

'EMA BYE BYE'

An original short screenplay.

*Written by:
Simon Parker.*

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simonkyleparker@hotmail.co.uk

FADE IN.

INT. JOE'S VAN - DAY

JOE, 34, sits in the drivers seat of his work van with a cup of coffee in his hand.

DAVE, 29, sits next to him on the front passenger seat.

They're both dressed in overalls and look out at the busy city street in front of him and watch the different people walk by.

JOE

It's a Monday morning, but the streets are just going to get busier.

Dave smiles.

DAVE

And what's your point?

JOE

I don't mind the old people that you see, or the mothers or the people you actually see grafting.

DAVE

That's nice of you. You should let them know that.

JOE

But it's the kids mate. It gets to me.

DAVE

How come?

JOE

Because I wasn't doing this shit when I was their age. I left school

when I was sixteen and the first thing I did was seek out an apprenticeship and got myself a job.

DAVE

So what 'shit' are they doing, I don't understand.

JOE

Just walking the streets, that's what I don't get.

DAVE

What about it?

JOE

I'm talking about kids, but not old enough that they're having to rely on their parents anymore, old enough that they should be doing something with their lives.

Dave laughs.

DAVE

And why do you care so much?

JOE

Because why do they get to do it when I didn't. I had to get a job, I didn't think about it, all I knew is I had to get one. I'm not even against the idea of kids going to college and university, I like the ideas of those things, it's just the walking up and down of the streets that pisses me off. Why the fuck have they got so much free time on their hands?

DAVE

Why don't you go and speak to one then. You're not that much older, ask them what they want to do with their lives.

JOE

Yeah, I just might do that.

DAVE

Good, then you can stop bitching to me about it. And we've got work to do.

Joe nods, he then starts the vans engine.

INT. CAFÉ - DAY

Joe sits in a corner of this small café, a plate of bacon sandwiches in front of him, he quickly flicks through a newspaper, but not interested.

He then looks around and stares at the few other people that are in here with him.

PHIL, 17, then enters, dark blue jeans and a black hoodie.

Joe watches him as he orders a cup of tea and sits down at a table close to his.

Phil takes a couple of sips of his tea then looks around to see who's in here with him too.

He locks eyes with Joe, Joe lifts up his newspaper high above his head.

JOE

You want to read this?

Phil's caught off guard.

PHIL

What?

JOE

The paper, do you want it?

Phil nods.

PHIL

Sure.

JOE

Come get it then.

Phil stands up and moves over to Joe's tables.

PHIL

Thanks mate.

JOE

Sit down.

Phil looks at him, unsure.

PHIL

What the fuck for?

JOE

Just sit down, I want to ask you something.

Phil sits down, on edge.

He reaches out and Joe gives him the paper.

An awkward pause.

PHIL

So what do you want to ask me?

JOE

It's bothered me for a few years now, and a friend of mine today challenged me to just find out, and that's what I'm trying to do.

Phil laughs.

PHIL

What the fuck are you talking about?

JOE

What are you doing out at this time, have you got no school to go to?

Phil shakes his head, bemused.

PHIL

No.

JOE

You go to college then?

PHIL

No.

JOE

And you haven't got a job?

PHIL

No, I haven't got a job.

JOE

So help me understand why, because I see hundreds of kids like you everyday. With no place to go and with nothing to do. Help you understand why.

PHIL

I don't know if I can.

JOE

Ok, I'll try and help, after school finished what did you want to do?

PHIL

I wanted to go to college.

JOE

So what stopped you?

Phil takes a moment to compose himself, he then leans forwards.

PHIL

Ok, I'll tell you why I couldn't go, I've had this conversation before with lots of different people, so I'm prepared.

Joe smiles.

JOE

Sure.

PHIL

For those school students like me, or like I was, who wanted to attend college, they had to decide to enter into a higher education that goes passed that of what is acknowledged as been mandatory, and this still has a special and powerful image for most, but especially for those who are living on or even below the poverty line.

JOE

So you're from a poor family yeah, but so was I.

PHIL

Yeah, it sucks been poor, but for me, the better educated you are, the better the job you can get. That was the thinking that I was brought up to believe by all the good people that I ever met in my life. And it is this idea, that a persons intelligence alone can lift them above and away from those around them and move them into a better life, both financially and socially that was so exciting for me. That my life could exceed my parents lives, because I fucking hate my parents. Drunk greedy scumbags. And now I live with my auntie, but I don't live with her properly, I just sleep in a room and never really see her, because she doesn't really like me been there and wants me out, so I have to avoid her. It's one of the reasons I spend so much time outside like this, walking aimlessly, bored.

JOE

But mate, my dad kicked me out when I was seventeen, I spent the first two years in a shitty flat with five

other lads. But I was still working at that time.

PHIL

And that's good, but I had everything set on college. But for me to even attempt to go on into higher education passed that of high school was a brave thing to do. I was going to be the first member of my family to have ever have done this, to have set my eyes on the goal of getting myself into university, and that first major step was getting myself into college. And EMA, or Education Maintenance allowance used to contribute up to thirty pounds a week for the poorest of students whilst they were studying. That was what was going to see me alright. If I was in college I would have had more room with my auntie and I know she would have sorted me out with everything else.

JOE

So you think you needed to get paid to go to college, that's bullshit. I'm glad that shit was stopped.

PHIL

No listen, the importance of EMA was not just the financial support it once offered, but it's existence was a symbol that those teenagers living on and below the poverty line like me are been thought of, that inside the world of college life, there is a place for me. EMA was to say someone has been thinking of me, they know I need help, help that I didn't need to ask for, as it is already there in existence, I simply now only have to apply for it. But to play a game of word association with a member of

parliament, the word benefit will always be followed by the word cheats.

JOE

So this is all the governments fault. Come one mate you've got to have a smarter argument than that?

PHIL

Well yeah, in a sense it is.

JOE

But you're a smart sounding kid, why couldn't you just walk away from it and found a job. You sound like a nice guy, surely someone would have given you one.

Phil smiles.

PHIL

Yeah maybe, but I had my heart set on it. It was what was going to separate me from my parents. And I know I shouldn't hate them, and people always talk to me like they know better. I should love my parents because they're the only ones I got. They brought me into this world all that shit. But I don't love them. And I need to leave them behind.

JOE

So you had a shitty life, join the cue. A lot of people did too, but how is the government responsible, how do they or even this country owe you anything. Life is hard. It's fucking really hard. And you've got to work for everything.

PHIL

No one owes me anything. But it's the governments fault because they took away something that was already there

helping people. And something that I needed to help me. And costs will always be brought up against things like EMA. The brutal idea that even in education, you pay for what you get will always ring true for so many different people, and if you can't pay for it, you can't get it. But the notion of paying for what you get is something I agree with. To pay to insure that all those who want to go to college get to, is surly worthwhile. A better educated society must be the way forwards, and for all those apart of it to be literate and smart, that must be the ultimate goal, and to get that, you've got to be willing to pay for it. But the main focus of education is now about the costs of it, and the romance has been lost. To think about furthering your own education passed that of high school, the first question will now be, and how do you plan to pay for it. It's not free you know. And that's fucked up. And even you as a hard working guy who hates seeing kids out on the street must know that.

Joe nods.

An awkward pause.

JOE

So what about just getting a job?

Phil smiles.

PHIL

Yeah, I'm looking. I promise. But it's going to be hard to give up on the dream of university.

JOE

Yeah, but maybe you just need to. You were unlucky enough to have been born

poor, and you just don't get to do it.

Phil nods.

FADE TO BLACK
THE END