

CHARITY CASE

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. PLAYGROUND - DAY

MYA (late 20's) pushes her daughter AUTUMN (5) on a swing. Both are laughing. The perfect day.

A SQUEAL of delight to Mya's left. She turns to see two children playing tag. She turns back to Autumn.

ALEC (late 20's) stands in front of Autumn's swing, facing them.

Mya's smile vanishes. She grabs the chains, stopping her daughter's swing. She's scared.

MYA

Alec.

Alec ignores Mya. He bends down to face Autumn.

ALEC

Hey, Autumn. How's daddy's little girl?

MYA

Alec, you can't be here. The judge said-

ALEC

I wasn't talking to you, bitch.

Another mother overhears the exchange, picks up on the tension. She takes her son by the hand and leads him away.

MYA

Alec, please don't do this.

Alec stands, his anger just beneath the surface.

ALEC

I'll see my daughter whenever I want, wherever I want.

MAN (O.S.)

Everything okay here?

Mya turns. The other mother and her son are standing behind a TALL, INTIMIDATING MAN.

Parents and babysitters stop what they're doing to pay attention to the confrontation.

Mya finds her voice.

MYA
He was just leaving.

Alec stands his ground. The tension builds. Alec steps forward, bends over, KISSES Autumn on the forehead.

ALEC
See you later, Princess.

Alec turns his back on Mya and strolls away.

Mya relaxes, unaware of how tense she was herself. Her hands are shaking.

MYA
Thank you.

Mya continues to pour out her thanks. She picks up Autumn, hugs her tight.

Leaning against a tree, a MYSTERIOUS STRANGER observes the scene from the shadows. He jots comments on a small NOTEPAD.

Paper clipped to the notepad is a PHOTO of Mya and Autumn.

INT. MYA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The mess in Mya's apartment is overwhelming, considering how tiny the apartment is.

Mya sits on the couch, staring at the PAST DUE NOTICES that litter her secondhand coffee table.

AUTUMN (O.S.)
Mommy?

Mya snaps out her reverie. Autumn stands nearby in her nightgown, rubbing her eyes.

AUTUMN
Aren't you gonna tuck me in?

MYA
Of course, baby. Come on.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mya tucks Autumn into a full-size bed in the apartment's only bedroom. She sits on the bed by her daughter.

AUTUMN

Story?

Mya considers.

MYA

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful little princess who lived in the biggest, safest castle in the whole wide world. The princess spent every day playing dolls with her friends, and at night she went to sleep in her very own princess bed. But outside the castle walls was a mean old dragon, because stories like this one always have a dragon. The princess didn't like the dragon, and neither did the queen, but that's okay. Where there's a dragon, there's always a knight. One day, the knight decided to help the queen and the princess, and he promised to take care of the dragon once and for all.

Autumn starts to nod off. Mya lowers her voice.

MYA

So late one evening, the knight snuck into the dragon's cave. He crept up on the sleeping dragon, drew his sword, and-

A KNOCK at the apartment door.

Mya's blood freezes. Autumn doesn't wake up.

Mya stands, collects herself. She leaves the bedroom, picking up a BASEBALL BAT that leans against the door frame.

INT. MYA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mya holds the bat in a defensive position, inches from the door.

MYA
Who is it?

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER (O.S.)
Mya Grimm?

A sigh of relief. Not Alec. She lowers the bat.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER (O.S.)
Miss Grimm, could I please come
inside? I believe I can be of
assistance with regards to your
situation.

Mya hesitates.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER (O.S.)
Please, Miss Grimm.

Mya undoes the deadbolt. She opens the door.

Standing in the hallway is the MYSTERIOUS STRANGER from the park.

INT. MYA'S APARTMENT - LATER

Mya sits on her couch. She's nervous, but she's hopeful that the stranger's offer is sincere.

The mysterious stranger sits in the only other chair in the room. He's unsettled, only a bit less nervous than Mya.

Two cups of coffee sit between them on the coffee table.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
Miss Grimm, I represent a very
unique charity. We seek out
individuals facing unfortunate
circumstances, and we offer a
solution. A permanent solution.

MYA
You mean you'll help pay my bills?

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
You have other problems more
pressing than your bills.

MYA
I don't understand.

The stranger doesn't respond. That's when it sinks in.

MYA
Wait, you don't mean-

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
A permanent solution, Miss Grimm.

The stranger picks up his coffee, takes a sip.

Mya leans back, overwhelmed. Should she be elated, or appalled?

MYA
You can't be serious.

The mysterious stranger takes another sip of coffee.

Mya stands, paces.

MYA
I don't... I mean, I shouldn't... I need time to think.

The stranger nods. He stands, reaches into his shirt pocket, removes a BUSINESS CARD.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
When you're ready, our benefactor can be reached at this number.

He extends the card to Mya. She accepts it.

MYSTERIOUS STRANGER
(hesitant)
Should you choose to accept his assistance, I will see to the matter personally.

With a nod, the stranger shows himself out.

Mya examines the card. It contains a phone number, accompanied by a single word.

CARITAS.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY

Mya leads Autumn down the cereal aisle. Autumn picks up a box of pure sugary sweetness.

Mya shakes her head. Autumn turns on the puppy dog eyes. Mya relents. Autumn grins with delight.

Mya looks up. Alec stands at the far end of the aisle, watching her.

Mya takes Autumn by the hand.

MYA
Come on, Autumn. Time to go.

Mya hurries in the opposite direction. A SMALLISH MAN stands at the other end of the aisle, watching Mya with interest.

SMALLISH MAN
Mya Grimm?

Mya stops.

MYA
Do I know you?

The man hands her a folded stack of BLUE PAPERS.

SMALLISH MAN
You've been served.

Mya does a double-take. What just happened?

She turns, locks eyes with Alec.

Alec smiles, waves.

Mya unfolds the papers. She scans the entire first page, but only one word registers.

CUSTODY.

INT. MYA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Mya steps out of the bedroom and pulls the door closed.

She shuffles toward the coffee table. The stack of blue papers sits atop the unpaid bills.

Mya stumbles to a stop. She begins to sob.

She struggles to quiet herself, to spare Autumn, but she's so hopelessly lost.

Mya COLLAPSES on the couch in despair.

She wipes her eyes, clears her vision, sees the TELEPHONE.

Mya sniffles, straightens. She digs in her pocket and produces a crumpled business card.

The card. The phone. The card.

Mya reaches for the phone and dials. One ring, then another, then another.

The CLICK of someone answering on the other end.

No greeting. Only soft breathing.

MYA
Hello? Is this Caritas? This is
Mya... Mya Grimm.

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - DAY

Mya walks Autumn to school, hand-in-hand. Mya glances around, preoccupied.

Mya stops at the foot of the school steps, bends down.

MYA
Mommy loves you, sweetheart. Have a
great day at school, okay?

Autumn plants a huge kiss on Mya's cheek.

AUTUMN
Love you, Mommy!

MYA
Love you, too.

Autumn runs up the steps. She disappears inside.

Mya stands, turns, and finds herself face-to-face with a uniformed POLICE OFFICER. Standing beside him is DETECTIVE WALLACE, wearing a suit and tie.

POLICE OFFICER
Mya Grimm?

MYA
Yes?

POLICE OFFICER
Ms. Grimm, I'm afraid you need to
come with us.

Panic sets in. She's exposed, and she knows it.

MYA

Why? What's going on?

The other man steps forward.

DETECTIVE WALLACE

Ms. Grimm, I'm afraid we have some distressing news regarding Alec Marzen, your daughter's father. Mr. Marzen was mugged last night. He was stabbed during the incident. I'm afraid he didn't make it.

MYA

Oh my god. Oh god, oh god, oh god.

Tears spring to Mya's eyes. She turns her face as she begins to cry.

POLICE OFFICER

Ms. Grimm-

Detective Wallace puts a hand on the officer's shoulder, indicating that they should let Mya grieve.

Neither man sees the look on Mya's face, or notices that she's shedding tears of relief.

INT. MYA'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Autumn bursts through the door, all smiles. Mya follows close behind, a spring in her step.

MYA

Hey, you. Reading homework first.

AUTUMN

Awww.

Mya closes the door. She bumps a MANILA ENVELOPE with one foot.

Mya picks up the bulging envelope. It bears her full name, but no address.

She walks to the couch, opens the envelope. A small VOICE RECORDER falls out into her hand.

AUTUMN

What's that, Mommy?

Mya pushes the play button. She hears her own voice.

MYA (O.S.)
Hello? Is this Caritas? This is
Mya... Mya Grimm.

She fumbles for the stop button.

MYA
Go play in the bedroom, Autumn.

AUTUMN
But you said-

MYA
Now.

Autumn obeys her mother.

Mya digs in the envelope and finds a TYPED NOTE. She unfolds the note and reads.

CARITAS (V.O.)
Mya Grimm, you have in your possession evidence of your complicity in the murder of Alec Marzen. You will also find in the envelope a copy of Mr. Marzen's insurance policy, naming your daughter Autumn as sole beneficiary in the event of his death. If you wish to remain free from prison, free to raise your daughter as you see fit, you will read this letter carefully and do exactly as it says.

Mya glances down the hall, toward the room where her daughter is playing.

She looks in the envelope and notices one last item.

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY

Mya sits in an uncomfortable plastic seat, ignoring the mass of humanity that swarms around her.

She focuses on MR. JAMISON (early 50's). Mr. Jamison walks toward the ticket counter, turns away, turns back.

His decision whether or not to buy a ticket is indicative of a much larger issue, one that's weighing on him heavily.

Mya refers to a small NOTEPAD in her hand. Paper clipped to the notepad is a PHOTO of Mr. Jamison.

Mya stands. She moves toward the man with purpose.

MYA
Mr. Jamison?

Mr. Jamison jumps, startled.

MR. JAMISON
Who are you?

MYA
Mr. Jamison, I represent a very
unique charity. We seek out
individuals facing unfortunate
circumstances, and we offer a
solution. A permanent solution.

CUT TO BLACK