An elderly jogger pushes himself to the limit. Basil and Mia sit on a bench with sandwiches.

BASIL

Everything okay?

MIA

(distant)

Yeah ...

BASIL

You're a little withdrawn.

Mia takes her time to respond.

MIA

What are we doing?

BASIL

Having lunch.

MIA

(chooses words carefully)

You're a very interesting person. And so easy to talk to. It's just ... there's nothing about you ... I don't have any of the feelings I usually get that distinguish a lover from a friend.

Basil, floored, forces a laugh.

BASIL

Well that's as blunt as a ... punch in the nose.

MIA

I'm sorry. I don't like leaving things unsaid. And I'm assuming you like me. I don't know what you're looking for.

BASIL

What are you looking for?

It's Mia's turn to force a laugh.

MIA

I don't know that either! Someone who likes rugby, not ballet.

BASIL

I really don't like ballet -

MIA

Of course you do! And you shouldn't have to change who you are to be with someone. Me, I'm into guys who are ... masculine. I'm sorry, that's a terrible thing to say.

BASIL

It's nothing my psychologist can't get me over.

MIA

You see a shrink?

BASIL

No, I was joking.

MIA  
I'm sorry, I'm just a bit of a puzzle.

BASIL  
Stop apologising. I understand. I  
reject good people all the time.

MIA  
You do?

BASIL  
Well, yeah. I work for the government  
film funding body.

MIA  
You're such a great person. So honest.  
I'd really love to be friends.

Eager, she waits for a response. Basil puts on a brave  
face and throws up his hands.

BASIL  
Of course!

Mia hugs him. The large swan chases the small boy. The  
elderly jogger comes to a stop, about to collapse. Mia  
looks relieved, Basil, crushed.

**INT. PSYCHOLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY.**

Basil sits with the decrepit shrink once more.

SEYMOUR  
We all. Have turning points. In our  
lives.

BASIL  
You said that last time! Do you not  
have anything else to add?

**KEVIN PENKIN: "GYPSY COIN".**

**INT. BASIL'S FLAT - DAY.**

Basil is slumped on his couch, a random TELEVISION  
documentary playing in front of him.

## TELEVISION

The mouse is often toyed with by  
the cat before it is killed.

Basil sits up and takes note.

**CUT TO:**

**EXT. CITY STREET - DAY.**

Basil and Mia walk HOWARD, an ugly dog.

BASIL

I never had a father. Growing up, I  
didn't have anyone to teach me how  
to ... be a man. Masculine.

MIA

(touched)

I'm so sorry.

BASIL

It's been tough.

MIA

I know. I never had a mother.

BASIL

Really? Maybe we should introduce your  
Dad to my Mum?

She laughs at the crazy idea.

**EXT. BEAT - DAY.**

Basil speaks with Victor as he emerges from the seedy  
club.

BASIL

Are you a genuine construction worker  
or is that just a costume for your  
role playing?

VICTOR

Yeah, I'm a chippy.

BASIL

Is there any chance you might take on  
a volunteer assistant?

**INT. LIVING ROOM, MIA'S FLAT - DAY.**

Basil and Mia sit on the couch with cups of coffee.  
Howard watches Basil with suspicion.

MIA

His name's Howard. I got him when  
my boyfriend and I broke up. He's  
not really an indoors dog. But I  
don't know where else to keep him.  
And I hate sleeping alone.

Saliva drips from the animal's mouth.

BASIL

You must!

**INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY.**

Basil and Mia pass the menswear department. Mia pulls a  
flannelette shirt from a rack and holds it up against  
Basil, judging its size.

**EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY.**

Men at work on the frame of a house. Basil, dressed in  
the flannelette shirt, is having trouble building a frame  
for a much smaller structure. Victor approaches.

VICTOR

What are you doing?

BASIL

Building a dog kennel.

Victor inspects the workmanship. It's laughably bad.

BASIL

I'll come and work on the house in  
a minute.

VICTOR

(rushed)

No, no! We're right! We don't need  
your help. Stay there.

**INT. BASIL'S FLAT - DAY.**

Basil reads a book titled "How to Be a Man". He writes notes as he reads.

**INT. TRAIN - DAY.**

Basil sits on his own, deep in thought.

**EXT. YARD, MIA'S FLAT - DAY.**

Basil and Mia stand in front of a cute, well-made dog kennel. Mia is impressed. So is the dog.

MIA

Where did you get this?

BASIL

I wish I could say I built it. Truth is, I picked it up second hand. Just gave it a fresh coat of paint. Is it alright?

She kisses his cheek.

MIA

It's lovely!

**INT. PARK - DAY.**

Basil and Mia eat lunch and watch passers-by.

MIA

You should grow facial hair. Maybe even a beard.

BASIL

I'd get food caught in it. I am who I am. I'm sorry if you don't like that.

**INT. LIVING ROOM, MIA'S FLAT - DAY.**

Basil, Mia and the dog, dressed in football colours, sit on the couch and watch a game. While Mia is wildly enthusiastic, Basil looks like he'd rather be elsewhere.

**INT. FLORIST'S SHOP - DAY.**

Basil is joking with CASSIE, another shop assistant. Mia arrives and looks at Basil with disapproval.

**EXT. FLORIST'S SHOP - DAY.**

Basil and Mia walk along.

MIA  
Why was she flirting with you?

BASIL  
She wasn't flirting.

MIA  
I saw her!

BASIL  
We were just talking.

MIA  
About what?

BASIL  
I don't know. Random stuff. How backward Western Australia is without daylight saving.

MIA  
The girl's had more boyfriends than hot meals.

**INT. CAFE - NIGHT.**

Mia hands Basil a ticket.

BASIL  
"Giselle"?

MIA  
Only if you want to go. I'm going with my friends. Just thought I'd get an extra ticket. Since I owe you.

BASIL  
Of course.

**EXT. HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE - NIGHT.**

The cultured, well-dressed, upper class arrive.

**INT. STAGE - NIGHT.**

Innocent Giselle dances with the deceitful Albrecht.

**INT. FOYER - NIGHT.**

CLAUDETTE, fifty, stands with Mia. On the other side of the foyer, Basil is the centre of attention. He talks with Mia's friends enthusiastically. Claudette watches.

CLAUDETTE

Where ever did you meet him?

Mia is surprised by her friends' interest.

MIA

I don't know. He just came into the shop. What's Samantha doing?

CLAUDETTE

Looks like she's giving him her number.

In the distance, SAMANTHA writes on a paper napkin and passes it to Basil. Mia is not impressed.

**EXT. MIA'S FLAT - NIGHT.**

Mia holds Basil's arm as he walks her home. When they reach her door, she abruptly turns and kisses his lips. It's a lingering kiss, Basil gives a lukewarm response.

Mia unlocks her door. She stands in the entrance and watches Basil, then she moves inside, leaving the door open. Basil follows, shutting the door behind him.

A moment later, the door opens and the dog is thrown out.

**EXT. MIA'S FLAT - MORNING.**

The street slumbers. A lone milk truck does the rounds.

**INT. BEDROOM, MIA'S FLAT - MORNING.**

Basil sits on the edge of the bed, buttoning up his shirt. Mia, having just awoken, watches him.

MIA

Hey.

BASIL

Hey.

She smiles. Basil is not as warm. Mia rubs his arm.

BASIL

What are we doing?

MIA

What do you mean?

BASIL

You're a very interesting person.  
But I don't have any of the feelings  
I usually get that distinguish a  
lover from a friend.

Mia laughs, not taking him seriously.

MIA

I didn't mean that! I was confused.

BASIL

I'm not.

Her smile drops.

BASIL

I'm sorry. But I don't like leaving  
things unsaid. I prefer girls who  
aren't so ... fickle.

MIA

Why didn't you tell me this last night?

BASIL

I guess I'm just a bit of a puzzle,  
really.

Basil pulls an expression of mock confusion, clearly enjoying quoting her. Mia's anger mounts.

MIAS  
 You're only the second guy I've ever  
 slept with!

BASIL  
 (dismissive)  
 Yeah, I've heard that before.

She slaps him hard in the face, pounds her fists against his chest and throws his wallet and keys in the direction of the door.

MIA  
 Just get out! Go!

BASIL  
 (insincere)  
 But ... I'd really love to be friends.

**EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY.**

The train pulls away from the platform.

BASIL (V.O.)  
 We all have turning points in our  
 lives. I was now at a stage where  
 I'd live by my wits and trust my luck.

**INT. TRAIN - DAY.**

Basil sits on his own, looking smug. He toys with the crumpled napkin bearing Samantha's number.

BASIL (V.O.)  
 Sure, what I had done to Mia was  
 selfish, heartless, despicable.

A smile lifts the corners of his mouth.

BASIL (V.O.)  
 And for the first time in my life -

**CUT TO BLACK.**

The sound of the accelerating train.

BASIL (V.O.)  
 I felt like a man.