

THE SOCIAL SCENARIOS EXPERIMENT

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For My Family

I love them because I have to

I like them because I want to (usually)

I know that I would be lost without them

Chapter 1 – Benny Rosario

Benny rolled his eyes as he was once again led to a small, dingy office which had little mental stimulation or color of any sort. Behind the plain wooden desk sat his old hard-ass parole officer, Mr. Stone. Stone had thinning grey hair and a permanent scowl. He had brown eyes darkened from the war in Vietnam and an attitude to match. He didn't put up with any bullshit, and that is exactly what Benny had a talent for exuding. His bushy eyebrows pressed together as Benny flounced in and sat jauntily in the chair opposite him.

“Hey Stoner, long time no see,” Benny said, flashing a bright white grin.

“It has been exactly three months since you were here after being arrested for shoplifting from Mario's Stop and Shop, Rosario. Being a minor, you only spent the night in Juvenile Hall, and got out on bail thanks to your generous father. Then you were referred back to me, your long time parole officer. Now here you are again, being brought in for stealing a car, and as you well know, that is an obvious violation of your parole. We've been through this again and again since you were fifteen, Rosario. Don't you get tired of it?” asked Mr. Stone without much emotion.

“So glad you remembered, Mary.” remarked Benny, using an annoying variation of Stone's hated first name, Marian. “You know, it's almost our anniversary.”

“It's funny you should say that, Rosario, because guess what buddy? Your eighteenth birthday was last month and you are now an official adult. And what do you do to celebrate? Commit your most serious offence yet, grand theft auto. And you know what happens to adults who commit federal crimes? They go to jail.” Stone was almost smiling with fiendish delight. Benny's face went visibly paler. For the past year or so, he'd gotten by during his odd night or two in juvie with swagger and a devil may care attitude. Sooner or later, his dad would bail him out. He didn't know if he'd survive real jail, with serious convicted felons. No matter how much money his dad had, and he had quite a lot of it, Benny didn't think his old man could get him out of this one.

“Hey, I appreciate the effort, Mr. Stone, but you don't have to go through all the trouble tossing me in jail.” Benny attempted to sound nonchalant.

“Oh, being nice now, are we?” said Stone, happy to see Benny shaken. “Well punk, it’s no trouble at all.” Benny gulped. He liked to think he was a hardened criminal, but in reality he had just never grown up. Hard life experiences gave him the feeling that he knew more than he did and could do more than he should. Just then, a clerk from the front desk came in with a note for Mr. Stone. Reading it, Stone’s face grew red and a tendon in his head began to stand out.

“Apparently your father wishes you to be anywhere but jail,” he growled, frowning deeply. “He has asked the courts for a postponement in judgment on your sentence and a temporary alternative to police custody. Seeing as you are barely an adult with a troubled childhood, they have agreed.”

“What does this mean for me exactly?” Benny asked, not yet daring to hope.

“It means,” Stone answered in a tight voice, “that you will not be going to jail just yet. The judge and your father have something else in mind, permitted you consent to the conditions.” Benny whooped with relief, the joy of freedom coursing through him. He knew he didn’t do well behind bars.

“I’ll consent to whatever he wants me to,” he assured Stone rashly. With that, Benny gathered his things, flicked down his dark shades with a grin, and strutted out of the office.

His father was waiting with a town car outside. Two pairs of identical dark blue eyes met, though behind his sun glasses, Benny’s held more pain and experience than high society brought up Derrick Rosario’s.

“Hey, Derrick, I mean Dad.” The term was unfamiliar on Benny’s lips, seeing as he and his father had only recently reconnected after being apart for nearly fourteen years.

“Hello, Ben.” Derrick said with a warm smile. The two shook hands and slid into the back of the sleek black vehicle. “Back home, Larry” Derrick told the chauffeur. Larry nodded and pulled away from the curb.

“Thanks for keeping me out of jail, Dad.” Benny said quietly. Derrick looked properly disapproving of his son’s misbehavior. In truth, he had no idea how to be a parent or how to feel as the parent of a criminal.

“Now that’s all right kid. I knew you didn’t want to be locked up. Who would? But this arrangement I made for you is a little out of the ordinary. Here, take a look.” Derrick handed Benny an official looking pamphlet. The cover was shocking white with large, simple orange script.

California Neural and Behavioral Institute

Participants wanted for social behavioral experiment.

Personnel type needed:

- A teenager (between 16-19 years of age) with a criminal record
- A teenager (between 16-19 years of age) pregnant and expecting to give birth to a child
- A teenager (between 16-19 years of age) with an intelligence quotient above a 150
- A teenager (between 16-19 years of age) with a diagnosed mental disorder requiring medication and/ or institutionalization
- A teenager (between 16-19 years of age) that is either legally blind or deaf.
- A teenager (between 16-19 years of age) diagnosed with a terminal disease or cancer

All participants under 18 years of age must have parental permission. All participants are expected to complete one year of high school as part of the experiment. More details will be released upon application.

If interested, call (714) 816 - 1997

“Really specific about their volunteers aren’t they? I’m assuming I’ll be trying out for the role of teen with a criminal record?” Benny had very little interest in science, and the fact that his participation in this experiment kept him out of prison didn’t much change that.

“Yes you will. You fill the requirements nicely. Now, you have to do exactly what the scientists tell you to if you want this to work out and stay out of jail.”

“Okay, that doesn’t sound too hard. I mean, after all, they are looking for a criminal. Sounds to me like they don’t want me to change or nothing.” Benny was unconcerned about the experiment. To him, it sounded like an assurance that for a year he could be himself without the risk of going to jail.

“I especially like this plan of action because it means you will be going back to high school and you will hopefully finish your education,” Derrick said, trying to sound like a parent wanting the best for his kid. That caught Benny’s attention.

“Back to school? Hate to break it to you Pops, but I dropped out when I was fifteen for a reason. High school and I aren’t exactly *simpatico*.” This wasn’t the only reason, but no need for Derrick to know more than necessary about Benny’s past.

“Well I hate to break it to you, Ben,” Derrick said, frowning, “but if you won’t go to school you can’t participate, and if you don’t participate, the judge made it very clear that you will go to prison and there is nothing I can do about it.”

“You’re a lawyer,” Benny argued, “I’m sure you could do something.”

“I own a private law firm that deals with domestic financial cases. Not only do I rarely work a case personally any more, I definitely don’t take criminal cases. No offence son, but I especially don’t take a case where there is evidence stacked against the defendant with no viable defense.” Benny hung his head. It was true about the evidence. The police found the car with Benny in it and the gadget he used to pick the lock with his prints all over it. The stripped wires Benny used to hot wire the car had his prints as well. To top it all off, they found the true owner’s wallet, complete with a hundred dollars cash, in Benny’s pocket. He had zero chance of getting acquitted if he went on trial. Derrick ran a hand through his

light, wavy hair, often like his son did, though Benny's hair was shiny black like his mother's. He gave Benny a pleading look.

"Please, Ben, say you'll at least try." Benny couldn't resist his father's pleas, especially after all Derrick had done for him.

"Alright, Dad, I'll give it a whirl," he said, somewhat defeated, but trying to look optimistic.

"Great, then we will swing by my place and get you all cleaned up. Then, off we go to meet the people at the Institute." Derrick looked genuinely happy that he had finally done something to really help his son.

Derrick's mansion had lush green lawns, stone columns out front, multiple huge rooms, a bright marble entrance hall, and a glittering fountain. Benny took a shower in his own personal bathroom, which was attached to one of the two rooms his father had given him upon his arrival a year ago. Benny's attached room included a king-size bed, a large closet full of dress pants and button down shirts (Benny's few pairs of jeans, t-shirts, and leather jacket obviously stood out), and a kick-ass stereo. There was also a full body mirror on one wall, and a bay window with a window seat overlooking the front yard on the other wall. His other room, connected to the first with a door next to his bed, was more of a study/ game room. It held a couch, a desk with a computer, a TV, a half empty book shelf, a pool table, and a mini fridge. Living there, Benny had decided, wasn't too bad, but he could barely get used to not wanting for or working for anything.

Benny finished his shower and went to his room to get dressed. He found that someone, probably Derrick's faithful maid, Mrs. Fredricks, had laid out a pair of dark blue trousers, a white dress shirt, a black blazer, along with a pair of leather dress shoes. Shaking his head at the effort, Benny opted to wear a pair of his black jeans and his leather jacket instead. He decided to keep the shirt to please his father, though he wore it half unbuttoned over a t-shirt, and threw on a black tie, loosely tied. Lacing up his black leather boots, as opposed to the brown loafers laid out, Benny was about to head down stairs when Mrs. Fredricks turned up at the door.

"You're going to leave looking like that, Master Ben?" she asked disapprovingly.

“Sure am, Mrs. F., and there’s nothing you can do about it.” In truth, Benny really liked Mrs. Fredricks for her warm, but strict, all together grandmotherly personality. He wasn’t going to change into something he wasn’t for anyone, but he gave her the benefit of the doubt. “You know, you can call me Benny if you want to.”

“Okay, Benny. Do you know what would make this old woman very happy? If you would at least comb your hair. I want you to make a good first impression to those scientists so you don’t have to go to jail. It would be boring around here without you.” Benny grinned and gave into her sweetness.

“Alright, Mrs. F., you win. But could you do it for me. I’m afraid I’m out of practice.” Mrs. Fredricks’ kind smile widened. This was exactly what she wanted. Together they went back into the bathroom, and Benny sat in front of the mirror while Mrs. Fredricks went to work. She combed his uneven black hair into long wavy sheets on either of his head. She left a little piece or two of the chin length locks to dangle in front of his face the way he liked, but with the severe part and the dark shine, Benny looked both stylish and upstanding.

“Thanks a lot, Mrs. Fredricks, I really appreciate it.” Benny said, being mostly truthful. Though he preferred his hair shaggy and wild, even he had to admit he looked pretty good.

“Not at all, dear Benny,” she replied with a pat on his shoulder.

When Benny walked into the beautiful kitchen of his father’s home, Derrick blinked a few times when he saw his son. Then he smiled a really big smile.

“You clean up very well, kid. Although those don’t look like the clothes I had Mrs. Fredricks lay out for you.” Benny shrugged.

“I had to add a little of my own flare, otherwise it would have felt like I was lying to the people we are meeting.”

“Yes, because we all know how much you hate to lie,” Derrick retorted sarcastically, shaking his head.

Without delay, they got into the town car and Larry took them to the California Neural and Behavioral Institute. Driving up to the place, even Benny was a little impressed.

The building was shaped similarly to a kidney bean, but with a flat top. The sides were covered with shimmering windows surrounded by shining white stucco. The roof had everything, including a swimming pool, a greenhouse, an enormous satellite dish, a few couches under an awning, and a vending machine. As they walked through rotating glass doors, rainbows were cast along the walls from the sunlight streaming through the glass, and the effect only added to Benny and Derrick's amazement at the interior of the building. The lobby was a large open space with white and silver furnishings. White leather couches sat in a cluster on one side near the long granite front desk. Silver light fixtures hung from walls, while far above industrial hanging lights could be seen. Right inside the door stood a large directory.

Floor 1: Lobby, Coffee & Lounge, restrooms, elevators

Floor 2: Main Laboratories, supercomputer center, scientists' offices

Floor 3: Psychiatric ward, library, multipurpose area, psychiatric offices

"I wonder what all of those facilities are used for," Derrick mused aloud.

"Yeah, the sign saying 'restroom' really has me stumped," Benny said sarcastically. Derrick shot him a pointed look then lead the way to the front desk. Their heels clicked across white marble floors as they came to a stop in front of a young, pretty receptionist. She had dark skin and short, wild curly hair piled on top of her head. Her bright smile widened as the two men approached.

"Hello, my name is Cally. How may I be of service today?" she asked enthusiastically.

"Well..." said Benny, leaning across the counter and waggling his eyebrows suggestively. His father pulled him back, rolling his eyes.

"I'm sorry. We are here to meet Dr. VonRode about his social experiment. He showed interest in my son Ben."

"Okay," Cally said, nodding and still smiling at Benny. "Just sign in and then take the elevators around the corner to the second floor. Dr. VonRode's office is down at the end of the first hall you come to. Can't miss it."

“Thank you very much, Miss,” Derrick said, writing his and Benny’s names on the sign-in form. Cally waved at Benny as they headed towards the elevators. The elevators were made of stainless steel with an interior completely made of mirrors. Benny loved it and often checked out his reflection. With a ding, they were out and on their way down the hall. A solid oak door at the end had a bronze plate that read Dr. VonRode, Neurology and Behavioral Sciences. Derrick knocked and they waited. Then an average height, thickset man with graying hair and a short bushy beard and mustache opened up. He wore a long white lab coat over a crisp blue shirt and gray slacks. He also wore round, wire rimmed glasses. Benny assumed this was Dr. VonRode. Behind the doctor stood a young guy, also in a white lab coat, though his was more disheveled. Underneath he wore jeans and a white shirt bearing the Institute’s logo. The guy had wavy blond hair cut pretty short and bright blue eyes.

“Hello, it is a pleasure to meet you, Dr. VonRode. My name is Derrick Rosario,” Derrick extended his hand to the older man, but the man just gave a soft laugh.

“I’m sorry for the confusion,” he said in accented English, (German maybe). “But I am not Dr. VonRode.”

“I am,” said the young guy stepping forward to shake Derrick’s still outstretched hand.

“Oliver VonRode, at your service. This is a friend of the family, and my partner on this project, Dr. Albert Sherman.” Derrick shook Sherman’s hand as well.

“I am very sorry. I guess I just assumed...” Derrick stumbled over an apology.

“It is quite alright, Mr. Rosario. Many people make that mistake.” Dr. VonRode had an easy smile. Derrick cleared his throat.

“Well, this is Ben, my son.” Derrick pulled Benny forward to shake the doctors’ hands.

“Pleasure to meet you, Ben.” Dr. VonRode said with warmth in his eyes. “Heard you are our delinquent.” Benny nodded.

“Heard that’s what you were looking for. Well here I am, a bonafied criminal.” VonRode laughed.

“Yes indeed, that is what we’re looking for. If you don’t mind, Mr. Rosario, I’d like to interview Ben privately and make sure he is qualified for the project. If you just follow Dr. Sherman, he will give you all the details about the experiment.” Derrick nodded.

“Behave, Ben.” He said over his shoulder. Benny just rolled his eyes.

“Well, Ben, if you’ll come with me.” VonRode motioned for Benny to follow him over a dark shiny wooden desk. There was a large leather chair on either side of it. VonRode sat behind the desk and picked up a clipboard. Benny sat opposite.

“So, Ben -- ” VonRode began.

“Benny, if that’s okay.” VonRode nodded.

“Okay, Benny. How old are you?”

“Eighteen as of last month.” Benny answered in a bored voice.

“Well happy belated birthday then.” VonRode continued. “What grade are you in?” Benny paused for a moment. He didn’t know how to answer. If he told the truth, he might not be able to participate and then he had to go to jail. But if he lied and was found out, he definitely wouldn’t be able to do it.

“Uh, actually, I dropped out of high school when I was fifteen.” Benny looked down, but VonRode didn’t seem fazed.

“Alright, what grade were you in when you dropped out?” he asked.

“I was a sophomore when I left,” Benny said softly.

“Well, I think I can swing putting you in the senior class at South Point High if you get extra tutoring. That way you will be with people in your age group, and you will get a diploma out of it.” The doctor looked as though he expected Benny to be happy or excited, but Benny grimaced.

“School isn’t exactly my thing Doc,” he said slowly.

“Well I hope it becomes your thing because you’ll be spending a year there. Try to make the best of it.” Benny sighed and nodded. Anything to keep him in the program and out of jail.

“Next. How many criminal offences have you been arrested for?”

“Seven since I was fifteen, I think,” Benny answered, almost proudly.

“And how many have you actually committed?” VonRode prompted.

“Bout that many,” Benny said under his breath. Dr. VonRode grinned but said nothing.

“Right, it shows here that your father took you in only about a year ago, when you were seventeen. And he told me that you and your mother lived apart from him since you were three, is that correct?” The doctor’s voice was kind, but he didn’t know the wounds he just opened. Benny grimaced. “Yes, that’s right.” VonRode was thrown by Benny’s expression, but he didn’t inquire about it.

“Okay, where did you live after leaving with your mother?”

Benny’s face became blank, expressionless. “We lived in Chicago for a while, and then moved back here three years ago. Then, when I got arrested for vandalism last year, my dad picked me up.” His tone clearly indicated the subject was closed. If Dr. VonRode knew Benny any better, he might have picked up on the fact that Benny’s lack of emotion hinted that he was lying, or at least not telling the whole truth. But Dr. VonRode didn’t know Benny and simply continued the questions.

“Last question, Benny. What do you hope most to get out of this experience?” Benny raised an eyebrow.

“Do you want the right answer that makes me look good, or the truth?” he asked.

“The truth of course,” Dr. VonRode said encouragingly. Benny shrugged.

“Alright, I hope to not end up going to jail,” he said simply. The doctor nodded.

“Anything else?” he asked hopefully. Benny thought about it.

“I guess I want to live my life as normally as possible, but that isn’t likely. I’m probably going to have to be on my best behavior to stay in this program, right Doc?” VonRode laughed, his kind eyes shining.

“Actually, we want you to go about your normal activities. We chose you for this experiment because you were already just what we needed. We want to monitor how a person such as yourself lives on an average day and how they are part of a society,” he said with a smile.

“Okay,” said Benny nodding. “When you say ‘person such as myself’, you mean criminal don’t you?” VonRode folded his hands.

“I wouldn’t say criminal, but essentially, yes,” he replied.

“Does that mean I can get into trouble without the threat of prosecution?” Benny asked casually.

“Technically that is correct. That doesn’t mean you should go looking for trouble, but as long as the crime you commit is reparable and not too serious, you will not be sent to jail.”

“Don’t worry, Doc, trouble usually finds me,” Benny said darkly. VonRode was quiet. Then he stood, hand outstretched.

“Well, I believe that is all, Benny. It was excellent to get to know you a bit and I look forward to working with you. We will be in touch one week before the school year starts to finalize the details.” Benny shook his hand. Dr. VonRode led him out the door to the hall where Derrick Rosario and Dr. Sherman were standing. Derrick looked up expectantly at VonRode.

“I think Benny will be an excellent asset to the project,” the doctor said happily. Derrick smiled with relief and shook VonRode’s hand. He turned to shake Dr. Sherman’s hand, and then he clapped his son on the shoulder.

“Thank you very much for your time gentlemen, but we must be going,” said Derrick. He led Benny back to the lobby. Cally waved to them on their way out and Benny winked at her.

“Good job, Ben,” said Derrick once they were in the car and on the way home. “I’m proud of you.” Benny just leaned back, sighing internally. He was relieved that he wasn’t going to jail. He was also, if he dare admit it to even himself, a little excited for the experiment to begin. He was also a little nervous, but he was sure he could handle it. All in all, it hadn’t been as horrible as he thought.

[End of Sample]