

ALYS

written by

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ALYS
A short film
Written by Toby Godden

SCREENPLAY

FADE IN:

INT. ERNEST'S FLAT - DAY

Concrete floor. Bare. Cold.

ERNEST OGDEN, late 30s, lies curled on a sofa that is clearly too small for him. Still dressed. Jacket bunched under his neck.

The TV is on. Daytime quiz show. Sound off.

An ashtray on the floor. Another on the windowsill. A chipped plate by the sofa, dotted with cigarette ends.

Everything is an ashtray.

Ernest is awake. Not moving. It's clearly daytime but the room feels like night.

He turns his head slightly. The room: empty.

After a beat:

A GIRL'S VOICE.

ALYS (O.S.)
Hello.

Ernest blinks.

Alys, 7, sits cross-legged on the floor, facing him. Yellow raincoat. Trainers scuffed. Hands folded neatly in her lap.

ERNEST
...Right.

Alys waits.

ERNEST (CONT'D)
You're real?

ALYS
Yes.

Ernest sits up slightly. Looks around the room. The TV. The door. The windows.

Everything is normal.

ERNEST
I'm tired.

ALYS
I know.

ERNEST
I haven't slept properly. I've been
smoking too much.

(gestures)
That covers it.

ALYS
That doesn't usually make new
people.

She looks around the flat, evaluating.

ALYS (CONT'D)
It's smoky in here.

ERNEST
You shouldn't be in here.

ERNEST (CONT) (CONT'D)
You're not real.

ALYS
I live here. Just not yet.

Ernest stubs out his cigarette on the plate. His hand is steady. He notices.

ERNEST
What do you want?

ALYS
To help you.

Beat.

ALYS (CONT'D)
So I can exist.

The TV flickers. Somewhere in the building, a TOILET FLUSHES.

ERNEST
Okay.

ALYS
I'm your daughter.

Ernest exhales.

ALYS (CONT'D)

I'm seven.
From later.
This is before you meet my mum.
You get very sad around now.

ERNEST

I don't have a daughter.

ALYS

Not yet.

ERNEST

I don't meet people.

ALYS

Yes.
That's the problem.

She stands, goes to the BALCONY DOOR, pulls the handle. It sticks.

ALYS (CONT'D)

You need to open this.

ERNEST

That won't fix me.

ALYS

I'm not fixing you.
I'm stopping things getting worse.

She pulls again. Fails.

ERNEST

It's cold.

ALYS

Still need to open it.

He sighs. Stands. Crosses the room. Pushes the door hard.

It slides open with a scrape.

Traffic noise. Damp grass smell.

Alys smiles. Steps onto the balcony.

Ernest follows. Leans on the rail. Looks down at the square of unused grass below.

ERNEST
I don't feel hopeful.

ALYS
That's fine.

She peers over the rail.

ALYS (CONT'D)
You're standing.

Ernest realises she's right.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Alys sits at the table, legs tucked under. Ernest fills the kettle.

ALYS
Rule one.

ERNEST
You have rules.

ALYS
Working assumptions.

She watches him.

ALYS (CONT'D)
Thoughts aren't facts.

ERNEST
Mine are convincing.

ALYS
Yes.

He hands her a mug.

ALYS (CONT'D)
I don't drink caffeine.

ERNEST
It's tea.

She considers. Drinks it anyway.

ALYS
So. It helps to move.

She gestures to his jacket.

ALYS (CONT'D)

Off.

He hesitates. Takes it off. Sits properly.

She nudges the plate of cigarette ends away from the edge.

ALYS (CONT'D)

Use this.

ERNEST

I'm not stopping.

ALYS

You don't have to.
Just don't let everything be the
same thing.

He rinses the plate. Leaves it wet in the sink.

ALYS (CONT'D)

If you can test something, you
should.

CUT TO:

INT. STAIRWELL - DAY

Alys bounds down the stairs. Ernest follows, slower.

The stairwell smells of damp paint.

ERNEST

Do you live here?

ALYS

Not yet.
But I know it.

EXT. ESTATE COURTYARD - DAY

The square of grass. Worn. Muddy shortcuts.

Alys stops. Looks around.

ALYS

Okay.

ERNEST

What?

ALYS
You didn't disappear.

ERNEST
I wasn't planning to.

ALYS
Still. Worth checking.

They walk. Sit on a bench.

ERNEST
You're very calm.

ALYS
I've had practice.

ERNEST
With what?

ALYS
You.

That lands.

ERNEST
I'm not good with people.

ALYS
I know.
But you're not bad.

Beat.

ERNEST
You talk like a leaflet.

ALYS
Mum says that.

He doesn't ask which mum.

CUT TO:

INT. ERNEST'S FLAT - EVENING

Curtains half open now. Light cuts across the floor.

Alys curls up on the sofa.

ALYS
That's enough today.

ERNEST
What happens now?

ALYS
We wait.

Tomorrow we do one more thing.

ERNEST
And if I don't?

She looks at him. Serious.

ALYS
Then I get worried.
And you get worse.

She closes her eyes.

Ernest watches her breathe.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NEXT DAY

Ernest fumbles with the kettle again.

ALYS
I won't stay much longer.

ERNEST
Where to?

ALYS
Not now.

She swings her legs on the counter.

ALYS (CONT'D)
Last thing.

ERNEST
I'm listening.

ALYS
You go somewhere new.

You talk to someone you don't know yet.

ERNEST
Ambitious.

ALYS

Boring.
That's why it works.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

They walk. Ernest hesitant. Alys certain.
She stops outside a small cafe.

ALYS

Here.

ERNEST

Why here?

ALYS

Because she's here.

ERNEST

I don't want to disappoint anyone.

ALYS

You're not that important.

She opens the door.

INT. CAFE - DAY

Warm. Cardamom. Steam.

LEILI, early 30s, wipes the espresso machine.

LEILI

Hi. Take your time.

Alys whispers.

ALYS

Mint.

Ernest steps forward. Finds his voice.

ERNEST

Mint tea, please.

Alys steps off the stool.

She is losing contrast.

ERNEST (CONT'D)

Oh.

ALYS

It's fine.
This is the right bit.

Alys tugs his sleeve.

ALYS (CONT'D)

That's her.

ERNEST

Right.

ALYS

You'll be alright.

ERNEST

I don't know how to be a dad.

ALYS

Good.

She grins.

ALYS (CONT'D)

You've got time.

She's gone.

Beat.

Leili looks up.

LEILI

Mint tea, yeah?

ERNEST

Yes please.

LEILI

Coming up.

She moves to the kettle.

Beat.

Leili sets the tea down.

LEILI (CONT'D)

I'm Leili.

ERNEST

Ernest.

LEILI

You can sit there.

(gestures to a nearby chair)

He does.

The tea cools.

The street hums.

Ernest stays.

FADE OUT.

THE END