

Puppy

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Inspired by true events

FADE IN:

1.INT. PODCAST STUDIO

In an intimate setting A PODCAST HOST (Enthusiastic, confident, witty) for true crime podcast STRANGER THAN FICTION sits with LAURA (50s, warm). Their dialogue becomes audible.

This dialogue has scope to be improvised between the characters. The following text is set as an example:

SHOW HOST

I did promise all of you a special guest for today's episode, and joining me in the studio is the incredible children's author Laura Dickinson. For those of you who don't know Laura has a new book out now called Number 7.

Now Laura before we launch ourselves into the book it's important to let everyone know that Number 7 isn't catered towards your typical fan base, mostly as it's actually an autobiography.

LAURA

I thought it was about time.

SHOW HOST

I must say I personally just could not put it down. And without giving too much away the book talks a lot about your time with the '**Disciples of Eden**' and within the group you were known as Number 7.

LAURA

Yes

SHOW HOST

A lot of what you talk about is just incredible and traumatic and I'm sure I speak for many people when I say we had no idea what you went through.

LAURA

(modestly)

Well, it's a story I wasn't sure anyone wanted to hear.

SHOW HOST

Oh trust me they do! Now I'm trying to be so careful not to give too much away about the book because I want everyone to go out and buy it tomorrow. But I would like to talk about was a part in the book that really did stand out for me especially, and that involves your daughter Ava.

Laura holds her composure as the sound of Ava's name unnerves her.

SHOW HOST (CONT'D)

You talk about her birth but we don't hear anymore about her in your book.

LAURA

There's many things I left out of the book. I felt that my daughter's anonymity should be one of them.

TALK SHOW HOST

I understand. Can you at least let the listeners know if she's doing well? I'm sure they're all desperate to know what happened to her.

LAURA

(reflective and deliberate)
...She's safe.

JUMP TO:

2. INT. KITCHEN. DAY

We see Laura now in her thirties. She stands on a stool adding the final touches to handmade birthday decorations attaching them to the ceiling. Cheerful music plays in the background.

CUT TO:

3. INT: UPSTAIRS BEDROOM. DAY

We enter a child's bedroom, littered with simple decorations, it doesn't resemble a 'typical' child's room. A large dog (PARKER) sits patiently at the foot of the bed concentrating on what is underneath it.

BACK TO:

4. INT: KITCHEN. DAY

Laura continues to decorate we see a brief glimpse of remnants of old burn scars, a faint and crude branding of a number 7 can be seen on her forearm.

A birthday cake and other party foods can be seen behind her. As she steps down from the stool she notices a dead mouse pinned to a mousetrap and nudges it with her foot.

BACK TO:

5. INT: UPSTAIRS LANDING. DAY

Closing in on the bed we see a young girl (AVA, 8 years old, pale and sombre) wearing a tatty beanie with dog ears. She is lying on her back underneath the bed seemingly happy in her world of her own.

LAURA'S voice can be heard from downstairs.

LAURA (O.C)

Ava!

AVA pulls herself out from under the bed, we stay locked underneath.

TITLE SCREEN:

PUPPY

BACK TO:

6. INT: KITCHEN. DAY

As Laura drops the dead mouse into the bin she turns to see Ava standing in the doorway.

LAURA

Hey. Tada! Happy birthday.

Ava stands silently in the kitchen. Parker beside her.

LAURA (CONT'D)

So, what do you think? (pause)

Ava stands in silence. We can see on Laura's face that she knows Ava hates it.

LAURA

I've made white chocolate brownies and those marshmallow things you like and I was thinking maybe later we could watch a film? You can pick.

Ava silently looks around the kitchen at the haphazard decorations and food.

A small cake with a large number 8 stands in the middle of the table.

Ava eventually sits and begins picking cucumber slices from the sandwiches and eating them; one hand holding Parker's fur. Laura's is resilient in her happy optimism.

AVA

(breaking her silence)

Parker doesn't like brownies

LAURA

(unflustered)

Oh really? Well he better have this then.

Laura brings out a dog treat from her apron and hands it to Ava who feeds Parker. They sit in an awkward silence. Laura still trying to hold the atmosphere together with a happy disposition.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Bernie said that she was probably
going to come over later.

AVA
She's not coming.

LAURA
Course she is. She told me yesterday
that she was calling at...

The mousetrap in the kitchen springs shut suddenly catching a mouse inside it. Ava looks blankly at it from the table.

Laura sees the mouse and seems embarrassed.

LAURA (CONT'D)
Tell you what. Why don't we take this
stuff through and watch some TV eh?

Ava exits the kitchen with her plate leaving Laura at the kitchen table.

FADE TO:

7. INT: LOUNGE. DAY

Ava sits in a world of her own at the window slowly controlling spit from her mouth on the windowsill ; Parker sitting loyally beside her.

LAURA (O.C)
(playfully)
You know, if you've got enough in
there you could do the windows too.

Ava stops what she is doing, she stares out of the window.

AVA
Do you think I'm weird?

LAURA
(surprised)
What. (pause) No. Do you think I'm
weird?

Ava indicates her answer by looking past her mother into the kitchen with the gaudy decorations.

Laura smiles acknowledging her daughter and laughing at her own terrible efforts. She notices a pendant around Ava's neck, a symbol which reminds her of her past.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Ava, what's this?

AVA

I found it.

LAURA

Are you sure? Because the last place I knew where it was was my room.

Ava shrugs but knows she's been found out.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Well I guess it's no good being locked away in a drawer. You can keep it, it's yours anyway. You used to wear it when you were a baby.

AVA

What does it mean?

LAURA

(reluctant to tell Ava it's meaning)

...Nothing, it's just a trinket.

Ava removes the pendant.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Hey. Honestly you can keep it...

AVA

I'm not a baby. I'm going to my room now.

LAURA

(disappointed)

It's still early. What if we did some painting? Or we could go out for a walk...

Ava starts to feed Parker from her birthday plate, seemingly ignoring her Mother. Laura sees that her argument isn't working and concedes. She is upset but understands her daughter.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Okay.

Laura kisses her two fingers and reaches them out to Ava. Ava returns the gesture and their two fingers meet.

Ava exits leaving LAURA by the window.

FADE TO:

10: INT. BEDROOM. EVENING

Ava is sleeping with Parker on the bedclothes, her fingers wrapped in his fur. Laura sits motionless watching Ava in the silent stillness of the room.

After some time she approaches Ava's bed and kisses her gently on the forehead (her time to steal any physical contact with her daughter).

A shrill call from the telephone breaks the moment, she stands and closes the door behind her.

11. INT. LOUNGE. EVENING

JANEY (V.O)

Laura? It's Janey.

LAURA

Hi ... Hi, it's been a long time. How are you, I must have been.

JANEY (V.O)

Have you seen the news today?

LAURA

No, it's Ava's birthday so...

JANEY (V.O)

(forthright)

He's dead Laura.

Laura understands and begins flicking through the channels until she reaches the news broadcast.

CUT TO:

TELEVISION BROADCAST:

NEWSREADER

Joseph Roth, the infamous cult leader of the group known as 'Disciples of Eden' died earlier this morning. Details of his death have not been released but it is known that Roth had been ill for some time but had refused medical intervention on religious grounds.

BACK TO:

13. INT. LOUNGE. EVENING

NEWSREADER

Questions were first raised regarding the 'Disciples of Eden' during a TVS documentary in 2010.

Laura stands in silence stunned at the news.

CUT TO:

14. DOCUMENTARY IMAGES (TV)

Old documentary footage of the 'Disciples of Eden' flash onto the screen; Joseph Roth is surrounded by his congregation. Their hands in the air, some silently weeping as they listen to Roth. A heavily pregnant Laura can be clearly seen absorbed by Roth's words.

ROTH

(Calm and deliberate)

Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. And he is ashamed. That we would allow sin into our hearts which should be saved for him.

ROTH (CONT.D)

Homosexuality, depression, epilepsy, cancer. These mental and physically afflictions you invite with open arms.

NEWSREADER (O.C)

It was reported Roth led a group to be up to 100 loyal followers in a remote settlement where he allegedly fathering up to 40 children.

Roth speaks to an interviewer - talking heads style.

ROTH

You know I want to tell you; I read something beautiful the other day. A powerful quote, not in scripture. It read.

"Demons are like obedient dogs, they come when they are called."

Laura is transfixed in the news broadcast.

NEWSREADER (O.C)

Roth was finally arrested in 2011 following the documentary broadcast. With charges including historical accounts of torture, abuse, rape and kidnapping within his congregation.

A cult member is being interviewed. Throughout the scene chiming bells can be heard faintly behind him as the rest of the congregation celebrate Roth's sermon.

CULT MEMBER

He knows me better than I know myself. He created this family for us, so we can be ready.

DOCUMENTARY INTERVIEWER (O.C)

Ready for what?

The Cult member says nothing, he casually smiles, his hand exposes a branded number on his forearm.

DOCUMENTARY INTERVIEWER (O.C)

Can I ask what the number on your arm means?

CULT MEMBER

(confidently)

Commitment.

Behind the Cult Member Roth can be seen preaching, the TV camera focuses in on him as he passionately draws his devotees into a frenzy.

ROTH

(passionate)

And you continue to call them while I fight for all of you.

Hold onto your sins, your pain and your treachery and they will spew forth and control all of you!

Some of the congregation can be seen speaking in tongues, crying and some heavily breathing as they take in Roth's sermon. The chiming bells and ringing slowly become louder.

Laura quickly turns off the TV. High pitched noise penetrates the room as we see Laura frozen.

BLACK OUT:

INT. LOUNGE. LATE EVENING - CONT:

CLOSE UP OF LAURA'S FACE WAKING UP FROM THE FLOOR:

Laura wakes up from the black out confused, opening her hand she reveals the pendant Ava had given back to her earlier. She immediately goes to check on Ava where she finds them both still silently sleeping.

As she returns to the kitchen she sees that most of the birthday food she had prepared looks rotten and she begins to throw the food away in disgust.

A scratching sound coming from the walls stops her, as she turns away towards the wall we see that the food appears fresh, Laura still sees rotten food.

Laura slowly approaches the wall and listens intensely.

A faint voice breaks the suspense coming from the telephone receiver.

JANEY (V.O)
 Laura?..Laura?

Laura composes herself and picks up the receiver.

LAURA
 Janey I'm sorry I - (she notices
 PARKER in the kitchen)

LAURA
 I'll call you back.

Laura stands stunned as she sees Parker sat in the kitchen,
 which seems impossible as she had left him in Ava's bedroom.

JANEY (V.O)
 Confess your sins, set the devil
 inside free and you shall be reborn.

Laura quickly puts down the receiver.

A loud baby's cry can be heard from upstairs as Laura
 frantically runs to her daughter's room. Chiming bells can be
 heard faintly.

16. INT: LANDING (LATE EVENING)

Laura rushes to Ava's room, the baby cry grows into growling.

She stops at the doorway and turns on the light, the room is
 empty. Laura looks around panicked.

Parker sits at the bottom of the stairs, Ava appears next to
 him looking up at her mother. Slowly figures seem to appear
 in the shadows at the bottom of the stairs near Ava. The
 chiming bells and growling becomes louder. Believing that the
 figures are remaining members of the **Disciples of Eden** Laura
 screams to her daughter.

LAURA
 Ava!

Laura runs to the bottom of the stairs grabbing Ava by the
 arm. Ava screams out and pulls back at the physical contact
 as Laura tries to pull her up the stairs.

LAURA (CONT'D)
 Ava please!!!!

Laura finally manages to pull Ava up to her bedroom. The chiming intensifies joined with speaking in tongues (reminiscent of the earlier scene in the documentary). Laura panics and pushes Ava violently into her bedroom pulling the door behind her. The sounds of the disciples intensifies to an almost deafening volume. Laura turns the key locking Ava's bedroom door.

Silence.

Laura stands shocked, turning to see that the shadowy figures are no longer there and the house is completely silent. She takes in the stillness of the house. Everything has returned to peace but Laura knows what this means for Ava.

BLACKOUT:

CUT TO:

17. INT: KITCHEN (DAY)

We see a close up of a cake with a number 18 being carried.

Laura (50's) slowly appears into view carrying the cake.

. INT: LANDING

We follow her as she stops by Ava's bedroom door.

LAURA
Happy Birthday

Laura kisses her two fingers and places them on the door (mirroring the first scene).

She places the cake on the floor and turns to leave. There is an absence and calm to her demeanour.

As Laura leaves Ava can be heard in her room screaming out for her mother, chains rattling as we hear pleading and sobbing.

CUT TO:

19. EXT. OUTSIDE HOUSE (DAY)

We exit and observe the isolated house. It's remoteness emphasising the terror that Ava's screams can not be heard.

AVA's screams become louder piercing the air as move further and further away from the house.

END