

Shadows & Mice

A Short Film
by Pilliard Dickle

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Ext: Kids playing in a front yard. Two kids twirl a long jump rope as another jumps over it. One kid is hula hooping. Two boys are playing football. One boy throws and say "Go deep!" the other boy misses. We follow the football across the street where it comes to a stop at a repairman's work boot as he steps out of a work truck.

The repair man (CHUCK) picks up the football.

CHUCK

(Loud enough to be heard across the street)

Man, I've been wanting a ball like this!

Chuck turns toward the house he just pulled up at (across the street from where the kids are playing). The two boys look at him from the sidewalk like "seriously?". Behind them, the other kids continue with their activities. (Lots of motion in this opening scene.) Suddenly Chuck turns.

CHUCK

Go deep!

He tosses the football back across the street.

Chuck walks up to the house and knocks on the door. It's answered by a drab-looking guy (ARNOLD).

The house is a two-story wood house with some age, not in ill-repair but not too pristine, kind of run-down.

CHUCK

Heater repair?

ARNOLD

Ah, yeah, hi. C'mon in.

INT: Cluttered house.

ARNOLD

There's a cold spell comin'. I can't let it get too cold in here. I gotta keep it warm for my cat.

CHUCK

Well, these old oil units can be tricky. But I'll take a look and try to get 'er goin' for you.

The two men step down narrow stairs into a dingy basement. Chuck looks over the furnace as Arnold watches from the bottom of the steps.

CHUCK

Oh, I see what the problem is already.
This should be an easy fix.

ARNOLD

Well, that's good news. You need me for anything?

CHUCK

No I'm good, thanks.

Arnold heads back up the steps.

ARNOLD

Well, I'll be right up here, just holler, I'll hear ya.

Chuck works on the furnace. As he works, he thinks he hears a voice. Looks around. Then he hears it again.

Scouting for the sound, he spots a door to a store room. He opens it. We see an empty room, a bowl of water, a bowl of gruel, and a girl in rags with a collar around her neck. She appears to be in her 20s. She is chained to the wall. Two other girls sit against the back wall, also chained to the wall, looking despondent.

GIRL 1

"Help ... Us..."

Chuck glances at the collar, and the chain secured to the wall.

CHUCK
(Low)

Wait right here.

Chuck closes the door gently, quietly scoots back over to the furnace. He takes out his phone, then hesitates. He glances over his shoulder at the staircase, then puts the phone back in his pocket. Quietly but quickly, he steps back to the door of the storage room and cracks it.

CHUCK

I'll be back, just sit tight.

Chuck goes up the stairs.

ARNOLD

Got it?

CHUCK

No, I'm gonna have to get a part. I might have it in my truck.

EXT: Chuck at his truck. Makes a phone call.

EXT: Small town police precinct. People walking by on the sidewalk. Painters or workmen out front are working on

the building. (Lots of bustling movement in this scene too.)

CHUCK
(Voice over)

Yeah, Fred, listen, you need to get 'em out here now.

INT: Police precinct. a Man (FRED) at a desk, a lady in the background, filing papers.

FRED

What? Dj'ya hear voices?

CHUCK

More than that. Fred, he's keeping young girls in there.
Captive!

FRED

Hey, Chuck, everybody hears voices in that place, they have for a hundred years. We've been out there five times in the past year. It's getting embarrassing.

CHUCK

Fred, I SAW them.

FRED

You know, Chuck, Ghosthunters contacted old McWhorter.
But he said no. We coulda been famous!

CHUCK

Listen, Ferd, are you gonna do something or not?

FRED

Yeah, yeah, OK. I'll send Hiram by.

CHUCK

(In his truck)

Wait, no, that's OK. You know, maybe I was mistaken.
Maybe it was just shadows. And mice.

Chuck sends a text to someone. We can read the screen on his phone: "If you dont hear from me in 15 mins call Fred tell him to get somebody out to McWhorther's place fast."

Chuck gets a handgun out of the glovebox, which he lodges discreetly in his work belt. He gets out of the truck and gets a blotter from the back. He takes a few steps toward the house, then turns back toward the truck and grabs some random part, then walks toward the house.

ARNOLD

(In his chair)

Find it?

Chuck walks through the room toward the stairs.

CHUCK

I think so. Not sure. I'm gonna see if this fits. I might have to come back.

ARNOLD

What is it?

Chuck mumbles something unintelligible as he disappears down the steps. Arnold leans forward and squints.

Chuck makes some clanging noises on the furnace for a moment, glancing over his shoulder toward the steps. Then he scoots back over to the storage room door and opens it.

There are no girls. But the room is not empty. There are some tools and supplies, and an old corn husker. [This could be any number of things—whatever might be in a storage room of a basement in an old house.) The things in the storage room look too bulky, dusty and heavy to have been hastily put there in the brief time Chuck stepped away.

Chuck looks befuddled. Confused, he closes the door, then opens it again. Still, just the same stuff.

As he's peering into the room, a hand appears on his shoulder. Startled, he turns! It's not Arnold, it's just a guy in his 30s (BRAD), casually dressed, stylish wire-rimmed glasses. He's holding something flat in one hand, like a folio or file folder.

CHUCK

Oh, I...I was...looking for someth...

BRAD

I know.

CHUCK

No, see, I was just...

BRAD

It's just old tools and cleaning supplies.

CHUCK

Yeah, I know.

BRAD

And an old corn husker.

CHUCK

I see that.

BRAD

But you heard 'em.

Chuck nods his head.

BRAD

You saw 'em.

(Pause)

CHUCK

I did.

BRAD

Shadows and mice?

Chuck is startled at this, realizing that's a phrase he used out in his truck on the phone to Fred.

BRAD

So.

What comes next?

CHUCK

I ... I dunno.

BRAD

I don't either. I don't have a clue. Listen, I've struggled with this, believe me. I don't see any way out.

CHUCK

Listen, I have a buddy, a deputy, I can get some men out here...

BRAD

Eh. A bit...expected.

CHUCK

All I gotta do is make a...

BRAD

Nah, seems like overkill. I'm thinking this might be a good place to end it. Right here. Right now.

CHUCK

Listen, I don't want any trouble.

BRAD

Trouble? Oh, there's got to be trouble. There always has to be trouble. Otherwise, what have you got? People just standing around.

CHUCK

Listen...

(Pause)

BRAD

I'm listening.

(Pause)

There's nothing to say, is there?

CHUCK

Look, pal, I'll just get back to work. I'll fix the furnace and get out of here.

Closeup of Chuck's hand on tool belt, moving slowly toward the gun.

BRAD

"Slowly and discreetly, inches hand toward gun."

CHUCK

'th hell?? Who ARE you?

Suddenly Brad's eyes light up.

BRAD

(With a tone of philosophical wonder, as if thinking to
out loud)

Hey! What if you killed me?? What would happen after
that??

CHUCK

Nobody's gonna kill anybody. Look, I just wanna...

BRAD

I guess everything just comes to a stop.

CHUCK

Listen, buddy...

BRAD

Let's end it now!!

Quickly Brad reaches in his pocket and starts to draw out what might be a weapon. Chuck draws his gun and shoots! Brad falls backward.

Arnold races halfway down the stairs. Brad pulls the "weapon" out of his pocket and holds it up. It's a pen.

BRAD

This ... was my weapon.

Then he drops the flat thing he's been holding, a folio of papers. The papers spill out onto the floor.

BRAD

(Can barely speak)

Roll...

Credits.

Brad slumps. The pen falls from his hand.

Closeup of pen falling onto the papers on the floor. You can read the title of the script: "Shadows and Mice," and make out a few lines (like "Go deep!" or "It should be an easy fix").

Chuck just stands there with a blank look. Arnold on the stairs just stands there too.

CHUCK

What do we do now?

Arnold shrugs. They look at each other, docile and clueless.

EXT: The kids across the street. The boys are just standing there with the football like they don't know what to do. The jump ropers, too, are standing still, just holding the jumprope. The hula-hoop is on the ground and the kid is standing in the middle of it, looking around confused.

INT The precinct. Fred is just standing there. The lady who works there, who had been pouring a cup of coffee, stands like a statue as the coffee runs over the top of the cup.

Out on the sidewalk, passersby are standing lost and clueless. Painters and workmen are standing around with brushes and tools, shrugging at each other.

OVERHEAD DRONE SHOT: The townsfolk are standing around looking at each other, with no clue what to do.

Pull away

Roll credits.

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