

NOSTALGIA MACHINE

a science fiction film by

Nate Gardner

ngardner.here@gmail.com
+1 (540) 784-6517
Los Angeles, CA

© 2025 by Nate Gardner, NOFUNPICTURES LLC
All rights reserved.

INT. THE APARTMENT, DAY

A room. Dim, cold, still; rusted greys and spoiling yellows. An unfurnished apartment in Orwell's 1984.

A wire-frame figure sits up, with excruciating slowness, from his hiding place in a dilapidated plastic lawn chair. TRISTEN stares down, then gets to his feet, just as slow. In one hand hangs something like a rag.

Tristen goes to the sink in the kitchenette and turns the faucet – a low, scraping gurgle. He turns it off, and waits while a few drops plunk into an empty plastic jar beneath the faucet.

He drinks.

Tristen transfers the rag to the crook of his arm; it's actually a stuffed animal, a LITTLE ELEPHANT worn down like it's been more than one child's best friend in the whole wide world.

The elephant seems to watch as Tristen picks up the second of two empty plastic jars in the sink – this one with a spoon handle poking out.

He painstakingly scrapes the inside of the jar, and savors the crusted slivers of peanut butter he's able to salvage.

Something in a dark corner of the place RATTLES, like an angry washing machine.

Tristen freezes. He takes a deep breath, returns the jar to the sink, carefully sets the elephant on a counter, and rolls up his sleeve.

Then he steps into the shadows...

And finds a MECHANICAL MONSTER.

An iron lung, breathing on its own, shallow and rasping. A mass of tubing and pipes spill below, disemboweled entrails. Atop the machine is a HUMAN HAND.

Tristen takes the hand in his, a long translucent tube extending like a slinky from the wrist to the machine. He pulls the lawn chair alongside and sits back, placing the hand on his right arm. The hand feebly crawls up his arm to the inside of his elbow, then latches there.

The hand quivers- the tubing flexes- the machine rumbles.

Tristen grits his teeth.

Red fluid fills the tube. The machine's breathing becomes more regular. The needle on a gauge creeps to maximum – and a hatch on the machine opens.

The hand loosens its grip on Tristen and crawls back to the machine, revealing a bloody hickey on the inside of Tristen's elbow.

Tristen ignores the blood and jumps to check the gauge, tapping it to make sure it's accurate. He gives the machine a wary rub, excited and terrified.

Then he looks to the elephant.

The elephant watches.

INT. TEENAGE GIRL'S BEDROOM, NIGHT

Hollywood's idea of a teen girl's bedroom – *Punk Edition*.

And a BURGLAR in all black and a ski mask is snatching items from every corner.

The burglar is picky – this book but not that one; 2 of 5 photos pinned to the wall; notes hidden deep in a drawer. All shoved into his black backpack.

Behind the burglar, the door cracks open, silent.

RAYMOND, 40s, a man with broad shoulders and a scorched-earth frown readying to pounce.

The door CREAKS at the end of its swing, and the burglar whips around.

RAYMOND

You picked the wrong fucking room.

Raymond raises a bat – and SWINGS to kill.

The burglar ducks, the bat rips through the air and decimates a lamp.

Raymond swings again with a roar, bringing it down like an ax, and the burglar scampers aside so the bat bounces against the bed, frame moaning under the blow.

The burglar lunges at Raymond's midriff – he's too slight to tackle him, but Raymond slips on a book and the two CRASH to the floor.

The two thrash, and with desperate ferocity the burglar mounts Raymond and laces his long fingers around the much larger man's throat.

In a last effort, Raymond tears the ski mask from the burglar – Tristen, of course.

Raymond's eyes fill with recognition, and Tristen loosens his fingers in shock, just enough for the man to groan...

RAYMOND (CONT'D)

You...

Tristen leaps up, frantic, and LUNGES out the open window.

Raymond goes to the window as quickly as he can, looks out–

Tristen is stumbling away down the street.

Raymond turns, leans against the wall.

Looks at the backpack Tristen dropped.

Among the random items that have spilled out of it is a polaroid – a teenaged girl and Tristen.

INT. THE APARTMENT, NIGHT

The door swings open, Tristen swinging with it. If he lets go, he'll be on the floor.

Tristen looks right at the elephant sitting on the counter.

Tristen stumbles to the counter, more of a fall with a destination. He grabs the elephant and holds it close, wheezing.

Tristen slides to the floor and takes a ragged breath.

Then he crawls to the machine, cradling the elephant.

Tristen does not notice the hand perk up atop the machine. His eyes are on the open hatch.

He looks the elephant in the eyes.

TRISTEN

You're all I've got.

Tristen kisses the elephant, then sets it in the hatch. The hatch closes slow.

Tristen sidles into the lawn chair and shimmies to be as close to the machine as he can.

The hand tenses, then POUNCES - claspings over Tristen's mouth.

The machine rumbles, its breathing quick.

INT. TEENAGE GIRL'S BEDROOM, NIGHT

The room is exactly as it was when Tristen was stealing from it, except for the two teenagers lying on the bed and the too-warm orange light illuminating everything.

Tristen looks the same age, wears the same all-black clothes, but his skin has color, the body underneath nourished and healthy.

ERICA, 16, wears an oversized band sweatshirt, jeans, black toe- and fingernail polish, and overdone cat's eyes. Her hair is an intentional mess, and her eyes are on Tristen.

Tristen's eyes are on the very cute stuffed elephant in his hands. He plays with the trunk, which has a wire in it so it can be twisted any which way.

ERICA

You can have it, if you want.

TRISTEN

Huh?

ERICA

Oh come on. What's your deal with that thing, anyway? You come over, first thing Ellie's in your lap. I have to work to get there.

TRISTEN

Ain't worth it if you don't have to work for it.

Instinctively Tristen rolls over on the bed, curling into a ball to protect Ellie, as Erica whales on him, trying and failing to stay mad.

Erica stops, and Tristen timidly pokes Ellie's head over his shoulder.

TRISTEN (CONT'D)

Is it safe now?

Erica rolls her eyes.

ERICA

Yes, it's all safe now.

Tristen sits back up, holding Ellie right next to his shit-eating grin. Then he considers the elephant.

TRISTEN

I dunno, it's relaxing? Like a stress ball... one you don't choke. Also, I should note that I am not the one who named it 'Ellie'.

This time, Erica gets him square in the jaw - and immediately puts her hands over her mouth, surprised and stifling a laugh.

Tristen sits still.

TRISTEN (CONT'D)

No more smiling.

ERICA

No?

TRISTEN

Nope. Hurts too much.

ERICA

Oh, oh no, so you're not smiling right now?

TRISTEN

Nope, not smiling.

ERICA

Then what the hell is that?

TRISTEN

Sure isn't a smile. Cause I can't smile. Not possible any more.

ERICA

You'll never smile again?

TRISTEN

Jaw was just shattered. They say I might get a smirk, but it'll be 18 months of PT, and that's best-case scenario. The monster who did it got off, too - never even apologized.

Erica rolls her eyes again and falls back onto the bed with a low groan.

Tristen makes a grimace at her, his best broken 'smile'.

ERICA

You are such an asshole.

Tristen gasps and covers Ellie's ears.

Erica's shirt lifted a little as she collapsed on the bed, and Tristen can see a few red lines over her hipbone, joining a mesh of similar scars.

Tristen gingerly walks Ellie over and brings the animal's trunk to kiss the cuts.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Stop.

Tristen kisses again, again.

TRISTEN

Muchas smooches.

Erica grabs Tristen's hand.

ERICA

Dude, stop.

She pulls down her shirt and rolls onto her side, back to him.

Tristen takes a moment, then walks Ellie up her back and onto her side - intentionally avoiding her hip.

Erica smacks Ellie, hard.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Do you need to leave?

Tristen stares at her, then lies back to eye the ceiling - Ellie on his stomach.

INT. THE APARTMENT, NIGHT

A streak of fluorescent light slices across the cement floor, spill from the hallway lighting through cracked open door - never closed when Tristen collapsed into the apartment.

The streak of light - the only light in the apartment - disappears.

The door opens, light sweeping across the apartment, a broad-shouldered shadow entering with it.

Raymond, a big man but much smaller than his towering shadow, stands in the doorway. He scans the apartment, pulling the bat from under his jacket.

Raymond sees Tristen's limp, toothpick legs sticking out from a wall of darkness in the corner.

Raymond does not see the machine, or the hand crawl atop it.

Raymond walks toward Tristen's legs, raising the bat.

Even right next to Tristen's legs, Raymond can hardly make out shapes in the darkness past the light cast from the hall. He spots a hanging cord and pulls it.

Raymond reels back from the sick green overhead light - and a catatonic Tristen, mouth bloody, sprawled in the lawn chair next to the machine.

Raymond leans in to inspect, immediately more curious about the machine, and Tristen thrashes to life, grabbing at Raymond.

Raymond jumps, then presses the bat to Tristen's throat.

TRISTEN

(wheezing)

If you want to see her again...

Raymond frowns, then sees that Tristen is gripping a KEYCHAIN hanging from Raymond's belt.

Tristen opens his hand - the keychain is kitschy as hell, made from colorful beads that read: "I <3 daddy".

Tristen lets the keychain go and points to the machine's hatch - wide open.

RAYMOND

What the fuck are you talking
about?

Raymond presses with the bat again, but there's no resistance. Tristen is completely limp.

A shiver tears through Raymond's body. He's furious.
Confused.

Raymond takes a last look at the machine, and Tristen. Then he leaves.

Raymond hardly makes it out the door before he's stomping back, shaking. He tears the keychain from his keys and stops in front of the machine.

Raymond kisses the keychain and puts it in the hatch.

The hatch closes.

Raymond hardly notices the hand readying to pounce before
it's on his face

BLACK

UNDER CREDITS:

LITTLE GIRL V.O.

It's for you, silly! Who else would
it be for?

RAYMOND V.O.

Well, I just wanted to make sure I
was the right daddy - there are a
lot of daddies out there, you know.

LITTLE GIRL V.O.

Of course you're the right daddy!