

>PLAYBACK

by

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1st Revision

FADE IN:

INT. FORENSIC AUDIO LAB - EVENING

A sterile hum. Racks of technical equipment line the walls and blink in semi-darkness. DAN, 30s, a forensic audio specialist, sits at a mixing console staring at a monitor screen.

Connected to the mixing console by a lead, a 'Zoom Recorder' (digital audio recorder) coated with dry blood and sealed in a transparent wallet tagged: EVIDENCE - PROPERTY OF: JUDE CARTER.

Across from Dan, DETECTIVE HARLAN, mid-50s, reading through a pack of report papers - a man more at home with crime scenes than computers.

DAN
So you say this kid was a Sound Designer? Feature films? Any I'd know?

HARLAN
Something like that, Freelance. Worked from home. The neighbour is-

Harlan checks the report.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
was, Emma Pearce. Flat above.

DAN
She's the one he-

HARLAN
Yeah, Play it.

Harlan points to the Zoom Recorder. Dan hits play and a small LED light blinks to confirm we're on.

ON SPEAKERS - THE RECORDING

Hiss. The intimate air of a one-bed flat.

JUDE (V.O.)
Scene-12. Foley layer, Take-8.
1,1,2... Sensitivity can go up a bit. 2,3...

Floorboards creak and something like a cupboard closes upstairs.

JUDE (V.O.)
Jesus, Emma. Give me just one clean minute will ya?

Microphone distortion catches an exhale, clearly frustrated.

JUDE (V.O.)
Scene-12. Foley, Take-9 -

Muffled music starts from above.

JUDE (V.O.)
For F's sake! Sensitivity down.

Rattle of microphone handling.

JUDE (V.O.)
Up again. Take-9, again.

More rattling, then something new. A deep voice, unplaceable / unpleasant / unintelligible.

3RD VOICE (V.O.)
Do, t.

BACK TO LAB

HARLAN
Who was that? What they say?

Dan rewinds. He tweaks the EQ and other settings on the console. The voice clarifies, deepens.

ON SPEAKERS - THE RECORDING

3RD VOICE (V.O.)
Do. It.

BACK TO LAB

DAN
Male.

Harlan gives Dan the 'obviously' look.

HARLAN
Another person in the flat?

DAN
Maybe. Or-

HARLAN
(sharp)
Shh.

Harlan leans in, ear closer to the speakers. Dan focuses on a scrolling waveform on the monitor, the recording continues to play.

INTERCUT: JUDE'S FLAT / AUDIO LAB

We move *inside* the waveform. The lab fades. Jude's flat materialises. Computer-screen light from the lab spills into this world, painting the walls cold blue. Everything we hear is the playback, but now diegetic – visible, it's the imagined scene by Harlan and Dan listening on.

Jude (late 20s, thin, wired), headphones around his neck with back to camera. He stands impatiently staring up at the ceiling and the source of the muffled music. In front of him, the Zoom recorder is mounted on a stand.

JUDE
(to ceiling)
Finished?

He waits. Nothing.

Jude slips on headphones, adjusts a setting on the recorder.

3RD VOICE (V.O.)
Go tell her.

Jude flinches as if the voice was amplified and piped loudly into his ears. He relaxes and turns around to reply.

JUDE
I can't make her, you do it.

The scene freezes to a stand still.

BACK TO LAB

Dan has paused playback.

HARLAN
Who is that? Report says he was alone? His mic can't pick up a voice like that through walls?

DAN
Could be he's editing live. Layering takes? Except this is one continues file.

HARLAN
Sure?

Dan zooms in on the waveform and points to a smooth sine wave.

DAN
Positive. See that? That's 50-Hertz mains bleeding on the signal. Continuous, edits would show.

Dan rewinds, applies another filter. The waveform splits into two, stacked vertically. Two vocal fingerprints.

DAN (CONT'D)

Hmm. Different pitch and formants
but, the same angle, distance.
It's him. Same person, same
mouth.

HARLAN

So, he's talking to himself.

DAN

Arguing.

Harlan makes a rolling hand gesture. Dan hits play.

INTERCUT: JUDE'S FLAT / AUDIO LAB

The two locations merge and coexist again. Muffled music, dancing footsteps and giggling from above. An active waveform from the lab screen tracks across Jude's face.

JUDE

You think I can't hear you. But I
can. Every step. Every breath.

3RD VOICE (V.O.)

She's laughing at you.

Jude yanks the headphones off his head and goes to throw them.

BACK TO LAB

Playback continues. The waveform's amplitude jumps with a sequence of erratic thuds: Headphones hit the ceiling? Chair knocked over? A door slammed?

HARLAN

(to Dan)

Brace yourself.

Muffled, more distant sounds continue.

Feet on staircase? A door bashed open? A female, screams.

Something falls to the floor.

Dan looks at Harlan. A long silence. No more music is playing upstairs.

One by one, sounds return in closer proximity: A door? A drawer? Something picked up - headphones?

Harlan cocks his head to the side. Dan squints his eyes. They're focused, trying to piece it all together.

Erratic breathing gradually fading, finding its pace.
A pause. An inhale. Then that voice again, deeper still.

3RD VOICE (V.O.)
Dooo it.

JUDE (V.O.)
Scene-12. Take, hmm -10?
Sensitivity can go, down.

3RD VOICE (V.O.)
(quickly / sharp)
Do it.

Metallic click.

GUNSHOT.

Harlan & Dan visibly jump.

SMASH CUT TO:

INTERCUT: JUDE'S FLAT / AUDIO LAB

The jagged lines of the waveform are projected on all walls, it spikes red, then instantly flatlines to blue.

A slow scan across a still, lifeless scene.

If there's a room tone, it's imperceptible. The Zoom recorder is still on, but now splattered with blood trickling down to the bottom corner, forming droplets waiting to happen.

BACK TO LAB

Neither man speaks. A dripping sound counts out the seconds, then stops. Finally:

HARLAN
That's it? That's the end?

DAN
Of him, yeah.

HARLAN
And her.

Harlan shakes his head as he grabs his coat, heads to the door.

HARLAN (CONT'D)
OK, we'll list it as a homicide-suicide in the morning. No signs of anyone else involved, no forced entry.

Dan hesitates, eyes lingering on the Zoom recorder.

DAN

Looks that way. I'll see you out.

Dan follows Harlan, they exit into a brightly lit corridor. The doors swings closed behind them leaving the lab empty and returned to semi darkness.

CLOSE ON THE ZOOM RECORDER WITH MONITOR IN BACKGROUND -

The red LED light blinks steadily, still rolling.

A slight shifting sound, confirmed by a flicker of the waveform. A whisper seeps through - lower, slower, almost affectionate:

THIRD VOICE (V.O.)

Good boy... Gooood boy.

The waveform rises and falls, like deep breathing.

CUT TO BLACK.