

An Experiment in Behavior

By

Lisa Lee

EXT. LONG STAIRWAY - DAY

MARIA, early 40s, dissatisfied with being a mother, impatiently follows her teenage daughter, GRACE, upstairs.

Grace, eager to please almost to a fault, carries an entire shopping trip on her own.

She stops to rest for a moment, trying to shift the overload of weight, which clearly irritates the unappreciative Maria.

As Grace continues up the stairs, a small item falls and lands near Maria. She looks over at it, then continues up.

MARIA

You dropped something.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Grace and Maria are watching an old-timey black and white comedy. Maria has never seen a funnier show. She looks over to see if Grace is enjoying it as much as she is.

Grace is not.

Maria's laughter turns to silence and she angrily stares at the tv.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Maria is on the phone.

MARIA

And then I spend all this time
making dinner and she won't even
touch it.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Grace and Maria are sitting down to dinner - macaroni and cheese, bagged garden salad, and sandwiches. Grace hasn't touched the macaroni and cheese. The cheese from her sandwich is laying on the side of her plate.

MARIA

Aren't you going to eat that?

GRACE

Does it have dairy in it?

MARIA

How else do you expect me to make
mac and cheese?

GRACE

I'm lactose intolerant, remember?

Maria scoffs and returns to her meal.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria walks past Grace's room then backtracks and peers in,
clearly annoyed by the unmade bed.

MARIA

Are you kidding me?

Beat.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I'm done.

She storms off.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Almost all of the floorboards have been pulled up and strewn
about.

The table, chairs, and other furniture are completely out of
place.

Maria has been at this for hours. She is hot, sweaty, and
covered in dirt.

She pries up one of the few remaining floorboards and finally
finds what she is looking for.

Reaching into the floor, she pulls out an old storage box.

Sitting down, she wipes the aged lid and lifts it.

Inside the box is an old photo of a stern mother and her
perfectly behaved children.

She puts the picture aside and keeps looking.

A weathered old newspaper clipping, advertising an elixir
"obedience is just a spoonful away"

The article has chicken scratch all over it. Measurements,
random ingredients, etc...

Underneath that is an envelope. Instead of an addressee, it says: "In Case of Extreme Emergency"

Maria opens it.

Slides out the contents.

A recipe card titled "Bertha's Famous Fancies"

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Between the baking ingredients and the chemistry equipment, the kitchen is completely cluttered. Distillation equipment, volumetric flasks, sugar, flour, burners, hotplates...

Walter White meets the Food Network.

A timer goes off and Maria adds a few drops of a mystery liquid to the batter, before pouring it into a pan and placing it in the oven.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - LATER

Grace, just getting in from school, inhales the delicious scent before tossing her backpack on the table.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Maria is busying herself with menial tasks.

GRACE(O.S)

Well, today sucked. I'm so glad to be done with it. What are these?

A tinge of guilt, followed by a change of heart.

MARIA

Those won't be done for a while. Let me whip you up something quicker.

She leaves the room and enters the

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

To find Grace has just taken a bite of the baked goods.

GRACE

They seem done to me.

Maria looks at the pan then at Grace, decides it's out of her control, and goes back to the bedroom nonchalantly.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Grace is lying on the couch- pale, sweaty, clearly ill. Maria sits on the chair watching tv. Grace groans and Maria turns the volume up.

GRACE

Can I have some water?

Maria, annoyed once again, grabs her water and drags herself over to Grace.

MARIA

I'm going to sleep. If you still don't feel well tomorrow, we'll see the doctor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

A MONTAGE OF GRACE TRYING TO GET COMFORTABLE

Grace is laying half off the couch.

Grace is on the opposite side of the couch.

Grace has thrown herself over the chair.

Grace is splayed on the floor.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Maria quietly opens her door and listens for Grace. Silence.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

She makes her way over to Grace and peers down at her. Her skin has changed from deathly pale to a grayish color.

All life has left her once vibrant body.

Maria leans closer to Grace and suddenly --

Grace's eyes pop open.

She GROWLS and Maria jumps back.

Grace begins moving stiffly, not used to her decaying body. Maria watches in shock. In awe. Unable to move.

It doesn't take Grace long to acclimate to her new body and she makes her way over to Maria.

Slowly.

Angrily.

Maria backs up towards the kitchen before rethinking her situation. Instead, she begins leading her to Grace's bedroom.

The first few steps are easy, but Grace settles into her speed almost instantly.

Maria can barely avoid Grace's ferocious grasp.

Once Maria leads Grace far enough into the bedroom, Maria rushes past her --

Grace grabbing a fistful of Maria's shirt.

Maria slams the door against Grace's hand, but still can't get it closed.

She tugs at her shirt until finally it tears free and she slams the door shut.

Exhausted she collapses against the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria is trying to have a relaxing dinner but Grace is making a commotion in the bedroom.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Maria is having tea with a FRIEND, as Grace growls, scratches, and bangs the bedroom door against the frame.

Friend looks concerned but before she has a chance to ask any questions, Maria jumps in.

MARIA

New puppy.

Friend tries to read the situation.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Poor thing still isn't used to
being away from me.

Friend hesitantly buys it.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Maria is carrying a glass of water. She passes Grace's bedroom and realizes it's finally silent. She listens more intently.

Still silent.

Slowly and quietly, she opens the door just a crack, scanning the room.

Nothing.

She opens the door fully to reveal --

Grace slumped over by the closet.

Maria cautiously approaches her, but Grace is not out for blood. Instead, she simply peers up at her quietly.

Uncaringly.

Maria isn't buying it. She nudges Grace with her foot, spilling a bit of her water.

That Grace does care about.

She begins drooling uncontrollably as she stares at the glass.

Maria passes it to her and Grace sloppily drinks it, barely able to hold the glass properly.

Maria leaves but decides to keep the door open when she does.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Maria is once again having the time of her life as she watches her outdated comedies.

Grace cautiously leaves the bedroom and makes her way to the couch, sitting in exactly the same position as Maria.

Maria laughs.

Grace laughs.

Maria coughs.

Grace coughs.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Grace awkwardly sits at the table. The couch was large and easy to master, unlike this small kitchen chair.

Maria puts a plate of food in front of Grace. Nachos. Macaroni and cheese. Cheese platter.

The old Grace may have protested, but zombie Grace begins practically inhaling it by the fistful.

Maria takes a hold of Grace's hand and Grace instinctually spins towards Maria, teeth bared ready to tear her apart.

Maria flinches but keeps her hand where it is. Grace waits for Maria's next move.

She places a fork in Grace's hand and shows her how to use it. It's awkward at first, but soon muscle memory kicks in.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

As Maria gets up from her spot she knocks her water over.

MARIA

Ugh. Get me a towel.

Grace quickly and obediently does.

While Maria's command was given purely out of instinct, Grace's obedience greatly impresses her.

Epiphany.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Maria is on the phone scribbling down notes. Open phonebooks are scattered all over the bed.

MARIA

So, Kim, are you happy with the way Louise behaves?

INT. OUTSIDE MARIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Maria quietly cracks the door open, hand still on the doorknob. Her body blocking the door as she turns and motions for silence from an unseen group. She then pushes the door open.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Past the dresser, beyond the bed, Grace is scrubbing the wall. She doesn't even notice the whispers coming from the doorway.

MARIA

See? Completely obedient.

VOICE 2(O.S.)
Did it take
long?

VOICE 1 (O.S.)
Wow.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The science experiment is back. This time there are packing materials stacked up off to the side.

Maria, exhausted from a day of creating potions, wipes her hands on her apron.

MARIA

There, finally.

Taking her apron off and tossing it aside, she leaves the kitchen.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Grace is sitting on the couch.

MARIA

I'm starving. Clear this mess up
for me and grab me something to
eat, will you?

She chuckles to herself, realizing the absurdity of her question.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Of course you will.

She shuffles off to her room as Grace obediently gets up.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Grace grabs a leftover from the fridge. There's no room for anything and as she tries to set the food down on the counter, she knocks over one of the vials. She quickly grabs it and curiously peers at its contents.

MARIA (O.S.)

And don't just heat up some
leftover, I want something fresh.

Grace grunts in reply. Is that annoyance or obedience?

Grace places the vial back on the counter, gives it one more curious glance, and grabs the leftovers.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM - DAY

Empty unmade bed, nightstand on its side, pillows, and blankets on the floor.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Lamp knocked over. Pictures hanging crooked on the wall.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Couch cushions everywhere. TV trays splayed across the room. The room is in complete disarray.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Grace and a newly zombified Maria are sitting at the table. Grace is eating as Maria drools into her plate.

Grace looks up from her plate and grins.

FADE OUT