

Charlie's Freedom

by

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1 EXT. URBAN STREET. DAY

CHARLIE (17) looks dishevelled as she rushes along the street in a standard, if frayed, school uniform.

Her long straggly hair needs a brush, her schoolbag has seen better days and she avoids eye-contact with anyone at all costs.

Opposite, two 'selfie' girls AMBER (16) and GRACE (17) spot Charlie.

GRACE
O.M.G!!!!

Grace can barely contain herself as she cruelly points at Charlie and starts laughing.

The back of Charlie's skirt has hitched up on her knickers which are on full show, looking rather grey and sporting a small hole.

Amber and Grace dash across the street to get a better angle and start snapping away with their mobile phones.

For Charlie their 'over the top' laughter gets louder and louder until it simply becomes a high pitched deafening ring.

She feels behind her, realises what's happened and adjusts her skirt. But her face is red hot and she is mortified.

She speeds up to get away from them and passes a young woman ...

... CHARLIE (20) sporting a smart short hair bob, who is rushing along a busy commercial street pulling a suitcase behind her with a handbag over her shoulder.

She's keeping her eye out for somewhere in particular and eventually stops outside a Premier Inn hotel.

She checks out the frontage, makes for the entrance and opens the door ...

2 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - KITCHEN. DAY

... Charlie (17) walks through the doorway into the kitchen bleary eyed and in her pyjamas.

Bedding, towels and underwear dry across two clothes-horses and a duvet is hung over the kitchen door. The kitchen is cluttered but everything is clean.

She squirts bacterial soap on her hands and scrubs like a surgeon before filling a fresh water jug. She grabs a large (7-day) pillbox, a clean tumbler and adds it to a tray.

3 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - HALL. DAY

Charlie balances the tray and uses her elbow to open her Mum's door.

4 INT. HOTEL ROOM. DAY

Charlie (20) enters the room still fiddling with the electronic plastic key and struggling to pull her suitcase into the room.

She dumps her things and takes in the sparse, faceless room; the kettle in an alcove with cups and coffee, a colourful laminated menu on the side table, a large white bed sporting a purple runner and an open empty 'wardrobe' area that becomes ...

5 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - SARAH'S ROOM. DAY

... cluttered with hospital paraphernalia, clean towels, bowls, sponge mouth wipes. A commode stands nearby.

SARAH (42) is half-propped up on pillows in bed. She looks pale and poorly, her face is drooped on one side implying a stroke.

Charlie, still in pyjamas, pops the tray on the side.

CHARLIE

Laura's gonna be late. She's stuck in traffic.

Sarah gives a lopsided smile.

Charlie pops a couple of tablets onto Sarah's tongue and helps lift a tumbler to her mouth.

She waits patiently for her to swallow before repeating with a couple of pills from an Opioid container that sports a red 'Warning' label on the lid.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

What do you fancy today then Mum?
Cereal? Toast?

Sarah struggles with her speech. Her words are barely recognisable.

SARAH

Toast.

On her way out Charlie lifts and takes the used commode pan with her.

Sarah's gaze fixes on the bottle of Opioids that Charlie's left behind before she weakly flops back down into the pillow.

She listens to Charlie slopping the commode's contents down the toilet, flushing and rinsing with the taps.

6 INT. HOTEL - BATHROOM. DAY

The taps are running into a steaming bubble bath.

Charlie (20) leans across, checks the water's temperature and fiddles with the taps several times until she's happy.

She turns off the taps and pulls her jumper over her head.

7 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - SARAH'S ROOM. DAY

Charlie struggles to pull Sarah's nightdress up and over her head.

She holds one arm up, followed by the other and is just pulling it clear of Sarah's head when a piercing smoke alarm goes off.

CHARLIE

Shit!!

8 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - KITCHEN. DAY

Charlie flicks off the main switch triggering two slices of charcoaled bread to pop out of the toaster.

She cracks open a window for the smoke and watches a couple of teenage girls laughing and flirting with some boys.

The bread packet has one leftover crust that she hurls into the bin in a fit of anger before slamming the window closed instantly shutting out their laughter.

She prepares a bowl of cornflakes and milk on a tray when she hears the front door and LAURA (40+) dressed in her official carer's uniform pops her head round the door and waves the smoke away.

LAURA
Toast again?

She looks at the clock.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Shouldn't you be getting a move on
for school?

Laura adds a spoon and some kitchen roll to the tray.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Hey, our Luke got into Bristol. His
first choice. You heard anything
yet?

Charlie looks at her Mum's closed door and lowers her voice.

CHARLIE
Warwick.

She grabs a well-thumbed letter from the kitchen top and shows Laura.

LAURA
BioChemistry?!

Charlie gets embarrassed.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Wow Charlie, good on you.

Charlie tries to shush her and looks at her Mum's door again.

CHARLIE
I'm not sure I'll go yet though.

LAURA
You know your Mum would want you
to.

Laura's mobile phone rings, she digs it out of her apron pocket and brings it to her ear.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Hello?

9 INT. HOTEL ROOM. DAY

Charlie (20) in her dressing gown has her mobile phone to her ear.

CHARLIE
Hello? Yes, I'm already here.

She checks her watch.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
An hour? Great! There's another key
at reception for you. See you then.

She digs into her bag for a small bottle of perfume. She sprays a little on both wrists, rubs them together and sniffs the aroma.

10 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - FRONT DOOR. DAY

Charlie sniffs the air, dumps her load of heavy shopping and school bags in the doorway and rushes straight through to --

11 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - SARAH'S ROOM. DAY

Sarah is straddled across the floor looking frozen and pale.

The commode is on its side with urine and faeces spread across the carpet and over Sarah.

SARAH
Sorry. Tipped.

Charlie looks desolate but quickly turns on a bright smile.

CHARLIE
Don't worry Mum. We'll soon have
you cleaned up.

Charlie covers herself in a disposable apron and gloves.

She looks at the alarm pendant her Mum is wearing.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Why didn't you press your pendant
Mum? I would've come straight home.

With great effort she manages to prop Sarah onto a low stool.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Right then. Ready for our waltz?

She holds Sarah tightly around the waist pulls her up, holds her tight and waltzes her onto the edge of the bed where she lifts her legs and positions her.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
You're freezing. How long were you
down there?

She switches on the electric blanket, pulls the covers right over Sarah and adds another blanket.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Get you warmed up first then we'll
have a wash eh?

As she lifts her Mum's soiled hands under the covers she notices the faeces ingrained in the nails.

The doorbell rings. Charlie looks relieved.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
The carers!

12 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - FRONT DOOR. DUSK

Charlie opens the door.

CHARLIE
Good timing!

But a mobile phone is pushed into her face by a giggling Amber and Grace.

GRACE
Your knickers are trending all over
the web!

Charlie barely has time to register what's going on when the girls suddenly see and smell the faeces smeared down her apron.

AMBER
Eugh!! Gross.

They turn in horror and run away squealing.

13 INT. COUNCIL FLAT - CHARLIE'S ROOM. NIGHT

A box room, with a single bed, a desk with a microscope in prime position and a freestanding rail for Charlie's few clothes.

Charlie sits at an old PC computer and clicks to the site she wants.

On screen we see Charlie's embarrassing moment trending on continuous loop with Grace and Amber's cruel laughter in the background.

Charlie sobs her heart out.

14 INT. SARAH'S ROOM. NIGHT

Sarah hears Charlie's wracked sobs through the paper-thin walls and is helpless to do anything. The tears trickle down her lopsided face.

She looks through blurry eyes at the hairdryer on her bedside table.

15 INT. HOTEL ROOM. DAY

Charlie (20) still in her dressing gown is propped up on the bed and watching TV. She starts laughing at an amusing news items.

16 INT. SARAH'S ROOM. NIGHT

Charlie and Sarah are laughing at the TV.

Charlie is squashed on top of the bed lying next to Sarah whose head has been propped up with many pillows. They are at ease and companionably enjoying a TV comedy together.

Charlie busily chomps through a packet of Maltesers and occasionally pops one directly into her Mum's mouth. She briefly glances across at a photo of the two of them jumping high in the air on a garden trampoline and laughing.

But she doesn't linger on the photo - she checks back to her Mum who's giggling at the programme and snuggles back comfortably with her to continue watching it together.

17 INT. HOTEL BATHROOM. DAY

Charlie (20) sits fully dressed in front of the mirror. She towel dries her wet hair and starts to comb it through.

18 INT. SARAH'S ROOM. DAY

Charlie, in her school uniform combs Sarah's hair, before cradling Sarah's head to quickly dry it off with the hairdryer.

Sarah struggles to be heard above the noise of the hairdryer.

SARAH

Please!

CHARLIE

I'm not going to Uni! I'm staying here. That's final!

SARAH

No. I want you go. Must.

She abruptly finishes her Mum's hair and places the hairdryer, still plugged in, near the bedside table.

CHARLIE

Laura should never have told you!

Charlie picks up the soapy bowl of water from the overbed table, but Sarah stops her.

SARAH

No, want soak hands.

Charlie gently takes her Mum's hands and inspects her fingernails which are still ingrained from being soiled and places them in the soapy water.

CHARLIE

Stop worrying.

She gives her Mum a kiss.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

And press that pendant if you need me!

SARAH

Love you.

Halfway through the door, Charlie turns and blows Sarah a kiss.

Sarah waits to hear the front door shut before removing her hands from the water. She grapples across the bedside table to try and get to the hairdryer but it remains stubbornly out of reach.

She continues trying but it exhausts her and she has to lie back and rest before starting the struggle once more to try and retrieve it.

On the brink of giving up, Sarah throws herself with one almighty lunge and manages to catch the hairdryer's cable with her fingertips and very carefully reel it in.

After getting her breath back, she hauls one arm into the bowl of water, switches on the hairdryer and plunges it into the bowl.

A blinding spark of light.

BLACKOUT

From the intense darkness, the hint of a flashing blue light becomes stronger and stronger outside Sarah's bedroom window.

19 EXT. SCHOOL. DAY

Laura looks very sombre as she waits next to her car outside Charlie's school.

Charlie in school uniform rushes through the school gates in tears and straight into Laura's comforting arms.

Walking towards the gates are Amber and Grace. Amber starts to snigger.

AMBER

Oooh. Big girl crying.

GRACE

Oh, shut up Amber!

Grace walks away from Amber and nods sympathetically at Charlie as she passes.

20 INT. HOTEL BATHROOM. DAY

Charlie (20) finishes drying her hair and ponders the hairdryer thoughtfully.

She looks in the mirror at her own reflection, then at the reflection of a graduation gown and mortarboard hanging up behind her on the bathroom door.

She muses on it, when a knock on the bathroom door interrupts her reverie.

LAURA (O.S.)

It's quarter to one.

CHARLIE

I'll be two minutes!

21 INT. HOTEL ROOM. DAY

Charlie opens the bathroom door in her graduation gown and mortarboard looking slightly embarrassed and awkward

She sees Laura (45) and gives her a cheeky smile before focusing on Sarah who is by the window in her wheelchair and looking like she will burst with pride.

Charlie rushes over to her and gives her a big hug and kiss before doing a twirl of her gown before her Mum.

Sarah struggles to control her tears as she gives Charlie a lopsided smile. Her speech has improved slightly.

SARAH
I am so proud of you.

LAURA
Let's get going then. We don't want
to miss it!

Laura starts pushing Sarah's wheelchair.

Charlie mouths 'thank you' to Laura as the three of them move through the door.

END