

AMERICAN SPIRIT

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FADE IN:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

We slowly PULL BACK from a Christian cross hanging on a wall, barely lit by flickering candlelight. Three voices drone a prayer in unison.

WORSHIPPERS (O.S.)

... May the peace and certainty
that You bring be enough. Grant us
with Your blessings, o' Giver Of
Light, vanquish our want and let
our bodies become temples of power.
Your precepts are before us, your
blessings made known.

Three kneeling figures outlined in the dim light. Something odd: defying gravity, they seem to be kneeling on the ceiling instead of the floor.

Actually, this is an inverted image, which is turned right side up to reveal:

They're praying to an inverted cross.

WORSHIPPERS

Allow us to receive Your good
fortune, oh great Mammon, as we
humble ourselves before Your
desires, as they become ours.

Beneath the cross is a golden, metal bowl with candles on either side. The bowl is filled with common valuables, loose change, earrings, car keys. The bowl could be mistaken for a large, common "catch-all" bowl except that it is filled to the brim with theses valuables.

WORSHIPPERS

Amen.

The worshipers stand up. One of them flips a light switch, revealing a run-of-the-mill living room. It's an average suburban family. DAN (40'S), a reverend still in his clothes, SHEILA (40's), looks and brains, and MEG (17) the family's troublemaker.

Sheila moves the cross to an upright position.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The family has gathered for dinner.

Sheila sets a big bowl of spaghetti on the table.

Meg wants to puke.

DAN

Meg, would you care to bless the meal?

MEG

God couldn't even make this dinner blessed.

SHEILA

Watch your mouth, this is a good dinner. Be thankful.

MEG

This is a poor person meal. This is what poor people eat.

SHEILA

This is NOT what poor people--

DAN

Meg. Watch your mouth.

Sheila smirks at Meg.

DAN (CONT'D)

Sheila, this IS what poor people eat.

Meg smirks back at Sheila.

DAN (CONT'D)

Until recently we've had to cut back. A lot. And I want to thank you both for your patience--

Sheila and Meg are emotionally touched.

DAN (CONT'D)

--But it's been hard to be thankful with all of the subtle bitching.

MEG

Thanks for the PSA, dad.

SHEILA

Bitching about bitching. You know what? You're right. It has been hard. We have put up with a lot. I'd say, if I can, that I've put up with the most. It'd be nice if I

wasn't the only one making a real
paycheck around here.

DAN
Distant memories soon enough.

Sheila and Meg look at Dan. Dan takes a huge bite of salad
with nonchalance.

DAN
(mouth full of salad)
I got the loan.

Sheila scoffs in retort.

SHEILA
Right. Good one.

Dan pulls a folded document from his pocket and slides it
along the table.

A doubting Sheila studies it in awe.

SHEILA
How...?

It reads: "Dan Hassle of The First Reformed Church."
"\$750,000 dollars."

SHEILA (CONT'D)
Seven hundred and fif--

DAN
It's finally happening. It's time
to regain our flock. We will build
a new church.

Dan can't escape the prying look from Sheila.

DAN
... Brian at the loan office was
having a good day, I guess. He's a
really smart guy, he explained it
to me. Something to do with
combining undesignated income with
yada yada, it's all legal, and
voila (Dan motions to the document
on the table).

SHEILA
It's all legal, Dan this doesn't
even--

DAN

Sheila. The Lord works... mostly in mysterious ways... C'mon how about a little trust here, honey? It's all going to work out. And how about a little excitement? You'll be able to quit your job.

Meg's gears are turning.

MEG

Does this mean we can get another car?

DAN

Maybe. (Poking fun) And if your grandpa would keel over, we could get YOU a car.

An eye roll from Sheila who's beginning to relax.

SHEILA

Okay, no inheritance jokes.

MEG

(winking)

Yeah, that's messed up dad.

Dan looks at her in a parody of innocence.

DAN

Oops, sorry.

SHEILA

Besides, my father is in excellent health and not going anywhere for a long time. Lord willing.

She eyes Dan.

SHEILA (CONT'D)

We'll just have to be smart with how to MAKE money.

DAN

Starting with this loan.

Meg springs up from her seat.

MEG

Screw the spaghetti, mom. Let's bring out the champagne!

Dan and Sheila are looking into each others eyes. Sheila

starts to smile.

SHEILA

Okay. Damn right we'll have some
cha --

She's cut short by a SUDDEN PAIN in her throat. She grips Dan's hand, her eyes bulging open and locking with his. Suddenly, her body starts to convulse.

MEG

Mom?

DAN

Sheila?!

Whatever it is, Meg gets it too.

MEG

(barely understandable)

Dad...

Her head begins to rapidly quiver like it's stuck in a pneumatic paint shaker. A strange hissing noise escapes her mouth.

Sheila's eyes are in the back of her head and there seems to be a slight smirk curling her lips.

Dan bottles his nerves. He's been here before.

He stands up, addressing an invisible presence.

DAN

Release them, Mammon.

A BEAT passes. Nothing.

DAN

I'll do whatever you want!

The spirit releases its grip on the women. Sheila sucks in air as Meg collapses to the ground.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Dan removes a small drawstring SCRABBLE bag from a table drawer. We track WIDE as he walks over to a fireplace mantel where he lights incense. Sheila and Meg are seated on the floor. Dan takes his place next to them.

Meg nurses her jaw.

MEG
Does it have to make such a big
fucking scene every time?

SHEILA
Hey, watch it.

MEG
I don't think it minds the F-word.

SHEILA
I do.

Disgruntled, Dan tightens the bag's draw string and shakes the contents.

DAN
You wanted an altar, we built you
an altar. Prayers, we gave you
prayers. What in God's
... What do you want now?

Dan spills the tiles onto the coffee table.

Ad libs as the family scans the construed tiles, removing the non contending letters. Dan spots it.

DAN
There.

He moves a large group of tiles aside to reveal "sacrifice".

MEG
Like, sacrifice more jewelry, what
does that mean?

Dan studies the word.

DAN
I don't know.

SHEILA
Fuck.

Meg's hand searches over the tiles.

MEG
Maybe there's another word.

Her hand slows to a stop, hovering over a single tile sitting atop another, obscuring a WORD. She moves the tile. Grim faces look down on what is a very clear message:

"HUMAN... SACRIFICE".

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

WE ARE BIRDSEYE OVER A NIGHTSTAND. Dan's wristwatch reads "2:17 AM".

We TRACK over to reveal Dan lying in bed, eyes open like saucers.

SHEILA
Remember that demonologist we met
at the college?

DAN
Sedwick.

SHEILA
Yeah, that's it. We should have at
least kept in contact with him.
Maybe he knows a story of how
people got rid of Mammon before.

Dan stares at the ceiling.

DAN
God doesn't acknowledge my
prayers...
(trails off in thought)

He sits up to the side of the bed, facing away from Sheila who sits across the room smoking a cigarette by a window.

What else are we going to try? We
wasted three fifty on someone who
filled our house with smoke. You
got duped by a con artist who
dazzled us with his spirit hunting
machines... a thousand dollars,
that I did not want to spend. What
makes you think tha--

SHEILA
Then we need to bring in a priest.

Dan clenches the sheets.

DAN
Yeah? For one, I AM a priest. Two -

Dan stands up and walks around the bed to face Sheila.

DAN (CONT'D)
- Do you want the entire church
community to find out I can't
exercise a demon in my own home,

let alone that we've had the damn thing so long? Do you know what that would do to us? Forget the new church.

SHEILA

I can't keep living like this. What about Meg? This horrible secret she's forced to keep from her friends, Dan...

DAN

Everyone has secrets. You manage yours quite well, don't you?

Sheila becomes self conscious about her vice and puts out the cigarette.

SHEILA

You could at least bring the demonologist in and hear what he thinks. We've got enough money to do that.

DAN

We've also got a mortgage to pay.

SHEILA

Do you see another option?

We are LOOKING AT DAN as he stares at Sheila. A whistling sound FADES IN and crescendos, UNTIL -

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A HOWLING tea kettle fills the frame. We SLOWLY PULL BACK as Dan walks into view, removing the kettle and filling a single mug.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Dan shares a table with MR. SEDWICK (70's), an inquistive man with a perpetually tired look.

Sedwick finishes a big sip of tea and set's the mug down.

Dan seems eager to get on with it.

DAN

So, do you have any initial questions before we get into gritty details?

SEDWICK

Only one, can you pay me upfront
like we talked about?

Dan remembers their agreement and pulls three large bills
from his wallet and hands them to Sedwick.

SEDWICK (CONT'D)

Not fun starting that way but I've
found people are less inclined to
pay after they find out how easy it
is to get rid of these things.

DAN

Understandable.

SEDWICK

Tell me. How long has it been
residing with you?

DAN

The last 3 years, three different
homes. Two houses and a duplex if
that makes a difference.

Sedwick writes on his notepad.

SEDWICK

Were these places in the same zip
code as this one?

DAN

All three were different.

SEDWICK

Great. This eliminates about three-
quarters of the possible demons.
Most demons are bound by
territories. While yours is likely
more than servile it's not likely
higher-ranking.

DAN

So, good news?

SEDWICK

There's no real good news when
we're talking about a demon.

(takes a sip of tea)

This tea is delicious.

DAN

I'm thrilled you like it.

SEDWICK

Another question. What has the communication with the demon been like?

DAN

It's not exactly audible. More like a feeling or impression we all feel.

SEDWICK

Let me re-phrase. What has the demon offered you and what has it asked for in exchange?

DAN

You're assuming it's not just tormenting us?

SEDWICK

You've lived with this demon in three different homes. You're a pastor at a local church and you've refused to get rid of it. It's paying its rent somehow.

Dan looks found out.

SEDWICK (CONT'D)

What has it offered y--

Sedwick stops short, feeling something in his throat. He coughs aggressively off to the side.

SEDWICK

Excuse me. What has it offered y--

He coughs again. Concern floods his face and his breath deepens. His eyes stare at Dan then over at his mug of tea.

SEDWICK

Oh...

Feeling very dizzy, Sedwick fumbles for the mug only to knock it off the table.

Dan watches, expressionless, as we HEAR Sedwick fall to the floor with a THUMP.

INT. BASEMENT - LATER ON

Sedwick's eyes flutter open. He finds himself tied to a

chair with the golden bowl placed underneath.

The basement is bare except for some storage shelves with boxes and a telephone in the corner.

Nobody in here but him and a nervous Dan... holding a brand new AXE.

DAN

I wanted to do this while you were out, but he said I couldn't. Sorry.

He forces himself to raise the axe, ready for the kill.

SEDWICK

Human sacrifice, is it? I should have known. You have that desperate look in your eyes. Let me guess. He calls himself Mammon?

Dan freezes, surprised.

SEDWICK

Bet it all started with strange noises during the night. That's all he could do at first. Bang a few doors, scratch a few windows. But then he started to get stronger, didn't he?

Dan lowers the axe, enthralled.

SEDWICK

His name isn't really Mammon. This is an impersonating, lesser spirit, pretending to be something it is not. That is why it likes you. You know what makes him stronger? You. Feeds off your servitude, your weakness. Destroy the altar. Stop the prayers. He'll move on.

DAN

And we'll never hear from him again?

SEDWICK

Never again.

Dan takes this in.

DAN

I believe you.

Then suddenly, SLAM! - He swings the axe into Sedwick's chest. Sedwick lets out a shriek, his eyes and mouth stretching open for the last time. Blood sprays out, coloring Dan's face.

For a moment, the only sound we HEAR is the sacrifice blood trickling into the metal bowl.

Dan tries to pull the axe out. It's stuck. He puts his foot on Sedwick's chest and yanks, knocking Sedwick and the chair back onto the ground.

A blood spattered Dan regains his composure then stares down at the bowl.

DAN
(heavy breathing)
Okay... Your turn.

We slowly ZOOM into the bowl and back to Dan's face. Tension mounts and then SUDDENLY -

The phone RINGS. Dan hesitates as he looks across the basement. Then he walks over and answers.

DAN
Hello? Yes, this is Reverend
Hassle. Yes, that's my wife, how
can I help you? What? You're
kidding me. When did he pass? Wow.
Well, thank you for calling us
immediately. This is... Unexpected.
Yes, she's at work, I'll give her
the news. Yes, thank you. Well,
thank you for the call, we'll be in
touch. Truly devastating. God
bless.

Dan cautiously places the phone back on the receiver. He looks across at a very dead Sedwick then back at the phone again. SUDDENLY, Dan bursts into a victory dance.

CUT TO TITLE

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