

AFTER IMAGE

By

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FADE IN:

URBAN SNAPSHOTS

- A WOMAN with a Mona Lisa smile and wise eyes.
- A MAN tired and poor but happy.
- BASKETBALL PLAYERS, mid-game, locked inside their chain-link fence. One of them stares, irritated, at us.

EXT. INNER CITY PARK - DAY

The ball bounces on the court and the BASKETBALL PLAYERS grumble. They shout their dissatisfaction at the presence of JOSEPH (28) who lowers his serious camera and then shrugs his apology. He turns away, smiles, raises his camera again.

URBAN SNAPSHOTS

- A LITTLE GIRL comforting a worn rag doll.
- TWO TEEN GANG MEMBERS eye us with suspicion.
- An OLD MAN with a cane and a manner you'd definitely obey. Behind him, almost invisible in the distance, a sad but defiant young woman, ARIEL, dares us to come closer. We do.

INT. DARKROOM

Ariel is bathed in deep red light.

Joseph bends over the developing pan, then stands with a jolt. He steps back, confused by conflicting emotions.

JOSEPH

Ariel?

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Ariel and Joseph engage in animalistic sex.

INT. DARKROOM

Joseph rubs his face then hurries to the enlarger. He zooms past the image of the old man straight into a close-up of Ariel's negative face. Her face becomes positive and begins to shake.

EXT. INNER CITY STREET - DAY

Joseph, haggard, slightly-bearded, frantically shakes the blown-up photograph of Ariel in front of a HOUSEWIFE.

JOSEPH  
Have you seen this woman?

The housewife glances at the picture then questioningly back at Joseph.

JOSEPH  
Have you seen her!

The housewife shakes her head as she nervously rushes off.

Joseph, discouraged but not beaten; a YOUNG MAN approaches. Joseph extends the photo toward him.

MONTAGE

- The young man passes by without a glance.
- A SHY GIRL doesn't look at him as she shakes her head.
- An OLD WOMAN eyes him compassionately then turns away.
- A TOUGH GIRL pushes him. Joseph nearly falls over.
- A SMALL GANG OF BOYS snatch the photo from his hand.

BACK TO SCENE

Joseph chases the boys. The boys tear up the photo sending the fragments toward Joseph.

Joseph pushes away the oncoming fragments then stops. He looks down. Ariel's eye stares out from the sidewalk; other fragments rain down around it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Ariel watches the rain stream down the large bay window. She turns looking sad but defiant. She wipes away a tear.

A flash. She pushes it away with a dismissive wave.

ARIEL  
It's over.

Joseph lowers his camera as his jaw drops.

EXT. INNER CITY STREET - DAY

Joseph rubs his teary eyes. Then he sees her, blurry, distant, but Ariel. He steps sluggishly forward; as he wipes tears away he gains speed.

He cries out her name as she turns away. She's still blurry but he's near enough now to reach out and...

JOSEPH

I'm sorry.

He touches her shoulder and she turns toward him. Only it's not Ariel, it's CANDY. Her smile could light a whole city.

CANDY

Well, then you can just make it up to Candy, sugar.

Joseph face falls with disappointment.

JOSEPH

I thought you were someone else.

CANDY

You must be greener than broccoli, honey, if you don't know that Candy can be anyone you want. You just got to want it bad enough.

Candy rubs her fingers together on her extended hand.

Joseph shakes his head but then Candy becomes Ariel who becomes Candy. Joseph smiles as he nods.

INT. DINGY HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Joseph, faraway, groans Ariel's name as he pumps Candy wildly. Candy, bored, still dutifully lets loose a loud moan.

Joseph stops, woken from his dream. He stares at Candy with fear, with shame. He pushes away.

JOSEPH

I can't do this.

He hops from the bed, starts to dress. Experienced Candy pulls down the sheet and squirms, touching herself.

CANDY

Sure you can, sugar. You the best Candy ever had. Come back to bed.

She rubs her nipples with her hands, but Joseph's not buying.

JOSEPH  
You aren't Ariel.

He sits on the bed to put on socks. Candy sidles up to him.

CANDY  
Tell Candy more about this Ariel  
girl. Then maybe...

JOSEPH  
You can never be Ariel. Never! So  
just get the fuck out of my sight.

Joseph pushes Candy away. Candy pouts, hops up off the bed.

CANDY  
Alright. You just pay Candy her  
money and she'll be gone.

She holds her palm out to Joseph.

CANDY  
Candy knows when it's over.

Joseph's jaw drops.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Behind Ariel rain streams down the large bay window. Joseph lowers his camera. Ariel glances somewhere faraway.

ARIEL  
He can make me a star. My face will  
be everywhere! It's what I always  
wanted, something you could  
never...

Joseph, face full of anger, lunges at her. He wraps his hands around her throat. Ariel pulls at his hands but they close tighter. She struggles for breath, steps back, attempts to escape but she's pressed against the bay window.

The glass fractures under her weight. Joseph tightens his grip as Ariel's consciousness fades. The glass cracks some more, then gives way. She falls out of the window.

And Joseph follows, part-way out the window but then he lets go. He watches Ariel flail as she plummets toward the street. Then with sudden regret, he stretches out to reach her...

INT. DINGY HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Candy falls to the floor as Joseph releases his hands from her neck. He moans with anguish as he eyes her lifeless body. Then he cries.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dishevelled and anxious, Joseph rushes to the large bay windows then glances out, up and down the street. Relieved, he turns.

The walls are covered with countless photos of the sad but defiant Ariel. She's everywhere. Joseph rubs his face, backs away from her.

A tapping sound, and Joseph turns. Outside the window floats Ariel. She taps on the pane. Joseph trembles.

JOSEPH

What do you want?

And she's gone. Joseph edges toward the dark window as he stares out into the night.

ARIEL (O.S.)

I want it to be over.

Joseph's eyes go wide. He rises to the sound of her voice. His head bursts through the window and some of the glass embeds itself in his face.

He teeters on the edge but doesn't fall. His arms spread out against the remaining windows. From the corner of his eye he spies Ariel as she hovers behind him. His voice quavers.

JOSEPH

I'm sorry.

Ariel nods and smiles. Then she blows him a kiss, the force of which blows out the remaining windows and Joseph with them.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Through the shattered bay window comes the sound of sirens.

The walls of the room are plastered with urban snapshots. Not a sign of Ariel in any of them.

FADE OUT.