

SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

By

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Bed springs CREAKING. A man GRUNTING. Sounds of SEX.

FADE IN:

INT. BACK OFFICE - MORNING

Filing cabinets along the far wall overflow with yellow invoices and manila folders. In front of the cabinets, a Black Walnut desk. Gouges and cigar burns mar the surface.

Cigar smoke rises from an ashtray on the edge of the desk.

Two mismatched chairs sit to the right of the room and the source of the sounds, an unsteady cot, lies to the left.

POPS, 58, violently thrusts into the girl beneath him. His back fat and dimpled ass ripple with each thrust.

Sweat drips down his face and onto the girl.

She faces the wall, only the brunette hair on the back of her head is visible. She pushes against him in vain.

Her face whips around, eyes closed, avoiding the sweat drops.

ASHLEY, 15, can't hold back the tears. They stream down her face and mix with the droplets of sweat raining from above.

Her eyes open. Emptiness pours out. Her body is here. Her mind is gone.

Pops climaxes.

INT. BACK OFFICE - LATER

Pops finishes dressing. A stained white T-shirt and blue work pants.

Ashley lies under the blanket, staring at the wall.

Pops looks at her, chuckles, tosses a crumpled wad of CASH at her, then leaves.

She lies motionless as the CLOMP of his footsteps diminish.

Once it's silent, she lunges for a waste basket and vomits. A rainbow of bruises dot her bony back and skinny legs.

She wipes bile from the corners of her mouth and looks back at the money.

She grabs it, counts it. Thirty-Seven dollars. In ones.

EXT. BUSY STREET - DAY

Ashley walks down the sidewalk, holding herself, head hung low. The stains on her denim skirt match the ones on her Skid Row concert shirt.

Bums and vagabonds hunker down along the store fronts. Most of them clutch a brown paper bag in their hands, others jitter and talk to walls.

Ashley ducks into a store.

INT. LIQUOR STORE - CONTINUOUS

She walks directly to the counter.

ASHLEY
Pack'a Marlboro Reds, Fifth'a
Nikolai ninety.

The CLERK scans the store. Empty.

CLERK
Fifteen forty-nine.

She counts out sixteen dollars.

He snatches the money from her, stuffs the items in a brown bag, and motions for her to leave.

She holds out her hand.

He gives her a puzzled look.

She thrusts her open hand toward him again.

Finally he relents, opens the cash register, and hands her two quarters.

She looks at the quarters, then back up at him.

He huffs, grabs a penny from the tray on the counter, flings it at her. It drops off the counter and lands at her feet.

She stands motionless, staring down at it.

EXT. BUSY STREET - CONTINUOUS

Ashley pulls the bottle out of the bag, opens it and takes a swig. Her face puckers as a chill runs down her spine.

A city bus stops in front of her. The door opens.

The driver, THOMAS, 58, a thick black man with just a hint of salt in his hair, gently stares at her.

THOMAS
Goin' somewhere?

Ashley looks at him with longing in her eyes, her head shakes "No".

THOMAS (CONT'D)
You alright, child?

Ashley waits a second, then nods.

With woeful eyes, Thomas shrugs his shoulders.

THOMAS (CONT'D)
Well alright then. Be seein' ya
again tomorrow?
(beat)
You take care yourself, child.

Thomas waves bye, closes the door, then drives away.

Ashley takes one step toward the departing bus, but halts.

She looks down at the vodka in her hand.

The sound of babies CRYING.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Three toddlers sit in the hallway CRYING, two baby gates pin them on each side. A makeshift corral. Overflowing diapers on each one. Gnats swarm above.

Ashley walks through the front door.

Trash everywhere. Unopened mail piles up next to the door. McDonald's bags and cups strewn about.

Roaches skitter along the peeling wallpaper, across exposed plaster, then down through holes in the rotting floor.

Ashley closes the door and walks to the children. They plead with their eyes to be set free. Their hands grasp for her.

Approaching FOOTSTEPS.

A hand reaches from behind Ashley and yanks the bag from her.

MARY (O.S.)
The hell took so long?

MARY, 23, cover girl for Crack Whore Magazine, towers over Ashley. She opens the bag and pulls out the cigarettes.

MARY (CONT'D)

Good good.

She pulls out the bottle and notices it's been opened.

MARY (CONT'D)

You little bitch!

Mary explodes on Ashley, shoves her to the floor, kicks her repeatedly until...

A hand grabs Mary by the hair and slams her face into a wall.

JOE, 19, professional wife beater. White tank top, backwards hat, pencil thin mustache, pimples aplenty.

JOE

Dumb bitch! Who's gonna want that trick now! You gonna buy my smokes when she got no work!

Joe points to Ashley cowering on the floor.

JOE (CONT'D)

How many times I told ya...

He slaps Mary with each word...

JOE (CONT'D)

Never. Hit. The Merchandise. In. The face!

...then throws her to the ground.

JOE (CONT'D)

Pick up my shit.

Mary collects the vodka and cigarettes and hands them to Joe.

He downs half the bottle, adjusts his crotch, then holds his hand out.

Ashley hands him the crumpled wad of cash.

JOE (CONT'D)

Least one'a my sisters ain't worthless.

Joe lights a cigarette and leaves. Mary wipes blood from her mouth. The children cry. Ashley stands and limps away.

EXT. BACK YARD - LATER

A ramshackle shed rests in the far corner, rusted car skeletons give a home to overgrown grass and weeds. Large black bags of trash are sprinkled about the yard.

Ashley exits the back door and weaves her way through the maze of refuse to the shed.

She looks around, nobody's watching. She opens the door.

Spider webs fill the shed from top to bottom. A Black Widow guards her egg sac near the ground.

Ashley kneels and carefully reaches inside, past the black widow, to a large jar hidden behind a hubcap.

She pulls it out. It's filled with quarters and pennies.

She unscrews the top, drops in today's haul, and closes it.

She stares at it.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Filthy. A short bar with rickety stools off to one side, dingy booths on the other. The remains of a pool table at the back decays next to a powerless slot machine.

Dim lighting barely penetrates the thick layer of smoke hanging overhead.

A baseball game on the TV provides a soundtrack for the dregs of society as they drink their lives away.

Joe walks in and snaps his fingers at the bartender.

JOE
He upstairs?

The bartender nods.

Joe walks to the end of the bar and up a flight of stairs.

INT. BACK OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Pops sits at the Black Walnut desk, snorts a line of cocaine.

A KNOCK at the door.

POPS
What!

Joe enters.

JOE
Hey, Pops, here's...

Pops charges from behind the desk, grabs Joe by the back of the neck, and pummels his fist into Joe's gut.

POPS
Call me 'Pops' one more time, I'll
fuck you up so bad your clothes
will bleed.
(pause)
I'm not your friend, I'm your
father, call me 'Sir', or don't
speak to me.

Joe winces and stands up straight.

JOE
Yes, Sir. I was just sayin', Sir, I
got your money.

Joe hands Pops a roll of cash.

Pops thumbs through it.

POPS
This all?

Joe nods.

JOE
Wait.

He pulls out the wad of cash from Ashley.

JOE (CONT'D)
From Ash.

Pops takes the money. Looks at it. Smirks. Smells it as he saunters back to his chair.

POPS
Make sure your sister's here early
tomorrow. I'm wanna take my time
with her.

JOE
Yes, Sir. Anything else, Sir?

Pops waves Joe away, leans back in his chair, and enjoys the scent of the money.

INT. BAR - MORNING

Empty. The sun peeks through the blinds, casting long shadows across the floor.

NOISES above.

Bed springs creaking. A man grunting. The sounds of sex.

The rhythm increases. The floor creaks.

The rhythm decreases. The slap of flesh on flesh.

Slight WHIMPERS are heard.

INT. BAR - LATER

The shadows are much shorter now.

Footsteps CLOMP down the stairs. Pops struts across the floor, stops at the exit, zips up his pants, and leaves.

EXT. BUSY STREET - LATER

Ashley stands on the sidewalk. Brown bag in hand.

A city bus pulls up. The door opens.

THOMAS
Goin' somewhere?

Ashley stares at him, pulls the jar of quarters from the bag.

A tear rolls down her cheek.

FADE OUT.