

FOOD CHAIN

by

Mikey Jackson

Feature screenplay. Social issue drama

www.mikeyjackson.com

INT. SUPERMARKET - STAFF TOILETS - AFTERNOON

Meet ALYSSA ABBOTT, 18, the not-so-proud owner of the guiltiest of pregnancy testing sticks.

ALYSSA

How can it be positive?

Meet EMMA SMITH, 21, face caked in foundation, retouching her mascara via the communal mirror above the sinks.

Both girls model the uniforms of supermarket workers.

EMMA

What were you thinking, not telling him to wear a condom?

ALYSSA

It all happened so fast. One minute talking. The next, my legs wide open.

EMMA

I always make sure my shag for the night slips on a fun balloon. No protection on that erection means strictly no entry into paradise.

ALYSSA

This can't be happening. I know women who have tried for months, sometimes even years for a baby without success. It doesn't happen overnight. Everybody knows that. Conception requires multiple attempts. It's all about cycles. Body temperature. The exact moment of ovulation. So how can it be frigging positive?

EMMA

Are you planning on telling the father?

ALYSSA

I might not even be pregnant. These things are never 100% accurate. It could be a dud. Or a glitch. Or... or maybe I've caught a virus or something that's affecting my pee.

EMMA skims over the printed text on the cardboard packet.

EMMA

99%.

ALYSSA

Well, there you go. Maybe I'm a member of the 1% club.

Her short-lived denial soon pisses off out of it.

ALYSSA

Oh, Emma, what if I am pregnant? I can't have a baby. Not now. I'm way too young for all that shit.

EMMA

Does he have a name?

ALYSSA

Why would it? It isn't a proper foetus yet. Collection of cells o'clock.

EMMA

No, I meant him. The father. Don't you think he has a right to know?

ALYSSA

We're not even an item. We never were. We had sex. Once. That's it. Our relationship history in all its glory. Oh, and he's already made it perfectly clear that our one-off shag didn't mean anything. Wanker is too tame a word for him. Idiot is too tame a word for me.

EMMA

Why won't you tell me who he is?

A stubborn ALYSSA looks away. She's not telling anybody.

ALYSSA

Oh, God, my parents will blow a gasket when they find out. And what about my job? There's no way Benson will keep me on, not once the dreaded bump reaches whale-like proportions.

A fresh thought occurs to the girl, a flicker of hope.

ALYSSA

Hey, what if I misread the result?
I could be worrying over nothing.

She grabs the instruction sheet. Scours the text.

ALYSSA

Two lines...

Her face drops. Flicker of hope extinguished. And then it's all too much, she bursts into tears.

EMMA

Oh, babes.

EMMA is there for her, embracing the girl, holding her tight, not letting go.

ALYSSA'S staccato whimpers morph into --

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - BEDROOM - MORNING

-- the screechy bleating of a four-month-old baby boy.

Fingers of morning light stab through gaps in the ill-fitting curtains. Patches of mould claim the walls, noticeable even in the grim semi-darkness. Oh, yes, this temporary accommodation is a shithole.

Under the duvet of the single bed, ALYSSA (now 19) barks --

ALYSSA

Scream, scream, scream, kid,
that's all you ever do!

The continued screech of a very insistent infant.

ALYSSA

All right, all right, you win!
Just like you always do.

Tearing herself free from the cosy warmth of her bed, ALYSSA reaches into the cot and scoops baby OSCAR in her arms. At once, his piercing screech surrenders to a gurgle of contentment. Huh, more like one-upmanship.

She pulls open the curtains. The world outside her tenth-floor window boasts nothing more than the sombre grey of neighbouring high-rise concrete tower blocks.

Home sweet frigging home.

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - KITCHEN - MORNING

With OSCAR in transit, ALYSSA shuffles into the kitchen.

She opens the fridge. Nothing inside except for a carton of milk and a bottle of readily made-up infant formula. She grabs OSCAR'S feed and closes the fridge door.

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - LOUNGE - MORNING

A weary ALYSSA on the sofa, feeding the baby, staring into space. Oh, she notices that he's had his fill. Sets about winding the little human, just how she's been taught.

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - KITCHEN - MORNING

A lone ALYSSA shakes cereal into a bowl. Oh. Barely enough cornflakes left to cover the bottom of the vessel.

She plucks the milk from the fridge. Pours it over her breakfast. A thick gloop of curdled mess ruins her plans.

ALYSSA

Fuck.

Cereal binned, alternative foodstuff required, the girl searches each cupboard in turn. Old Mother Hubbard empty.

Except for one lonely brown onion.

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - LOUNGE - MORNING

OSCAR. Asleep on the changing mat on bare floorboards.

ALYSSA. Back on the sofa. Mug of coffee in one hand, the peeled raw onion in the other. Oh, well, here's to hunger, she takes a big bite of the onion. Chew, chew, chew, it's not so bad. Then --

-- urgh, the sharp, pungent taste, big mistake. She spits out the chewed white pulp, then gulps down her coffee, glug, glug, glug.

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - LOUNGE - MID-MORNING

Later. ALYSSA sits on the floorboards, her back propped against the wall, engrossed in social media on her phone.

She scrolls through her newsfeed. Stops at a photo of EMMA with friends in a nightclub, jazz hands, happy smiling faces.

ALYSSA'S face sinks. Wishes she still had her freedom.

Then, an idea. She browses the images on her phone, selects a cute photo of OSCAR and adds the caption: "My little man is all I need. 😊😊😊" She hits Post.

Her happiness shared online for all the world to see.

Huh, what happiness? ALYSSA loses the phone to the floor. Stares into space, forlorn, wishing for better things.

Oh, floating erratically above her head, a busy animated sequence of captions typed before our eyes like texts show us what she's really thinking:

"MY LITTLE MAN IS ALL I NEED.", "BUT THAT'S A LIE." "I KNOW I SAY I'M HAPPY.", "BUT I'M NOT.", "I AM FUCKING DYING HERE!", "I HAVE OSCAR, BUT I FEEL SO ALONE.", "YOU'VE ALL FORGOTTEN ABOUT ME!", "ABANDONED ME!", "HELP ME!", "PLEASE!", "GIVE ME BACK MY FUCKING LIFE!!!", "😞😞😞😞😞"

Throughout, she sits in silence. Trance-like.

INT. SUPERMARKET - SHOP FLOOR - MIDDAY

ALYSSA, a girl on a mission, pushes her pram around the shop. Searching for something. Or rather somebody.

Aha, she spots him down the canned foods aisle. DAN BENSON, the store manager, somewhere in his late 30s, handsome in a conniving bastard way. He's far from pleased.

BENSON

What the bloody hell do you want?

ALYSSA

We need to talk.

INT. SUPERMARKET - BENSON'S OFFICE - MIDDAY

BENSON ushers ALYSSA, complete with accompanying pram, into his office and closes the door to the outside world.

BENSON

Park your arse.

ALYSSA rests her posterior. BENSON sits behind his desk. Mutual animosity heavies the air.

BENSON

If you've come here to beg for your old job back, forget it.

ALYSSA

I need to earn money.

BENSON

No chance.

ALYSSA

I might have known you'd be like this.

BENSON

Hey, don't blame me. You'd have a job to come back to if you hadn't been stupid enough to steal money from the tills.

ALYSSA

I was desperate, I needed baby stuff. I didn't see you offering to help.

BENSON

And why would I want to do that?

ALYSSA

You know why. You're the one who got me pregnant.

BENSON

Look, let's get one thing straight, shall we? I've told you before, I don't believe for a second that I had anything to do with the creation of that sprog. We only did it the once.

ALYSSA

Yeah. Unprotected.

BENSON

Read my lips, Alyssa. Not. My. Problem.

ALYSSA

Fine, I'll settle for maintenance instead. I'm not asking for much. Just enough to --

BENSON

As if. I have a wife to support.

ALYSSA

Shame you didn't think of your precious other half when you shagged me on this desk.

BENSON

I have sex with a lot of girls.
What makes you so special?

ALYSSA

I'm the mother of your child.

BENSON

Allegedly.

ALYSSA

If you didn't want this shit, you
should have used a condom.

BENSON

How was I supposed to know you
weren't on the pill? You didn't
say a word, you just let me get on
with it. What do you think I am, a
bloody mind reader?

No answer from ALYSSA. Instead, a savage glare.

BENSON

Looking back, maybe I should have
worn a rubber. I mean, how mental
was I, going bareback with you?
What if I'd caught something? How
the fuck would I explain a
sexually transmitted infection to
the wife.

ALYSSA'S appalled face is an absolute picture.

BENSON

Oh, get real, Alyssa. I know
exactly what girls like you get up
to. Parading half-naked in your
boob tubes and short skirts.
Drinking like there's no tomorrow.
Every weekend going home with a
different bloke.

ALYSSA

I am not a slag.

BENSON

Oh, yeah? That little brat and no
ring on your finger paints a very
different picture.

ALYSSA. Close to tears.

ALYSSA

That little brat happens to be
your son.

BENSON

Bollocks. He could be anybody's.
Now piss off out of it, pramface,
I've got work to do.

INT. SUPERMARKET - SHOP FLOOR - MIDDAY

Visibly distraught, ALYSSA needs to get out of this place.
She pushes the pram, heading towards the exit.

EMMA

Alyssa!

EMMA trots over. ALYSSA reluctantly slows to a halt. Tries
her hardest to mask her true emotions. Thin smile time.

EMMA

How the hell are you, babes?

ALYSSA

I'm... getting by.

EMMA senses that something is wrong.

EMMA

Are you okay?

ALYSSA

Yeah, yeah, I'm just... tired,
that's all.

EMMA

Sorry I haven't been in touch. But
you know how it is. Full-time job.
And then hitting the bars at the
weekend.

ALYSSA looks away, not wishing to hear that.

Oblivious to the young mum's pain, EMMA takes a peek inside
the pram.

EMMA

Oh, my God, your little boy is so
cute. How old is he now?

ALYSSA

Four months.

EMMA

No way. Time flies by so fast.
Hey, it's been so long since we
had a girlie night out together.
Are you free this evening?

ALYSSA

I don't have any money.

EMMA

No worries, babes. Drinks on me
all night.

ALYSSA

Aren't you forgetting something? I
have a baby to look after.

EMMA

Like, duh, no-brainer. Get
yourself a babysitter.

ALYSSA

They want paying.

EMMA

Like, seriously? He's four months
old, no trouble at all. I mean,
how hard can it be to find
somebody to look after him for
free?

INT. MUM AND DAD'S FLAT - LOUNGE - AFTERNOON

The family home that was. Bright and airy. Pleasant decor.
Ah, so ALYSSA did not have a disadvantaged upbringing.

MUM and DAD sit on the sofa, with DAD cradling OSCAR in his
arms, cooing and oohing, the doting grandfather.

Opposite, a self-conscious ALYSSA has claimed an armchair.

Between them, tea and biscuits decorate the coffee table.

MUM

You look like death warmed up.

ALYSSA

Nice to see you too, Mum.

MUM

Are you looking after yourself?

But before ALYSSA can respond --

MUM

And are you feeding Oscar correctly? He doesn't seem to be putting on much weight.

ALYSSA

The health visitor reckons he's doing fine. Better than average.

MUM

Yes, but how does she know for sure? Most of those health visitor types don't have babies of their own.

DAD

Oh, leave the poor girl alone. I'm sure Alyssa's doing the best she can under the circumstances.

ALYSSA

Thanks, Dad.

MUM

I worry about the pair of you. Forever scrimping and scraping. Stuck all day and night in that god-awful flat.

ALYSSA

It was you who put me there.

MUM

Alyssa, we kicked you out for your own good. It's called tough love. How else are you supposed to learn how to stand on your own two feet?

DAD

It may seem harsh, love, but you need to see it from our point of view. At our time of life, we can't have a child running around the place.

ALYSSA

Oscar's four months old. He's not even crawling yet.

DAD

You know what I mean.