

THE WEIGHT OF LIGHT

Short Film Script

(Winner, 2006 Director's Guild of Canada Kickstart Grant)

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FADE IN:

1 EXT. RUNDOWN GRAFFITIED STORE FRONT, AFTERNOON 1

A stained and battered cardboard sign states in hand-printed letters: SPARE ME, SPARE CHANGE. An old can containing some coins sits beside it and beside that is a pair of feet in tattered boots. Raggy jeans and a grey frayed sweatshirt make up the rest of WENDY, 17, long dirty hair shrouding most of her face.

Her gaze rests on the sidewalk where business shoes, running shoes, and various other footwear walk along without stopping. Occasionally, a coin clatters into the can. People go by in a steady stream. Someone spits near her. Wendy draws into herself slightly but otherwise doesn't react.

More shoes pass. Wendy picks at a tear in her boots. A child-size pair of colorful kids' shoes go by. Turn back toward her, stop. One of them is untied.

HANNAH

(o.s.)

Here. I made this. You can have it.

HANNAH, a bright, happy five-year old in a jacket and dress holds out a piece of paper. Wendy pulls her hair out of her face, takes the drawing, meets Hannah's eyes. Her mother CLAIRE, just a stocky pair of panty-hosed legs in sharp high heels, clicks into view.

CLAIRE

(preoccupied)

That's nice, Hannah. Now come on.

Still looking at Wendy and buying time, Hannah sticks out her shoe with the untied shoelace.

HANNAH

(to her mother)

Why is she sitting there?

Claire, impatiently well-off in tailored clothes, kneels down to tie the shoe as fast as possible.

CLAIRE

I don't know. It's none of our business.

HANNAH

Will I be like that?

CLAIRE

No.

HANNAH

Why?

Finished with the shoe, Claire zips up her daughter's coat and begins to haul her away.

CLAIRE

Because we all choose who we want to be. Now let's go.

Wendy looks at the drawing: a smiling girl on a tree swing under a sunny sky.

WENDY

(mocking)

"We all choose who we want to be..." Fucking philosophers.

She looks after Hannah who is already on to the next thing, hop-scotching her way down the sidewalk. Wendy crumples the paper, throws it into the can beside her. Settles back against the wall.

2

EXT. BACK YARD, DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

2

Wendy, sign under one arm, can in the other, enters the overgrown backyard over the fence. She takes a moment to straighten her clothing. Her posture seems straighter, more confident. The house is in bad shape, abandoned and fire-damaged. The windows are boarded and there's no sign of life.

Bypassing the barricaded back door, Wendy goes toward the side of the house. Ducks under a fishing line strung across the way; tin cans hang at one end, which would rattle if disturbed. She disappears down the walk.

3

INT. HIDEOUT KITCHEN, DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

3

In the "kitchen", three teenage boys lounge around on crates and boxes chairs. The lopsided table is filled with take-out Chinese food and a few bottles of beer. RAFE, 16, high-strung and skittish, and SHADES, also 16, tough and battle-scarred, are eating from containers with plastic forks. BALDY, 18, leans back in the only chair with his feet on the table. Smoke from his cigarette hangs in the light from an partly-boarded window.

KATZ, 15, scrawny but well-kempt, hovers over a dented pot on a small camping stove on a makeshift counter. Beside him, two water containers sit near a cracked plate. A bent metal fork stands in a jar of soapy water.

At the SOUND of movement elsewhere in the house, Rafe dives behind Baldy.

RAFE  
(whispering loudly)  
Code red, code red!

Katz ducks down to hide, Shades stands up, pulling out a butterfly knife. Baldy is totally at ease.

BALDY  
(putting out the  
cigarette)  
Relax. It's D.

Footsteps CLUMP. Rafe and Shades remain nervous as they look toward the doorway. Wendy appears.

WENDY  
Hey guys...

Shades goes toward the counter, knocking Baldy's feet off the table as he passes.

RAFE  
(passing Wendy)  
You forgot the signal. Why do you  
always forget the signal?

He checks the doorway Wendy just came through.

Unapologetic, Wendy moves into the kitchen, rapping out a pattern on the studs along the way. Ruffles Katz's hair as he straightens.

Katz, flustered by her attention, grabs his pot of the burner and pours heated food onto the plate.

KATZ

Look, high class today-- Baldy hit a delivery truck. (smelling it)  
Thanks, man.

Baldy keeps his eyes still on Wendy. Shades takes a beer from the counter, opens it with his ring. Wendy swipes it from him. He snatches it back as she's about to drink. Returns to the table. Wendy takes a jar, fills it with water, follows him.

Rafe returns from the doorway, sees the burner still on. Blows it out.

RAFE

Why you waste so much fucking fuel, Katz?

He takes the fork out of the soapy water and passes Katz, jamming it into his food.

RAFE

And water.

He continues back to the table.

KATZ

(indicating the water container)

Hey, I drag all that shit in here. And hot food is better for you. Right, D?

Wendy arrives at the table, placing the can with her money down in front of Baldy. Baldy offers a cigarette pack to Wendy, holding her gaze for a beat. She slowly draws one out, pockets it. Crosses behind him to come between Baldy and Shades.

WENDY

Lay off him, Rafe... he's fine.

BALDY

(also to Rafe)  
Brings in more than you do.

RAFE

Don't I do my fucking part?

WENDY

No one said you don't. (looking around) Where's Mickey?

SHADES

Never left his room today.

RAFE

So... no take.

WENDY

Oh, great... what is it now?

SHADES

His fish died.

BALDY

He's fucking lazy.

SHADES

His fish died.

BALDY

So the fuck what?!

WENDY

(to Shades)

He had a fish?

BALDY

No take, no place. We should throw him out.

SHADES

Shut up!

BALDY

(puts the cigarette back  
in his mouth)

Don't push me, Shades!

WENDY

Let it go.

BALDY

That's right, you fuck.

Wendy glares at Baldy.

WENDY

Baldy!

Shades storms away. Wendy leaves the table. As she crosses the room, Katz offers her a plate of food. She takes it, continues out of the room. Baldy reaches for the can of money, but tracks her with his eyes.

4

EXT. ROOFTOP, EARLY EVENING

4

Wendy sits alone on the slope of the roof, setting the empty plate beside her. Ties back her hair into a ponytail. As she pulls the cigarette Baldy gave her from her pocket, Hannah's crumpled drawing falls out too. Wendy stops it from rolling off the roof with her foot. Lights the cigarette with a lighter. Considers it for a beat, then shakes it out, watching the smoke trail up to the sky.

Becomes aware of a rhythmic THUMPING sound that has been going on for some time.

WENDY

Boys...

She gives the house behind her the finger, then turns her attention back to her own thoughts. Looks down at the paper trapped underfoot. Draws it up within reach. Uncrumple it, smoothing the wrinkles. Traces the girl on the swing.

Flicks the lighter on. Brings the flame close to the paper. The drawing catches on fire. She holds a corner while it burns, then lets it fall to the plate where the paper blackens and curls in the flames.

WENDY

I'm such a shit...

The fire consumes the drawing, dies out. Wendy picks up the plate, draws her finger through the ashes, feels them. A loud KNOCKING above the on-going THUMPING interrupts her. Then a POUNDING, as if fists on a door. Distant voices raise sharply to SHOUTS.

Wendy gets up, shoes GRATING on the tar paper roof. The shouting is definitely coming from inside the house. The thumping continues unabated. THUMP THUMP THUMP. She moves to the other side of the peak where the sounds come through a mostly-boarded open window.

VOICES

(o.s.)

Hey! Fucking cut it out!!

More POUNDING. Wendy creeps over to the window, peers in through the gaps in the boards.

MICKEY, a bony 14-year-old boy, rocks on a messy pile of tattered bedding. The door is closed and blocked. Lantern-light from the hall streams in underneath along the floor, broken by shadows of house mates on the other side.

Mickey rocks back and forth, slamming his head against the wall: THUMP THUMP THUMP. Wendy can see a dark stain growing on the dingy paint.

Alarmed, she draws back, presses against the outside wall.

SHADES

(O.S.)

Mickey, it's me, man! Open the door!!

WENDY

(to herself)

Let him in, for fuck's sake.

SHADES

(o.s., rattling the door)

Dammit, Mickey! What the hell are you doing?

Wendy stares out at the sky. Looks down at her hands, at the sooty ashes still clinging there. Comes to a decision.

She turns back to the window, pulls off the boards to open a space. Climbs in.

5 INT. MICKEY'S ROOM, CONTINUOUS

5

Wendy lowers herself into the confined space. The room is fairly dim, the only light coming in through the boarded window and under the door. A high shelf and a sagging bookcase are loaded with pack rat belongings.

SHADES

(o.s., urgent)

Mickey!!

WENDY

(to Shades)

Shades, I got it!

Mickey continues his rocking motion, his head smacking wetly against the wall. Wendy folds herself around behind him, slows his rocking. He can no longer reach the wall.

WENDY

Stop. Stop. Just stop.

He lies back against her. Wendy can see his sweating face now, forehead smeared red. He closes his eyes, raising one shut fist to his heart.

MICKEY

She jumped out. She left me...

Reluctant, Wendy opens his palm. An orange fish lies there, squashed slightly out of shape. The wrist and lower arm are covered with blood. Wendy stares in confusion for a moment before grabbing his other wrist. It has been slashed as well... Cross-wise, though, not along the vein.

WENDY

Good thing you never do anything right.

As she shifts him out of her lap to open the door, Mickey's eyes search, swimming, then focus on hers. He is dazed from the blows to his head.

MICKEY

Everyone's always leaving me.

Wendy looks toward the locked door. He grabs hold of her.

MICKEY

I was never worth staying for, was I? Not even a fish wanted me.

WENDY

Hey, look at me, I'm staying.

Wendy allows him relax into her, his head in her lap. He seems to be losing consciousness.

WENDY

Hold on, Mickey.

His eyes roll back as he passes out. She supports him wholly, his blood streaking her now, glistening.

WENDY

Shit.

She frees herself enough to reach for the sheet, starts tearing it into pieces for bandages, wrapping his wrists.

WENDY

Hey, Shades! Call 911!!

Feet on the other side of the door dash off, then stop short.

BALDY

(o.s.)

The fuck you're calling anybody...



WENDY

Baldy! He's in deep shit.

BALDY

(o.s.)

If he calls-- you know what that means.

WENDY

We need an ambulance.

BALDY

(o.s.)

Fuck!

He kicks the door, hard, but it holds. Wendy finishes binding Mickey's wrists tightly. Grabs them with her hands, applying pressure.

MICKEY

(coming to briefly; in pain)

Will I go to hell?

WENDY

You're gonna be fine, you little prick. (he slips back out) It's the rest of us you've screwed.

She looks under her hands, the blood has seeped through the bandages.

SHADES

(o.s.)

Baldy! Get out of the way! He needs help.

BALDY

(o.s.)

Fuck no! This is my home!!

There is a SCUFFLE on the other side of the door, then silence for a beat. Wendy tears another strip of cloth, wraps the red-soaked bandages in another layer.

BALDY

(o.s.)

Let's just... get him out of here.

Wendy considers it; not a bad idea. Shifts, tries to get up. Mickey's head rolls to one side, the light exposing his wound. Wendy looks at his forehead; it's pulpy, soft.

WENDY

We can't move him... (beat)  
There's no way.

There is a long pause on the other side of the door. Baldy kicks it one last time, then walks away.

BALDY

(o.s., giving Shades  
change)  
Alright, Shades. Go make the call.  
(sound of coins, footsteps)  
Everybody fucking pack your bags.

More FOOTSTEPS head off in different directions. Wendy settles in to apply pressure to stop the bleeding.

5A

INT. MICKEY'S ROOM, A LITTLE WHILE LATER

5A

Wendy is still in the same position. Night has fallen; moonlight glows dimly. FOOTSTEPS sound out in the hall.

SHADES

(o.s., out of breath)  
Code red! For real, it's code red.  
They're on their way.

BALDY

(o.s.)  
D, you better get out of there!

Throughout the house, there are sounds of people RUNNING, SLAMMING doors, STOMPING on the stairs, etc.

Wendy pulls a pillow over, transfers Mickey's head to it. Covers his body with the scant bedding. Stands up, shaking out legs that have fallen asleep. A CLINKING on the shelf above catches her attention.

Straightening, Wendy searches for the source. Finds a dirty, cloudy fishbowl. A blue fish bumps around looking for food. She picks up the bowl.

WENDY

Still hanging in there...?

She crouches, places it beside Mickey.

WENDY

Here's a fucking true blue...

She lifts his arm, hand still clasping the dead fish, places it around the fishbowl. Her sooty fingers leave a mark on the white fabric. She stares at it for a long beat. At the blue fish. At Mickey's face. The soot on her fingers.

5B INT. MICKEY'S ROOM, CONTINUOUS

5B

A scuffling at the window snaps Wendy out of her contemplation. Baldy appears with a lantern, throwing light into the dim room, perches on the sill.

BALDY

Come on-- we gotta split.

Wendy hesitates, looks back at Mickey.

WENDY

(uncertain)

No.

BALDY

(holds up a ratty bag)

Got all your stuff.

WENDY

(removing her sweatshirt)

He needs me.

BALDY

What for?! They're coming for him.

Wendy places her sweatshirt over Mickey's torso. She is left wearing only a thin tank top. Draws some sheets over the rest of his body.

BALDY

He doesn't fucking know you're here.

WENDY

Doesn't matter. I know I'm here.

BALDY

This is bullshit. You don't even like him! (beat) Wendy, come with me.

She crosses to the door, opens it. The hallway beyond is dark.

BALDY  
 (indicating the house)  
 When the cops come, this is all  
 going to fall on you.

She approaches him.

BALDY  
 And then what?

WENDY  
 I don't know.

Wendy reaches for the lantern and her bag. Baldy touches her hand. She takes her things and turns back toward Mickey.

BALDY  
 Fuck.

Wendy stops. Sirens sound in the distance as Baldy stares at Wendy's back.

BALDY  
 Fuck.

Baldy slips out of sight. Wendy finishes crossing to Mickey. Sets down her bag, looks at Mickey, motionless, breathing slowly but steadily. She picks up the fishbowl.

WENDY  
 Who we choose to be...

Carries the bowl and lantern out of the room.

6 INT. KITCHEN, CONTINUOUS

6

The kitchen is dark, abandoned in disarray. All the other kids are gone, the house quiet. Wendy crosses to the counter. Puts down the bowl and the lantern. Takes a jar, scoops up the blue fish. Dumps the water into the slop bucket. Refills it with fresh water from the container. She shivers a little in the cold air.

Wendy bends down to bowl-level. Drops the blue fish into its clean home. Watches as it swims around, happier.

The ambulance arrives, red and white pulses of light filling the room. She stands, carries the bowl and lantern back to Mickey's room.

7 INT. MICKEY'S ROOM, CONTINUOUS

7

Wendy kneels down to nestle the bowl back where it was but booted FOOTSTEPS echo in the house.

HEAD EMT

In here!

Two EMTs and a trainee arrive in a flood of equipment and confidence. Wendy turns up the lantern as high as it will go, withdraws toward the wall. The HEAD EMT assesses Mickey, places the oxygen mask on.

HEAD EMT

(to his partner)

He's lost a lot of blood. Let's ready two units. Check his wrists.

The EMT PARTNER takes over as the Head EMT crosses to Wendy, pulling a shock blanket from his bag. Behind him, the EMTs care for Mickey.

HEAD EMT

(reassuring Wendy)

Hey, everything's going to be alright. He'll be just fine.

He wraps the blanket around her shoulders.

EMT PARTNER

(murmuring to trainee)

Depressed cranial fracture, probable subdural hematoma.

HEAD EMT

(to his partner)

As soon as he's stable, let's get him out of here.

Hearing this, Wendy holds out the fishbowl to the Head EMT.

WENDY

He's going to need this.

Behind him, the EMT partner and the trainee move Mickey's limp form onto the stretcher, strap him on. They lift the stretcher and carry Mickey out.

HEAD EMT

(taking the bowl)

Any message?

WENDY

Just tell him he wasn't alone.

The Head EMT leaves, looking back at Wendy. As he exits, a POLICEWOMAN arrives at the bedroom door. They MURMUR an exchange. Wendy remains where she is, looking down at her hands. The soot has been washed clean. She picks up the lantern and her bag, stands, meeting the cop's eyes.

WENDY

OK, I'm ready.

The policewoman leads Wendy out of the room.

8

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE, NIGHT

8

Following the cop, Wendy steps out onto the porch. The flashing lights blaze red across her face. Wendy watches the ambulance pull away, lights fading off her face. Then walks toward the waiting patrol car. The cop opens the door for her. Wendy looks back at the house, then down at the lantern. She turns the wick down, snuffing out the light. Gets into the back seat. Wendy looks one more time out the back window as they pull away from the house and then turns forward as they head off down the street.

FADE OUT.