

Title: The Tradition

Logline: Haunted by witnessing a bizarre death, a couple flees with their baby to a picture-perfect village for a fresh start, only to find themselves trapped in a sentient nightmare that loops reality, weaponizes their deepest fears, and targets their young daughter for assimilation.

Genre: Psychological Horror / Supernatural Thriller

Tone: Atmospheric, suspenseful, dread-inducing, claustrophobic, increasingly desperate, ultimately focusing on survival against incomprehensible forces.

Characters:

* TIMOTHY CRAWFORD (30s): An engineer haunted by guilt and trauma after witnessing a horrifying event. Initially anxious and seeking peace, he becomes increasingly paranoid, then obsessed with understanding the trap they're in.

* REBECCA CRAWFORD (30s): Timothy's wife. Initially pragmatic, even sarcastic, her skepticism gives way to terror and fierce maternal protectiveness. She adapts through rigid control before finding defiant strength.

* LIZZIE CRAWFORD (Infant to 4/5 years old): Their daughter. Her innocence makes her both vulnerable and, unknowingly, a potential key to disrupting the village's influence as she grows up disturbingly adapted to it.

* JOHN PORTER (Late 50s): Timothy's former colleague, whose bizarre death is the catalyst for the family's move.

* MARK & CHLOE (30s): The hopeful newcomers who arrive later, mirroring the Crawfords' initial naivete and becoming victims of the village.

* FUDGEWICK (The Village): The primary antagonist – a sentient entity or cursed location that traps inhabitants, feeds on fear, manipulates reality, and seeks to absorb newcomers into its "tradition."

Treatment:

Introduction:

We open on a sharp, traumatic flashback: a grimy Salford warehouse. TIMOTHY watches in focused horror as his colleague, JOHN PORTER, is killed instantly by an object – seemingly an electric toothbrush – thrown with impossible speed and force from a derelict factory window. The unnatural screech of metal and the sickening wet crack of impact sear themselves into Timothy's memory. This inexplicable event leaves him deeply traumatized and riddled with guilt.

Present day: At John Porter's funeral, the atmosphere is heavy. Timothy struggles, the memory vivid and inescapable. His wife, REBECCA, tries to offer comfort, though her pragmatism sometimes clashes with his raw grief. During the service, a folded leaflet mysteriously appears in Rebecca's open handbag – John Porter's company logo, and inside, three words: "YOU CAN'T ESCAPE." This unsettling event solidifies their decision: they need a complete fresh start, away from the ghosts of Salford, for themselves and their infant daughter, LIZZIE. They choose the remote, idyllic village of Fudgewick.

Act I: Welcome to Fudgewick

The Crawfords arrive at Fudgewick, a village straight off a postcard – charming thatched cottages, impossibly perfect gardens bursting with colour. But the perfection feels hollow. The village is utterly deserted. The silence is unnerving. Timothy's anxiety prickles immediately, while Rebecca tries to embrace the promised peace and quiet.

Their initial interactions confirm the strangeness. An attempt to greet a neighbour is rebuffed by a muffled voice claiming she's naked due to a "tradition" for when new people arrive, mentioning mysterious "welcome packs." Inside their quaint cottage, the only welcome pack is a single, formal letter. Exploring the village, they find the shop perfectly stocked but unmanned, operating via an honesty jar. The village pub is similarly deserted, inviting patrons to "Help Yourselves" to a free bar.

Rebecca initially indulges, trying to make light of the eccentricity, while Timothy grows increasingly uneasy. The place feels curated, staged, wrong. His paranoia clashes with Rebecca's attempts at normalcy. After a tense evening at the pub, where Timothy feels watched and glimpses a dark figure outside, the underlying dread solidifies. The next morning, after unsettling dreams, the silence feels heavier, more absolute. Even Lizzie seems distressed by the atmosphere. They decide, despite just arriving, that they need to leave – perhaps just for supplies and a dose of reality.

They pack the car and drive out of Fudgewick, passing the weathered village sign. But after driving for miles along the winding country road, they round a bend and are confronted by the impossible: the same "FUDGEWICK - Please Drive Carefully" sign. They try again, faster, more desperately. The result is the same. Panic sets in. They are trapped. The cryptic leaflet wasn't a prank; it was a warning. They have driven into a cage.

Act II: The Walls Close In

Forced back to the cottage, terror gives way to a desperate struggle for survival. The village, now revealed as a prison, begins its psychological assault. The house itself torments them, specifically targeting Timothy's trauma. He hears the warehouse sounds – the screeching metal, the wet crack of John's death. An old, grimy electric toothbrush – identical to the one described in police reports – inexplicably appears

inside their living room. Whispers echo their past conversations and prey on Rebecca's maternal fears, sometimes seeming to emanate from the baby monitor.

Outside, the seemingly benign village elements reveal their malevolence. The playground swings move violently on their own. A single green balloon appears, pulsing with a sickly light. Dark figures flit at the edge of vision. Time itself feels distorted. Timothy, driven by a need to understand, obsessively maps the village, trying to find a flaw in its impossible geometry. Rebecca, initially trying rationalization, shifts towards fierce maternal protection, then adopts rigid, controlling routines as a coping mechanism – constant cleaning, strict schedules – trying to impose order on the encroaching chaos. Their relationship frays under the unbearable strain.

Weeks blend into months, then years. Lizzie grows from a baby into a young child (around 4-5 years old). Her adaptation to Fudgewick is the most chilling development. She seems unfazed by the emptiness, hums the village's unsettling discordant tune, talks casually about "Mr. Mannequin" in the shop having feelings, and recites the village's rules ("Must stay inside when new people come... it's the tradition...") with unnerving accuracy. She is becoming part of the place.

The arrival of a new couple, MARK and CHLOE, provides a horrifying jolt. They are hopeful, excited, oblivious – exactly as the Crawfords were. Rebecca feels a desperate urge to warn them, but the village actively prevents it. When she tries to open the door to intercept them, she hits an invisible barrier, accompanied by insidious whispers reinforcing the "tradition." Lizzie, witnessing this, calmly repeats the rule, acting as an innocent mouthpiece for their prison.

Mark and Chloe inevitably fall prey to the village. It isolates them, preys on their individual fears (Mark develops intense claustrophobia; Chloe sees comforting but impossible visions), and subtly turns them against the Crawfords. Meanwhile, Timothy's mapping leads him to believe the bandstand on the village green is the nexus of Fudgewick's power. Rebecca reinforces this by discovering an old locket containing a child's drawing and a note confirming the bandstand's role in the village's ritualistic absorption of newcomers ("May Day Green. Bandstand waits... We sing the song. Stay inside. Forever.").

Act III: Confrontation and Escape

The situation escalates towards a climax. The village entity, sensing perhaps an opportunity or a culmination, lures Lizzie towards the bandstand under the light of the pulsing green balloon. The Crawfords realize she's gone and race to the green.

They find Lizzie seemingly entranced near the bandstand's centre. Mark and Chloe, now fully controlled, appear, chanting the "tradition" mantra and physically blocking the Crawfords' path. The entity launches a final, powerful psychic assault. Timothy is

bombarded with hyper-realistic replays of John's death, but drawing strength from the widow's words about life being "meaningless" and cruelly snatched, he consciously rejects the imposed guilt, recognizing the randomness and weakening the vision's hold. Rebecca is assaulted with terrifying visions of losing Lizzie to the village, but her fear transforms into pure maternal rage, a defiant force pushing back against the psychic attack.

They manage to bypass the controlled Mark and Chloe and reach the bandstand platform. Lizzie, momentarily confused, reaches for her parents, her connection to them disrupting the entity's full control. She hums a discordant mix of the village tune and a real nursery rhyme. This innocent disruption, combined with her parents' focused defiance, creates instability. Seizing the moment, Timothy uses a piece of wood to strike the bandstand's central pillar – the weak point identified on his map.

The overload is catastrophic for the entity. The green balloon explodes, a psychic screech tears through the air, and the oppressive energy collapses. Mark and Chloe crumple, unconscious. The unnatural silence breaks, replaced by faint, normal sounds like birdsong. Crucially, the road leading out of Fudgewick looks solid, real, leading into the darkness.

Without hesitation, Timothy and Rebecca grab Lizzie and run for their car. They drive frantically through the now-lifeless village. As they approach the dreaded sign, they brace for the loop. But this time, they pass it. The road continues straight. They are out.

Resolution:

The blue SUV speeds away into the night, leaving the silent, waiting village and the unconscious Mark and Chloe behind. The Crawfords have escaped the physical trap of Fudgewick. Relief washes over them, mingled with exhaustion and tears. But the escape is not clean. They carry the deep scars of their psychological torment, the horrifying memories, and the chilling knowledge of the village's nature and its insidious influence on their daughter. They are free, but the silence of Fudgewick and the echo of its whispers will haunt them forever.