

RITUAL

by

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Inspired by true stories

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TEASER

EXT. CONHAM RIVER PARK, BRISTOL - DAY

Standing on the bank of the River Avon, is NEIL MURRAY, 12, Irish/Indian, clever, curious, and precocious.

Watching him adoringly nearby is SOPHIE MAXWELL, 16, Scottish/Pakistani, a people pleaser, gloomy beneath a sunny exterior.

She lets go of a rope swing above the river and lands in the water with a splash.

She swims to the bank and gets out.

SOPHIE

Your turn.

Neil looks from Sophie to the rope swing that is tied to a broad branch of a particularly tall tree. He gulps.

EXT. RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

Neil stands on the heavy branch with the rope swing in his hand, petrified.

SOPHIE

You can do this, Neil. You do way scarier stunts on your skateboard.

NEIL

It's too high, Soph, I'm gud on the bord ewe no that. But that's on the ground; you know that.

SOPHIE

C'mon. Bein' brave doesn't mean you're never scared.

Neil looks back and forth from Sophie to the rope swing. He's about to jump but instead starts climbing down.

NEIL

Nah. I'm not gonna lie maybe next time, aye?

Neil gets to the ground, trying to hide the tears in his eyes as Sophie comes up to him.

SOPHIE

Hay, you were up that wee trunk
faster than a sporran in the
Highland Games.

NEIL

I s'pose.

SOPHIE

No, you did. Now all you have to do
is take that one more step. Easy
Peasy lemon squeezy.

Sophie tries to poke Neil in the belly, but he slaps her off.

INT. LIVING ROOM, MCCORMACK'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MCCORMACK, 42, white, English, sleazy, greying hair, greasy t-shirt, is sprawled with a beer in front of the TV. There are kids' movie posters on his wall, one featuring a superhero named The Dark Falcon. He's alarmed to see an intruder walk into the room.

JAMES ROYLESTON, 35, Northern English/Spanish, handsome, olive-skinned, disarming yet guarded, an out-of-the-box operator.

MCCORMACK

What the *fuck*?! How did you get in?

McCormack jumps to his feet.

JAMES

Kitchen window was open.

MCCORMACK

Get out of my house! I'm calling
the police.

He reaches for his phone. James punches him before he can dial. McCormack hits the floor.

JAMES

I don't think so. People like you
don't call the police.

He kicks McCormack hard in the ribs. McCormack howls.

MCCORMACK

Who are you?

JAMES

You wouldn't know me. But I've been watchin' you a long while.

He kicks him again.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You thought you could get away with what you did. Thought you were invisible. But invisible people are watching you.

MCCORMACK

I was acquitted! Fair and square.

James kicks McCormack in the balls. McCormack doubles over, eyes streaming from the pain.

JAMES

Inadmissible evidence. A 'ung jury. A travesty of justice. But you're gonna be a reformed character from 'ere on out. 'Cuz I'm 'ere to warn you: you're gonna be looking over your shoulder for the rest of your miserable life.

James kicks him some more, grinding his boot down into his groin. McCormack screams.

MCCORMACK

Jesus-fucking-Christ. I didn't torture anyone. Not like this.

JAMES

You think what you did to them girls weren't torture, you Pedo fuck?

McCormack manages to crawl to his feet.

MCCORMACK

You better just kill me now, or I will call the pigs on you.

James laughs.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. THE CLIFTON DOWNS PARK - BRISTOL - DAY

Neil plays on his phone at a picnic table with an app: "The Dark Falcon Returns." A winged superhero flies over a maze, zapping bad guys with X-ray vision.

Neil's mother, KIARA, 32, Indian, devoted, cheerful, marks test papers.

KIARA

Oi, Neil, we said no screen time
for the next hour. The whole idea
was fresh air.

NEIL

Smells like car fumes.

KIARA

Please, can you just take a wander?

Neil wanders off, dissatisfied.

Kiara's phone rings. She looks at the screen and rolls her eyes.

KIARA

What, Conner?

Neil looks back at her, gets his phone out again.

YOUNG GIRLS play football nearby.

Neil plays his game, walking, not looking up.

KIARA

No, not really, why? Because unlike
you... yeah, well...

Now out of sight from his mother, Neil practically walks into-

NEIL

Sophie!

Sophie touches a finger to her lips and motions for him to follow. Back at the bench:

KIARA (INTO PHONE)

I'm not doin' this now, mind. Well,
you should've thought of that
before you started stalkin' me...

Neil turns to see his mother still absorbed on her phone.

 KIARA (INTO PHONE)
 (nastier)
Listen... my solicitor...

 SOPHIE
Guess who's here?

 NEIL
Who?

She leads Neil toward a gray Bristol City Council van.

 KIARA (O.S.)
Because it's court-ordered. A
document you should perhaps read
before...

INT./EXT. VAN/STREET ADJACENT TO THE DOWNS - CONTINUOUS - DAY

SAM LEUNG, 34, White, English, well built, is dressed as the Dark Falcon, with a beaked hood and a winged cape. He hangs out in the back of the van.

MARC KRAUS, 35, English/Spain, good looking, bronze-skinned, sensitive, timid, detached from the kind heart he conceals, is in the driver's seat, wearing sunglasses and a hoodie.

 SOPHIE
Hay, you got a fan here!

 SAM
Aw, we're just packing up. But Yo,
I've always got time for a fan.

Neil steps closer to the back.

 NEIL
Mint costume. Grand.

 SAM
Thank you. I'm the Dark Falcon.

 NEIL
Nah, that's Marc o Andrez, innit?

 SAM
Clever boy and I'm his stunt double
giving out film tickets.

Neil grins. Finally pockets his phone.

INT. NATIONAL CRIME AGENCY, LEEDS - DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S OFFICE-
DAY

James enters to see his boss, Deputy Director TONY BANKS, 55,
White, English, dour, at his desk. Tony gestures him to sit.

TONY

You've been doin' good work,
Royleson. The Harris and Lane
cases. The McCormack case.

JAMES

Thank you, Guv.

TONY

For what it's worth, the bloke got
off on a technicality.

JAMES

So I heard. Can't win 'em all.

TONY

No one should be above the law.

JAMES

Friggin' right.

TONY

*Either side o' it. Say McCormack
shows up at t'emergency room
bleating about 'ow some intruder
brayed 'is sorry arse good and
proper, the police would be called.*

Tony slides a police composite sketch across the desk. It's a
passing likeness of James. James shifts uncomfortably.

TONY (CONT'D)

I've recommended you for an
immediate transfer to another unit.

JAMES

What?

TONY

A new initiative.

JAMES

New, how?

TONY

Well, the crimes aren't new, the
unit is.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)

You'll be investigating ritualised
and mind-control crimes, primarily
against bairns.

JAMES

Fuckin', kiddie-fiddlin'?

TONY

Paedophile rings and more. Pack tha
bags, Cocker, yer off to Bristol.

JAMES

Fuckin' Bristol?

TONY

Outta of our jurisdiction.

JAMES

Fuck me. No, I'm not up for -

TONY

No-bugger was. I spoke to Lead
Investigating Officer Trahern,
who'll be headin' up the Ritual
Crimes Unit. She's rite chuffed you
volunteered.

JAMES

But I -

TONY

Tek this as a' opportunity, lad. To
stop actin' like a mardy bastard.
Or tha'll be off t'force.

Tony stares intently at James, who pales under the scrutiny.
James makes for the door, abashed.

Tony crumples the composite sketch, shaking his head.

TONY (CONT'D)

An' James? Look after tha sen.

EXT. THE DOWNS - DAY

Kiara hangs up in a huff, then looks around, stands up, and
shades her eyes from the sun.

KIARA

Neil? Where'd you go, love?

INT./EXT. VAN - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Sam leans into the van and rummages in cardboard boxes.

SAM

I got special edition comic books
if you get the winning Falcon spin.

He points to a large spinning wheel. Neil looks to Sophie.

SOPHIE

Go, spin the wheel!

Neil hops into the van and spins the wheel.

EXT. THE DOWNS, FOOTBALL FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Frantic, Kiara beelines to PARENTS on the sidelines.

KIARA

Have you seen my son, he's twelve,
blue tee-shirt?

They all shrug or shake their heads. Starting to panic, Kiara races onto the field to ask the football players.

INT. VAN - CONTINUOUS

Sophie slams the van doors closed! Neil is thrown off balance as the van pulls away. Sam slams him to the floor and jams a hand over his mouth. Neil bites down hard.

SAM

Owya! Little twat!

EXT. STREET ADJACENT TO THE DOWNS - CONTINUOUS

Kiara darts out onto the path of the oncoming van. Marc slams the brakes and barely avoids bulldozing her. Kiara doesn't even notice the van, still whipping her head back and forth.

KIARA

Neiiiiil..?

INT./EXT. VAN - MOVING - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Neil and Sam slide towards the front of the van. Neil's face pressed against the glass as he sees Kiara and screams.

NEIL

Mammy! HELP!!

Unwitting, Kiara runs past the van without looking inside.

EXT. INSIDE VAN - TRAVELING - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Sam duct-tapes Neil's mouth shut - then uncaps a syringe. On the inside of his left wrist is a tattoo of a blue-green peacock. He administers the needle to Neil.

SAM

You're lucky. What an honor to be chosen. You can't be free before you know you are in shackles.

Neil struggles to keep awake, but his eyes blink several times, then close. He passes out.

INT. NCA, BRISTOL - JAMES AND BECCA'S OFFICE - DAY

James's new boss, Deputy Director HAKIM DOUGLAS, 60, black, dedicated, cranky, shows James through the busy office.

DOUGLAS

Since the 60s, there've been abuse cases involvin' elements of violence and ritual. Mostly unrelated, w' thought. Till Trahern - she was a barrister at the time - cross-referenced the files.

JAMES

Grand.

DOUGLAS

Talkin' to survivors, she found eerie similarities between the stories throughout the country. Enough that she wanted to make a move to the NCA.

JAMES

So there's enough of this to warrant its own unit? Won't "Sexual Exploitation" cover it?

DOUGLAS

An audit found that in nearly all cases where there was ritual abuse, the CPS ignored the ritualised aspects. At this rate, we're barely addressing the tip of the iceberg.

James frowns. Douglas opens the door on -

INT. NCA - JAMES AND BECCA'S OFFICE- DAY

A poky little office with two desks.

BECCA TRAHERN, 41, Welsh, dignified, reserved, a perfectionist, who sacrifices self-care for work, sits at one of the desks. She looks up from her computer.

DOUGLAS (CONT'D)

James, this is Lead Investigating
Officer Becca Trahern.

Becca shakes his hand.

JAMES

Who else is on the team, Mahm?

BECCA

Only you and me, for now. Take a
seat. There's a lot of info to get
you up to speed.

She grabs a giant stack of files from her desk and dumps them
on his.

JAMES

Thank you, Mahm. I read through
your email briefings. I've seen
some sick shit, but -

BECCA

That's exactly why you came here.
You care maybe too much.

She smiles kindly. James evades her gaze.

JAMES

If this is all so big, how come I'm
just now reading about it?

BECCA

Let me ask you this: how do you get
witness statements from four and
five-year-olds? Especially when
they're raised in a cult, none of
them talk. Even the older ones
won't tell what happened to them.

James flips through a file.

JAMES

Pff. Brainwashin', torture, forced
drug use...

(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

After all that, I s'pose they
wouldn't make the best witnesses.

BECCA

A lot of the programming is to make
sure they don't EVER tell.

JAMES

They're big into Nazi memorabilia?

BECCA

Oh, yeah. I even reckon Hitler was
a member. Some of the experiments
in the camps were to perfect their
mind-control programming.

JAMES

Chuffin' 'ell.

BECCA

You've arrived at the perfect time.

JAMES

'ow so?

BECCA

A high holy day for satanic
worship. Every year for the past
three years, a child has gone
missing in the southwest.
Permanently.

EXT. PRIVATE HOME - PROGRAMMING ROOM - DAY

A black van drives through a large private compound and pulls
up in front of a substantial gated home. In the boot -
Covered by a blanket, is the drugged Neil.

INT. PRIVATE HOME - ENTRANCE FOYER - DAY

Classical Wagner plays as BENJAMIN KRAUS, 67, white, English,
brilliant, dominant, manipulative, and easy to anger, hums
jovially with the music. He has a blue-green dove tattoo on
his arm. Sam enters, carrying Neil in his arms.

BENJAMIN

Ah, our newest recruit.
Put him in the white room. And set
up the cameras in the red place.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. THE DOWNS - BRISTOL - NIGHT

Bristol City Council van is at the roadside. Becca and James approach FOUR BEAT CONSTABLES, 20s-30s.

JAMES

We're lookin' for Sergeant
Thompson?

P.C. CHEN MOK, 30s, Cantonese, class clown, street-smart,
joins them.

CHEN

Let's see... two suits, lurkin' in
a dark car in the dead of night,
means undertakers, jazz band, or
Scotland Yard...

Becca flashes her warrant card, unamused.

BECCA

Ritual Crimes.

CHEN

And you're here... why?

JAMES

We need to see if this kidnappin'
is connected to a larger
investigation we're workin' on.

Chen waves his arm.

CHEN

We got the van.

BECCA

That's tidy. We'll need to perform
a forensics report.

Chen rises to his full, intimidating height.

CHEN

We got this. We're not the wallies
you think we are.

BECCA

That's not what we're saying -

CHEN
It won't help you much anyway. It
got reported nicked.

JAMES
And right 'ere's a blind-spot on
the CCTV -

Chen points through the trees.

CHEN
Looking at the bracken, they could
have gone that way.

BECCA
Or somewhere else entirely.

JAMES
What do you mean, Mahm?

Becca examines the mud next to the van for tire tracks.

BECCA
We're looking in the wrong place.
They wouldn't get far on foot
through the woods. They
rendezvoused here with another car
for a clean getaway.

James snaps pictures of the tracks on his phone.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Make sure to get casts of these
tracks.

CHEN
You're makin' an assumption these
crooks have friends?

BECCA
How about we start over, officer
Chen? We're looking for Sergeant
Thompson.

Chen clicks on his phone and hands it to Becca.

CHEN
He's makin' his T.V. debut, Mahm.

ON CHEN'S MOBILE PHONE -

INT. A MODEST LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

POLICE SERGEANT RALPH THOMPSON, 40, white, English, a sports nut, down-to-earth but territorial, gives a live interview on a couch, next to a tearful Kiara.

THOMPSON
We're looking for volunteers to
help with the search.

BACK TO THE DOWNS -

Becca hands the phone back.

BECCA
We still need to talk to him.

CHEN
Mind if I tag along, Mahm?

EXT. KIARA'S HOUSE - WITHYWOOD, BRISTOL - NIGHT

A panda car is parked outside, its lights flashing against the dark night. Becca, James, and Chen walk up, just as -

CONNER MURRAY, 35, Irish, tattooed, narcissistic, with a chip on his shoulder, runs out of the house followed by Thompson.

THOMPSON
Mr. Murray, unless you agree to
questioning, we'll have to take you
down the station.

Conner struggles against Thompson.

CONNER
I'm not the one who lost him.

Hot on Conner's heels is Kiara.

KIARA
He was abducted, you prick!

CONNER
Cos you weren't keeping an eye out!

Conner lunges for Kiara, jerking away from Thompson - but Chen instantly pins his arms behind his back.

CONNER (CONT'D)
Where's my son, Kiara?

Conner flashes a mean stare at Becca and James, as Thompson and Chen throw him against the patrol car. Chen pats him down, then removes a crack pipe from his pocket.

CONNER (CONT'D)

That's not mine.

CHEN

S'pose this baggie ain't either?

He holds up a tiny bag with a small crack rock at the bottom.

KIARA

You really are a prize muppet,
Conner.

CHEN

You're under arrest on suspicion of
possession of an illegal substance.

Chen cuffs Conner and reads him his rights as he shoves him into the patrol car. Kiara heads for her car, wiping tears.

KIARA

I have to get back to The Downs.

Thompson hurries over to get between Kiara and her car door. She tries to force her way past him. Then she walks into the street to try to get in on the other side.

THOMPSON

Madam, I'm sorry, but --

KIARA

Please.

Kiara shrieks as a car whips by and almost sideswipes her.

She collapses, hyperventilating on the street. Becca bends over her, checks Kiara's pulse, and looks up at James.

BECCA

999.

James makes the call. Becca looks at Kiara.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Kiara, look at me. I need you to
slow your breathing. In and out.
That's good. Again.

INT. JAMES'S CHILDHOOD HOME - DAY - FLASHBACK

Four-year-old James waits at the window. Another CHILD, 12, approaches him from outside.

CHILD
We're makin' slime. Come on; you've
been stuck in there for hours.

JAMES
Nah, I hafta wait for me Mam. What
if she never comes home?

EXT. KIARA'S HOUSE - WITHYWOOD, BRISTOL - NIGHT

James snaps back to attention.

KIARA
I need to - we need to find him.

Kiara tries to breathe between her sobs.

BECCA
We're going to do everything in our
power to find Neil. Okay? You need
to trust us. In and out. In and
out. That's lovely.

Thompson comes from around the car, and they both help Kiara
away from the road. Becca stands and approaches James.

JAMES
We've nowt at all to prove this kid
disappearing is related to our line
of inquiry.

BECCA
Excuse me?

JAMES
You know we'll be taken off this
case if we can't prove a link.
(looking to Kiara)
Best not to make promises?

Now Becca looks to Kiara, who's managing her breathing, but
can't stop the tears.

INT. POLICE STATION - THOMPSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Thompson searches through papers on his desk as Becca and
James talk to him.

THOMPSON

Bristol Council didn't even realize
the van was missing till we found
it. CCTV didn't give us much to
I.D. the driver.

BECCA

We'll need to look at the footage
from the park.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT

Nervous, Conner rocks back and forth. On the other side of a
large table sit Becca and James. The baggie and the crack
pipe between them.

BECCA

And between 15:00 and 17:00 today?

CONNER

Kristen came into the tatt studio
around three and... I took those
off her 'cuz she admitted she'd
used again. She'd been clean six
months. I was trying to help the
woman.

BECCA

Drugs are the local's problem. What
I need to know, Mr. Murray, is, do
you know who could have snatched
Neil?

CONNER

If I knew, I'd tell yer. That kid
is the fecking greatest thing I
ever got outta that marriage.

Becca sighs, withering, thinks a beat, then:

BECCA

But if Kiara is the one who lost
him, that would put you in a pretty
great light, eh?

Conner looks confused. Even James turns to Becca.

CONNER

What are you saying, ye fucking
eidjit?

BECCA

I mean, in a custody battle, if one of the parents lost their nipper, well, that puts the other parent pretty far ahead.

Conner leans forward.

CONNER

You think I'd use Neil like that?

JAMES

I dunno, would you?

CONNER

Feck no.

JAMES

Kiara had some tracks on her arms.

CONNER

Yeah, old. She hasn't fixed in years.

JAMES

But you were the one who gorr'er started, right?

James picks up a file and opens it.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Says she OD'd twice. Both times you were shootin' up wi'er.

CONNER

Bollocks to yer. You think I don't regret those times? I swear on me Mammy's eyes I DIDN'T TAKE HIM.

Conner slams the table, his tears coming down. There is a genuineness to his plea.

Chen enters the interview room.

CHEN

Your friend Kristen confirmed your alibi and admitted the crack was hers. We're lettin' you off with a warnin'.

Conner starts to get up.

BECCA

Ohhh! Sit down Boyo.

Conner sits back down, not sure what's happening.

CHEN
Sarge's orders, mahm.

BECCA
We're not with this office. I'm the
investigator in charge here,
Officer Chen.

CHEN
By the time you get approval to
overrule us, we'll have solved our
case.

Becca reluctantly grins, impressed by Chen's gall. Chen leads
Conner out as James turns to Becca.

JAMES
That was... an approach.

BECCA
Had to make sure.

Becca's hands shake, which she struggles to conceal,
something James notices.

INT. POLICE STATION - SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY

Becca and James sit with Chen in front of a wall of monitors,
watching CCTV from the park.

In a partially obscured view through the trees, Chen hones in
on a blurred image of The Dark Falcon.

CHEN
Brazen as you please. Posing as a
super-hero and foiling the facial
recognition. The tabloids'll love
that.

JAMES
Anything on the driver?

CHEN
Shades and a hoodie.

BECCA
Anything on the second car?

CHEN
Possible second car. Based on the
tire tracks, we think it's a Ford.

JAMES

I've been goin' through CCTV of between the road from The Downs and further down from where the van was left. I've a list of number plates we can check through for Fords.

EXT. WOODLAND LEADING TO THE COMPOUND - DAY

Becca and James drive down a dirt road in a wooded area.

BECCA

We're in the middle of nowhere.

JAMES

We're scrapin' the barrel on our line of inquiry. That's where we are.

BECCA

We managed to track down all the other drivers. It's just one last Ford. You questioned Kiara's boyfriend and Neil's sitter?

JAMES

Craig and Sophie. No new info, Mahm.

Becca pulls up next to a padlocked gate.

JAMES (CONT'D)

You wanna try calling her again? The whole area's fenced tight.

EXT. GATE TO THE COMPOUND - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Becca and James stop at the gate. James examines the padlock with his gloved hands.

JAMES

A spankin' new lock.

BECCA

You sure it's new?

WITHIN THE WOODS -

An unseen observer is creeping closer to them.

JAMES

Yes, Mahm, Glossy paint, no rust,
and a fancy logo sticker on the
back.

James takes a homemade skeleton key from his pocket and tries
to pick the lock.

BECCA

You can't open it with -

The lock opens with one turn.

JAMES

What, you don't study lock
calibration? Fascinating science.
Mahm, came in rite handy when I was
a foster kid.

A crunching sound of branches being walked on is heard.

BECCA

Ssshhh. Did you hear that?

Then there's the sound of a car. James snaps the lock shut
again as a Ford Fiesta comes toward them down the road.

BECCA (CONT'D)

That's our last Ford.

INT. THE COMPOUND - WHITE ROOM - DAY

The room is blurry and white. It comes into focus as Neil
blinks groggily. He rubs at the injection spot on his arm.

He bolts upright as he sees he is not alone.

Seated around a table are Sam (still wearing the Dark Falcon
costume), CROSS, 30s, white, a rough, inbred-looking sadist,
LEWIS, 30s, white, innocent-eyed, and genuine, and Benjamin.
Aside from Sam, they are dressed in funeral black.

SAM

It's awake.

CROSS

Well, let's get it on its feet,
then.

Lewis, Cross, and Sam move toward Neil, who shrinks back.

NEIL

Who are you people? You better let me go, right now, mind!

CROSS

Or what? Your mummy'll be cross?

He reaches for Neil, who punches him away. Cross smiles a twisted smile.

Neil bolts for the door, but Sam intercepts him.

NEIL

Where am I? This is kidnappin'. The bill'll be lookin' for me!

Sam shoves him down. Neil springs to his feet, fierce.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Let me be. I'm not afraid of you.

He is powerless to fight them off. Their hands are on him, dragging him across the room. They lay him face-down in front of Benjamin, who bends and extends his hand. Neil sees an enamel pin on his lapel in the shape of an eye inside a triangle.

Benjamin helps Neil to his feet.

BENJAMIN

You are most definitely afraid, Neil. And you definitely should be. Right now, you are afraid because you find yourself in a strange place, with strange men.

NEIL

You don't scare me!

BENJAMIN

Once you get to know us, you will be doubly afraid. With every right, given who we represent: He who is the most powerful. And what we plan to do to you is merely the smallest step within our greater, global plan. But which will nonetheless bring you pain.

The men snigger quietly to themselves.

NEIL

Please, let me go!

Neil runs at Benjamin, punching at him; Benjamin doesn't even feel it. Neil breaks down, sobbing.

BENJAMIN

That's it, boy. Get it all out. You must stay in this room for a while, as this will be your last chance to cry. We have very strict rules here. You'll soon see.

NEIL

Fuck you! Where's my mobile?

BENJAMIN

Forget your mobile. You will never see your mam again. You have a new family now.

NEIL

Come on, fairs fair. I'm not stayin' here.

BENJAMIN

There's no escape.

He exits, the other men following. Neil bolts to the window, but it is barred on the inside. He listens to the door locking behind his captors.

EXT. GATE TO COMPOUND - DAY

A grey-haired little old lady, SYLVIA WILSON, gets out of the Ford on unsteady legs, peers at Becca and James.

BECCA

Sylvia Wilson?

SYLVIA

Yes?

Squinting, Sylvia fumbles with the padlock on the gate.

BECCA

We understand this car is registered to you. Were you driving it through Clifton Down yesterday, around two-thirty?

SYLVIA

Why yes, I was! I went to see my niece, is she okay?

BECCA

Your niece is absolutely fine, Ms. Wilson.

JAMES

Ms. Wilson, 'ow come you keep this gate locked?

SYLVIA

Oh, it's not safe for a woman alone. The bloody poachers! Traipsing after my pheasants and scaring my badgers!

She bristles indignantly. Wipes her nose with a lace handkerchief.

WITHIN THE WOODS -

Marc stands hidden by shade. He peers between tree branches to look carefully at James. Mouth slightly agape, Marc removes his sunglasses and squints in disbelief.

They are identical.

AT THE GATE -

Sylvia drops her handkerchief with her fumbling fingers. Becca retrieves it for her.

BECCA

Sorry to have bothered you, Ms. Wilson.

James looks suspiciously toward the trees.

WITHIN THE WOODS -

Marc presses tighter against a tree trunk.

INT. THE COMPOUND - WHITE ROOM NIGHT

Neil sits beneath the window, looks out into the darkness. He's exhausted, his hands still clutching the metal bars that prevent him from leaving. The door unbolts, and Marc enters.

MARC

Come with me.

INT. THE COMPOUND - LOWER HALLWAY - NIGHT

Neil's eyes scan the hallway for means of escape.

MARC

If you try to escape, I'll have to hurt you, and I'd really rather not do that. So let's not make this harder for us, all right?

Neil hurries ahead of Marc. There is a door at the end of the hallway, with a flight of stairs before it.

MARC (CONT'D)

It's locked, so don't even think about it. Upstairs.

Neil hesitates near the bottom of the stairs. Marc gestures upward. His face is not unkind. Neil heads up the stairs.

INT. THE COMPOUND - UPPER HALLWAY - NIGHT

Marc unlocks a door, ushers Neil inside.

INT. THE COMPOUND - DORM ROOM - NIGHT

A small dorm room, sparsely furnished. There are five small beds, two of them empty. In the other three, children are lying very still.

MARC

Evening, guys. Eyes open. Neil, I'd like you to meet your new family. I'll leave you to get acquainted.

Neil runs for the door, but Marc pushes him back. He locks the door behind him. Neil looks at it, then turns around.

The other kids are sitting up, staring at him. He stares back. Silence.

LIN LEUNG, 13 years old, of Hong Kong heritage, kind and parental, with huge eyes and a habit of chewing the ends of her long hair, approaches him hesitantly.

LIN

Don't be afraid. I'm Lin. This is Eleanor.

ELEANOR, 4, wearing makeup and nervous, nods to Neil. JOHN, 5, angry and haunted, turns towards the wall.

JOHN

Shut up, Lin.

NEIL

Where are your Mam and Da's?

No one answers. Neil moves to the window, cups his face with his hands to look outside. He can't see much, but there is a roof not far below. He tries to push the window up, struggles with it.

Lin lays a hand on his arm.

LIN

You mustn't try to escape. You
already met John's dad.

Neil looks around and grabs the only chair. He drags it toward the window, lifts it, ready to break the glass.

John catches the chair in mid-swing, wrestles it away.

NEIL

Give it back, you bastard!

John pushes him roughly to the ground.

JOHN

New Boy doesn't know the rules.
What are the rules?

The children move toward Neil and gradually encircle him.

CHILDREN

You don't cry; you don't throw up;
you don't say no; you don't run
away, and you never tell.

Neil stares, mystified. John yells again. The others chant back at him.

JOHN

Quae praecepta sunt?

CHILDREN

Et nolite flere: non est iactare:
non dicent ultra: non fugiendum, et
non ad semper!

Neil covers his ears, distressed.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. WILDLIFE REHABILITATION CLINIC - DAY

Sophie holds a baby squirrel in her hands. A greying AFRICAN VETERINARIAN, 60, hands her a small pipette filled with formula. Along a wall are several cages with animals.

SOPHIE

Aww, he's so cute!

Sophie softly strokes the back of the squirrel's head.

VET

Are you tryin' to kill him? If he believes people are friends, he's likely to be hit with a broom.

Sophie places the pipette's long nipple in the squirrel's mouth.

SOPHIE

Sorry, I know. He's not a pet.

VET

Hold his head so he can't move.

Sophie hesitates.

SOPHIE

I don't want him to feel helpless.

VET

Don't apply human psychology to a squirrel. And no more than two milliliters.

Sophie holds his head in place. The vet leaves. Sophie looks at the squirrel adoringly.

SOPHIE

Here, be free! Drink!

She lets go of his head and holds him loosely in the middle of his body so he can reach the nipple with his little paws.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Such a good eater.

The baby squirrel finishes. Just then, an adult squirrel in one of the cages chatters. Sophie turns.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
 Hey, handsome! Jealous?

Sophie's phone rings. She sees it and reluctantly answers, removing her gloves.

INT. ESTATE AGENTS OFFICE - DAY

Scribbling on a file is Sophie's mum, MRS. FATIMA MAXWELL, 40, Pakistani, well-dressed, workaholic.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

SOPHIE
 Oh, hi, Mum.

MRS. MAXWELL
 Sophie? Where are you?

SOPHIE
 You know. Told you five times.

MRS. MAXWELL
 Tell me.

SOPHIE
 Like I said, I'm helping at the
 wildlife--

MRS. MAXWELL
 Don't be cheeky. You know I'm busy.

SOPHIE
 Yes, Mum.

MRS. MAXWELL
 Shouldn't you be revising for
 tomorrow's test?

SOPHIE
 I'll revise for it when I get home.
 I know it inside and out, mind.

A knock on the doorway.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)
 I gotta go, Mum, bye.

Sophie looks up as Becca enters.

END INTERCUT CONVERSATION.

BECCA
Sophie Maxwell?

INT. PRIVATE ESTATE - THE BARN - DAY

Marc enters a stall with an empty jam jar. A goat sits in the corner. Marc spots a pile of excrement nearby and, shielding his hand in a plastic bag, deposits it into the jar.

MARC
Why, hello there, Horace.

The goat approaches him. Marc looks at the goat's eyes, reaches over, and pets it.

BENJAMIN
For fuck sake, this is why you've never been promoted. You *named* the sacrificial goat?

Marc watches as Benjamin drinks coffee from a paper cup.

MARC
There were people at the perimeter earlier. Police.

BENJAMIN
They can't come in here.

MARC
They're going to talk to Sophie.

BENJAMIN
She'll say nothing. She's trained.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Mrs. Maxwell sits next to Sophie and across from Becca.

Becca points to Sophie's handbag, which has a picture of a peacock on it.

BECCA
That handbag is well lush. You like peacocks?

MRS. MAXWELL
Sophie loves animals.

BECCA

If you don't mind, Mrs. Maxwell,
let her answer, please. When did
you last see Neil?

SOPHIE

Last Friday. After swim practice.

BECCA

Did anything unusual happen...
anything at all that sticks out?

SOPHIE

No... not really.

Becca looks over to Mrs. Maxwell, who is now busy texting.

BECCA

How long have you been babysitting
for Neil?

SOPHIE

About a year.

BECCA

And where were you yesterday, from
three to five PM?

SOPHIE

Um... at the wildlife clinic.

MRS. MAXWELL

She already told your colleagues.

A slight rap on the door. James steps in, carrying a can of Fizzy drink. He smiles at Sophie before bending and whispering to Becca.

JAMES

Mahm, the boyfriend was a dead end.
And the alibi checks out.

BECCA

Sophie, were you over the Downs
yesterday?

Sophie's eyelids flutter, and she shifts in her seat. Sophie looks at the mirrored glass window beside her.

Her reflection transforms - in her mind's eye only - into LISA, 6, covered with scars and wounds, dressed all in black and sitting in a wheelchair.

SOPHIE/LISA
(in child's voice)
May I please have some Fizzy drink?
I was a good girl. I wasn't bad.

She addresses only James. Stunned, Mrs. Maxwell puts down her phone.

SOPHIE/LISA (CONT'D)
I'm not bad, right? Am I a good girl?

BECCA
(to James)
Get her some Fizzy drink.

James leaves. Sophie leans back, and her eyelids flutter.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Who told you that you were bad?

Back to normal, Sophie looks at Becca like she is crazy.

SOPHIE
You what?

MRS. MAXWELL
Sophie, are you all right, Babber?

SOPHIE
I'm fine, Mum. Why?

BECCA
(to Mrs. Maxwell)
What time did Sophie arrive home on Tuesday?

MRS. MAXWELL
I'm not sure exactly.

BECCA
Were you there when she arrived?

MRS. MAXWELL
No.

BECCA
How about Mr. Maxwell?

MRS. MAXWELL
He's no longer with us.

BECCA
I'm sorry to hear that.

Sophie rubs her forehead.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Sophie, were you at the Downs on Tuesday?

SOPHIE

No. I came right home from work.

MRS. MAXWELL

Sophie's been under a lot of pressure with her schoolwork. Sweetie, are you getting a migraine again?

Chen and James enter. James hands a can of coke to Sophie.

SOPHIE

Oh, no, thanks. The sugar.

Becca's phone pings with a text. She checks it, concerned.

MRS. MAXWELL

Babber, you just asked--

BECCA

It's fine. Excuse me for a moment, would you?

INT. PRIVATE HOME - PROGRAMMING ROOM - DAY

Marc lays on a stretcher, hooked to a large EKG machine. He's strapped in place.

GABRIELA MILLER, 56, Latina, cold, efficient, and stern, adjusts his IV drip. Benjamin stands next to her.

GABRIELA

Let's start with your refresh. You do well here this week, and we won't need to go to the blue room.

Benjamin sticks electrodes to Marc's body, then clamps wires to them.

BENJAMIN

Bereit Marc? Gut. Start 389FHDF834D.

Gabriela places a loudspeaker by Marc's right ear.

GABRIELA

I will count down from ten to one.
I need you to go to state Ocean
Floor by the time I get to one.

Gabriela turns a dial. Marc arches in pain as the wires electrify.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Ten... deeper and deeper... nine...
eight... calmer and calmer...
seven...

Benjamin monitors Marc's progress. She nods.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Good boy. Six... five...
concentrate... the machine hurts
like the dickens, so just do it.
Four... three... two AND one.

Marc's breathing becomes deeper - until he is limp. Gabriela looks up at Benjamin, who nods. He places a virtual reality headset over Marc's eyes. He grabs a small remote and presses it.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Open your eyes but stay at Ocean
Floor. What do you see?

A close-up image of gruesome roadkill of a rabbit. Bizarre and loud distorted noises blare.

MARC

It's a sign.

GABRIELA

Good. From who?

Marc breathes heavily.

MARC

The Absolved. It'll be me if I
tell. That's what you'll do to me.

GABRIELA

Good. Every time you see a crushed
animal on the side of the road,
you'll know that we put it there.
For you. To remind you what will
happen if you tell.

MARC

I won't.

BENJAMIN

I don't believe you. I think you're just saying it.

Gabriela shocks Marc some more. He writhes.

MARC

I won't. Really. Nobody would believe me anyway.

BENJAMIN

That's exactly right. Do you feel this is a fair punishment?

MARC

Yes.

BENJAMIN

Again, I don't think so. Work harder, son. Unless you'd prefer the stretch machine? I need you to really, really believe.

MARC

I do! I swear.

BENJAMIN

Let's hear it then.

MARC

I wouldn't ever talk! Even if I thought about telling anyone, you'd find out.

BENJAMIN

Yes, we would. And don't forget, all this training will only make you stronger. Much stronger.

He releases the straps. Gabriela unwraps a red lollipop.

GABRIELA

Good boy, Marc. Let baby Ronen come out for being such a good boy. You earned it. I'm very proud of you.

Marc's expression changes, and he turns on his side, laying in a foetal position. He rocks slightly.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Such a good, good baby.

Gabriela hums and puts the lollipop in his mouth. She strokes his hair. He grasps one of her fingers with his hand. As he sucks, he moves his head back and forwards gently.

INT. POLICE STATION - HALLWAY - EVENING

James finds Becca leaning against the wall, texting.

JAMES

Mahm, why are you on Sophie's case?
She doesn't know owt.

BECCA

Well, my gut says that a part of
her does, Detective.

JAMES

Based on what, Mahm?

BECCA

I believe she switched to a younger
part of herself after you walked
in. Later, she didn't remember
asking for that coke. And the
peacock handbag makes me wonder.

(off James's look)

The "eyes." These people make the
kids feel like they're always being
watched.

JAMES

Watched how, Mahm?

BECCA

A kid from my last case was made to
swallow a fish's eye. The cult told
him afterward they would always see
where he was going and what he was
doing.

Becca's phone pings with another text.

JAMES

It sounds... right *methodical*,
like, Mahm.

BECCA

It is. They've manuals on
brainwashing and torture. If they
weren't careful, they could kill
kids accidentally. They're very
fond of almost killing them to get
the message across.

James looks disturbed. So does Becca when she looks at her phone.

JAMES
You allrite?

BECCA
I'm fine, ta.

Becca stares at him holds up her phone.

BECCA (CONT'D)
Some family stuff. When it rains it pours.

She's visibly upset.

JAMES
You need to go, Mahm? I can finish up here.

Becca pushes herself off the wall and smiles warmly.

BECCA
Thanks. I'll write up the report later. Do me one favour, though?

JAMES
Shoot.

BECCA
Schedule with Sophie's mum for a follow-up. Let her know they'll be meeting with Doctor Armaan.

Becca walks away.

JAMES
Doctor Armaan?

Becca is already gone.

INT. PRIVATE ESTATE - BARN - DAY

Chained to a post, Neil watches a Jack Russell Terrier chase chickens. Sad as he is, he can't resist the cute dog and whistles.

NEIL
Come here, doggie.

The dog wags her way over.

BENJAMIN (O.S.)
Do you like the dog?

Benjamin appears in the doorway. Neil watches him with trepidation.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
You want to stroke her, don't you?

Neil nods. Benjamin unchains his hands from the post.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
You can play with her for a while,
but you have to keep her quiet. And
you can't leave here, got that? Or
there will be consequences - worse
consequences than you're used to.

NEIL
I get it.

Neil pets the puppy as Benjamin leaves the barn.

NEIL (CONT'D)
Good girl.

In the shadows of the loft above, Marc watches, shaking his head.

Neil rolls her over and strokes her belly. He is startled to realise Marc has joined him.

MARC
You shouldn't play with the dog.

NEIL
Benjamin said I could, though!

MARC
You just shouldn't.

NEIL
You're a right tosser; you know
that, right?

Marc looks sorrowfully at Neil, leaves.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

DR. ARMAAN SOOT, 50, Indian Yogi, sympathetic, present, and intuitive, sits in a chair. The door opens. Becca ushers Sophie in. Dr. Armaan rises. Sophie immediately backs away, fearful.

BECCA
It's okay, Sophie. This is Dr.
Armaan Soot.

Sophie eyes Dr. Armaan, hesitant, then looks back to Becca.

BECCA (CONT'D)
He's a kind man and an excellent
psychologist. I'll be right outside
if you need me, okay?

DR. ARMAAN
Please, Sophie. Have a seat, and
I'll stay right where I am.

Dr. Armaan warmly gestures to a sofa. Wary, Sophie sits and
wrings her hands. Behind Sophie, a clock reads 12:12.

INT. PRIVATE ESTATE - BATHROOM - LATER THAT DAY

Neil winces, fearful as Benjamin bathes him with a sponge.
Nasty bruises and cuts are visible on Neil's torso.

Behind Neil's back, Benjamin pours rubbing alcohol onto the
sponge. Then he mashes the sponge onto one of Neil's cuts.

NEIL
Ow. Leave me alone, you fucking
perv.

BENJAMIN
Not until you stop crying.

Benjamin touches the sponge to the corner of Neil's eye,
making him jerk away, eyes streaming.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
You must like this, right?

NEIL
No.

BENJAMIN
Of course, you do, or you would
stop crying. Do you know how
tiresome it is for me to listen to
you whining like that?

MARC (O.S.)
I'll take over.

Marc appears in the doorway. Benjamin turns, curious.

BENJAMIN
Oh? Finally, willing to contribute?

MARC
It's my job.

Marc holds his hand out for the sponge, surprisingly firm.
Benjamin nods curtly and leaves the room.

MARC (CONT'D)
I know you must be scared.

Neil lowers his head, ashamed.

NEIL
Why am I here?

MARC
You don't have to understand it.
You just have to get through it.

NEIL
What?

MARC
We are governed here by One who is
all-powerful.

NEIL
You know how mental that sounds?

MARC
Listen, there's going to be a
ritual tonight. People will do
things to you. So will I.

NEIL
I don't want you to.

MARC
I am sorry. It will look like I'm
doing things to you, but it will
really be Robert. That's his job.

NEIL
Who's Robert?

MARC
One of us.

NEIL
But you're Marc?

Marc looks at himself in the mirror and sees Stephanie, a 64-year-old, kindly grandmother-type.

MARC/STEPHANIE

I'm Stephanie. I am a part of Marc, but he doesn't know it. I take care of the kids. But not Robert. Robert belongs completely to The Absolved. So whatever he does, he doesn't have a choice.

NEIL

How can he have no choice?

MARC/STEPHANIE

You have no choice. All you can choose is to stay as quiet as possible. Can you do that?

NEIL

Whatever. One time I hid for three hours in a trunk 'cause my dad was mad at me.

MARC/STEPHANIE

Being in a trunk didn't scare you?

NEIL

Nah, I took a nap. It scared my dad shitless 'cause I was gone so long.

MARC/STEPHANIE

When things get scary tonight, you could pretend like you're still in the trunk. Remember how good you are at being quiet. It will go much better for you if you're quiet.

Marc helps Neil up and gently wraps him in a towel.

NEIL

Why did you tell me not to play with the puppy?

MARC/STEPHANIE

Sometimes... sometimes they don't live long.

NEIL

My dog's nine.

MARC/STEPHANIE

Yes, but not here. Do you understand?

Neil wipes a tear, his fist clenched.

INT. POLICE STATION - OBSERVATION ROOM - LATER - DAY

A clock now reads 14:32. Underneath it, Chen, James, and Mrs. Maxwell look through a one-way mirror to the observation room, seeing Sophie and Dr. Armaan by a dollhouse.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Sophie sits with her eyes closed and takes slow breaths.

DR. ARMAAN

Now I want you to imagine a place
in your mind's eye. And I am not
sure if it will be a real place, or
somewhere you just made up... but
either way, you feel safe there.
And when you're able to imagine
that place, just nod your head
"yes."

A beat later, Sophie nods.

DR. ARMAAN (CONT'D)

Good. And it is up to you if you
want to share the safe place with
me or want to keep it private.

SOPHIE

I'm in the water, under a bridge,
in the shade. Just me.

INT. PRIVATE ESTATE - SHRINE ROOM - NIGHT

A room lit with candles. In the background, there is a statue of a man with wings. He has three eyes and a bull's head.

The adult cult members, led by Gabriela, are dressed in black robes.

On their heads, they wear nemes, head-cloths like Pharaohs, covering the crown and back of their heads, with two flaps hanging down in front of both shoulders. The flaps are striped in horizontal black and white, except for Gabriela's, which are black and gold.

GABRIELA

Lord God, Heavenly Father, bless
our worship today through the
mighty Moloch, our ruler.

They bow their heads in reverence. They gather around a horizontal altar, large enough for someone to lie on it.

Marc, also in a black robe, stops at the open door. Seeing them gathered around the altar, he can't breathe. He backs away. Gabriela looks up at him and frowns.

INT. PRIVATE ESTATE - BENJAMIN'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

Benjamin, naked, slips on a black embroidered robe, stands next to a mantle with symbols and peacock feathers.

A knock comes at the door. Marc enters.

MARC

I know what will break the boy.

BENJAMIN

Tonight's ritual will break him.

MARC

He has a terror of small spaces. I forced it out of him.

BENJAMIN

You're sure?

Marc swallows, nervous of the lie.

MARC

Yep. Especially if it's quiet.

BENJAMIN

That's the worst thing he can imagine?

MARC

He just about pissed his kegs, confessing it.

BENJAMIN

Well, then that's all we need. We don't need to get more elaborate just yet.

Benjamin takes a bottle of oil and traces an inverted cross on his forehead and chest.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Have Claudia take his place on the altar tonight. She's been a little too cheery lately. Tell the others I'll be a few minutes late.

(MORE)

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I shall be giving young Neil a gift. His worst nightmare. In a box. A gift to make him strong.

INT. POLICE STATION - SURVEILLANCE ROOM - DAY

Becca and Chen are re-watching the CCTV videos from The Downs.

ON THE FIRST SCREEN - A girl scores a football goal.

BECCA

I've asked around the whole bloody football team, and nothing.

James enters with several take-out coffees and snacks.

ON THE SECOND - Kiara looks around in distress.

CHEN

Mahm, right here, Kiara starts to look for him.

ON THE THIRD - The Bristol City Council van pulls away.

Becca scrolls through more videos. The Council van stops as Kiara runs into its path. Another shot shows it continuing out of the park in the background.

BECCA

There has to be something we've missed.

James notices someone walk through the park in the background, backs up the footage, and hones in on it.

JAMES

Who does that looks like, comin' back into t'park, Mahm? In t'trees...

He points. Becca looks at the image closer and closer.

BECCA

Shit.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Becca enters with a laptop.

BECCA

Is it okay if I come in and show
you both something?

Armaan wisely looks to Sophie, who smiles and nods.

BECCA (CONT'D)

Soph, there's something we need you
to help us understand if you would?

DR. ARMAAN

But before we watch that, let me
ask you this, Sophie, do you have
many memories of when you were a
small child?

SOPHIE

Not really. Only one or two.

DR. ARMAAN

I see. The brain is amazing. When
babies or toddlers experience
extreme trauma, their brain helps
them by creating parts. This way,
the excruciating memories are split
between the parts, so it's more
manageable. Plus, the parts that
don't hold the memories can go on
functioning. Great defense.

BECCA

Unfortunately, some criminal groups
have figured out how to create
these parts intentionally. And also
how to force some of the parts to
work for them.

DR. ARMAAN

Sometimes, these parts do things
that the core personality would
never do, but it's not their fault.

Becca opens the laptop and presses "play".

ON THE LAPTOP:

Sophie is walking into the park. She beckons to Neil, who follows her. Sophie frowns, confused.

BECCA

Now, remember you told us you weren't in the park Tuesday?

SOPHIE

That's not me.

Becca shows her photo enlargements of her in the park.

SOPHIE (CONT'D)

Okay, it looks like me. But it must be from a different day.

DR. ARMAAN

No, if you look at the date-stamp, it says April 7th, the day before yesterday. But I think I know why you cannot remember.

SOPHIE

I wasn't there.

DR. ARMAAN

I believe you. Remember what we just said about the brain creating parts? I think you might have a condition called Dissociative Identity Disorder, or D-I-D for short.

Sophie scowls, not believing him.

DR. ARMAAN (CONT'D)

I believe there is a part of you who was in the park. But you - Sophie - as you sit here now, may not recall you were there.

SOPHIE

No, no... I don't have that.

DR. ARMAAN

Do you sometimes find yourself in a place but don't remember how you got there?

Sophie shakes her head, leans forward, and nervously pulls her knees up to her chest.

SOPHIE

Can I go home now?

DR. ARMAAN

In a short while. Please take a minute and close your eyes... put yourself in your safe place... I want to talk to the part of you who saw what happened in the park.

Sophie closes her eyes and breathes slowly but doesn't speak.

DR. ARMAAN (CONT'D)

Would you come out, please?

Sophie rocks in her chair then looks into the two-way mirror.

INT. POLICE STATION - OBSERVATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Mrs. Maxwell sees Sophie staring into the two-way mirror.

MRS. MAXWELL

She knows we're watching.

JAMES

I don't think so.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS - DAY

Sophie still looks into the mirror, rocking. Her reflection suddenly transforms into LEO, 27, Korean, muscular, confident, in a suit, with a husky voice.

SOPHIE/LEO

Leave her alone. She doesn't know.

DR. ARMAAN

Who am I speaking to?

SOPHIE/LEO

Leo.

DR. ARMAAN

And what is your role, Leo?

SOPHIE/LEO

I protect Sophie and the others. If you care about what happens to her, you'll sod off.

Sophie's eyelids flutter. In a second - Leo is gone, and Sophie is back.

SOPHIE

May I go to the bathroom?

DR. ARMAAN

Of course.

Sophie gets up and leaves. James enters. Behind him, Mrs. Maxwell pushes past and bursts in, visibly shaken.

MRS. MAXWELL

What have you done to my daughter?.
She's acting so... mental.

DR. ARMAAN

She's not crazy, but she does need treatment. She's developed parts within herself as a defence mechanism. And that's a good thing.

MRS. MAXWELL

You don't really think she has... multiple personalities?

DR. ARMAAN

Oh, I'm quite sure she has. But honestly, that's not the alarming part. That's highly treatable.

Mrs. Maxwell, stunned, pulls a tissue from her handbag to wipe her tears. James directs her to a chair.

MRS. MAXWELL

But... why would she have that?

DR. ARMAAN

It's complicated. We have to look into it more, but typically it's considered a reaction to trauma.

MRS. MAXWELL

She hasn't had any trauma and she never mentioned parts.

DR. ARMAAN

Yes, well, the Sophie you interact with may not be aware of them. That's part of the defence, actually.

MRS. MAXWELL

I don't know. This just doesn't ring true to me. I want to take her home now.

DR. ARMAAN

Of course, I understand. It's a lot to take in.

Mrs. Maxwell rises stiffly and leaves.

JAMES

So, you think someone's been
abusing Sophie?

BECCA

Yes, and we need to find out who.
Whoever's hurting Sophie could be
the one behind Neil's
disappearance.

DR. ARMAAN

Hopefully we can persuade the
alters to speak up.

JAMES

Assumin' 'er mum still allows us
access to 'er.

DR. ARMAAN

I'll speak to Mrs. Maxwell
tomorrow. She'll need some time to
process all this.

BECCA

We're a little short on that,
Doctor.

James sees Sophie left her handbag and her phone.

JAMES

This might 'elp - keep 'em talkin'
while I 'ook it to the kiosk,
willya?

BECCA

Are you for real?

JAMES

No one needs to know. It won't take
five minutes to extract the data,
and I'll drop it right back in 'er
'andbag. Do you want this or not?

Becca frowns as James takes Sophie's phone and hurries out.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - NIGHT

The dark woods surround the brooding structure.

INT. THE COMPOUND - WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

A wooden trunk is in the center of the room. Silence. And then the trunk shakes from within.

Lin climbs in through a tiny window with a flashlight, looks around, and goes to the trunk.

She lifts the lid off to find Neil curled up inside, tied with a rope, completely still.

LIN

Good job. You're not cryin'.

Neil doesn't move. He's beyond crying. A huge spider is about to crawl onto his face. Lin, unafraid, puts her hand out for it to crawl on, then places it back in the trunk.

LIN (CONT'D)

I can let you out for a bit if you promise to stay quiet.

He nods. Lin unties him. Neil frantically brushes down his clothing, afraid of more spiders. Rubs his sore wrists.

LIN (CONT'D)

Did you get anythin' to eat?

Neil shakes his head. Lin takes half a sandwich from her pocket and offers it to him. Neil eats ravenously.

Lights flash in the hallway and shine underneath the door. The two are frozen in terror when someone stops in front of the closed door. A beat later, the footsteps continue.

LIN (CONT'D)

Did they hurt you?

Neil flinches and nods. Humiliated. Lin hugs Neil and hands him a red Smartie.

LIN (CONT'D)

The red ones help the ouchies stop hurtin'. They're magic.

Neil takes the Smartie, examines it.

NEIL

You're winding me up. It's a *Smartie*.

He shrugs and eats it. Lin's expression turns serious.

LIN
You can't let them know I did that.

Lin makes her way to the window.

NEIL
I won't tell them. Promise.

Neil watches Lin climb out the window.

Terrified, alone again, Neil sticks his head out and looks up to see Lin climbing the rusted fire escape up to the next floor up. He looks down. Below him, the fire escape is broken, with a fifteen-foot drop to the bottom.

CHILDREN (V.O.)
You don't run away, and you never
ever tell.

INT/EXT. THE COMPOUND - WHITE ROOM - NIGHT

Neil thinks a beat, starts to climb out, then stops. He goes back into the room.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - FIRE ESCAPE - NIGHT

Neil emerges headfirst out the window, carrying a sheet. Slowly and cautiously, he creeps down the fire escape. On the bottom rung of the fire escape, Neil ties the sheet in place. He looks down at the drop.

Sweating, terrified, he steels himself, clings to the swaying sheet. Slowly, he clambers to the bottom, still six feet above the lawn.

SOPHIE (V.O.)
Bein' brave doesn't mean you're
never scared.

Neil closes his eyes. Let's go.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - GARDENS - NIGHT

Tumbling onto the lawn, Neil stares up for a moment at the building where he was held captive.

He tiptoes into the barn and lets the dog out. She barks, excited to see him. Neil, alarmed, tries to quiet her.

NEIL
Ssh! Shh!

Neil picks her up and runs like hell into the dark night.

EXT. THE DOWNS - WOODLAND - NIGHT

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS in orange vests, some on horseback, search through the thick trees.

James and Becca push through them to meet Thompson at a well-stocked food table, where Kiara and her boyfriend CRAIG BERNARD, straight-laced, 30, talk to volunteers. Kiara sees Becca and instantly perks up.

KIARA

Tell me you have news?

BECCA

I'm sorry. Not yet.

KIARA

I feel useless here. Maybe there's somewhere else I could help better?

BECCA

Kiara, when they see you here, it makes the search very real.

Kiara hugs Becca. Becca holds on as long as Kiara needs to.

James stops munching on a doughnut and watches them, then his face goes blank.

JAMES'S FLASHBACK

A YOUNG JAMES hugs his FOSTER MOTHER, 29, with both arms clinched around her neck.

Strong arms pull him away from her.

YOUNG JAMES

Noooooo, I don't want to go.

James's mother has the saddest smile but says nothing.

END FLASHBACK

James snaps out of his memory as flashbulbs pop around Kiara and Becca.

JAMES

Oi! This is a crime scene! W'didn't invite no paparazzi!

He leads them away from the site.

Becca notices Sergeant Thompson, who bends over the map with Chen and another officer, P.C. D'ALBORA.

BECCA
(to Kiara)
Excuse me.

She points to Thompson and beelines that way.

THOMPSON
And the river?

OFFICER
Draggin' it as we speak.

Thompson, still bent over, looks up at Becca.

THOMPSON
P.C. D'Albora, this is um...

BECCA
Lead Investigating Officer Trahern.
Sergeant Thompson, I'm still
waiting on the forensics report
from the van?

THOMPSON
Right. Drop by the station.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Neil, scratched, bleeding, and exhausted, sits huddled against a tree and hugs the dog. Tear tracks streak down his dirty face like warpaint. His teeth chatter in the cold.

The lights of a car approach on a nearby road.

NEIL
Oi, wait! I'm here! Wait!

Neil plunges into the brush running blindly to the light. He just misses the car as it passes along a dirt road.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

INT. NCA - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Becca walks in to find James.

BECCA

The lab got a return on the syringe
in the van. Lorazepam.

JAMES

One of only three mass-market drugs
unlikely to kill. Which leads me to
'ope 'e's alive. DNA?

BECCA

When it comes, I'll bet you any
money it has Neil's tracers.

James nods.

JAMES

In the meantime, I found a deleted
email from Sophie's phone from a
user, MaxPXD. Sent encrypted via a
proxy server. I cross-referenced
the email address with a profile on
the dark web -

BECCA

Fucking, FiveRockSpiders.com?

JAMES

I 'ate that site.

James holds out a thumb drive. Becca anxiously eyes him.

BECCA

What is it?

Becca goes to reach for it, but James pulls it back.

JAMES

Let's just say... it's not for
anyone with a weak stomach.

James extends it out again, and Becca accepts it, tentatively
inserting it into the computer.

James and Becca watch; the sounds and flashing imagery begin
breaking Becca's resolve.

When it concludes, a visibly shaken Becca jerks the thumb drive out and walks out of the room.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Becca?

James runs after her.

EXT. POND - NEAR THE BARN - DAY

Gabriela holds John under the water. He struggles but can't stand up or get away.

BENJAMIN

Okay, take him out.

A group of adults and children stand on the edge of the pond. Two of the children are soaked, all look scared.

Gabriela releases John, who staggers and collapses on the bank. Sam lifts him by the feet, Benjamin slaps him, and he starts to come around.

He sputters, gasps for breath, gags, and throws up some water.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Who let Neil out?

Benjamin looks at the group of terrified faces.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Okay. We'll just go one by one.
You're up.

Benjamin points at SUN LEUNG, 3, Lin's sister. Gabriela beckons Sun into the pond. Sun steps forward, terrified but unquestioning.

LIN

(screaming)

Okay, I did it. I did it!

Benjamin wags a finger at Lin.

BENJAMIN

We don't believe you.

Gabriela pushes Sun under the water. A tear rolls down Lin's face.

LIN

I did it, okay?! It was me! I didn't think he would escape. It was just gonna be a break.

Sun is let out of the water.

GABRIELA

Okay, Kinder, what are the rules?

They recite the rules.

GABRIELA & CHILDREN

You don't cry, you don't throw up,
you don't say no, you don't run
away, and you never ever tell.

BENJAMIN

Lin is going to the Blue Room to
remind her to be more obedient.

The children encircle Lin, the adults flanking them. They walk back to the house; Lin is stoically silent.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Sophie and Dr. Armaan sit at the table. Sophie sees herself as Leo in the mirrored glass.

SOPHIE/LEO

Doc, I'm disappointed in you.
Sophie thinks you're a clever
bloke. You should know we can't
talk.

DR. ARMAAN

I know that's what they told you,
but with whose interest at heart?
What if I take you to a safe house?

SOPHIE/LEO

They'll find out. They're
everywhere. We've seen them here.

DR. ARMAAN

Here? Tell me who you've seen here
who you know is from the group?

SOPHIE/LEO

I can't say, and I can't tell you
where Neil is, or Lisa will come
out. Watch. He's being held...

Leo's eyes flutter, and he transforms into Lisa.

SOPHIE/LISA

Please don't make me tell. I am not allowed. I can't. I can't. I'll do whatever you want...

She runs her hands along Dr. Armaan's legs. He pushes her hands aside, quickly stands, and moves away.

DR. ARMAAN

No, no. It's okay, Lisa. You don't have to. May I talk to Leo again, please?

Reflected in the glass, Lisa turns and switches into Leo.

SOPHIE/LEO

I can only tell you two words. "The Absolved."

DR. ARMAAN

What does that mean? You're the protector, right, Leo?

SOPHIE/LEO

You bet I am.

DR. ARMAAN

Do you protect all children?

Leo nods.

DR. ARMAAN (CONT'D)

What are you doing to protect Neil?

SOPHIE/LEO

What are you doing to protect Sophie? Don't you get it? They control her from within. If they can't reach her, she's trained to punish herself if she tells. Right, Lisa?

Leo switches to Lisa, who wheels over to the wall and starts to bang her head.

INT. POLICE STATION - OBSERVATION ROOM - SAME TIME

James, Becca, and Mrs. Maxwell watch Sophie bang her head on the wall.

Armaan rips off his jacket and tries to slip it between her head and the wall. Mrs. Maxwell jumps up.

MRS. MAXWELL

Stop her! We need to end this right now!

She heads for the door, but Becca grabs her arm and stops her. Mrs. Maxwell glares daggers and tugs away from Becca.

MRS. MAXWELL (CONT'D)

Let go of me! I'm taking Sophie home and getting a solicitor.

Mrs. Maxwell grabs her phone and hits her contacts list.

BECCA

Mrs. Maxwell, we have evidence that Sophie has been abused by a cult.

MRS. MAXWELL

That's proper tosh!

Becca pulls the flash drive out and heads to the computer.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN -

Four-year-old Sophie is surrounded by several nearly NAKED MEN, including OLIVER MAXWELL, 35, white, English, a tall, fair-skinned man with a soothing voice. The men all wear masks. A large peacock painting hangs on the wall.

OLIVER (V.O.)

Show us what a good girl does.

Mrs. Maxwell watches with concern. She turns and looks at the screen in abject horror.

Becca looks at her and not the video.

SOPHIE (V.O.)

Okay, Daddy.

Mrs. Maxwell's face crumples in tears. James turns off the video. Becca goes to touch her arm, but she slaps her away, sobbing. Becca kneels next to her chair.

BECCA

I'm sorry you had to watch that.

MRS. MAXWELL

It can't be. It just can't be.

BECCA

I'm sorry. I take it you knew
nothing of this?

MRS. MAXWELL

No. God, no. That fucking bastard!

JAMES

Forgive me, but I 'ave to ask you,
would you be willin' to take a
polygraph?

Mrs. Maxwell nods, wipes her eyes with her sleeve, attempts
to compose herself.

MRS. MAXWELL

Whatever you need.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

James walks to the window, watches Sophie fighting Dr. Armaan
as she tries to hit her head on the wall again.

EXT. LONELY ROAD - NIGHT

Neil walks along a deserted dirt roadway with the dog
trotting ahead.

A car comes around the curve, and headlights illuminate him.

It pulls to a stop. Neil runs to the driver's door.

NEIL

I... I need you to call the police
and my mum.

DRIVER

It's okay. I'll get you home. Hop
in.

The DRIVER opens the door and eases himself out. He towers
over Neil, who begins to back away. The dog emits a low
growl.

Neil looks toward the passenger seat and sees ANOTHER MAN
turned slightly toward him. Neil's eyes widen, terrified.

The dog barks, guarding Neil. Neil stumbles backward into the
woods near the dirt road.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Hey, poppet... don't be scared...

Neil gets his bearings, turns, and darts away into the trees, the dog running at his feet.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Hey, son. Son?
(under his breath)
Bloody Hell.

He races after Neil, tripping, stumbling...

EXT. WOODS - SAME TIME

Neil dodges behind a boulder and sinks into the grass.

He hears the footsteps of the driver run past him, getting further and further away.

Neil lets out a relieved breath.

As things settle and everything becomes silent, Neil quietly weeps, the weight and terror of this all weighing further on him. He hugs the dog.

A twig cracks behind him. Neil whips around.

What he sees makes him scream out loud.

END OF PILOT

CAPTION CARD:

Ritual abuse has been disclosed by survivors from:

Every country in the UK

Every state in the USA

Every province in Canada

And over 30 other countries worldwide.

If you or someone you know has been affected, contact
<https://survivorship.org> or your local rape crisis center.

FADE OUT.