

The Tradition
an original screenplay by
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FADE IN:

EXT. WAREHOUSE - SALFORD - DAY (FLASHBACK - SHARP, TRAUMATIC FRAGMENTS)

SOUND of high-pitched, unnatural SCREECH of stressed metal.

Grimy light spears through dusty windows. Stained concrete floor. Scattered porcelain toilets.

TIMOTHY (39, work gear), focus absolute, stares at blueprints on a crate.

Nearby, JOHN PORTER (late 50s), sharp suit jarringly out of place, paces by a high window, mobile clamped to ear. Expression thunderous.

JOHN
(Into phone, clipped)
Non-negotiable, Davies! The boundary runs along the canal path! Check the damn ordnance survey again!... No, you listen... My new distribution hub needs that access!

John gestures emphatically, back half-turned to the window.

Outside, across a rubbish-strewn alley: a DERELICT VICTORIAN FACTORY. Broken windows like empty eyes. Grime cakes the brickwork.

SOUND of a rising, sharp WHISTLE - piercing, unnatural, cutting the city hum.

Timothy glances up, brow furrowed. Unease flickers. He looks towards John.

He sees IT.

A dark object hurtles from a high window of the derelict factory. IMPOSSIBLE VELOCITY. Terrifyingly flat trajectory, trailing faint dust. Malevolent.

TIMOTHY
(Shout, fractionally too late)
JOHN! LOOK OUT!

SMASH! The unknown object OBLITERATES the reinforced window beside John.

SOUND: a sickening WET CRACK fused with high-frequency SHATTER. Vibrates deep. Echoes.

Glass shards, wire fragments spray. The object strikes his temple squarely.

John's eyes flare wide. Mouth opens, no sound. Collapses like a puppet. His expensive phone skitters across the concrete.

Silence. Settling dust. The distant city drone filters back. Faint TINKLE of falling glass. The air feels cold.

WHISPERING VOICE (O.S.)

(Faint)

You can't escape.

Timothy stares, frozen in disbelief. His gaze snaps to the factory window - dark, empty, impassive. Impossible.

Metallic taste of adrenaline. He scrambles towards John's body, drops to his knees.

SOUND of shatter lingers, morphs into opening chords of a heavy CHURCH ORGAN HYMN...

(TRANSITION TO PRESENT DAY - SEAMLESSLY OVERLAP SOUND)

INT. CHURCH - SALFORD - DAY (PRESENT)

Rain lashes stained glass. Hymn swells, voices strained. Air heavy - stone, beeswax, damp wool.

TIMOTHY stands rigid beside REBECCA (36), pale in dark attire. The warehouse horror replays. Vivid. Inescapable. He feels jumpy.

Beside him, REBECCA sits with nervous energy. Eyes dart. Clutches a small handbag.

VICAR (O.S.)

(Solemn, Booming voice)

It is with great sorrow that we are
all gathered here today, to mourn
the loss of John Porter, beloved
businessman of Salford, a family
man, and friend to all. A life...
taken too soon... in the most
bewildering circumstances.

John's wife, GLORIA (late 50s), sits front pew, grieving quietly, dabbing eyes with a tissue.

Rebecca leans slightly towards Timothy.

REBECCA

(Sarcasm)

Do you think that is two ply or three?

Timothy flinches slightly. Jaw muscle twitches. Eyes fixed forward, fighting tears.

TIMOTHY
(Fighting the tears)
Knowing John probably two.

He reaches for his own crumpled tissue. Hand trembles slightly.

REBECCA
Are you ok babe?

TIMOTHY
(Wiping away tears)
Yeah its still all a bit raw. Seeing everyone. Standing right there... when it happened. Just... that sound. The way it... flew.

REBECCA
(Playful)
Are you using two ply too?

TIMOTHY
(Chuckles quietly)
Stop it. Not helping.

VICAR
Please can you now turn your hymn books to page 54. 'The Lord's My Shepherd'. I have been told this was one of John's favourites so please don't hesitate to sing at the top of your voices.

Congregation stands, rustling hymn books.

As a GENTLEMAN exits, he brushes gently past Rebecca's open handbag. A FLASH. Swiftly, precisely, a folded LEAFLET appears inside.

Rebecca picks up her hymn book, feeling the paper.

REBECCA
I think this hymn book is three ply.
Do you want some?

Timothy shakes his head, faint, weary smile. Organ CHIMES. Hymn starts. He feels eyes on him—scans the sparse congregation. Downcast faces, hymn books.

EXT. CHURCH - SALFORD - DAY

SOUND of mournful HYMN drifts out.

Grey drizzle. Lychgate, slick gravestones. Mourners exit slowly. Offer hushed condolences to GLORIA beside the VICAR.

Timothy and Rebecca are in line.

TIMOTHY

(Nervous)

I haven't spoke to Gloria since the day it all happened.

REBECCA

(Reassuring)

Tim. Listen to me. The police said a man threw a electric toothbrush through a window of a building you just happened to be in. You couldn't have done anything about it. Freak accident.

TIMOTHY

Why a toothbrush? Is it some kind of symbolism? That it happened to a bathroom tycoon?

REBECCA

It's not exactly a horse's head in the bed. Maybe just... they picked up what was to hand.

TIMOTHY

I know, But what if he had an enemy in the business? A rival?

REBECCA

The police said they have followed all lines of inquiry and have come up with nothing. It's a big city. Randomly horrible sometimes.

They approach GLORIA. Timothy takes deep, shaky breath. Her red-rimmed eyes meet his.

GLORIA

(Solemn, voice
trembling slightly)

Hello Timothy. Rebecca. Thank you for coming.

TIMOTHY

(Apologetic)

Gloria... I am so, so sorry. About what happened. Being there... seeing it...

GLORIA
(Hand briefly touches
his arm, deep sorrow)
It's ok. Nobody understands it. Life...
snatched away. Cruelly. Meaningless.
Cherish what you have. Keep your
family safe.

She turns to the next mourner. Timothy and Rebecca murmur
condolences, walk away.

Timothy stops abruptly on the pavement. Expression tight.

TIMOTHY
(Sudden, urgent)
Becks. I Can't do this.

Rebecca, taken aback, sees his pain. Nods slowly.

REBECCA
(Quietly, searching
his face)
What do you mean?

Relief floods Timothy's face. Pulls her into a tight hug.

TIMOTHY
(Muffled)
I need a fresh start. Away from...
this... I want to leave. I mean move.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - SALFORD - LATER THAT DAY

Quiet house. Packing started. LIZZIE (2 months old) gurgles.

REBECCA
(Relieved to be home)
Make us a cuppa please Tim? Strong
one.

Walks to side table, puts handbag down. Glances in. Sees a
leaflet.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
(Confused frown)
What the...? Where did this come
from?

She pulls out the leaflet. John Porter's face. Salford
Bathroom Company logo. She Unfolds it. Unsettlingly neat
script. Three words.

"YOU CAN'T ESCAPE."

REBECCA (CONT'D)
(Quiet, disturbed)
Tim...! Call the police.

Holds out leaflet as Timothy enters with mugs. Timothy looks. Eyes widen. Disbelief, alarm. Expected?

MONTAGE - FAST FORWARD - WEEKS LATER

A) TIMOTHY AND REBECCA pack boxes frantically, taping them shut. Timothy perpetually anxious, checking windows.

B) THEY SAY hurried, awkward goodbyes to confused colleagues/friends.

D) TIMOTHY checks locks multiple times before bed.

E) LOADING their blue SUV. Cramming every inch. A final, anxious look at their Salford house.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - SALFORD - DAY (A FEW WEEKS LATER)

Bright, sunny. Tension.

REBECCA carries baby bag. Closes door. Gets into blue SUV. TIMOTHY silent, knuckles white on the wheel, engine humming.

REBECCA
Ready, then?

Timothy doesn't answer. Looks in rearview mirror, at house.

TIMOTHY
(Quietly, heavy)
Just... feels mad, doesn't it?

Packing everything up, just like that.

REBECCA
(Reassuring, but
flicker of
apprehension)
We talked about this. After
everything. Fresh start. Miles away.
For us. For Lizzie.

He nods, hesitant. Backs car out. Leaving Salford feels heavy.

EXT. ROAD LEAVING SALFORD - DAY

The blue SUV rolls along the road.

It passes a weathered sign: "You Are Now Leaving Salford." A silent farewell. A threshold crossed.

INT. CAR - MOTORWAY - DAY

LIZZIE gurgles. TIMOTHY drives slightly below limit, eyes flicking to mirrors.

REBECCA

(Sarcasm)

It would have been quicker getting the bus.

TIMOTHY

(Tense)

I'm doing the speed limit. Driving carefully.

REBECCA

You know its seventy miles per hour right?

TIMOTHY

(Sharp breath)

I know how fast seventy is, Becks.

Pass under bridge. TIMOTHY glances up—thinks he sees FIGURE. Blinks hard, checks mirror. Nothing. Paranoia. Heart pounds.

Car passes sign: "FUDGEWICK" junction, partially obscured.

REBECCA

This is it. Our junction. Pull over.

TIMOTHY signals stiffly.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Trees press closer. Light dims. Air stiller.

REBECCA

(Window down)

Ah, proper country air. See? Told you it would be good.

TIMOTHY

(Still tense, low)

I just wish... knew how that leaflet got in your bag.

REBECCA

The police said it was probably just some weirdo at the church. Don't start, Tim. Not now.

TIMOTHY
(Small, hesitant smile)
I'm sure you are right.

SUV rounds bend, enters Fudgewick.

INT. CAR - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Charm undeniable--thatched roofs, ancient stone. Gardens explode, impossibly lush, uniform.

TIMOTHY
(Awe-struck)
Wow. Okay. It's... like something
from a postcard. Properly chocolate
box.

REBECCA
(Awe-struck too, eyes
darting)
Told you.

Drive slowly. Immaculate, utterly deserted. Village green empty. Bandstand silent.

Turn past children's play park. Empty. Swings sway slowly, no breeze. Single, deflated GREEN BALLOON tangled in frame.

TIMOTHY
(Confused, unease
returns)
Where are all the families? The
children? It's sunny. Deserted.

REBECCA
(Excited, pointing)
Maybe school time? Nap time? Here!
Look. It's our house! Number 17!

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

SUV pulls onto gravel driveway. Charming cottage. TIMOTHY exits, nervously gets LIZZIE. REBECCA stands, awe battling unease.

REBECCA
(Awe)
Oh, Tim. Wow. It looks even better
in person. Don't you think?

TIMOTHY
(Struggling with seat,
tight voice)
Yeah. Great. Babe. A hand please?

Passes Lizzie carefully. Opens boot, fumbles pram.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
(Uneasy, whispering)
It's all... very quiet. Too quiet.

REBECCA
(Adjusting Lizzie)
Isn't... isn't that what we wanted?
Peace and quiet?

TIMOTHY
(Fumbling harder)
Yes, of course. Quiet is good. Just...
this is deathly quiet. Eerie.

Glances toward neighbouring cottage (red door). Curtains twitch, snap shut.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
(Jumpy, whispering)
We're being watched! Just now! Next
door!

REBECCA
(Looking around)
What? Where? By who? The petunias?

TIMOTHY
Sh! The neighbours! Saw them!

REBECCA
(Sighs dramatically,
strides toward
neighbours')
Bloody hell Tim!

TIMOTHY
(Panicked whisper)
Wait! What are you doing?! Becks!

REBECCA
(Halfway there)
We are going to introduce ourselves!
Come on.

Timothy trudges behind. Rebecca reaches red door, knocks firmly. Waits. Knocks harder. Pushes letterbox open, peering.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
(Not shy)
Hello? We're your new neighbours!
Just wanted to pop over and say hello!
We saw you peeping!

TIMOTHY

(Hesitant, mortified)

They obviously don't want to be disturbed, Becks. Let's just leave it.

VOICE 1 (O.S.)

(Nervous, thin, elderly female, muffled)

Hello. I... I can't answer the door right now.

REBECCA

Why not? Is everything alright?

VOICE 1 (O.S.)

(cracked, broken voice, forced)

Because... because... I'm... naked.

Timothy's jaw drops.

TIMOTHY

(Muttering)

Oh for God's sake... I told you we should...

REBECCA

(Leaning closer)

Sh! Naked? Can't you just... put some clothes on? Just for a second?

VOICE 1 (O.S.)

(Hesitant whisper)

Er... it's the... the tradition... when new people arrive... we have to... stay inside. It's complicated. You'll find out more in your welcome packs. Just... welcome to Fudgewick. I have to go.

Voice ceases. Rebecca pulls back, baffled.

TIMOTHY

(Unsettled)

Welcome packs? Tradition? What is this place?

REBECCA

(Quietly to Timothy, forcing smile)

Eccentric. Definitely eccentric. But these places always have their quirks.

Timothy follows slowly, deeply unsettled. Finishes pram assembly. Rebecca uses key from under flowerpot. As door opens, a DARK FIGURE blurs past on the road. Timothy glimpses it. Unease deepens.

INT. HALLWAY - CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Door swings open. Cool, silent hallway. Lavender and old wood smell. REBECCA enters first, forces smile. TIMOTHY follows, pushing pram, eyes scanning.

REBECCA
(Trying amazement)
O.M.G. See? Lovely! Potential!

TIMOTHY
(Tense)
Yeah, lovely. Where is this welcome pack?

REBECCA
I'm going to look at the bedrooms!
Choose ours! Can you get Lizzie and the baby bag?

Timothy stands alone, silence pressing. Walks toward living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

TIMOTHY enters, holding Lizzie. Pleasant room—fireplace, sofas, bay window—eerily quiet.

On coffee table, perfectly centered: single, plain envelope. Dark green paper, matching leaflet.

TIMOTHY approaches cautiously. Picks it up. Opens it.

Inside: Letter, formally folded— "Welcome Crawfords."

REBECCA walks in, bouncing.

REBECCA
(Forthright)
Hey! Right, got rooms sorted! Lizzie gets back. We get front. Find the welcome pack? Need to unpack.

TIMOTHY
(Holding up envelope)
This. Just this. A letter.

REBECCA
(snatches envelope,
playfully)
It seems harmless. Welcoming actually.

TIMOTHY
This isn't funny Becks.

REBECCA
Okay. Lets go for a walk. It might
help your anxiety.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Walking down main road. LIZZIE in pram, pushed by TIMOTHY
REBECCA tries casualness.

REBECCA
(Trying content)
A whole village to ourselves! It
feels like we are Lord and Lady
Crawford! How do you do?

TIMOTHY
(Looking around
nervously)
It feels like... Sleepy Hollow.

REBECCA
(Sarcastically)
How do you do Lady Elizabeth, I'm
fine Lord Crawford, thank you for
asking. Didn't the headless horseman
give you nightmares?

TIMOTHY
(Pointing at map,
then ahead)
Yes. Look. Shop. Maybe someone's in
there?

REBECCA
(Hopeful)
Great. Need nappies. Come on.

They quicken pace towards shop.

INT. SHOP - FUDGEWICK - DAY

BELL JINGLES. TIMOTHY peeks in cautiously.

Perfectly stocked, silent shop. MANNEQUINS near entrance,
simple clothes, frozen friendly poses, fixed smiles.

TIMOTHY
 (Whispering, slightly
 unnerved)
 Hello...? Anybody there...?

REBECCA walks past, scanning shelves. TIMOTHY surveys shop.
 Silence. Approaches counter. Looks behind. Small wooden
 "Honesty Jar", scattered coins and notes.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
 (To himself, unnerved)
 Honesty jar...? Empty shop...? This
 doesn't make any sense.

REBECCA
 (Creeping up behind,
 nappies and milk)
 What doesn't?

TIMOTHY
 (Startled)
 Jesus Christ Becks.

REBECCA
 An honesty jar. How cute. Tenner
 should cover it.

Places items on counter. TIMOTHY feels watched. Glances at
 mannequins. Did one move? No. Unsettling. Places tenner in
 jar. Note rustles loudly.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
 (Excited)
 Tim!

TIMOTHY
 (Startled)
 What?

REBECCA
 There is only a bloody pub across
 the road!

INT. PUB - FUDGEWICK - DAY

BELL JINGLES. Classic village pub—low beams, fireplace, well-
 stocked bar. Utterly deserted. Stale hops, furniture polish
 smell.

REBECCA
 (Excited, voice echoing)
 A pub all to ourselves! Always wanted
 to pull my own pint! Dibs on the
 snug!

TIMOTHY
(Uneasy, pushing pram)
This doesn't feel right, Becks.

REBECCA spots blackboard sign: "Help Yourselves - Sorry for the Inconvenience!"

REBECCA
(Disbelief, quiet)
No. It can't be.

TIMOTHY
What?

REBECCA
(Top of her voice,
shocked, giddy)
Free bar! Tim! It's a bloody free
bar!

INT. PUB - FUDGEWICK - DAY (LATER)

REBECCA, slightly flushed, pours herself a second pint. A G&T sits beside it.

They're tucked away in the snug.

TIMOTHY nurses his first G&T cautiously.

LIZZIE bats at a toy, oblivious to the unease lingering between them.

INT. PUB - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT

Hours passed. Empty glasses litter table—mostly REBECCA'S. Topsy, relaxed. TIMOTHY tense, watching windows, pram close. LIZZIE bats at toy.

REBECCA
(Slightly slurring)
Gonna finish that, Slowcoach? Waste
of free booze!

TIMOTHY
(Concerned)
One of us has to stay alert.

REBECCA
(Laughs, dismissive)
Nine months pregnant remember? You
Owe me this one.

TIMOTHY

(Small, weary smile)

Fair point. Still... Isn't this all
a tad more than eccentric, Becks?
Alone in village, leaflet, naked
neighbours, free booze... feels...
curated.

Planned. Like... a trap.

REBECCA

(Hiccups, dismissive
wave)

Don't be daft. It's Just
Unconventional! Stop being jumpy!
Have another G&T!

DARK FIGURE WHISKS past window-blur of black, unnatural speed.
TIMOTHY sees it. Stiffens, blood cold. Real? Shadows? Beer?

TIMOTHY

(Unnerved, whisper)

Did you see that? Outside. Something
moved. Fast.

REBECCA

(Looking at window)

See what? Honestly, Tim, you're
letting this place get to you.

TIMOTHY

(Standing abruptly)

Can we go now? Please.

REBECCA

(Sighing)

Why? I'm having fun.

TIMOTHY

Because... I want to sleep and wake
up not needing psychiatric help. Or
facing whatever that was. Please,
Becks.

REBECCA

(Sobering slightly,
seeing his fear)

God. Okay. I didn't realise it had
got that bad. Let's get Lizzie home.

TIMOTHY nods, relieved, pushes pram toward exit, glancing
nervously at window.

INT. DREAM SEQUENCE - VILLAGE ROAD - FUDGEWICK - DAY
(DISTORTED)

Timothy views an empty play park from his car. Swings sway faster than natural. A green balloon pulses sickly, swelling slightly.

INT. DREAM SEQUENCE - CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY
(DISTORTED)

A Dark Figure blurs past outside, leaving after-images.

INT. DREAM SEQUENCE - PUB - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT (DISTORTED)

Timothy sits opposite REBECCA at a table littered with dozens of empty glasses.

REBECCA (V.O.)
(Distorted, mocking)

REBECCA (CONT'D)
It's Just Unconventional! Stop being
jumpy!

A Dark Figure slams against the pub window, leaving a deep crack. It fades into shadows.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Timothy JOLTS awake on the sofa, cold sweat, gasping.
Elizabeth cries softly in travel cot. Rebecca snores on other sofa, empty bottle nearby.

Timothy swings legs to floor, rubs face, heart pounding.
Dreams vivid. Walks to cot, lifts Lizzie, holds close.

TIMOTHY
(Whispering, soothing)
Shhh, there there, Lizzie-bug. It's
Okay. Daddy's here. Bad dream that's
all. .

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Timothy opens front door slowly, cautiously, steps out, Lizzie held tight. Crisp air, bright sun, absolute, heavy silence.
Walks to edge of garden, peers down deserted road. Not a car, person, sound.

Walks hesitantly to neighbour's house (red door). Knocks lightly, louder. Nobody answers. Curtains still. Just silence.
Absence feels worse.

Timothy stands frozen on the lawn, Lizzie cradled protectively. The silence is absolute. No birdsong. No distant traffic hum. Nothing. Just the low THUMP of his own heart. He looks up and down the deserted village street. Immaculate gardens. Quaint cottages. Utterly lifeless.

He turns, walks quickly back towards his own cottage door, the gravel CRUNCHING too loudly underfoot.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Timothy holds Lizzie close, scanning the room, the silence pressing in after the vivid nightmare. He looks at Rebecca, still asleep on the other sofa.

SOUND of a gentle THUD upstairs.

Timothy freezes. Listens intently. Nothing. House settling? Or... something else? He clutches Lizzie tighter.

REBECCA stirs, groaning softly. One eye cracks open, squints at the daylight filtering through the bay window.

REBECCA
(Raspy, hungover)
Ugh. What time is it? Feels like I
wrestled a brewery and lost.

She pushes herself up slowly, rubbing her temples.

TIMOTHY
(Quietly, tense)
Morning. You okay?

REBECCA
Define 'okay'. Did Lizzie sleep?

TIMOTHY
(Eyes darting to the
window)
Some. I... didn't. Bad dreams. That
silence outside... it's heavier today.

REBECCA
(Swinging legs to
floor, unsteady)
It's just a quiet village. I need to
go to the shop. Coffee and
paracetamol.

Timothy changes Lizzie, constantly glancing out the window. They pack a small bag - nappies, bottle. Rebecca shoves sunglasses on.

EXT. VILLAGE ROAD - FUDGEWICK - DAY

They walk down the main street again. The sun shines brightly, but the silence remains absolute. No birdsong, no distant traffic, just their footsteps echoing slightly too loud on the pavement. The houses look immaculate, windows like blank eyes.

REBECCA
(Trying cheerfulness)
Where the hell is everyone?

Suddenly, Lizzie starts to CRY. Not her usual fussing, but a distressed, piercing wail that cuts through the stillness.

TIMOTHY
(Immediately anxious)
What is it? What's wrong, Lizzie-
bug?

He tries to soothe her, rocking her gently. She keeps crying, burying her face in his shoulder.

REBECCA
(Voice tightens)
It's like, this place has spooked
her.

TIMOTHY
(Looking around wildly)
I told you! Lizzie feels it too!

REBECCA
(Quietly, decisively)
We should leave. After coffee.

Timothy nods.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Frantic energy replaces unease. They quickly throw essentials back into the SUV. Timothy fumbles with Lizzie's car seat, hands shaking slightly. Rebecca slams the boot shut.

INT. CAR - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Engine starts, sound unnaturally loud. Timothy grips the wheel. Rebecca grips a travel mug.

TIMOTHY
Right. Main road.

He reverses off the drive, past the children's play park - the deflated green balloon seems fractionally more inflated, swaying gently. Timothy floors the accelerator slightly.

EXT. ROAD LEAVING FUDGEWICK - DAY

The blue SUV speeds past the weathered wooden sign: "FUDGEWICK - Please Drive Carefully". Trees line the road.

INT. CAR - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

They drive in silence for several minutes. The road twists and turns through dense woodland.

REBECCA
(Trying to sound normal)
Should be hitting the main A-road
soon.

Timothy nods stiffly, eyes fixed ahead, scanning the trees. The woods feel oppressive, closing in.

TIMOTHY
Should be. Feels like we've been
driving longer though.

They round another bend. Up ahead, through the trees... a village sign. Weathered wood. Familiar shape.

REBECCA
(Confused)
What? Is that...? No, it can't be.

They draw closer. The lettering becomes clear.

"FUDGEWICK - Please Drive Carefully"

Timothy slams on the brakes. The car skids slightly on the tarmac. Lizzie startles, whimpers.

TIMOTHY
(Disbelief, voice
trembling)
How?! It's not possible!

REBECCA
(Staring, pale)
Maybe... maybe we took a wrong turn
back there?

TIMOTHY
(Hitting the steering
wheel)
There was no turn! This is the only
road!

They drive again, faster this time, the scenery blurring past. Five minutes pass. Ten minutes. The same woods, the same winding road.

Then, ahead. The sign.

"FUDGEWICK - Please Drive Carefully"

Rebecca lets out a small, choked sob.

REBECCA
(Whispering)
It's not possible... It's not...

Timothy pulls the car over onto the verge, engine idling raggedly. He stares at the sign, then looks at Rebecca, sheer terror dawning in his eyes.

TIMOTHY
The leaflet... "You can't escape."

He grips her arm, his hand ice-cold.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
(Voice cracking)
Becks... I think we're trapped.

Rebecca stares back, her face ashen. Forced smiles, sarcasm, pragmatism - all gone. Replaced by raw, naked fear. She looks at Lizzie, asleep now in the back seat, oblivious. The silence outside feels absolute, malevolent, pressing in. They are utterly alone. And they can't leave.

The camera holds on their terrified faces, trapped within the car, the impossible village sign looming behind them.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CAR - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The blue SUV sits idling raggedly on the verge, facing the "FUDGEWICK - Please Drive Carefully" sign. Air thick with fear. Rebecca stares ahead, tear tracks on her dusty face, breathing shallow. Timothy grips the steering wheel, knuckles bone white. Lizzie whimpers fretfully in the back seat.

Silence stretches, amplifying their frantic heartbeats.

TIMOTHY
(Voice rough, choked)
It's not... there's no...

He can't finish. Slams his palm against the steering wheel. A dull, hopeless sound.

REBECCA
(Whispering)
I don't understand?

He looks at her, sees the raw terror mirroring his own.
Glances in the rearview mirror at Lizzie, small face crumpled.
No options. Only the cage.

Timothy puts the car into gear. Engine whines. He turns the car around, driving slowly, inevitably, back towards Fudgewick. The charming village now looks predatory. Thatched roofs press down, stone walls bulge slightly, lush gardens writhe with unseen energy. Every window a dark, watching eye.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT

Back in the cottage. Sofa shoved against the front door - pathetic barricade. Oppressive village silence permeates the thin walls. Every CREAK, every distant RUSTLE sounds intentional, menacing.

Rebecca rocks Lizzie, who refuses to settle, small body tense. Rebecca hums a broken lullaby, voice trembling. Timothy stands by the window, staring out, unseeing. Looking inward. Replaying horror.

TIMOTHY
I can see it as plain as day. John...
the way he fell... it plays it again
and again. But different. Worse.

REBECCA
Stop it.

TIMOTHY
I can't help it.

He turns from the window. Eyes bloodshot, pupils dilated.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
Did you lock the back door?

REBECCA
Yes. Three times. Like you asked.

TIMOTHY
Check it again.

REBECCA
(Voice rising)
We need to get the hell out of here.
Not lock the bloody doors.

TIMOTHY

It doesn't matter anyway. It's not outside. It's... everywhere. In the walls. In the quiet. In... us. Look come see.

Lizzie cries louder at her tone. Rebecca holds her tighter, trying to soothe her, tears welling.

REBECCA

Shhh, shhh. It's okay. Mummy's here.

Timothy watches them, jaw muscle twitching. Utterly helpless. Walks to the back door, checks the lock. Secure. Makes no difference.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Time feels distorted. Sluggish, then racing. They venture outside.

Near the playground again. The GREEN BALLOON bobs gently, sickly, vibrant green.

As they watch, mesmerized, the balloon visibly PULSES. Slow, rhythmic inflation and deflation, like a diseased lung.

THWACK-THWACK-THWACK! The swings beside the balloon jerk violently into motion, crashing back and forth. Terrifying speed. Metal SCREAMS against metal. No wind. Just violent, unnatural motion.

They run. Sound of frantically swinging chains chases them down the silent street.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY

Burst back into the cottage. Slam and barricade the door. Hearts pounding. House feels no safer. Air hums faintly.

Rebecca collapses onto the sofa, catching her breath, holding Lizzie close. Timothy paces, agitated, running hands through his hair.

TIMOTHY

See? SEE? It's not us! It's the place!
It's alive!

REBECCA

Stop it! You're scaring her!

Suddenly, the antique clock on the mantelpiece CHIMES erratically, hands spinning backwards at impossible speed. Simultaneously, cups on the coffee table RATTLE violently, sliding towards the edge.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
What's happening?!

Spinning clock hands blur, then stop abruptly. Cups cease rattling. Silence rushes back, heavier.

Timothy stares at the clock. Rebecca stares at the cups. They look at each other, unspoken terror passing between them. Fundamental laws fraying.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT

Another night. Haven't dared go upstairs since the THUDDING. They exist in the living room, a small island in a sea of encroaching dread.

Timothy dozes fitfully on the sofa. Rebecca watches him, looks down at Lizzie sleeping in her arms. Fierce, protective love sharpens her fear to a razor edge.

A faint WHISPER seems to slither from the corner.

WHISPERING VOICE (O.S.)
(Faint, insidious)
Do you use you two ply? It's all a
bit raw.

Rebecca stiffens. Looks around wildly.

REBECCA
Who's there?

Silence. Real? Exhausted mind? Looks at Timothy. He stirs, muttering.

TIMOTHY
(In his sleep)
...not my fault... John... didn't
see...

Jolts awake, gasping, eyes wide with remembered terror.

REBECCA
No! Tim, it wasn't your fault.

TIMOTHY
(Looking around
frantically)
How do you know that for sure. Becks?
How?!

His panic is infectious. Rebecca holds Lizzie tighter. Familiar room feels alien, hostile. Floral wallpaper seems to crawl. Shadows deepen, coalesce.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT

Darkness, punctuated only by Rebecca's phone light. Slow, deliberate THUD... THUD... THUD... continues down the stairs. Timothy and Rebecca frozen, backs against the far wall, Lizzie clutched tight.

TIMOTHY
(Whispering, voice
trembling)
It's coming down... The thudding reaches
the bottom step. Stops. Silence
stretches, thick, suffocating.

Suddenly, the air fills with a high-pitched, unnatural SCREECH of stressed metal - warehouse flashback sound, amplified, from the walls themselves. Timothy claps hands over ears, eyes shut tight.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
No... no... make it stop... Overlaying the
screech, the sickening WET CRACK
echoes, fused with SHATTERING glass.
Reverberates around the room.

REBECCA
Tim! Look at me! It's not real! It's
the house!

Timothy shakes head, squeezing eyes shut harder.

TIMOTHY
John... falling... the sound... A faint,
sharp WHISTLE cuts through the noise
- same unnatural whistle from before
John was hit. Darts around the room.
Then, something small and dark
CLATTERS against the barricaded front
door from *inside* the room.

Timothy's eyes snap open. Stares at the floor near the door. Illuminated faintly by phone light lies... an electric toothbrush. Old, grimy, identical to police reports.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
(Gasping)
It... how...?

Warehouse sounds abruptly cut out. Toothbrush lies still. Silence feels charged. Timothy stares at the toothbrush, trauma given physical form.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY (LATER -
ESCALATION - REBECCA FOCUS)

Weak sunlight, no comfort. Haven't slept. Living room is their bunker. Lizzie awake in travel cot, unusually quiet, eyes wide, tracking something unseen. Rebecca sits beside cot, watching Lizzie intently. Baby monitor on coffee table emits faint static.

REBECCA
(To Timothy, low voice)
She hasn't cried since... since the
noise stopped. She just... watches.

Timothy sits slumped on sofa, staring blankly at wall where clock was. Utterly drained.

TIMOTHY
It knows what haunts me. It uses it.

Baby monitor static sharpens. Faint sound emerges - not Lizzie crying, but distorted, sibilant WHISPER.

WHISPERING VOICE (O.S.)
(From monitor,
distorted)
...so fragile... mummy can't protect.

Rebecca snatches monitor, listening, horrified.

REBECCA
What the hell?

Looks at Lizzie. Baby flinches slightly, as if hearing it too. Small wooden block toy near cot trembles, slowly ROTATES on the spot.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
Tim! Look!

Timothy looks over, sees toy turning. Dull resignation, not fresh shock.

Rebecca feels sudden, intense COLDNESS envelop area around cot. Deep chill raises goosebumps despite daylight. Lizzie shivers, lips tinged slightly blue.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
(Panicked)
She's cold! It's freezing right here!

Scoops Lizzie out, wraps tightly in blanket, moving away from cold spot. Fear sharpens - no longer just for them, but fiercely, primally for Lizzie. House isn't just trapping them; it's targeting her baby.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
 (Voice hard, determined)
 No. You don't touch her. You hear
 me? Stay away from her!

Glares around room, challenging unseen presence. Cold spot
 dissipates. Whispering static fades. Toy stops moving.
 Oppressive atmosphere lessens, surprised by her defiance.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT (CLIMAX)

Chaos. House in full revolt. Lights flicker strobe-like,
 monstrous shadows. Furniture RATTLES, SHAKES. WAREHOUSE
 SCREECHING and John's death CRACK blend with distorted NURSERY
 RHYMES sung in whispering voice. Time fractured - outside
 bay window, day/night flash intermittently.

Timothy on knees, hands over ears, trapped in hyper-realistic
 hallucination.

TIMOTHY'S POV

Living room walls melt away -> Grimy WAREHOUSE brickwork.
 JOHN PORTER pacing, phone to ear. The window. DARK FIGURE in
 derelict factory window opposite, raising arm. TOOTHBRUSH
 hurtling... again... again... John falls, collapses, over
 and over. Whispering VOICE laughs.

VOICE (V.O.)
 Too slow... always too slow... watched
 him die... weak...

BACK TO SCENE

'Real' living room. Rebecca clutches Lizzie, screaming
 inconsolably. Room warps around them. Whispering voice focuses
 on her now, sharp, venomous, from all directions.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Bad mother... brought her here...
 she'll be ours... like the others...

Rebecca spins, trying to locate source. Glances at travel
 cot - EMPTY.

REBECCA
 (Screaming)
 LIZZIE! NO!

Looks down - Lizzie still safe in her arms. Cruel trick.
 VOICE doubles down.

VOICE (O.S.)
 Give her to us... she belongs to
 Fudgewick now...

Floor beneath Rebecca seems to ripple. Shadows coalesce, shifting, vaguely humanoid shapes reach towards Lizzie. CLOCK on mantelpiece (reappeared) spins hands uncontrollably. Exit door rattles violently, sofa barricade slides back inches.

Simultaneous assault on their deepest fears - Timothy's guilt/failure, Rebecca's maternal terror. Hits its peak. Designed to shatter them.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - NIGHT (TURNING POINT)

Amidst psychic onslaught, something shifts.

Timothy, watching John fall again, remembers Gloria's words: "Life... snatched away. Cruelly. Meaningless." The loop stutters. Looks up from mental replay, truly seeing chaotic living room, Rebecca shielding Lizzie. Crushing weight of responsibility LESSENS.

Warehouse overlay flickers, pixelates. Screeching sound glitches, fades.

Simultaneously, Rebecca, facing encroaching shadows and voice demanding child, feels terror mutate into pure, defiant RAGE.

REBECCA
(Shouting over
cacophony, voice raw)
NO! SHE IS MINE! YOU CAN KEEP THE
DAMN HOUSE, YOU CAN KEEP THE VILLAGE,
BUT YOU DON'T GET HER! NEVER!

Holds Lizzie tighter, planting feet, mother lion protecting cub. No longer looking for escape, preparing for battle.

Her raw defiance, coupled with Timothy's internal shift, disrupts psychic assault. Whispering voice falters, loses coherence. Reaching shadows retract. Lights stop strobing, settle into dim, steady glow. Temporal distortion outside ceases - just night again. House's overt attack subsides. Heavy, watchful silence remains, but imminent violation recedes.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - CONTINUOUS

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - FUDGEWICK - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Days turn into nights. Time passes.

WEEKS, MAYBE MONTHS LATER.

Cottage tidier, lived-in, still temporary. Sunlight streams through window. Timothy sits at small dining table. Tired, older, frantic edge gone, replaced by deep weariness, strange calm.

Rebecca enters from kitchen, carrying Lizzie, few months older, gurgling happily. Places her gently in playpen in centre of room. Moves with quiet efficiency, sarcasm replaced by steely pragmatism focused on Lizzie's needs.

REBECCA
Milk's warming. Did you check the jar?

TIMOTHY
(Without looking up)
Still got that tenner in it. Shop's still stocked. Same mannequins.

REBECCA
Right. Pub still free?

TIMOTHY
(Looks up, faint, sad smile)
Always.

No talk of leaving. Tried again, weeks ago. Road still looped. Sign still waited. Stopped trying.

House quiet now. Overt phenomena ceased after that terrible night. Village utterly deserted, silent. Neighbours never seen. Direct, personal assault stopped. Trapped, indefinitely,

Rebecca picks up Lizzie, holding close, looking out window at empty, perfect street.

REBECCA
She needs fresh air. Walk?

Timothy nods, puts down pencil. Stands, stretches. Move towards door - no barricade now. Just a lock.

TIMOTHY
Playground again? See if the balloon's popped yet?

REBECCA
(Shakes her head)
Just... round the green. Keep it simple.

They step outside into bright, silent day. Perfect houses watch. Lush gardens bloom unseen. Walk slowly down path, family unit isolated in impossible cage.

Camera pulls back slowly. Tiny figures walking through immaculate, lifeless village. Silence absolute.

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - FUDGEWICK - DAY

TIMOTHY (39) pushes LIZZIE (approx. 1 year old) in her pram. REBECCA (36) walks beside him. Bright sun on immaculate, deserted village green. Perfect flowerbeds bloom unattended. Quaint cottages silent, windows like vacant eyes.

Walk slowly, stiffly. Silence absolute - no birdsong, no distant traffic. Only crunch of shoes on gravel, gentle squeak of pram wheels. Louder than it should be.

Timothy glances around, scanning houses, empty bandstand, still swings in distant playground. Relief replaced by low-level, constant anxiety hum.

Rebecca keeps gaze fixed forward or down at Lizzie. Face pale but composed, mask of determined practicality.

REBECCA

(Quietly)

See? Fresh air. Doing her good.

Voice sounds unnaturally loud. Timothy just nods, scanning roofline nearby. Curtain twitching? Or light? Can't be sure.

Complete slow circuit of green. Nothing happens. No figures dart. No objects fly. No voices whisper.

Lizzie gurgles, momentarily breaking tension. Rebecca stops, adjusts Lizzie's blanket meticulously.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Milk will be warm. Let's go back.

Timothy looks around one last time. Village feels like perfectly preserved specimen under glass - beautiful, lifeless, inescapable.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - DAY (DAYS LATER)

House tidier, atmosphere tense. Rebecca moves with focused energy, wiping already gleaming faucet. Established RIGID ROUTINES.

Counter holds small pile of supplies from shop - nappies, formula, bread. Fewer items than expected, given shop's abundance.

Timothy looks tired, lines around eyes deeper.

TIMOTHY

I walked down past the pub again.

Rebecca continues wiping, doesn't turn.

REBECCA

And?

TIMOTHY

Nothing. Just... quiet. The blackboard still says 'Help Yourselves'. The door's unlocked. It feels... wrong. Like bait.

REBECCA

Then don't go in. Simple. Stick to the routine. Shop for essentials, back here. Keep Lizzie on schedule.

TIMOTHY

Don't you want to know why? What this place is? How it works? If we understood it, maybe...

REBECCA

(Turning, voice sharp)
Maybe what, Tim? Maybe we could reason with it? Ask the empty houses for directions? Understanding doesn't get us out. Surviving the day gets us through. That's all there is. Now, did you check the back door lock like I asked?

Her pragmatism is a wall, deflecting anything threatening her fragile control.

TIMOTHY

(Muttering)
This is nice. It's quiet.

MONTAGE - PASSAGE OF TIME (WEEKS INTO MONTHS)

B) INT. SHOP - DAY: Rebecca places items (nappies, formula, bread) on counter by HONESTY JAR. Puts tenner in without looking. Timothy at window, idly watches deserted street. Barely glances at MANNEQUINS - poses subtly different? Can no longer be sure, or care.

C) INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT: Room more lived-in, sterile tidiness remains. Timothy drawing map, details recalled automatically. Rebecca meticulously folds laundry, movements precise, robotic. Faint, unsettling MUSIC BOX TUNE drifts from upstairs (new sound). Both register, brief weary glance, ignore it. Background noise now.

D) EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - DAY: Lizzie (approx. 1 year old, toddling uncertainly) takes steps towards empty swings. Rebecca, watching hawk-like, calls sharply.

REBECCA

Lizzie! No! Stay on the grass!

Lizzie whimpers, turns back. Rebecca scoops her up, holding tight. Baseline anxiety palpable.

E) INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - NIGHT: Timothy holds complex sketch of village layout, looping roads.

TIMOTHY

Look. If the curve here is consistent... maybe there's a point where the geometry breaks down? An overlap?

REBECCA

(Washing dishes, back turned)

It's magic, Tim. Or madness. Geometry won't help. Did you wind the clock? It stopped again.

Timothy sighs, puts sketch down.

F) EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - GARDEN - DAY: Rebecca kneels, weeding flowerbed obsessively. Flowers unnaturally perfect, uniform. Imposes rigid order. Nearby, GREEN BALLOON drifts slowly past end of garden, silent, unnoticed or ignored.

END MONTAGE

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (MONTHS LATER)

Accumulated weight of time, hopelessness. Timothy and Rebecca look older, profoundly tired. Frantic edge gone, replaced by deep, settled weariness. Exist in same space, miles apart.

Timothy stares blankly at detailed map of Fudgewick, spread on dining table, ignored, pencil still. Rebecca darns tiny sock for Lizzie (nearly 1 year old, asleep in cot nearby). Only sound: soft ticking of clock.

REBECCA

(Quietly)

She coughed again today. Twice during her nap.

TIMOTHY

(Voice flat, eyes still distant)

Air's probably damp. This house... it holds the damp. Like everything else.

REBECCA

We need to keep things clean. Keep
her warm. Make sure she eats properly.
That's all we can do.

Timothy finally looks up, not with sharp frustration, but
deep, bone-weary exasperation.

TIMOTHY

(Standing slowly,
voice low but intense)
Is it? Just keep things clean? While
the place watches us?

REBECCA

(Doesn't look up from
darning)
What else is there? Redraw the map
of this place for the hundredth time.

TIMOTHY

(Standing slowly,
voice low but intense)
It proves it's real! It stops us
from forgetting! Your way...
pretending this is just some quirky
village... scrubbing the floors
while the walls hum...

REBECCA

(Looks up, eyes
flashing with years
of suppressed
fear/grief)
I am keeping our daughter alive! Day
after day! In this... place! All you
do is draw this bloody map! You—

TIMOTHY

Seeing her... growing up here...
Knowing there's no way out!

Lizzie cries out in cot, sharp, startled wail, disturbed by
shouting.

Instantly, anger evaporates. Shared parental instinct
overrides. Rebecca puts down sewing, rushes to cot, murmuring
soft, soothing sounds.

Timothy turns away, runs hand through hair, leans heavily
against wall. Looks at intricate map.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - DOORFRAME - DAY (TIME JUMP
TRANSITION)

CLOSE UP on wooden doorframe inside cottage. Pencil marks track child's growth.

SOUND of older CHILDISH LAUGHTER (O.S.), clear and bright.

REBECCA'S HAND adds new mark, significantly higher. Beside it, clearly written: "LIZZIE - AGE 4". Years have passed.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - DAY (PRESENT DAY - YEARS LATER)

Bright, sunny day, indistinguishable from arrival day. garden, pristine, deserted.

LIZZIE (now 4), bright clothes, plays contentedly. Runs across grass, laughter echoing slightly in profound quiet. Seems completely integrated.

Points at something unseen.

LIZZIE
Mummy! Look! The birdie!

Rebecca, watching intently from her seat, forces smile. Timothy stands apart, map now constant companion in worn leather satchel.

REBECCA
(Calling)
Careful, sweetheart. Stay on the grass, remember?

Lizzie runs onto the grass and peers over neighbour fence.

LIZZIE
Hello, house! Nobody home today?
Okay! Maybe tomorrow! I want to say
hello to Mr. Mannequin! He looked
sad yesterday!

Timothy, marking map, looks up sharply. Catches Rebecca's eye. "Mr. Mannequin" - casually dropped, chills them both.

TIMOTHY
(Forcing calm tone)
He's not sad, sweetie. He's... just
pretending. Like in a shop window.
Come back here and play.

Lizzie pouts, skips back towards Rebecca, easily redirected but unfazed by mannequin having feelings.

Sits down, picking daisies. Starts humming, discordant, slightly off-key melody. Absently, happily. Melody morphs into words spoken under soft breath.

LIZZIE
(To her daisies)
Must stay inside... when new people
come...it's the tradition...

Recites phrase perfectly, to melody, words she couldn't have overheard from neighbour encounter years ago.

Suddenly, stops reciting. Goes completely still, hands frozen over daisies, eyes staring blankly ahead at nothing. Unnerving stillness, mirroring pervasive village quiet. Lasts few seconds.

Rebecca takes involuntary step towards her.

REBECCA
Lizzie?

Just as quickly, Lizzie snaps out of it, blinking. Smiles brightly, resuming daisy chain as if nothing happened.

LIZZIE
Finished! Look, Daddy!

Holds up completed chain. Timothy forces another smile, takes it.

TIMOTHY
It's beautiful, Lizzie-bug. Really
beautiful.

Looks at Rebecca over Lizzie's head. Her face pale.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Timothy carefully places Lizzie's daisy chain on table beside map. Rebecca enters from kitchen, putting away picnic blanket. Lizzie runs to toys in corner. Atmosphere quiet, earlier tension settling back into weary resignation.

SOUND of CAR ENGINE approaching, stopping nearby. Unusual.

Timothy and Rebecca exchange quick, alarmed glance. Timothy cautiously moves to bay window, peers through gap in curtains. Rebecca follows, stands slightly behind.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dusty estate car, packed to roof, pulled up outside neighbouring cottage (RED DOOR). Couple - MARK (30s, hopeful,

eager) and CHLOE (30s, excited, looking around delighted) - get out, stretching after long drive. Tired but thrilled.

MARK

Wow. It's even better than the photos!
Like a postcard!

CHLOE

(Beaming)
Told you it was perfect! Proper
chocolate box! Peace and quiet at
last!

Sound exactly like Timothy and Rebecca, years ago.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Timothy and Rebecca watch, stone-faced. Echo of own arrival sickening.

REBECCA

(Whispering)
No... Not again.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Mark spots Timothy and Rebecca in window. Smiles broadly, gives friendly wave.

MARK

(Calling over)
Hello there! Looks like our new
neighbours!

Chloe waves too, excitedly. Start walking across small lawn towards Crawfords' cottage.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM / HALLWAY - DAY

Rebecca backs away from window, heart pounding. Desperate urgency floods face, breaking through resignation.

REBECCA

(To Timothy, fierce
whisper)
We have to warn them! Tell them to
leave! Now! Before... before it
settles in.

Moves towards front door, hand outstretched to fling it open.

TIMOTHY
(Grabbing her arm
gently)
What can we say? How? They won't
believe us.

REBECCA
I don't care! We have to try!

SOUND of a firm KNOCK on the front door.

Rebecca flinches. Looks wildly from door to Timothy. Lizzie looks up from toys, curious.

LIZZIE
(Quietly, matter-of-
factly)
Mummy? Must stay inside. It's the
tradition.

Recites rule, chillingly authoritative.

Rebecca freezes, staring at daughter. Lizzie's words, echoing uncanny "rule", act like invisible barrier. Desperate urge to warn battles ingrained fear, learned helplessness, passive acceptance reinforced by Lizzie's adaptation.

Timothy watches Rebecca, sees conflict, paralysis. Gives tiny, almost imperceptible head shake. No use.

Another KNOCK, friendlier.

MARK (O.S.)
Hello? Just wanted to introduce
ourselves!

Rebecca remains frozen, hand hovering near door, unable to open. Tears well - impotent rage and despair.

They stand in silence. Eventually, footsteps outside recede.

Through window, Timothy watches Mark and Chloe exchange confused shrugs, turn back to own cottage, perhaps commenting on strange neighbours.

Rebecca leans forehead against cool wood of door, shoulders slumping. Another chance to fight, lost. Lizzie goes back to toys, humming discordant tune.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Hours later. Darkness outside. Crawfords' cottage quiet. But next door...

SOUND of LOUD LAUGHTER, drunken SHOUTING. Free pub clearly utilised.

Rebecca stands rigidly by window, watching lights next door, listening to oblivious revelry. Hands clenched. Timothy sits at table, staring at map, not seeing it.

REBECCA
(Voice tight with
anger)
Listen to them. They haven't got a
clue. Swimming in free booze while
the cage locks around them.

TIMOTHY
We were the same.

REBECCA
We have to do something. Now. Before
they get stuck like us. Before they
can't leave.

Sudden, fierce resolve ignites in her eyes. Turns abruptly from window, strides towards front door.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rebecca reaches front door. Breathing shallow, determined. Doesn't hesitate. Hand closes around doorknob. Turns it. Pulls.

Door opens an inch... STOPS. Hits invisible wall. Rebecca pulls harder, grunting, door won't budge further. Not locked; simply won't open for her with this intent.

Freezes. Panic flares. Tries again, yanking furiously. Nothing.

SOUND of faint, sibilant WHISPERS starting, emanating from walls. Follows familiar melody.

WHISPERING VOICE (O.S.)
(Layered, insidious)
Must stay inside... when new people
come...it's the tradition... Must
stay inside... when new people
come...it's the tradition...

Rebecca gasps, stumbling back from door, hands flying to cover ears, though whispers seem inside head as much as outside.

REBECCA
(Whispering)
No... please... stop...

Whispers intensify, mocking, coiling, then abruptly cease. Silence rushes back, thick, malevolent.

Rebecca lowers hands slowly, trembling. Door remains slightly ajar, mocking failed attempt. Stares at it, defeated, tears of frustration streaming.

Turns slowly, leaning back against wall for support.

And sees LIZZIE.

Standing silently at bottom of stairs in pyjamas. Face blank, eyes wide, unnervingly empty in dim light. Just stares at Rebecca.

Beat of terrifying silence.

Then, Lizzie begins to sing. Softly, clearly, perfect, chilling innocence. Discordant tune from green, now with words recited earlier.

LIZZIE
(Singing softly)
Must stay inside... when new people
come...it's the tradition... Must
stay inside... when new people
come...it's the tradition...

Rebecca stares in horror. Lizzie isn't just adapted; she's an echo, innocent vessel for village's insidious control. Song continues, quiet, relentless.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Heavy silence, broken only by faint, rhythmic WHISPERS seeping from walls, echoing Lizzie's chilling song. Rebecca frozen, staring at LIZZIE (4) at bottom of stairs. Lizzie's eyes wide, blank, continues soft, clear, innocent rendition.

LIZZIE
(Singing softly)
Must stay inside... when new people
come... It's the tradition... Must
stay inside...

Timothy moves slowly towards Rebecca, places hand gently on her arm. She flinches, pulling away slightly, eyes locked on Lizzie.

TIMOTHY
(Whispering)
Becks...

Singing stops abruptly. Lizzie blinks, blankness receding slightly. Looks from Rebecca to Timothy, flicker of confusion, as if waking.

LIZZIE
Mummy? Daddy? Is it bedtime?

Rebecca lets out shaky breath, kneeling, pulling Lizzie into tight, fierce hug.

REBECCA
Yes, sweetheart. Yes, it's bedtime.

Long past bedtime.

Scoops Lizzie up, holding protectively, carries upstairs without looking back. Timothy watches them go, turns to front door, still slightly ajar. Pushes closed gently. Clicks shut with unnerving ease. Leans forehead against wood, faint mocking whispers finally silent. Sounds of drunken revelry from next door filter through again.

MONTAGE - OBSESSIVE BEHAVIOR INTENSIFIES

A) INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - KITCHEN - DAY: Rebecca obsessively scrubs kitchen counter. Movements jerky, agitated. Keeps glancing towards window, neighbouring cottage.

B) INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - DAY: Timothy pores over map, frantic annotations. Draws lines connecting neighbour's cottage to shop, pub, green. Grim, determined expression.

C) EXT. STREET - DAY: Mark and Chloe emerge from cottage. Mark tired, rubbing temples. Chloe forces bright smile, points towards shop. Walk off, oblivious to Timothy watching from window.

D) EXT. WOODS NEAR FUDGEWICK - DAY: Mark walks alone on path just outside village. Trees unnaturally close, path narrow. SOUND of branches scraping. Mark quickens pace, glancing nervously into dense woods, breathing heavily. Imagines trees pressing in. (Subtle claustrophobia trigger).

E) INT. NEIGHBOURING COTTAGE - NIGHT: Chloe sits alone in sparsely furnished living room. Boxes everywhere. SOUND of wind outside (or is it?). Jumps at floorboard creak, eyes darting nervously towards dark windows. Intensely isolated.

F) EXT. VILLAGE SHOP - DAY: Mark and Chloe exit shop, minimal supplies. Confused by honesty jar, glance around empty street.

Mark shrugs off, Chloe uneasy. As they walk away, one MANNEQUIN inside shop window seems to subtly turn head to watch them go.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - DAY

Bright, sunny afternoon. Impossibly perfect. Timothy and Rebecca sit stiffly on bench in the back garden. Lizzie plays nearby, humming unsettling tune.

Mark and Chloe approach hesitantly. Mark waves his toolbox above the neighboring fence.

MARK
(Calling over, forcing
cheer)
Afternoon! Fancy meeting you here.
Bit of fence came loose at the front
between our gardens. Thought I'd see
if it needing fixing?

Timothy and Rebecca exchange looks. They glance at Lizzie who continues to play, no longer humming.

TIMOTHY
(Standing up)
Oh? Right. Let's have a look.

Timothy and Rebecca walk through the house, silence oppressive, to the boundary between gardens. Chloe follows Mark.

CHLOE
It's... remarkably quiet here, isn't
it? We thought moving out of the
city would be peaceful, but this
is... something else.

REBECCA
(Voice tight)
It has its own... rhythm. You get
used to it. Or you don't.

Mark examines perfectly intact fence post.

MARK
Huh. Could've sworn this was wobbly.
Must've been imagining things. Stress
of the move, I suppose.

TIMOTHY

This place... it plays tricks. You need to be careful. Watch out for... inconsistencies. Things that don't add up.

Mark laughs nervously.

MARK

Inconsistencies? Like what? Free beer and empty shops? Suits me fine!

Suddenly, LOUD BANG echoes from empty bandstand direction. Mark and Chloe jump. Timothy and Rebecca barely flinch.

CHLOE

What was that?!

REBECCA

(Calmly)

Probably just... the pipes. Old village. Settling.

Stares hard at Timothy. He nods imperceptibly.

TIMOTHY

Look, the main thing is... don't ignore your instincts. If something feels wrong... deeply wrong... don't rationalize it away.

Faint, sibilant WHISPER snakes through air, audible only to Timothy and Rebecca.

WHISPER (O.S.)

"...they won't listen... too late..."

CHLOE

(Frowning slightly)

I'm sorry? What feels wrong? Apart from maybe needing more neighbours?

MARK

(Clapping Timothy on shoulder)

Look, we appreciate the welcome. Bit quirky, this place, but we'll manage. Need to get these boxes unpacked. Catch you later?

Mark and Chloe walk back towards cottage, exchanging confused glances.

CHLOE
 (Muttering to Mark,
 unheard)
 Told you they seemed a bit strange...

Timothy watches them go, frustration etched on face. Rebecca turns away, walking quickly back to Lizzie.

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - BANDSTAND - DAY

Weeks later. Lizzie (closer to 5) sits cross-legged inside empty bandstand. Arranged pebbles in complex spiral pattern on dusty floorboards. Talks animatedly to empty space beside her.

LIZZIE
 ...and then Mr. Mannequin said the
 flowers get sad if nobody waters
 them, but the rain does it anyway,
 so it's okay... No, he doesn't talk
 loud. He just... thinks it. Near my
 ear.

Rebecca watches from edge of green, arms crossed tightly. Timothy beside her, sketching bandstand structure into notebook, observing Lizzie intently.

REBECCA
 She spends hours here now. Talking
 to nothing. Humming that... tune.

TIMOTHY
 It's because we spoke to our
 neighbours.

REBECCA
 Maybe. It doesn't matter now anyway.

Lizzie suddenly goes still, eyes unfocused, staring straight ahead. Begins humming discordant village melody, louder, rocking slightly.

Rebecca starts forward, Timothy holds her back gently.

TIMOTHY
 Wait. Watch.

After moment, Lizzie stops humming, blinks, looks around as if surprised. Scrambles up, runs towards them, smiling brightly.

LIZZIE
 Mummy! Daddy! Can we go to the shop?
 Mr. Mannequin needs new buttons!

Rebecca forces smile, taking Lizzie's hand. Timothy looks back at bandstand, then down at sketch, thoughtful, disturbed expression.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIZZIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Lizzie asleep. Rebecca smooths her hair, notices drawing tucked under pillow. Pulls out gently.

Crayon drawing. Crude village green. Centre: bandstand, disproportionately large. Inside, stick figures hold hands in circle. One figure labelled "ME". Taller figure beside labelled "MR M". Outside bandstand, two smaller figures (Timothy/Rebecca) watch from distance. Ominous spiral patterns fill sky above bandstand.

Rebecca stares at drawing, blood running cold.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Timothy has large map spread across dining table. String pinned across, connecting points - house, shop, pub, playground, bandstand. Overlays tracing paper, drawing lines, measuring angles. Exhausted but intensely focused.

Traces looping road they tried to escape on, again, again. Measures curve, compares to other village paths. Refers to notes about day/night fluctuations.

TIMOTHY

(To himself)

It's not a loop... not exactly. The curve... it tightens. Every time... inwards...

Draws final line with ruler, connecting apparent entry/exit road back towards village centre. Intersects perfectly with other lines, converging on single point.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)

(To himself)

The bandstand. It all leads back here.

Meanwhile, Rebecca sorts box of old items found in attic - left by previous occupants. Mostly ignored, but Lizzie's drawing spurred her. Finds small, tarnished silver locket.

Forces open. Inside, faded tiny picture of young girl, 6-7 years old, decades ago. Tucked behind picture: minuscule, folded paper. Carefully unfolds.

Written in faded ink, looping, childish handwriting:

REBECCA

(Reading)

"May Day Green. Bandstand waits. New friends come. We sing the song. Stay inside. Forever."

Drops locket as if burned. Looks up, meeting Timothy's gaze. He holds up map, pointing to centre.

INT. NEIGHBOURING COTTAGE - NIGHT

Chaos. Mark backed into corner, hyperventilating, eyes wide with terror.

MARK

(Gasping)

Get it off me! It's closing in! The walls... the trees... can't breathe!

Chloe tries to approach, he flinches away violently.

CHLOE

Mark! It's okay! It's just the room! Look at me!

Suddenly, Chloe freezes, staring past Mark towards window. Face drains of colour.

CHLOE (CONT'D)

(Whispering)

Mum...? Is that... you...?

Takes step towards window, reaching out, tears streaming. Mark watches, own terror momentarily forgotten, replaced by confusion.

EXT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - GARDEN - NIGHT

Timothy steps outside for air, needing space. Hears shouting next door. Suddenly, Mark bursts out front door, face contorted in rage/fear. Spots Timothy.

MARK

YOU! You did this! This place... it was fine until you started talking! Filling our heads with nonsense!

Stumbles towards Timothy, fists clenched. Fudgewick manipulating his fear, directing outwards.

TIMOTHY

Mark, listen! It's not me! It's the village! It's feeding on your fear!

Mark lunges, swinging wildly. Timothy sidesteps.

MARK

Liar! You want us trapped here too!

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - LIZZIE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Lizzie sits bolt upright in bed. Eyes wide, fixed on window. Faint, melodic WHISPERS fill room, audible only to her.

WHISPERING VOICE (O.S.)

(Sweetly, calling)

Lizzie... come play... your friends
are waiting... at the bandstand...

Mr. Mannequin has a surprise...

Lizzie slowly gets out of bed, drawn towards window, blank, receptive look.

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - NIGHT

GREEN BALLOON back, tethered inexplicably to bandstand roof. Pulses faintly with sickly green light, like diseased heart.

INT. CRAWFORD RESIDENCE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rebecca hears commotion outside. Checks on Lizzie. Bed empty. Window slightly ajar. Panic seizes her.

REBECCA

LIZZIE!

Runs downstairs, past Timothy trying to calm frantic Mark near garden gate.

REBECCA (CONT'D)

Tim! She's gone! Lizzie's gone! The
bandstand!

Timothy shoves Mark away forcefully. Mark stumbles back, momentarily stunned. Urgency in Rebecca's voice cuts through manipulated rage.

TIMOTHY

Go! I'll handle him!

Rebecca sprints out gate, down silent street towards village green.

Timothy turns back to Mark, looking confused now, village influence momentarily weakened.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)

Stay here. Or help us. But don't get
in the way. Our daughter is out there.

Timothy runs after Rebecca. Mark watches them go, looks back at own dark, silent house where Chloe is still lost in vision. Hesitates.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET / GREEN - NIGHT

Rebecca runs, breath tearing. Village deathly quiet, houses watching. Sees Lizzie ahead, walking slowly, deliberately towards pulsing green light of bandstand.

REBECCA

Lizzie! Stop! Wait for Mummy!

Lizzie doesn't react, continues steady pace. Timothy catches up. Race onto green. Air grows heavy, charged with unnatural energy.

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - BANDSTAND - NIGHT

Reach edge of bandstand. Pulsing green light from balloon illuminates structure eerily. Lizzie stands near centre, facing darkness within, back to them.

Suddenly, Mark stumbles onto green from one side, Chloe from other. Eyes glazed, movements jerky. Move to block Timothy and Rebecca's path.

MARK & CHLOE

(Chanting monotonously)

Must stay inside... when new people
come... It's the tradition... Must
stay inside...

REBECCA

Mark! Chloe! Snap out of it! It's
controlling you!

Don't react, just stand, swaying slightly, barring way.

Psychic assault begins.

TIMOTHY'S POV

Bandstand melts away -> WAREHOUSE. John Porter falls, WET CRACK echoing. Timothy doesn't flinch. Sees Gloria's face.

TIMOTHY

(V.O.)

Meaningless.

Looks past falling body, focusing on illusion structure.

TIMOTHY (CONT'D)
 (Quietly, firmly)
 It wasn't my fault. It was random.
 You can't use it anymore.

Warehouse image flickers, distorts.

REBECCA'S POV

Visions bombard her: Lizzie pulled into shadows under bandstand, Lizzie's face blank like Mark's/Chloe's, Lizzie singing tradition song with empty eyes. Whispering Voice screeches threats.

VOICE (V.O.)
 She belongs to Fudgewick! Give her
 to us!

Rebecca screams, raw maternal fury.

REBECCA
 NO! GET AWAY FROM MY DAUGHTER!

Rage feels like physical force, pushing back visions, shielding mind.

BACK TO SCENE

Timothy grabs map from satchel. Points towards central pillar of bandstand.

Rebecca shoves past chanting Mark, defiance momentarily stunning him. Timothy dodges Chloe. Scramble onto bandstand platform.

Lizzie turns slowly. Eyes glow faintly with green light. Opens mouth, WHISPERING VOICE emerges, layered, ancient.

LIZZIE / VOICE
 Welcome... to the tradition...

Lizzie blinks. Green glow fades slightly. Looks confused, seeing parents. Reaches out hand.

LIZZIE
 Mummy? Daddy?

Starts humming village tune, falters, wrong notes, mixing with real nursery rhyme.

LIZZIE (CONT'D)
 (Humming, discordant)
 Must stay inside... twinkle twinkle...
 little star...

Innocent disruption, innate connection battling entity's control, sends ripple through energy field. Pulsing green light flickers violently.

Timothy seizes moment. Grabs loose piece of rotten wood from bandstand floor, slams against central pillar, exactly where map indicated weak point.

Rebecca rushes to Lizzie, scooping into arms, shielding.

REBECCA

It's okay, baby. We're here.

Impact of wood, combined with Lizzie's disruption, parents' focused defiance, overloads nexus.

High-pitched SCREECH rips through air. Green balloon EXPLODES, showering area in faint, dying sparks. Pulsing energy from bandstand collapses inwards with sickening WHOOSH.

Mark and Chloe cry out, clutching heads, collapse to grass, unconscious but breathing.

Oppressive atmosphere vanishes instantly. Air clean, normal. Birdsong, impossibly, faintly returns.

In distance, moonlight illuminates road leading out of Fudgewick. Solid, real, stretching into darkness.

Timothy stares at road, grabs Rebecca's arm.

TIMOTHY

Now. While we can.

Scramble off bandstand, Lizzie held tight between them. Don't look back at Mark/Chloe. Run towards cottage.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Frantic energy. Throw themselves into blue SUV. Engine roars. Timothy reverses violently off drive, swings car around, floors accelerator.

Speed through silent village - past dark pub, empty shop, lifeless houses.

EXT. ROAD LEAVING FUDGEWICK - NIGHT

Approach weathered wooden sign.

SIGN READS: "FUDGEWICK - Please Drive Carefully"

Timothy grips wheel, bracing for loop. Rebecca shuts eyes tight, holding Lizzie close.

They pass the sign.

Road continues. Straight. Dark tarmac stretches ahead, leading into normal world.

Timothy lets out choked sob of relief. Rebecca opens eyes, tears streaming. Lizzie, exhausted, fallen asleep.

REBECCA

We did it... We're out...

Timothy keeps driving, eyes fixed on road ahead, knuckles white on wheel. Doesn't slow down.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Blue SUV speeds away into darkness, leaving silent, perfect village behind.

HOLD ON FUDGEWICK SIGN PAN SLOWLY ACROSS VILLAGE GREEN

Mark and Chloe lie still on grass near now dark, silent bandstand. Village watches, waits, eternally patient.

Crawfords free. But silence of Fudgewick, memory of whispers, image of Lizzie's blank eyes, will travel with them, forever etched. Escaped place, but perhaps part of it always remains inside.

FADE TO BLACK.