

Innocent Guilt

by
Robert L. McBride

I_write_films@aol.com
201-238-1971

FADE IN:

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Dark as Hell, and the fog makes it almost impossible to see.

Behind the wheel -- SUSAN, fifties, blond hair -- navigating through the fog. She talks through the wireless bluetooth system in her car.

SUSAN

And how's the little stranger?

LAURA (V.O.)

Lord almighty, mom, would you stop?

SUSAN

What? I never see him.

LAURA (V.O.)

He's in the bed asleep... like you should be.

SUSAN

I know, I know, but these cravings.

In the backseat: two shopping bags full of various ice cream flavors.

LAURA (V.O.)

Mom, you're talking like a pregnant woman.

SUSAN

No, I'm talking like a menopausal woman. You'll see. You've been warned.

LAURA (V.O.)

Are you almost home?

SUSAN

Yes. The market is only a few minutes away.

LAURA (V.O.)

(a beat)

Mom, if you, you know, ever want to come stay with me, I'd completely understand. Mike would be totally fine with it, too. We have the space.

Susan restrains her tears.

SUSAN

Thank you, honey, but I'm okay. I'm ummm, I'm holding on. Things are getting better.

LAURA (V.O.)

You would tell me if they weren't, right?

Susan pulls into her driveway. She smiles.

SUSAN

Of course, baby.
(beat)
I'm home now.

LAURA (V.O.)

Love you.

SUSAN

Love you, too, Laura. And give my grand baby kisses for me.

LAURA (V.O.)

And wake him up this time of night...

They laugh.

SUSAN

Bye, baby.

LAURA (V.O.)

Bye-bye.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - SAME NIGHT

Metal trash cans sit curb side on these cold city streets. This type of cold makes you angry. Barely any traffic, no passers by... Not even a stray animal is desperate enough to be out.

Perched on a bus stop bench is LAWRENCE. His dry lips are close to splitting. Laboured breathing. Cold sweat. No coat. His raggedy sweat suit has blood on the back of the sleeve -- The cold doesn't seem to be prominent on his mind.

AND THEN, Lawrence vomits -- right there!! Some of it lands on his shoes.

He wipes his mouth with his sleeve and then wipes the tears that roll down his cheek. We see a deep cut on the side of his thumb.

Lawrence weeps. Coughing and crying...

EXT. VARIOUS STREETS - SAME NIGHT

Lawrence wanders aimlessly down the side of the highway as cars pass by.

LAWRENCE (V.O.)

They say forgiving yourself is the start of freedom... but I feel there are some things you shouldn't get over. Guilt is what keeps you in check, keeps you human.

INT. DINER - EVENING

Super: 5 years later

Lawrence looks nothing like we last saw him. He's well groomed, cheery -- a sight to behold.

Doing most of the talking is PETER. He's a much older gentleman with a thick accent and gray hair -- no nonsense type. If he doesn't like you, you'll know.

PETER

Successful, young, good looking... why would you want to do that? Throw away your life?

LAWRENCE

Sir, with all due respect, I don't think I'd be throwing away my life.

PETER

Pretty much raised yaself, right?

A tough thing for Lawrence to speak on...

LAWRENCE

Yes, sir. Me and the streets.

PETER

How'd you get out?

A FLASHBACK:

From behind we see a Woman with the phone to her ear, typing in her ATM pin. She's completely oblivious to Lawrence standing behind her, memorizing the numbers... 0-5-2-2... She takes her cash and exits.

Lawrence waits a moment... and then heads out...

BACK TO SCENE

LAWRENCE
(solemn)
Just the usual. Buy my way out.

A crass change of subject --

PETER
So what you make?

Peter doesn't give him a chance to respond --

PETER (CONT'D)
Your field of work...
(mulling it over)
I'd say eighty, ninety... probably
clear a hundred after bonuses. Am I
right?

Beat. Lawrence goes to speak --

PETER (CONT'D)
Of course I am. And how'd I know
this? Because you're me twenty
years ago, and that scares me. See
my hands...

Peter waves his hands. Wiggles his left ring finger.

PETER (CONT'D)
This is how guys like us -- men of
accomplishment -- should be. Free
of all attachments.

Lawrence looks on. Can't believe what he's hearing.

PETER (CONT'D)
Too real for you? Not what you'd
expect from your girlfriends father
right?

Lawrence shakes his head.

PETER (CONT'D)

Listen, she sees me in you. I come from that life, kid. If you decide to ask her -- and I'm fine with that, you have my blessing -- but if you go through with this, you better go ALL THE WAY THROUGH! Don't fuck up her perception of me, because if you do...

Peter smiles, but it's far from friendly -- more threatening than anything.

LAWRENCE

No, sir --

PETER

Enough with the sir shit. Not for a future father-in-law.

Peter flashes a hint of a smile. Something in Peter's eyes says: "you're alright with me... But don't fuck up."

INT. DINER - LATER

They're eating now.

LAWRENCE

Does it ever haunt you?

PETER

Use to. All the time. But I got far away. For my own guilts sake. Now I'm around palm trees. Now only time I see "those people" is behind bars on Scared Straight. You watch that shit?

Lawrence is thrown off. Trying to process these comments. Are they racist? And isn't Peter...(a minority too)...

PETER (CONT'D)

She better not be pregnant!

Lawrence almost chokes. Wasn't expecting that.

LAWRENCE

No. Not --

PETER

When I met Mya's mother, I knew in my heart she wasn't the one. As men, we know these things.

(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
 (raises a glass of
 Bourbon)
 Kudos to you kid for not letting a
 good one get away.

Lawrence raises his water. They clink glasses.

PETER (CONT'D)
 So when you popping the question?

LAWRENCE
 I want to do it on her birthday.

PETER
 Hey. Not a bad idea.

LAWRENCE
 I figured since we'll already be
 celebrating her graduation that
 day...

PETER
 (pointing)
 The moment you propose, those
 student loan bills come to you.
 That's your responsibility. I paid
 out of my ass these past five
 years. I feel like that Ph.D. is
 part mine.

LAWRENCE
 (nods)
 I was thinking of sending for her
 mom.

PETER
 Never met her yet, huh?

Lawrence shakes: no.

PETER (CONT'D)
 You ask me, I don't think Mya's
 ready for that, but use your own
 discretion.

INT. SMALL BEDROOM - NIGHT

Not the neatest and barely bigger than a prison cell.

In the corner: colored pencils, sketch pads, and a stack of
 magazines.

On the wall: pictures of homes that he's drawn are taped to the wall.

Forbes, Fortune, and Architectural Digest magazines are all open and scattered across the bed.

A pre-teen (12) LAWRENCE kneeled on the floor sketching.

LAWRENCE (V.O.)

I'm doing exactly what I've always dreamed of as a kid. So in some ways I'm proud of myself... but the things I did to get here -- better yet, the things I did to survive so I could be here still tear me apart...

BANG BANG BANG!!!!

We hear three gunshots from outside. Lawrence doesn't even flinch; he's use to it... continues drawing...

EXT. GHETTO STREET - MORNING

A filled bookbag lightly bounces on the back of Pre-teen Lawrence as he scuttles to school. His eyes to the ground. Probably daydreaming. Seems safe until --

Four GANG MEMBERS dressed in all red (or blue) stop in front of him. He peers up -- senses the danger. He tries to walk around them but they surround him.

LAWRENCE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Growing up with a drug addicted dad, and a mom searching for love in any man that comes along, left me alone... I was always told my eyes say more than my lips could speak. Well I guess they could tell --

GANG MEMBER 1

Yo lil' cuz, you look like you could use a friend.

INT. BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY

Lawrence lies on the bed. Sweating. Done reflecting. He bolts up and runs to the bathroom. He stuffs his face in the toilet and barfs uncontrollably...

SHORT WHILE LATER

Lawrence wipes the fog off the mirror. Stares at himself. Reflecting on the man he was, looking at the man he is... hoping for a glimpse of the man he's destined to be.

LAWRENCE (V.O.)

Once you put on a front even you
forget who you really are. You
train yourself live your lies.

INT. FIVE STAR RESTAURANT - BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

Lawrence stands in front of the mirror of this elegant bathroom. Straightens his tie, gives himself a once-over, smiles.

INT. FIVE STAR RESTAURANT - TABLE - CONTINUOUS

MYA, mid-twenties, beautiful, her bubbly personality makes her a joy to be around. Beside her, her brother ALEX, laughs with their dad, Peter.

ALEX

Did Lawrence get lost?

PETER

(to Mya, playful)

You sure about this guy?

MYA

(laughing)

Yes, Daddy. I love him very much.

PETER

I'm gonna go pull him out the
toilet.

INT. FIVE STAR RESTAURANT - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Lawrence paces in front of the mirror. Peter storms in.

PETER

The fuck is wrong with you?!

LAWRENCE

Just give me a minute. One more
minute, I promise.

PETER
 (realizing)
 Hey, you're paying.

Peter closes the door. Lawrence takes one last look at himself. Exhales.

INT. FIVE STAR RESTAURANT - TABLE - MOMENTS LATER

Lawrence takes a seat at the table. His mind is elsewhere.

MYA
 Honey, this is my mother, Susan.
 And my sister, Lauren --

And before they're revealed, Lawrence throws up! Right on Alex's shoes.

He pushes away from the table. Everyone stands excepts Susan.

PETER
 What the fuck?!

MYA
 Daddy!
 (to Lawrence)
 Baby, what's wrong?!

ALEX
 Oh great. My fucking shoes. My God
 damn shoes bro!

Lawrence runs to the door. He bumps into a WAITER carrying champagne glasses --

KRSHHHHHHHHHHH!!!! The sound of broken glass --

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVEWAY - OPENING SCENE - CONTINUOUS

5 years ago.

That sound of broken glass is heard exactly when --
 Glass flies into the car --

We hear a woman SCREAM. In a matter of seconds she's yanked out the car and tossed onto the pavement by --

Lawrence, in that raggedy sweatsuit and wielding a small baseball bat, reaches into the car.

He cuts his thumb on a piece of glass but that doesn't slow him down; it only angers him more.

Susan gasps for air. Can't yell, barely able to breath. Shards of glass stuck in her face. She's in too much pain to scream. This happened too fast for her to realize what's going on.

Meanwhile, Lawrence riffles through her pocketbook. Tosses some things to the ground: makeup, gum, ASTHMA PUMP.

He pulls out her wallet, a WAD of CASH -- pockets it. He takes her ATM card, ditches the wallet and takes off running.

Susan lies there in her driveway, almost dead --

CUT TO:

Insert Iphone

In the corner of the phone is a green dot: GPS... And the date is MAY,22 (0-5-2-2: the ATM pin)

We're on the side of a --

BRIDGE - NIGHT

Lawrence stands on a bridge -- shaking. It's a LONG way down to the water. Now's the time to have second thoughts.

A HORN BLARES as a car screeches to a halt --

Mya runs out the car. Her cell phone in hand. She was tracking him.

MYA

Lawrence!

He turns, recognizes the voice --

MYA (CONT'D)

(at the ledge)

What are you doing?! Get down!

LAWRENCE

Leave. I'm sorry! I'm sorry Mya.

Mya cautiously steps closer.

MYA

Sorry for what? Just come down. Whatever it is, it's okay. Just come on down...

Lawrence looks back at her. Sorrow in his eyes. She can tell this is it --

Lawrence throws something to her.

LAWRENCE
That's for you.

She reaches for it -- her eyes never leaving him. Fingers tickle the ground for it. It's a ring box...

Mya picks it up, glances at it AND THEN --

Lawrence leaps off the bridge. Mya runs to the guardrail but he's gone, he's just a ripple in the river --

CUT TO:

INT. FIVE STAR RESTAURANT - PRESENT

He was hallucinating... But his reality is worse.

Lawrence's sweaty face: not blinking, breathing heavy...

Lawrence stares at Susan from across the room as she laughs along with Mya and the rest of the table.

He wrecks his brain trying to put this together... will she remember him, did she ever see him, is HE seeing things?

But a slight turn of Susan's head reveals that she can't see anything. She has pitch black lenses inside her frames... And beside her is a guide cane (cane used by the blind)...

PETER
(waving him over)
Bring your ass!

MYA
Daddy.

Clearly inappropriate language to yell in a five star restaurant.

Mya turns to Lawrence, flashes him her best smile. Waves him over. Any other time this would be inviting but today it's heart wrenching.

Lawrence pats his pocket -- ring still there. Exhales. He gathers courage, takes a step --

Susan turns in his direction and all Lawrence can see --

Are two eyes staring at him...

SUPER: To be continued

FADE OUT.