

Alleyways

by

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FADE IN ON:

EXT. URBAN SIDEWALK - DAY

The babble of CHILDREN'S VOICES. Bursting with life; not a care. That's *despite* the state of the street: candy wrappers and empty bottles everywhere.

Alleyways lead off in every direction. Cement corridors filled with shadows - and under-utilized trash cans.

The SWISH of a jump rope... a beer can soars through the air. CLICK - plastic tubes hit asphalt. Another neon "rope" WHOOSHES by the other way.

It's Double Dutch. Done Bronx style.

Between the ropes, KELLY (6), bounces and weaves. She chews her gum like an Olympian. Blonde pigtails flip-flop in the air.

Tomboy ABIGAIL (7) whips ropes expertly - stationed to Kelly's right.

JESSICA (6) mans the other side. Her chocolate colored cheeks jiggle, she moves as little as she can. It's just not good for her weight.

Then there's VICKY (7). Fraying jeans, nappy hair. Her eyes scream she'd love to join in. Instead, she watches from afar.

The beer can hits cement near her feet. Vicky kicks it away. Sighs.

Kelly stops skipping. Enough show-boating - now she's done. Timing her move, Kelly jumps clear of the ropes. Patent leather shoes smack the street.

KELLY

(grins at Jessy)

Did you count everything? Two hundred jumps - even. And I landed perfectly!

Kelly waits for earned applause. From Abigail to Jessy. Back again.

Jessy CLAPS; a lackluster performance. Abigail hugs her arms.

ABIGAIL

I guess. It was okay.

KELLY

Did you record it for Facebook, like I said?

ABIGAIL

I was busy. With the ropes.

Kelly points at Vicky.

KELLY

Not you. Her. Over there..!

The three girls swivel toward their "fourth wheel." An embarrassed Vicky stares at her feet.

VICKY

Sorry. I forgot.

KELLY

You had *just one job*, Sicky-Vicky.

JESSY

And you blew it. Big time!

Vicky chews on her lip.

VICKY

I was studying your moves.

KELLY

(snorts)

Like you could beat the best?

VICKY

Can I try now?

Vicky steps towards the ropes. Jessy pulls her end away.

JESSY

Earn it, or suck it. Pricky-Vicky.

Vicky turns toward Abby; the one sympathetic face she sees.

VICKY

Only fifty jumps. I promise.

Abby looks to Kelly for permission. The leader sticks out her tongue.

KELLY

I don't lend my ropes to losers!

She grabs the handles from Jessy.

KELLY

Come on, Jess. You know you're next!

ABIGAIL

(glances at Vicky)

Sorry...

Vicky sadly looks away. She excavates a small, red rubber ball from her jeans - bounces it on cold cement.

One of the alleyways catches her eye.

Trash cans fill the entrance. Twenty feet away, a winding corridor leads to a brick wall. Featuring: a single window hidden by curtains.

Kelly barks at Abigail.

KELLY

Stop staring. Start swinging!

Abigail jumps; does as she's told.

Jessy starts jumping, too. She does her best, but she's too clumsy. All that weight's taken its toll.

Abby's hands move on autopilot. She focuses on Vicky, inching towards the alleyway. Concern floods Abby's face.

ABIGAIL

Vicky - don't! You know what Missus says.

A light flicks on at the back window. Vicky swivels towards it, intrigued.

A SHADOW walks past the curtains, barely seen.

Vicky reaches the alleyway entrance. Abigail yelps, and drops the rope. She rushes over to her friend.

ABIGAIL

Don't you know it's dangerous? There could be bad drug people in there. And rats!

Jessy stands in a tangle of ropes, annoyed. Kelly glares.

KELLY

So what if something happens?

JESSY

It's not like Vick's got a family who cares!

Vicky's face crumples. She pulls out an old cell phone with a cracked screen. And views the picture gallery:

INSERT: FRANKLIN (4), SARAH (17) and EMILY (53). Brother, sister and mother. The resemblance to Vicky is clear.

A door CREAKS. MISSUS (matronly 40s) sticks her well-groomed head outside. All the girls swing around.

MISSUS

Who didn't hear me hollering? Come on girls. It's past lunch time!

KELLY

What are we having? Spaghetti? Hot dogs?

JESSY

Mac and cheese?

MISSUS

It's Tuesday. Ravioli day.

Kelly and Jessy run to Missus.

Abigail yanks Vicky from the Alleyway. She glances at the photo on her friend's cell.

ABIGAIL

Don't listen to Kelly. You know your family cared.

VICKY

And I miss them. Every day.

She glances back at the window. A FOUR YEAR OLD HAND wiggles through the curtains. A flash of fingers, then it's gone.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

A very "homey" touch. Though just as cluttered as the street. The sign over the door reads:

"Miss Classon's Foster Care for Girls."

Missus' business is booming. The kitchen table is filled with 10 GIRLS: including Kelly, Jessy, Abigail and Vicky.

Utensils CLINK against dishes. GIGGLES fill the air.

Jessy chows down on Chef Boy Ardi. Kelly picks on her serving daintily.

Vicky doesn't eat at all. Missus points an accusing finger at her plate.

MISSUS

Young lady, your pasta's getting cold.

VICKY

I don't care. Not hungry.

She stares at the phone in her lap. Another family picture on display.

JESSY

Figures. Kelly and me exercised. All you did is stand around.

VICKY

I wanted to jump! I asked, but you said no way!

MISSUS

(to Kelly)

Is that true, Princess? What did I tell you about playing?

JESSY

(rolls her eyes)

"I run a fair business. You girls should always share."

KELLY

Vicky wasn't helping. She kept staring down that alleyway. You know, that one between Hull and Perry?

Missus flushes pale - points her fork at Vicky's face.

MISSUS

Don't you listen when I speak? Get those cotton balls outta your ears. Don't go in no alleyways!

VICKY

(mutters)

I know... "sometimes, there are rats."

MISSUS

If you go outside, stay in sight!

Missus stabs her pasta. Focuses frustration on her plate.

MISSUS

There are bad people out there. What happened to your folks should be your lesson. I don't want you girls getting hurt. Not on MY god-damned watch!

Vicky recoils. She scrolls through more family photos in her lap. A single tear rolls down her cheek.

INT. BATHROOM - MISSUS CLASSON'S FOSTER CARE

A crowd of girls stand at a row of sinks.

Kelly and Jessy brush their teeth. Abigail and Vicky scrub their faces hard with soap.

Abigail whispers in Vicky's ear.

ABIGAIL

Tomorrow, I'll tell Kelly she's gotta let you jump. Or I'll tell Missus just what she said.

Vicky grabs a towel and dries off.

VICKY

Tomorrow. Now, I gotta go to bed.

She slinks towards the exit. A long hallway separates her from an open room. Inside: broken toys, and a bunk bed.

Kelly nudges Jessy and laughs.

KELLY

Look - baby Vicky's running away again.

JESSY

You think your family's over there?

Vicky shoots a look at Jessy, darts away. Reaching her room, she scales up lightning quick to the top bunk. Burrows underneath the Little Pony sheets.

Abby turns to the bullies, enraged.

ABIGAIL

Stop talking about her family. You know what happened to them!

Abigail storms from the bathroom, to the shared room down the hall. She hops into the bottom bunk, and stares up - through the mattress - at her friend.

ABIGAIL
 Don't cry, Vicky. Kelly never had a cool
 family, like you did!

In the bathroom, Kelly and Jessy roll their eyes. Abigail
 glares. SLAMS the door.

EXT. URBAN SIDEWALK - AFTERNOON

Another round of Double Dutch. This time, it's Abigail's
 turn. Kelly and Jessy turn the ropes.

Once more, Vicky's all alone.

She peeks down that alleyway. Now, the window's open
 wide. A FEMININE SHADOW wanders past the window.

VICKY
 (gasps)
 Sarah?

She takes a step. Abby sees, and instantly abandons her
 "post." She runs over to Vicky.

ABIGAIL
 Don't go in!

VICKY
 But - I saw my sister.

ABIGAIL
 That ain't possible. She's -

VICKY
 - dead?

Abigail falls silent. Awkward. No idea what to say.

ABIGAIL
 You know what I mean. She's... gone.

VICKY
 Maybe Sarah's in heaven.

ABIGAIL
 Over there?

Vicky glances towards the window. SARAH'S FACE reflects
 off the glass for a moment. Then quickly fades away.

Kelly waves to the two girls, annoyed.

KELLY

Abby! Get back here, or lose your turn!

Abby doesn't budge. She's torn.

BEGIN MONTAGE

Kelly takes Double Dutch center stage. Vicky is left alone again. She creeps two feet into the alley. And notices FROSTY HANDPRINTS on the window. Exactly brother Franklin's size.

In the kitchen: Kelly SLURPS spaghetti. She brandishes her cell phone - shows the girls video of her jumping exploits. Vicky's the only one not paying attention. She's totally focused on her phone.

END MONTAGE

EXT. URBAN SIDEWALK - EVENING

More jump rope. This time, it's Jessy's turn. A thunderous performance - practice is paying off.

JESSY

Lookit me. I'm flying!

Outsider Vicky glances towards the back alley window. This time, she spies a rocking chair silhouette. An ADULT FEMALE SHADOW sits inside. Missus hollers out the door.

MISSUS

Get a move on, Girls. It's getting dark!

She yanks Abby into the lobby - an iron grip on the girl's wrist. Jessy and Kelly take their time, pack their toys.

But Vicky doesn't listen. She inches towards the window, mesmerized

VICKY

Mom?

MISSUS

(yells)

Ms. Vicky Watson, listen to me. Get back here. Or you'll get your skinny ass grounded... all week!

Vicky thinks fast. She pulls her red rubber ball out of her jeans and drops it... "accidentally."

The ball rolls down the alleyway, toward the window.
Picking up both dirt and speed.

VICKY

Wait - I gotta get my ball!

Vicky darts into the alley, out of sight.

Abigail tries to run over. Missus has too tight of a hold. The little girl struggles, can't break free.

Kelly and Jessy stroll to Missus' side.

KELLY

Don't worry about stubborn Vicky. She's
always gotta do her own thing.

EXT. ALLEYWAY - EVENING

Vicky follows the ball's trail - all the way to the window. She squints hard - looks inside.

The room is dark; hard to see. Then the woman swivels around. Looking close - it's Emily!

VICKY

Mom!

She reaches out to touch the pane. Her hand goes through the glass like it's nothing. Distortions RIPPLE the air.

Vicky's mom stands up. The rocking chair wobbles. The apparition approaches the window with a smile.

Vicky rubs her eyes, looks again. Now Franklin and Sarah are there, as well.

VICKY

I missed you. You came back for me?

Emily spreads her arms wide, and moves to hug her daughter. Vicky leans into it, joy on her face...

INTERCUT BETWEEN SIDEWALK AND ALLEYWAY

Abigail yanks harder, and breaks free. Missus yells as she scoots away.

MISSUS

Abby Melissa Littleton, stop running.
You'll get hit by a car!

Abigail screeches around the corner. Pushes trash cans out of the way. She reaches the alleyway entrance...

...just as it's getting dark.

She turns and looks. The light dims at the window. The red rubber ball a colorful additional to the sill.

But Vicky's disappeared. Missus darts to Abby's side.

MISSUS

You crazy girls are killing me!

Kelly and Jessy run over. Both PUFF loud enough to split their sides.

The light at the window shuts off, CLICK. A worried Missus scans the street.

MISSUS

Vicky, answer me!

(to Abby)

Where'd that dag-gone girl go this time?

Abigail stares at the window. She catches a momentary reflection of Vicky - nestled between Franklin, Sarah and Emily. Reunited with her family - now and for eternity.

The reflection fades away. Abby shakes her head, not at all sure what to believe.

ABIGAIL

I dunno where she went.

JESSY

Maybe to the store to buy her own rope?

KELLY

(sneers)

Or she went to heaven. It's so great...

Abigail SIGHS.

ABIGAIL

Maybe.

FINAL FADE OUT: