

'SMILEY FACE'

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INT. ZAC'S APARTMENT, LONDON - NIGHT

ZAC, a balding business man in his mid-to-late forties, sits staring longingly down the table. His plate and cutlery rest below him, and he holds his fork in his hand with his elbow rested on the table.

Suddenly, MUM, an attractive, authoritative late-thirty-something, strides into the dining room from the living room, holding a glass of wine, looking at her phone.

Zac, hearing her come in, looks up at the woman and FREEZES in utter bafflement. His body language immediately transforms from casual flaccidity to cowering, submissive, rigidity. She walks round the table and sits adjacent to him.

A few moments pass as Zac continues to watch.

MUM

(noticing, barely
turning her head)

Eat up now, Zac - or we'll be here
all night.

Zac looks dazed and continues to stare at Mum. He feels unable to reject this instruction, and accordingly looks down at his food. He sees before him a plate of SMILEY FACES and FISH FINGERS.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - one smiley face

EXTREME CLOSEUP - Zac's expression of horror and confusion

He looks up again, over to her, and watches her cold, unmoving face. He looks down again.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - Zac's knife

He picks up the knife.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - a prong of the fork through the eye, the knife ripping the smiley face in two, the soft, inner, mushy potato spilling out over the skin.

He eats his piece in evident discomfort.

MUM (CONT'D)

(looking into her phone,
away from Zac)

And I won't be back until late, so
Catherine will be taking you to
school.

Zac once more looks sluggishly up and over towards his mother, his face becoming more and more distorted with confusion and angst.

He watches her, again. Motionless.

The faint WHIMPERING OF A CHILD is heard coming from the living room. Zac glances over towards the entrance. The noise stops. He looks back at Mum.

He opens his mouth to speak, but the words don't come out for a few seconds.

ZAC

(attempting to feign
confidence)

But... I don't... I don't go to
school.

Mum looks up from her phone and stares into the distance. She then spins around to face Zac properly with an expression of scarcely restrained rage. Zac hunches over and cowers once more, screwing up his face. The silence drags on.

Abruptly, Mum bursts into a fit of laughter, her whole body swaying on the chair. Her glass shakes too - droplets of wine spill onto the table and onto the floor. The laughter drags on.

MUM

(leaning over, putting
her hand on Zac's
shoulder)

Oh Zac, you do make me laugh
sometimes.

He notices her breasts. The WHIMPERS are heard again - Zac glances over restlessly once more. They stop - the entrance is clear.

He looks back at Mum. She has returned to her *exact* position prior to her outburst.

MUM (CONT'D)

(speaking to her phone,
expressions and all)

You know, I was speaking to Mr
Hopkins the other day before I
collected you and -

Her phones chimes; she reads the message for a few seconds. Zac stares, unable to move. Mum giggles subtly and smiles, sends a message and then resumes.

MUM (CONT'D)

- and he said that you're
distracted in class.

Zac is *still* frozen, his face warping further and further as his confusion increases.

MUM (CONT'D)

And I *know* that you aren't good at
English, but he said it's for other
subjects too. He said in physics
you just seem to be dozing -

HOPKINS

(standing, looking out
of the window)

(MORE)

HOPKINS (CONT'D)

- just seems to be dozing off,
gazing out of the window like he's
lost in his own little world.

Zac whips his neck round to stare at HOPKINS behind him - a towering, though somewhat hunchbacked and emaciated professor. He wears a lab coat.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)

I wonder what he must be thinking
about, watching the leaves sway out
there.

Zac sees the leaves swaying, out there.

HOPKINS (CONT'D)

Time and time again his performance
has dwindled below standard. I
don't even know why we keep him on
anymore.

ZAC

(chained to the chair)

No it doesn't - it hasn't... Jeremy
says I di... my portfolio was up
3.6%!

HOPKINS

(still facing away)

- and the other months?

MUM

And he said that it's been poor for
months.

Zac slowly turns around once more to face his mother. His eyes are slightly red now - face still contorted.

ZAC

I kno-

Mum's phone chimes again. She laughs once more, evidently oblivious to Zac. He watches again, waiting.

MUM

(turning to Zac,
suddenly stern and
aggressive)

Well? Don't you have anything else
to say for yourself

ZAC

I..

Zac begins to grip the armrests of the wooden chair. It
creaks. Mum looks down. The WHIMPERS are heard once more. Zac
looks again towards the living room.

CHILD

(distantly)

Please stop.

MUM

Why are you gripping the chair so
hard?

Zac whips his head back towards Mum. He can't look down.

ZAC

I'm not.

MUM

Give me your hand.

ZAC

No.

MUM

NOW.

The phone chimes once more. Mum laughs her girlish, seductive
laugh, withdrawing back to her original position.

MUM (CONT'D)

(whilst texting on her
phone)

Come on, Zac.

(MORE)

MUM (CONT'D)

You really need to finish up now.
They'll be here soon.

Zac looks down.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - one smiley face

A voice-note suddenly starts playing from Mum's phone. She tries to turn the volume down, but can't stop the first few words from spilling out.

UNKNOWN MAN

Oh, baby. I can't wait to fu-

MUM (CONT'D)

Oops oops oops oops oops
oops.

Silence reigns again. Zac can't stop staring at Mum. A tear rolls down his cheek. Mum makes sure to reply to her phone, then continues scrolling. After a while she notices Zac; guilt overcomes her face, then anger.

MUM (CONT'D)

Zachary, this is the LAST time I am
telling you to finish your food. Or
I'll tell Dad about what happened
at school the other day.

DAD

What happened?

DAD, a burly, staunch figure, stands by the window, looking out at the leaves swaying.

MUM

(withdrawing back to her
original position;
dismissively)

Nothing.

ZAC

What happened?

CHILD
(still crying)
Please. Please.

UNKNOWN MAN
(standing behind Mum,
stroking her hair)
You're in for a real treat tonight.

Mum giggles.

DAD
Tell me what happened. Or I'm
leaving.

Mum glances over resentfully towards Dad, then back down at her phone. The unknown man remains.

Zac glances back over his shoulder. Nobody is by the window.

ZAC
Why did you do that?

Mum turns back towards Zac, and stares him down, once more leaning forward.

MUM
(sotto)
And why did you do *that*?

She glances towards the entrance to the living room. The WHIMPERING of the child has now increased in volume. Zac looks over.

CHILD
Please - I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I
didn't mean - please stop. No. No!
Please - I... I promise - I -

He then looks back at Mum, absolutely terrified. His eyes are now very red and moist. His hair is a mess.

ZAC

But I didn't...

MUM

You didn't?

ZAC

No! No! I didn't. I promise.

MUM

Didn't what?

Zac's mouth drops open in horror. He looks back towards the entrance. The whimpering continues, progresses towards screaming. He quickly turns back to Mum.

ZAC

I didn't!

MUM

DIDN'T WHAT?

UNKNOWN MAN

What didn't you do Zachary?

ZAC

(stalling)

N-n-nothing.

Mum's mouth drops open in shock.

MUM

You didn't do... nothing?

Zac looks down - he can't bear to face his mother.

MUM (CONT'D)

YOU DIDN'T DO NOTHING ZACHARY, SO
WHAT DID YOU DO?

EXTREME CLOSEUP - one smiley face

EXTREME CLOSEUP - Zac's face, looking down at his food.

UNKNOWN MAN

Oh baby, just wait till tonight.

MUM

ZACHARY. I'M SPEAKING TO YOU.

Zac looks up to towards MUM. The unknown man is gone. Zac is broken. Tears stream down his face. His skin is red. His hair is falling out. Mum looks back at him with a sort of patronizing rage.

CHILD

SOMEONE PLEASE. HELP ME. HELP.

The doorbell sounds. Mum gets up from her original position.

MUM

(warmly)

Coming!

She grabs her coat, greets the guests behind the door and slinks out. Zac is left alone, staring longingly down the table. The leaves in the trees sway outside the window.

END