

Distraction

written by

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FADE IN
INT.CAR - NIGHT

SARAH (32) is driving along a dark 40mph country road. The dark winter night is illuminated by intermittent street lights that cast an eerie glow on the empty road. SARAH switches on the radio, glancing at the clock. It is 11.04pm, SARAH yawns. SARAH's old blue volvo is the only car on the road in either direction. SARAH glances at a passing cemetery to her left, her eyes switch focus as she watches the cemetery pass by in her rearview mirror. She slowly returns her gaze to the road as it returns to being flanked by fields and hedgerows on the left and right.

SARAH
(Humming to the radio)
Yes I do feel better, yes I do, I
feel alright...

SARAH's phone beeps, once, loudly. It lies face down in the passenger seat next to her. SARAH turns her head towards the phone, contemplating whether to pick it up. SARAH looks back to the road. It is clear. The phone beeps twice, in quick succession. SARAH looks back to the phone. She glances at the clear road once more before reaching over to grasp the phone. The phone slips out of her hand and lands closer to the passenger door, out of SARAH's reach.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Shit

SARAH strains across the passenger chair, fingers scrambling for the phone.

BANG

SARAH looks up to see something collide with the front of the car and slam on the brakes.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Shit! What the hell was that!

SARAH puts the car into neutral and turns her body to look through the rear window. A body is illuminated by the green street lights. There is no movement. SARAH starts to breathe heavily as she takes in the scene.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Oh god no!

SARAH reaches to open the car door, her hand is shaking. She slowly exits the car, leaving the driver door open. She apprehensively approaches the body.

It is a female, it is clear from the clothing and long hair but the woman's face is concealed. The woman's body is twisted in an unnatural shape. Moans of pain float across the night sky.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry...I..I didn't see you,
you just came out of nowhere..

As SARAH gets closer to the body, she notices the paisley skirt, vaguely recognising it. She walks slowly around to the woman's head, her face concealed by long, blonde bloodied hair.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(Rambling, clearly in
shock)
Oh god I am so sorry, I am so so
sorry, I didn't see you, you just
appeared from nowhere, I'm so so
sorry, but you're going to be
alright, I'll...I'll call for an
ambulance and you'll be okay, just
stay still...

The woman mumbles something.

SARAH kneels and slowly moves the hair from the person's face to hear what she is saying. SARAH recoils in shock.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Mum? MUM?! IS THAT YOU?!

The woman groans in pain once more.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(HYSTERICAL)
Oh my god! Mum! Mum! But..but what
are you doing here?! You don't live
round here? Why were you in the
dark on your own, in the middle of
the night? I don't understand..Oh
mum I am so sorry, mum, please
forgive me.

SARAH gathers her mother's head onto her lap, caressing her hair whilst sobbing hard and rocking backwards and forwards.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Help!! Help!! Somebody help me!

SARAH (CONT'D)

Mum, stay with me, I'll call for an ambulance, they'll be here in minutes, just stay with me mum, please! PLEASE! Just stay with me.

SARAH'S MOTHER emits a painful groan. SARAH reaches for her phone in her jacket pocket. Its not there. SARAH looks at her car in the distance.

INT.CAR - NIGHT

SARAH's phone lies upright in the car. The three text messages visible on screen are Spam marketing texts.

INT.FACILITY COMPUTER ROOM - NIGHT

A young man (32) with scruffy hair is sat in a clinically clean room, facing a wall of cctv like screens. His untucked, creased, shirt bares the logo DI with 'Research & Rehab Dept' embroidered below it. His name tag says JASON. JASON is watching a small screen intently whilst half listening to a song on a radio app that is open on his phone on the desk in front of him.

DEREK (35) dressed in a nicely pressed red shirt and complimentary tie, walks in the room and stands behind JASON looking at the screens in front of them. Derek's shirt bares the same logo, but with a name tag that states his name DEREK MATTHEWS and role of Night Manager. He holds a clipboard with authority.

Jason closes the radio app and pockets his phone, swinging around to smile at his manager.

JASON

Evening boss, how's it going tonight?

DEREK

Good thanks JASE, just doing the rounds through D Block. How are the inmates tonight?

JASON

Well inmates 200 to 280 are pretty standard, no real issues as the rehab sessions are working well. These last 20 inmates are fairly new and most are responding to the scenarios.

DEREK

Most?

JASON

Yeah, well, this one here, inmate
298 SARAH ALTINGHAM...

JASON swivels back around and points to the screen he has been watching, on the bottom row, two from the right hand side.

JASON (CONT'D)

She got convicted of driving using a mobile phone 30 days ago and has been in cryosleep for the last 20 days, of her 60 day sentence. I've been running the standard driving rehab sequence, you know the one..

DEREK

I'm struggling to keep track of all the new and revised programmes, there's so many now, refresh my memory.

JASON

OK, night time, isolated and empty road, phone goes off, driver is distracted, hits a pedestrian who appears out of nowhere. Driver is full of remorse, yada yada yada. Same sequence every night for 30 nights and we should start to see the phone being ignored by night 5 to 10. The rehab sequence starts from night 31.

DEREK

OK, so whats her problem?

JASON

Well, she's reached for the phone every night without fail. She doesn't seem to have an emotional response to the sequence, until now that is..

JASON taps on a console in front of him and SARAH's distraught but mute image fills all screens. She is frantically shaking her mothers body, crying, shouting for help.

DEREK
Certainly looks like she's
responding emotionally.

JASON turns around in his seat to look at DEREK, he has a sly smile on his face.

JASON
I changed the pedestrian. Made it
resemble someone she knows.

DEREK
Who?

JASON
Her mother.

They both look back at the screen. SARAH is sat on the roadside, crying whilst cradling her mothers limp head in her lap, screaming for help. Lights from an ambulance can be seen approaching in the distance.

DEREK
That's dark. Really dark. I don't
know whether to be impressed or
worried.

A puzzled look crosses DEREK's face.

DEREK (CONT'D)
Wait a minute, who gave you
permission to try this?

JASON's smile fades

JASON
Look Derek, before you go off on
one, I thought I should give this a
try before we had to report this
case as another failure.

DEREK's face is a contorted mixture of anger and frustration.

DEREK
For fucks sake JASON! What the fuck
are you playing at?

JASON
Derek, relax, no one will find out,
only you and I know about it.

DEREK points to the screen whilst turning to glare at JASON

DEREK

Relax! Relax?! You're messing with
a girl's mind!

DEREK's face begins to redden. A vein pulsates on his
forehead.

DEREK (CONT'D)

Shit! I could lose my job over
this.

DEREK leans over JASON menacingly, moving his arm to point
his right finger in JASON's face. JASON leans back, tense as
DEREK's face comes close to his.

DEREK (CONT'D)

You should have spoken to me first.
Who the hell do you think you are!
You don't just start playing god
and begin mucking about with
people's brains. If this goes wrong
and anyone finds out, we could lose
our jobs...or worse, end up like
these guys.

JASON holds both his hands up in the air like he is being
held at gunpoint.

JASON

(nervously)

Jesus DEREK! I'm sorry okay! I'm
sorry. Look...honestly. I have a
plan and its gonna work. Just calm
down..please.

DEREK slowly moves backwards, straightening up. He begins to
rub his forehead, audibly breathing deeply to try and calm
down.

DEREK

(sarcastically)

OK genius, whats your plan then and
this better be good.

JASON

I've put a lot of thought into
this. If it doesn't work, I'll just
delete the new profile and replace
it with one from an inmate whose
already been discharged. Ok? No one
will ever find out.

There is a long, stagnant spell of unbroken silence. DEREK
looks less than convinced. His jaw is clenched.

His fists clenched by his side. The anger radiating from DEREK's body is palpable. He leans forward suddenly, grabbing the handles of the chair, thrusting his face forward toward JASON's.

DEREK

Is that it?! Are you mad! You can't just add and delete profile's without someone noticing. For fucks sake! Someone from the day shift is bound to notice somethings not right.

JASON

(hurried whispering)

Look. If you keep on shouting, someone's gonna come down here. Anyway, have you seen the idiots employed on the day shift, they don't know their arse from their elbow. And I'm not stupid you know. I'm a coding genius, remember. I know how to hide this. Besides, if this works, its a BIG promotion for YOU and me. BIG. Anyhow, management will be more than happy to forgive a little bit of ethical creativity, if it gets us back on track.

DEREK's face lingers infront of JASON's for a long silent minute. The stillness of the room reverberates.

JASON (CONT'D)

Look mate, I'm sorry, but it's done now, so I can either erase the profile now OR we wait one night and see what happens tomorrow.

DEREK shrugs whilst rolling his eyes and shaking his head somewhat defeated by the exchange. He moves back to an upfront position, stepping away and pacing a little, jaw still clenched.

JASON turns around to watch the screen. SARAH is still sat on the road sobbing into her mothers head of hair.

DEREK turns and walks back, he looks at the screen and watches SARAH's image.

DEREK

When will you know if its worked?

JASON points to SARAH's crying face which has illuminated the screen.

JASON

With this reaction? I'd bet money that she won't be driving and texting anytime soon. Come back tomorrow at 11pm, I'll run the scenario again and we can see what she does. I reckon we'd have to get three consecutive, negative results before we'd know for sure.

DEREK

Do you think it'll have any negative effects on her, you know, messing with her mind like that?

JASON

Nah. I mean, she did the crime, she's gotta do the time. Plus, a virtual death is way better than being responsible for a real one. It'll be worth it if it saves lives.

DEREK looks at his watch and then his clipboard, he fills in the report for D Block, ticking boxes that show the visit to be clear of issues.

DEREK

OK. I'm gonna leave you to it but no more fucking about.

DEREK fixes JASON with a steady stare.

JASON

Ok, no more fucking about. See you tomorrow night and say hi to my sister and the kids for me.

DEREK leaves the room.

JASON watches DEREK leave and then pulls out his phone, tapping on its screen, opening the radio app once more. A song fills the silent room. After a few moments, the song ends and a singular voice speaks out.

NEWS PRESENTER

Now for a recap of today's news. The Dillon Institute came under intense scrutiny today as it released its first quarter figures on its controversial rehabilitation programme.

(MORE)

NEWS PRESENTER (CONT'D)

Funded by the Government as a radical new initiative, its aim was to combat soaring reform costs through pioneering cognitive restructuring. Sadly success rates have fallen short of their predicted targets. Human Rights activists are already calling on the Government to end the pilot...

A sly smile crosses JASON's face as he taps the radio app and a new song fills the room.

SKIP TO THE NEXT NIGHT

INT.CAR - NIGHT

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SARAH

(Humming to the radio)

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Fade out