

Did Everybody Pay Their Dues?

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FADE IN:

EXT. SPEEDWAY - AFTERNOON

The view from the air of a car speedway long disused. A major interstate freeway is visible for a moment in the background. On a service road, a vehicle moves slowly towards the gated speedway - a medium sized delivery truck.

SUPER - NEAR SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA

EXT. SPEEDWAY ENTRANCE - AFTERNOON

Rusted chainlink fencing with a padlocked double gate entrance. The van stops a few feet away. A lean older man wearing jeans, hooded overcoat and scarf gets out.

A padlock opens. The man opens the gates, the van rolls forward. The man locks the gates up, moves to the van.

A chill wind blows, sending tumbleweeds across the front of the van. The old man peers around, shivers before getting in the van. It moves off, deeper into the speedway grounds. A battered wooden sign that hangs on the fence comes into view.

It reads - ALTAMONT SPEEDWAY

Graffiti, bird shit and dust cover most of it. But a small patch remains visible on the bottom right...carved letters - R.I.P M H

INT.VAN - AFTERNOON

The driver is KEITH RICHARDS(73)face wrinkled, hair a mess. Next to him in the middle of the cab sits an impassive CHARLIE WATTS(76). The gate opener, MICK JAGGER(74) sits in the passenger seat.

Three of rock's greatest musicians crammed into the front of a fifty a day rental...

MICK

Gonna be dark soon. And cold.

CHARLIE

Lucky we brought firewood in the back. And our instruments.

MICK

I thought a campfire would be nice.
Make it more comfortable, you know.

KEITH

We're outta our fucking comfort
zone already in case you hadn't
noticed.

He mutters to himself as the van moves along the dirt track.

MICK

Matches! We need...or a lighter,
yes. Keith, you have a lighter,
don't you?

KEITH

Of course I have a fucking lighter.
I've been smoking all the way here,
ain't I? Jesus...

As if on cue, he lets go the wheel to shake out a smoke from
a crumpled pack, produces a lighter and gets it going. The
van veers off the track. Mick grabs the wheel hastily.
Charlie seems to be asleep.

MICK

Hey, concentrate.

KEITH

On what? What the hell can we hit
out here?

MICK

I...just be careful, ok?

He gazes out at a collection of old structures -
grandstands, workshops. Charlie opens his eyes.

CHARLIE

The concert was on the
west-northwest side of the
speedway. You need to turn off this
road to the left about a mile
ahead. I'll tell you where the
stage site is.

KEITH

There better not be any reporters
hiding out here. Mick? You
listening? What about getting the
key to this joint? No trail?

MICK

No. A family member we can trust made contact with the current owner through the friend of a friend. I sweetened the deal with a signed picture. Don't worry. No one saw us leave the hotel room.

KEITH

What about Ronnie? He knows something is going down. Fucking hawk that bloke.

Mick winces. Charlie has his phone out. He puts on his glasses, squints at the screen. The light outside is fading so Keith turns the van lights on.

MICK

Ronnie may have seen the book next to my bed. But only for a moment.

KEITH

Shit! I knew it. He'll be following us, he'll know where we're going...

He glances in the side mirror anxiously. Charlie points ahead after consulting his phone.

CHARLIE

There. Stop where that bush is.

MICK

Charlie, forget the stage for a moment and humor me. Do you think Ronnie will follow us if he twigs what we're doing? Seriously please.

The van pulls up. Keith cuts the engine, lights another fag.

CHARLIE

No. I dosed his orange juice with sleeping pills and hung a 'DO NOT DISTURB' sign on his door.

KEITH

That's been tried before.

CHARLIE

Ah, but I also tied him to the bed and padlocked the door.

KEITH

Nice work. That may slow him down for a bit but we should be back by then. You always were the sane one.

CHARLIE

Well, after fifty five years of drumming behind Jagger's skinny arse I'd need to be.

EXT.SPEEDWAY - NIGHT

The sun has vanished, the clouds cleared to reveal a cold, starry night. Mick and Keith stand around a small fire.

Charlie fusses about nearby, setting up his drum kit and two camp chairs. He checks his phone, measures angles.

CHARLIE

Right. My kit is exactly where it was in nineteen sixty-nine. The edge of the stage was where the fire is. By the way, nice job with the fire.

KEITH

Thank you Charles. I wouldn't have been able to do it without the help of young Michael here.

Mick smiles briefly but he's tense.

MICK

I can almost hear them.

KEITH

Hear who? Oh, you mean the two hundred thousand crowd who came here to see us? Tripping off their heads, no food or drink to buy, bugger all toilets, one fucking doctor. Yeah I can hear them alright...

Mick takes a step closer to him. Charlie wanders over to stand between them.

CHARLIE

Look guys, lets not argue, ok? I'll grab Keith's guitar from the van and your stuff, Mick. And we can sit down and have a little jam, right? Isn't that why we're here?

Mick and Keith glance at each other as Charlie waits.

KEITH

Of course, Charles my good man.

He slaps Charlie on the back, breaks into huge laughter. Charlie avoids the look on Mick's face and heads to the van.

KEITH

Come on, Mick, lighten up. We'll have a play, drink some bourbon, it'll be just like old times. Isn't that you dragged us here?

MICK

What? Dragged? You're not taking it seriously. After all this time, I'm finally acknowledging that a young man died here. We never accepted any responsibility back then.

KEITH

Because it was way out of our control by then. The Hell Angels were causing all the trouble. But don't forget the dude had a gun. How do we know he didn't plan to kill us?

MICK

Well, if you had read the new book you'd know he had the gun for self defence. He was worried about his girlfriend being hassled.

The slam of the van door breaks the quiet. Charlie makes his way back holding a guitar case and a small cardboard box.

KEITH

Ah, here we go again. The new book. Joel Selvin reveals the whole sordid satanic truth of Altamont!

MICK

So you read it?

Keith shrugs his shoulders before lighting another smoke.

MICK

That figures. Par for the course for you. Too damn lazy is your problem.

KEITH
Shut the fuck up.

MICK
Too lazy, too weak to pick up a
book that finally tells how it was.

Charlie puts the guitar case against one chair, the box on the other. He gets behind his kit, holds a pair of brushes.

CHARLIE
Ok, chaps, ready? Mick, your
harmonica and maracas are in the
box.

Mick and Keith stare at each other like boxers at a weigh-in.

CHARLIE
Mick? Keith? For once in your lives
can you listen to the drummer?

The pair look at him. Keith raises an ancient eyebrow. Mick has a faint smile on his famous lips.

CHARLIE
Now, I know Mick had good
intentions in wanting us to come
out here. I'm happy to go with it.
So lets chill for a few hours, play
some songs. We don't even have to
talk if we don't want to. But lets
behave, ok?

Mick and Keith both open their mouths to speak but Charlie stands up, shakes his head.

CHARLIE
Say nothing. Sit down and play.

He sits down, takes up his brushes. And waits. Mick sits in one chair, looks in the box, pulls out maracas. Keith sits, opens the case, takes out his acoustic. He tunes it.

A moment of thought then he begins the hard strumming intro of 'Street Fighting Man'. Charlie smiles, closes his eyes. Mick stares into the fire. The drums kick in, then Mick's maracas. Then Mick sings:

MICK
*Everywhere I hear the sounds, of
marchin', chargin' feet booooo...*

MONTAGE

- Mick sings 'Wild Horses' as Keith and Charlie back him.
- Mick plays the harmonica, launches into 'Sweet Virginia'.
- Keith and Mick sing a duet on 'Love In Vain'.

BACK TO SCENE

The three musicians stop for a break. Keith re-tunes his guitar, lights a smoke, a half bottle of bourbon at his feet. Mick sips from a bottle of water. Charlie tends the fire.

MICK

I'm enjoying this, you know.
Feels...right.

KEITH

Yeah. Just good music. No bullshit.

MICK

You know..I was thinking. Maybe we could do some type of...I dunno, benefit album for charity.

KEITH

No.

MICK

No, hear me out...we could raise money for...for the family of Meredith Hunter. His mother is still alive, siblings too. We can get...

KEITH

No.

His voice has risen. Charlie slowly straightens up. But its like Mick ain't listening...he's pacing now, excited.

MICK

And we could...no, wait, I got it. We'll contact Bill and Mick Taylor, I'm sure they would...yes, we can play a gig. Here! Maybe on the fiftieth anniversary in two years time so we can plan it. And it will be free again.

Keith sits quietly, plucking his strings. He throws his cigarette butt into the fire, puts his guitar aside. Then he's on his feet, in Mick's face.

KEITH

Fucking unbelievable you are! Why don't you film this special concert, Mick? Hmm, hows that for an idea.

Mick muses on this, caught up in the moment. Bad move...

KEITH

I...you gotta be fucking kidding me! I'm only joking. Jesus, you're always thinking of your reputation, how you look to the public. Your stubbornness was the catalyst for what went down here at that fucked up gig.

MICK

Now hold on. The Hells Angels were the problem, come on.

KEITH

No, thats passing the buck. It all started with the free concert. It was always about the film. Nothing else mattered.

MICK

We needed the film to be good. We had no damn money, remember?

KEITH

And whose fault was that? Yours! You hired the dodgy financial advisers. Jesus, Allen Klein for fucks sake. McCartney warned us about him but you wouldn't listen.

MICK

Look, none of this is relevant now. Its old history you're bringing up. Charlie is waiting for us so lets stop this shit and play some music.

KEITH

You are such a fucking hypocrite. YOU are the one dredging up the past as we speak.

MICK

Keith I'm trying to be calm here. Sit down and lets play some more.

KEITH

Always giving orders aren't ya. Mr control freak fucking Jagger.

Mick's face is a pale angry sheet. Eyes ablaze.

KEITH

We had a perfectly good site to use. That other speedway, what was it, Charlie? Not far from here?

CHARLIE

Sears Point Raceway but...

KEITH

Yeah thats it. But no...we had to move it at the last minute 'cos Mick here wouldn't pay the owners what they wanted for the use of it.

MICK

A hundred grand was too much for a free concert. Wasted money. And it was pure blackmail because the owners were a rival film company. We were fucking broke, you fool.

He takes a step towards Keith who just grins.

KEITH

The hundred grand wouldn't have been wasted. But your attitude made it like thirty pieces of silver.

Mick launches himself at his longtime partner. Keith is ready for him and they crash into each other. Both fall to the ground, kicking, wrestling. Charlie sighs.

Suddenly, a VOICE from the shadows near the van - soft but commanding, mimicking perfectly the pleading of a twenty five year old Mick Jagger on the this very site back in nineteen sixty-nine:

THE STRANGER(O.S)

Hey people...sisters, brothers and sisters...brothers and sisters. Come on now. That means everybody, just cool out. Will you cool out, everybody?

Charlie looks up in surprise. A young black man, THE STRANGER, steps forward into the light of the fire.

His Afro frames a handsome face and he wears a very sharp lime green suit with a black shirt. Neat black leather shoes complete his attire.

Mick and Keith continue to grunt and wrestle, oblivious, rolling close to the fire. The black man watches interest.

CHARLIE

I...hello there.

THE STRANGER

Hello yourself...Charlie.

CHARLIE

You know us? Well, I guess...Mick, Keith! We have a visitor. Stop fighting.

Mick and Keith look up from the ground, see the newcomer for the first time. The pair get to their feet, brush dirt off.

KEITH

How you doing, man? You a local? I bet my buddy Mick disturbed you with his squealing, right?

THE STRANGER

A local? Well, yeah I guess I am. And I was loving your music until the arguments started. That was sad.

CHARLIE

Rock stars, hey? Can't take them anywhere. Maybe we can play some more. We've, ah, had a decent break.

THE STRANGER

That would be nice.

He slowly unwinds the scarf from his neck, sits on the ground not far from the chairs. Waits with a smile on his lips. Charlie moves back to his drums.

KEITH

Man, I dig your suit. You dress well for such a young cat. How old you, twenty perhaps? Your folks have a farm or something nearby?

THE STRANGER

Yeah somethin' like that. And I'm
eighteen years old.

(beat)

Feels like I been eighteen for
like...forever.

He laughs. Mick hasn't said a word yet. He steps slowly around the fire, eyes locked on the young man. Keith sits in his chair, holds his guitar, watching, as is Charlie.

Now Mick is slightly behind the man, searching, peering at and finding...

An ugly raised scar is visible on the stranger's neck, above the shirt collar. Mick gasps. Keith and Charlie wait...

MICK

You're...him.

(beat)

You're Meredith Hunter.

His voice cracks, lips tense in a thick white line. Keith and Charlie start to rise but the black man holds up his hands.

THE STRANGER

No, no please, sit. I don't want to
cause no trouble. I...I brought all
this sadness down on my family, my
girl Patti...

KEITH

(whispers)

Pleased to meet you...hope you
guessed my name.

The young man smiles even as tears glisten in his eyes.

THE STRANGER

I like that, Keith, yeah thats
cool. I'm not here to accept
forgiveness or redeem you somehow.
None of you could stop the madness.
It was the sixties, it was how we
lived and learned, it was us. And
the music, YOUR music was all that
mattered.

Mick opens his mouth to speak finally but...

THE STRANGER

No, please Mick. Go and sit down.
Play for me. Thats all I want on
this night. I wanna hear and see
the fabulous Stones again.

Charlie takes a deep breath, looks at Keith who looks at
Mick. Mick settles into his chair. The black man wraps the
scarf around his neck again.

KEITH

What song do you want us to play,
ah, Meredith?

THE STRANGER

Murdock.

KEITH

I..sorry?

THE STRANGER

My friends used to call me Murdock.

MICK

You would've known that, Keith if
you had read the book.

KEITH

You're a laugh a minute, Jagger. So
what song then...Murdock?

THE STRANGER

'Under my Thumb'. My favorite
Stones song. Absolutely love it.

The three Stones frown, exchange uncomfortable looks.

MICK

That, ah, that was the song we were
playing when you were...when you
were...oh man...

THE STRANGER

When I was killed, yeah. Thats why
I want you to play it.

(beat)

I only got to hear half of it then.

FADE OUT

THE END