

## AREA BOY

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We hear the SOUND of an engine running, then...

FADE IN:

1 EXT. CAR - DAY

1

A completely ordinary and unidentifiable place. A bright day. Or what we can see of it. But our gaze is fixed: looking into an old sky blue hatchback (think 1985 Honda Accord).

At the wheel, we find MARLENE (mid 40s). An unquestionable motherly aura about her. A modest, God-fearing woman but something tells us that she is a force of nature not to be crossed). A small metal crucifix hangs from the middle of her rear-view mirror.

At the back we find ELI (16, short hair, slim build with a gentle face. Has a slightly mysterious quality to him. The quiet type). He's listening to Haven't You Heard by Patrice Rushen through his headphones, whilst fidgeting with his backpack.

From the car window, Eli overlooks the residential streets that pass by. Houses that all look the same. Branded with the same paintbrush, all uniform. Orderly. The forest sits behind them. He notices a beautiful white church in the middle of the town. The thought that this new-found neighborhood will soon become his home hasn't quite sunk in yet.

Marlene looks in the rear-view mirror.

MARLENE  
Eli...

Eli is completely unaware of his mother calling him.

MARLENE (CONT'D)  
Eli!

Her voice disturbs his peace. He takes out his headphones begrudgingly.

ELI  
Yes, mum.

MARLENE  
What are you listening to?

Uncomfortable with telling her the truth.

ELI  
What?

MARLENE

I said what are you listening to?

ELI

Just some Kirk Franklin.

Irritated.

ELI (CONT'D)

Don't worry, it's not that secular  
music.

A look from Marlene.

MARLENE

Alright. Alright.

Marlene seems satisfied with his response.

Eli puts his headphones back in. He rolls down the window and waves his hand through the air. Back in his own world.

We hang on Eli's expression as he looks out the window.

WE CUT TO:

2 INT. BEDROOM - DAY 2

Moments later. The door of an old house opens. Dust informs Eli and Marlene of the house's age.

Eli walks up a wooden staircase and into his bedroom, which faces the front of the house. He drags his two heavy suitcases behind him.

Finally taking a look around his surroundings, we wait a beat before Eli glances outside his window.

Off Eli...

3 INT. STAIRCASE - DAY 3

We hear the sound of indistinct chatter. Pleasantries are being exchanged. The news is out - Eli and Marlene; the talk of a very nosey town.

Eli stands at the top of the stairs, trying to catch a glimpse of the figure at the door. MARLENE brings in a gift basket into the living room. It comes with home-made cookies, sweets and a card...

## MARLENE

"Welcome to your new home and to your new community. We pray you settle in peacefully. If you and your son would ever like to come to our church, we will welcome you with open arms. Service times on Sundays are 12pm and 6pm. God bless you."

Marlene is pleased.

## MARLENE (CONT'D)

Make sure you bring out your nice clothes from the box okay?

Hanging on Eli's expression. Marlene comes closer.

## MARLENE (CONT'D)

This might be a place to meet some good church friends, Eli.

Her chatter continues off screen whilst we hang on Eli's face before he walks away.

4 EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

4

The sound of night slowly ascends as we watch Eli sneak out of his house, walk through the front garden and towards his old bike. He quickly picks up his pace on the bike, excited to see what this new town has to offer him.

We watch as he winds through the empty roads, stretching further and further away from home. Away from the steady gaze of his mother's eyes. Moments later, he rides through an unfenced lot and into...

5 EXT. OLD DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

5

Eli follows the sound of music and people's chatter. He sees an unhinged door and squeezes through it, leaving his bike behind.

6 INT. OLD DERELICT BUILDING

6

The sound of the rap music gets louder and louder. Think Afro trap. Eli, now closer to the commotion, peers through a slightly open door.

A couple of disorderly, smoking cigarettes - disturbing the peace. All older and noticeably stronger than him - notably KEVIN (24, dreadlocks. Appears scary but is just a young boy with a hard exterior).

Eli walks back. Afraid to enter. He questions whether he should approach them. His heart beating. With one final exhale, he musters the courage and storms into their base. No turning back now. He walks with energy to them and then says-

ELI  
You got a lighter?

Addressing Kevin. A bravado in his voice, trying to convince the boys that he's one of them - as rebellious as them. Kevin stares at this kid. Slightly puzzled.

KEVIN  
What do you need a lighter for?

ELI  
To smoke.

KEVIN  
Do you smoke? I don't see no cigarette?

ELI  
I don't have one. But you're gonna give me some.

Laughter. Eli appears brave to a few members of the group.

GROUP MEMBER 1  
Ay! why is this little boy-

KEVIN  
Am I dumb to you?

ELI  
Depends if you give me a lighter or not.

Eli puts his hand out and there is a moment of pause. Tense. Everyone holding their breath, curious as to how Kevin will react. We linger on Eli's hand.

Kevin smirks. We hold on Kevin's face as he gets a box of cigarettes and hangs one over to Eli. Kevin lights the cigarette for him.

Eli has a drag. He coughs uncontrollably and pulls an ugly face. The boys laugh at him.

KEVIN  
Take it easy little boy. Take it  
easy.

Off Eli.

CUT TO:

7 EXT. OLD DERELICT BUILDING - NIGHT

7

An hour later. Kevin and the boys are leaving the base and  
are about to break into a vacant home. Eli is left behind.

ELI  
Hold up!

Tries to grab Kevin's attention but Kevin keeps on walking.  
The boys continue to cause a ruckous in the background.

KEVIN  
What do you want?

ELI  
Where you going?

KEVIN  
Need to handle some business.  
Couple things that need to be done  
before the morning.

ELI  
Like?

Kevin laughs at Eli's inquisitive nature. He looks over to  
see Eli is wearing a necklace with a cross on it.

KEVIN  
You a church kid like everyone else  
in this place?

ELI  
Yeah...maybe...

Kevin finally turns around and addresses Eli.

KEVIN  
Then you shouldn't be hanging  
around boys like us? Understand? We  
aren't like you lot.

A pick up truck pulls up beside Kevin and the boys.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

This is where I leave you church boy. You know where you're going?

ELI

Yeah I live in the old house, near the church on Market Street.

KEVIN

Ite, well run along. Don't want to get lost this time of night.

Kevin ruffles Eli's hair. Condescending.

Kevin and Eli go in for a handshake. Kevin and the boys get in the back of the pick up truck and the car drives off.

8 EXT. BACK GARDEN. - DAY

8

It's a Sunday and the sound of birds and the summer breeze transports us into daytime.

The sun beats on Eli as he works out in the back yard, trying to master the bench press. Eli mutters the counts to himself.

ELI

One, two, three...

You can tell Eli is struggling - his muscles too skinny but he still persists. Maybe it's something to do with his encounter with those boys last night.

ELI (CONT'D)

four, fiveeeee.

Exhausted. Now barely able to pick up the weights. His mother's voice cuts through his inner fight. She walks into the garden.

MARLENE

We need to go soon. You best get ready now.

ELI

Alright. I'll be quick.

9 INT. MARLENE'S ROOM - DAY

9

Moments later. We see Marlene in a purple frilly dress. It complements her skin tone. She puts a colourful necklace on. The type that you would wear on a special occasion.

A special occasion reserved for God and church folk. The only special occasion Marlene truly cares about.

Marlene puts the finishing touches to her aesthetic. We watch her like flies on a wall. Her movement becoming more ritualistic. She slowly brings out her lipstick from her bag. Ruby red. She applies it to her lips.

Eli, fully dressed up, has been staring at her all this time. He gazes though the narrow space of her bedroom door. He focuses on how she applies the lipstick to her lips. Precisely, with such exactness.

SMASH CUT TO..

10 INT. CHURCH STAIRCASE - DAY

10

We hear the sound of the pastor preaching as we see church boys and girls (between 18 and 20 years old) walking down a corridor in single file. All dressed in their Sunday best. We look at them as if God was watching himself. Ominous. Our eyes are forced to linger. At the back of the line we see Eli, tense, as he walks into the church.

11 INT. CHURCH - DAY

11

Sunday service has almost come to an end. The choir soothingly lull the church into the closing prayer as they sing Michael W. Smith's Agnus Dei. A preacher's evangelical voice leads the churchgoers.

With all eyes closed and heads bowed, the pastor's voice cranks rustily into gear.

PASTOR

Woah, it is a breakthrough for all of you here!

The pastor is in a state of motion, exactly where he wants the congregation to be. The energy in the air is high, the congregation all led by the man so passionately moving on stage.

CONGREGATION

Amen!

PASTOR

With your heads bowed and your hands in the air, I want you to repeat after me.

(MORE)

## PASTOR (CONT'D)

Say Dear Lord Jesus (Dear Lord Jesus), I have confessed that I have sinned (I have confessed that I have sinned). I open the door to you God (I open the door to you God).

One person urgently walks to the front. Another, situated at the corner of the church comes forward. The sound of the congregation's prayers begins to build and build.

As the congregation repeats the Pastor's words, Eli's feet slowly leave the pew, not quite sure what will await them at their destination.

He walks through the middle isle. He kneels down and instantly feels the sweat of the pastor's hand and wet cloth gripping on his shoulder.

## PASTOR (CONT'D)

Lord Jesus (Lord Jesus), come into my life (come into my life). Wash away every sin in my life (Wash away every sin in my life). Make me whole again (Make me whole again). Satan (Satan) Satan (Satan), I cancel every contract I had with you (I cancel every contract I had with you). I resist you (I resist you) I rebuke you (I rebuke you). I belong to the kingdom (I belong to the kingdom). I will walk as a child of God (I will walk as a child of God). Lord Jesus (Lord Jesus) Lord Jesus (Lord, Jesus), I will be your follower from this moment on (I will be your follower from this moment onwards) and I will look to you all the days of my life (and I will look to you all the days of my life).

The pastor reaches the end. His crescendo.

Eli can't seem to hear anything other than the sound of his own heartbeat. The muttering of prayers become louder and louder.

Eli looks back. One by one the congregation put their hands out to touch him; to thank God as another young soul has been saved. He sees his mother, standing with pride as she prays for him.

PASTOR (CONT'D)  
And the church said...

CONGREGATION  
Amen!

ELI  
Amen. Amen.

Off Eli...

12 INT. BAR - NIGHT

12

A bar is bustling. Bradley dances uncontrollably to techno music - losing all inhibitions. He's the focus of the frame as other people dance around him.

13 INT. BAR - NIGHT

13

At the smoking area of the bar. The boys sit on plastic chairs, laughing and talking loudly amongst themselves. Shisha pipes are shared between them. Alcohol on the tables. Disco lights shine on their faces whilst they chat. Kevin takes a swig of a cheap vodka and passes it to Bradley.

Bradley obliges like usual. Bradley passes it onto Eli.

ELI  
Nah, I'm okay.

BRADLEY  
Looks like we've lost him to Jesus.

The boys laugh. Eli subtly laughs too.

We cut to Eli's face as the boys continue laughing. His gaze locks to two girls - much older than him - chatting across from the other side of the room. Their soft features highlighted with colourful powder. Eli thinks about how they got their look so perfect.

Kevin and Bradley jump off theirs seat and pick up Eli. They begin to shout towards the direction of one of the girls.

BRADLEY (CONT'D)  
My friend wants to dance with you!

The boys push Eli forward. They laugh and joke. Boys being boys.

BRADLEY (CONT'D)  
Eli grab her hand... c'mon you want  
to dance with her!

Their noise has now turned into a cackle. Like laughing hyenas.

The girl lends out her hand, amused by the whole thing. Eli watches for a moment and then grabs it. They begin to slow dance, the girl leads as Eli is overcome by his overthinking. He stares at her face as she stares back at him.

Everything begins to move in slow motion for Eli, almost feeling detached from reality.

Eli enters back into reality and quickly glances around at the boys. Kevin looks at Eli as though he's clocked something that no one else has seen.

Off Eli...

SMASH CUT TO:

14 INT. SHOWER - DAY

14

Water from the shower head beats down on Eli's face.

15 INT. ELI'S BEDROOM - DAY

15

Eli walks into the corridor, freshly out of the shower. He re-iterates the words of the pastor to himself...

ELI  
I have confessed that I have  
sinned.

Trying to go back to that moment he was at church and confessed his love for Christ.

I open the door to you God... I  
open the door to you God (a long  
beat) I resist you... I rebuke  
you...

Eli's attention darts to his room. He waits for a further few moments - negotiating with himself before entering.

16

INT. ELI'S BEDROOM - DAY

16

Eli walks to one side of his room and switches on his stereo player to Haven't You Heard by Patrice Rushen. He gently settles into himself before taking the lipstick beneath his pillow and beginning his own secret ritual.

First, he applies the lipstick onto his lips, careful not to get it around the outside. He looks into the mirror to view his creation and finally Eli smiles as though he has found respite from his performative act of masculinity. Sexuality is absent from these images and yet, the hint of something sensual is there.

As he goes again to perfect his look, the front door goes. Eli unaware as his favourite song continues playing.

KEVIN (O.S.)

Eli?

Eli's thoughts continue to drift, taking him away from his room, to another world completely.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Yo, church boy. Do You want to come with us to another party tonight?

The sound of footsteps become louder and louder as

KEVIN (CONT'D)

It's supposed to be a mad one again.

Kevin's voice finally piercing through Eli's moment of solace. Reality. He frantically tries to hide the make-up.

As the room door swings open, Eli looks up.

The music suddenly cuts out. The camera floats from Eli's expression to Kevin. In the middle of them both, the sign of the cross on the wall. Make-up still on Eli's face.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Yo. I thought-

Eli runs past Kevin.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Eli, wait.

Eli ignores him and runs out of the house - too scared to make eye contact. Trying to run away to anywhere but here.

17

INT. OLD DERELICT BUILDING - DAY

17

Hours later. Eli is sitting on the floor of the building, right next to where he first saw the boys that summer night. His mood sunken to the floor. Eli holds the lipstick in his hand, tossing it and turning it as he questions himself.

Kevin comes into the room. Eli puts away the lipstick and hides it in the pocket of his hoodie. Kevin sits next to him and lights up a cigarette.

KEVIN

You good?

Eli looks embarrassed. Ashamed. Unsure of what Kevin thinks of him.

ELI

Yeah. You good?

KEVIN

Yeah.

Beat. Kevin sits down next to Eli.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Can I ask you something?

Kevin takes a drag from his cigarette, then pauses a moment.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

Do you think God hears you from up there?

ELI

I think so... I don't know...

A long pause. Kevin now tapping the cigarette. Eli turns to Kevin.

ELI (CONT'D)

Do you believe in God?

KEVIN

I think so... I don't know.

They laugh. Eli's mood changes, becoming more relaxed with every word Kevin says.

KEVIN (CONT'D)

You wanna know something? (long beat) When I was your age, I used to live me with dad.

(MORE)

KEVIN (CONT'D)

One day, he left for work and never came back. For a while, I pretended that he was gonna come back. I told the boys that he'd left to star in some big movie in Hollywood and was gonna come back for me any day now. I would pray and pray and pray that he'd come.

Takes another drag. Kevin looks up at Eli, deep in thought.

We all have secrets. Things we are ashamed of. Things that we don't want no one to know about us. But no matter how much we try to pretend they don't exist, no matter how much you try to pray things away, you can't hide the truth.

Eli looks down.

KEVIN (CONT'D)  
Don't be so scared Eli.

Eli nods. Kevin starts to walk away.

KEVIN (CONT'D)  
Oh and Eli?

ELI  
Yeah?

KEVIN  
Say hi to God for me, yeah? That guy owes me some prayers.

Kevin and Eli both laugh. Kevin walks off.

The church is alive. Drums explode eardrums as the sound of worshipers singing joyful hymns flood the space. Marlene sits down in her seat, ready to witness her son being baptised.

Eli stands in line as he waits his turn to be called and for his life to change forever. The devotion in their eyes is unmatchable; the desire to know Jesus. Yet Eli's expressions are foreign to these yearning devotees. The congregation watches on.

Eli's feet move him closer towards the altar. The bass of the instruments become like the sound of metal clanging and wrestling within Eli as the line gets shorter - another person is submerged into the crystal clear water. It is now becoming impossible for him to breathe as he awaits his fate, scared that the very walls of the church will fall down.

Eli stumbles closer to the pool before a hand reaches out to him.

PASTOR  
What is your name?

ELI  
H-huhh

PASTOR  
Your Name, son. What is your name?

ELI  
Eli

PASTOR  
I baptise Eli you in the name of  
the Father and the son-

The pastor dunks Eli's body into the water.

19 EXT. LAKE - DAY

19

Eli runs through the woods - completely filled with emotion. Music begins to fade in. Eli's head is now floating up for breath. The shame of his secret no longer haunts him.

20 INT. CHURCH - DAY

20

Eli emerges out of the pool as if him running away from church was a mere dream. We continue where we left off..

PASTOR  
...in the name of the Father, the  
son and the Holy Spirit.  
Congratulations you are now  
baptised!

The congregation applauds. We linger on Eli's expressions as reality settles into him.