

FOOD CHAIN

by

Mikey Jackson

Feature screenplay. Social issue drama

www.mikeyjackson.com

INT. SUPERMARKET - STAFF TOILETS - AFTERNOON

Introducing 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.

EMMA

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

Both girls model the uniforms of supermarket workers.

ALYSSA

It all happened so fast. One minute, deep in conversation. The next, 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

Oh, God, 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% accurate.

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 won't be 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.
Twat is too tame a word for me.

EMMA
Why won't you tell me who he is?

A stubborn ALYSSA is not telling anybody.

ALYSSA
I don't need this. 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 a single bed, ALYSSA (now 19) barks --

ALYSSA

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

Cue the continued screech of a very insistent infant.
ALYSSA tears herself free from the cosy warmth of her bed.

ALYSSA

All right, you win! Again.

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.

ALYSSA

Home sweet fucking home.

INT. ALYSSA'S FLAT - LOUNGE - MORNING

A weary ALYSSA on the sofa, winding the little human post-feed, just how she's been taught. This is still new to her. So fragile. Doesn't want to break him.

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 bare 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.

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

OSCAR, asleep on the changing mat on bare floorboards.

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

She scrolls through her newsfeed. Stops at a photo of EMMA posing with friends in a nightclub, 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 bloody 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 to see her.

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. And I didn't see you offering to help.

BENSON

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

In retrospect, 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. Boozing it up 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. A reluctant ALYSSA 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 age, we can't have a
child running around the place.

ALYSSA

It's okay, I get it. It's just
so... difficult.

MUM

I still don't understand why the
father of your child can't
contribute.

ALYSSA

I've told you a zillion times, he
is well out of the picture.

MUM

I would so love to give him a
piece of my mind. That's if I knew
who he was. You never did reveal
his identity.

ALYSSA

Believe me, Mum, he's a nobody.
I'm better off without him.

MUM

Better off? It's a bloody
disgrace, the way you're perfectly
content to let him shirk his
responsibilities.