

THE ABDUCTION GAME

by

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INT. BASEMENT - UNSPECIFIED TIME OF DAY

A flurry of blinks.

Then, eyes open. Female.

The naked glowing lightbulb above hurts her eyes.

These same eyes go through confusion: Where is she?

Then realisation: Brought here against her will.

Then terror: Oh God, she's laying on a single bed, her mouth gagged, both wrists handcuffed to the metal headboard.

Meet MIA, 22, attractive in an Insta selfie kind of way, dressed in last night's "hot date" threads.

CORA (V.O.)

She's awake.

Seeking freedom, MIA rattles the headboard. No escape.

NATHAN (V.O.)

So I can hear.

The room, done out like a bedroom, but zero windows suggest a basement location. Furniture-wise, nothing but this single bed and a wooden chair five feet to her left.

Across the room, a door. Closed. No doubt locked.

She's scared. Really scared. But there must be a way out.

Aha, she spots a solution hanging by its shoulder strap on the nearby chair.

Her handbag, pink and glittery, so "her."

Zero restraints on her legs. Good.

She inches to her left, her lower body sliding off the bed.

CORA (V.O.)

She's going for her bag.

One leg grounded for balance, the other leg stretching outwards.

NATHAN (V.O.)

What is this, a running commentary?

Outstretched foot curled, struggling to hook that bag. Almost. But not quite.

CORA (V.O.)

Just wondering why you felt the need to plant it there.

A second attempt, further stretching. And yes, the shoulder strap, hooked by her foot.

NATHAN (V.O.)
Hope tastes good...

With her grounded foot, MIA sets about pushing her body back on the bed, so careful to keep the other foot raised.

Don't drop it. Nearly there. So close to the bed.

Then success, the handbag, landed.

Using both feet, she up-ends the bag, spewing its contents onto the bed; keys, make-up, compact mirror, deodorant spray, pocket tissues, a condom, but --

-- no phone. Shit.

NATHAN (V.O.)
...but lost hope tastes awful.

MIA scans the vicinity for answers. Spots something high above in the far corner of the room.

An active CCTV camera. Aimed at her.

Again, she rattles her shackles, this time in anger at her unknown captors. And as much as her gag allows, she hollers a tsunami of expletives.

INT. LOUNGE - MORNING

A homely lounge, morning light flowing in through the window.

A laptop on the dining table feeds both audio and video footage of a livid MIA.

Its audience of one, CORA, 48, the glamorous middle-aged type, a far cry from the usual brand of kidnapper.

Across the room, gracing an armchair, NATHAN, 27, handsome in a conniving bastard way.

He's engrossed in a mobile phone, its case pink and glittery, so obviously MIA'S.

NATHAN
Our houseguest is a feisty one.

CORA
Understatement of the century.

NATHAN
Are you sure her father will follow through with the goodies?

CORA
He can certainly afford it.

NATHAN
What if he refuses?

CORA
I can't see that happening.

CORA'S attention, back on the laptop. MIA has given up hollering. Instead, she's laying there, sobbing.

CORA
That girl is his little princess.

Still browsing MIA'S phone, NATHAN opens a dating app.

NATHAN
So you're one hundred per cent certain he won't be any trouble?

CORA
Oh, he'll have no choice but to play ball. Unless of course he wants a dead daughter on his hands.

NATHAN
Eww. Morbid. But I like it.

NATHAN'S eyes fall upon a conversation in the dating app featuring MIA and Connor, a younger cute guy.

The final cluster of last night's messages read:

"Connor: Looking forward to meeting up tonight. x"

"Mia: Same here. C u at 8. Xx"

"Mia: Where are you?"

"Mia: Have you ghosted me?"

"Mia: Fuck you."

CORA
Don't forget to get rid of the evidence.

NATHAN
Next on my right-now-to-do list.

Out comes his own phone. He opens the same dating app.

The same conversation between MIA and Connor.

But in reverse.

He's been playing the role of Connor.

Fake name. Fake profile pic.

NATHAN catfished her.

Cue the wicked grin... before unmatching MIA.

The conversation disappears, no matches, no trace.

NATHAN

I must admit, last night, I did
feel sorry for the girl.

He looks across at CORA.

NATHAN

I guess that almost makes me human.

INT. PUB - EVENING

Last night, a trendy bar. Or maybe it's a dive, some tables occupied by herds of friends living life, others featuring guys and girls on the verge of getting off with each other.

Except MIA.

She's alone on a stool at the bar, dressed in those same "hot date" threads... but the date's not happening.

Phone in hand, she glares at her dating app messages.

"Mia: Same here. C u at 8. Xx"

"Mia: Where are you?"

"Mia: Have you ghosted me?"

Timestamp of her last message: 9.07pm.

Her eyes sail towards the clock on the wall. 9.49pm.

Right, that's it, one final message to compose.

"Fuck you."

Message sent, she slams her phone upon the bar.

A SHARP-SUITED GUY standing nearby at the bar turns to face the girl.

Oh, look, it's NATHAN.

NATHAN

Ghosted?

She's not really in the mood for a conversation with a "random." But he's kind of cute. So...

MIA
Ghosted.

NATHAN
Same here. And there was me
thinking my guy was The One.

MIA
Your guy?

NATHAN
Yeah. Soz.

They exchange cheeky smirks.

MIA
Okaaaaaay. So I guess I don't
qualify. But maybe, in an alternate
universe, you swing the other way
and we end up married with twenty
children.

NATHAN takes the quip as an invitation to plonk his posterior
upon the neighbouring bar stool.

NATHAN
And maybe, in this universe, I can
buy you a drink.

Her smirk widens.

MIA
Well. We're sitting here. In a pub.
Both heartlessly jilted at the
altar. So why not?

INT. BASEMENT - MORNING

MIA lays on the bed, still gagged and handcuffed, her face
stained by a million tears.

Oh, the sound of the door being unlocked.

NATHAN enters, disguised in a black hoodie (hood up) and a
balaclava.

Out comes the girl's stolen phone... which he uses to take
several photographs of a very distressed MIA.

He pockets the phone. Walks right over to his prisoner --

-- and draws a pistol, the cold barrel pressed against her
forehead.

MIA, struck dumb with terror.

CORA enters, disguised the same, holding a plastic bucket which she places on the floor beside the bed.

She yanks away MIA'S gag. Next, she sets about unlocking one handcuff. Then the other. The result, both cuffs hang redundant from the headboard, swinging to and fro.

Job done, a silent CORA turns and leaves the room.

NATHAN withdraws the weapon from MIA'S forehead, walking backwards, wary, cautious, aiming the firearm at the prisoner until he reaches the safety of the door.

MIA

Please. I badly need a pee. Can you take me to the toilet?

NATHAN says nothing. Points at the bucket.

MIA

You have got to be joking.

No. He's not. He leaves the room and locks the door.

INT. BAR - EVENING

MIA and NATHAN, comfortable with each other, still seated at the bar.

NATHAN

So... Mia. What do you do in the great scheme of things?

MIA

If you're talking about a job, I haven't yet decided what I want to do with my life.

NATHAN

At twenty-two? How do you get by?

MIA

Rich father.

Knowing grins.

NATHAN

Wouldn't you rather make your own way in the world?

MIA

I am. In a sense. On social media. 200,000 followers and counting.

NATHAN

Wow. How did you attract such a massive audience?

MIA

Again, rich father. My followers believe I lead an interesting, high-flying life. So I create the relevant content. To give them what they want. Even though it's nothing more than an empty illusion.

NATHAN finds it interesting. Possibly even disturbing.

NATHAN

What about the real Mia? The one behind the mask.

MIA goes to speak, but --

NATHAN

And I want you to be totally honest here. More than you are with yourself.

MIA

I guess... even if I had a million followers... I'd still feel like the loneliest girl alive.

NATHAN

That kind of makes me wonder why you continue this illusion.

MIA

The show must go on.

NATHAN

At the expense of your mental health?

MIA

I've played a caricature for so long now, I've forgotten what it's like to feel real.

They share a moment. Deep. Emotive. As though NATHAN feels her pain, a mutual understanding. Does he? But then the guy snaps out of it, sinking his drink.

NATHAN

Same again?

MIA

Sounds like a plan.

NATHAN wins the attention of a BARPERSON.

NATHAN

Emergency refills required.

And as the BARPERSON prepares the drinks --

NATHAN

You know... maybe you should start believing in yourself. Your true self. The self who doesn't get out much. I mean... who knows where you could end up tomorrow?

Matching smiles.

And MIA looks away, contemplating his wisdom... not noticing NATHAN'S subsequent sub-zero leer.

NT. LOUNGE - MORNING

NATHAN paces the room, deep in thought.

He passes CORA at the dining table.

Clocks the woman amused by MIA'S humiliation on the laptop, the prisoner struggling to squat low over the bucket, her skirt thankfully masking bare flesh.

NATHAN

Oh, Cora, give the poor girl a little privacy.

CORA takes the jibe in good humour.

CORA

It was your idea to install the camera.

NATHAN

For security purposes. There's a lot at stake here.

Out of his pocket comes MIA'S phone.

NATHAN

Speaking of which... it's time I got her darling daddy involved.

Browsing her contacts list, he selects DAD.

Types: "Hi, Dad. Not my greatest morning after the night before."

Adds one of the photos he took earlier of the tearful girl, gagged and handcuffed.

And he hits Send.

NATHAN

I'm guessing we won't have to wait too long for a reply.

EXT. UPMARKET BISTRO - AFTERNOON

A few weeks ago, a glorious sunny day.

Check out MIA and her exuberant lifestyle; designer sunglasses, brand-name summer dress, sitting alone at an alfresco table.

Around her, people chatting, loving the weather.

Producing her phone, she snaps a pic of her vibrant seafood dish, all prawns, sweet peppers and rocket leaves.

Types: "Dee-lish! Totally living it."

Hits Send.

Her latest social media post, published.

Oh, an APPROACHING FEMALE FIGURE darkens her sun.

MIA looks up, her face impassive, indifferent, the unseen person looming over her table clearly no friend or lover.

MIA

I was beginning to think you
wouldn't show up.

Without invitation, the visitor sits opposite.

It's CORA, all hair, make-up, glamour. Yes. CORA.

She smiles. Forced.

CORA

When have I ever let you down?

MIA

You've made a virtual career out of
it.

CORA'S forced smile fades.

CORA

People make mistakes.

MIA

Not as many as you.

CORA

Oh, Mia.

CORA leans forward in her chair.

CORA

That's no way to talk to your
mother.

INT. BASEMENT - MORNING

Post-pee, MIA lands her bum upon the bed.

She casts a peek at her empty handbag, at the scattered ex-contents; the keys, make-up, compact mirror, deodorant spray, pocket tissues and condom.

Nothing that can aid this girl in her plight.

MIA stands up. Ambles over to her belongings. Uses a tissue to dab her moist eyes and blow her nose. Then packs everything back inside the handbag.

Her attention, aimed next at the CCTV camera, the longest of glares. Then she calls out --

MIA

Nathan.

She listens. Silence.

MIA

I know it's you. Can you hear me?

Further hush. Weighty. Like sodden clothes in a rainstorm.

MIA

Is that your real name?

And then she realises --

MIA

Of course it's not.

She visually kicks herself inside.

MIA

You're as fake as I am.

Giving in, she seats herself back upon the bed.

Not a sound as she surrenders to her plight.

Then oh, the unlocking of the door.

CORA in disguise enters, standing close to the door, a sentry of sorts, the pistol in her hand aimed in MIA'S direction.

And NATHAN in disguise makes his appearance. He sits down on the chair, a safe distance from MIA.

Unhurried, he pulls down his hood.

And off comes his balaclava, his face exposed.

He stares at her. She stares at him.