

F R O S T      F A I R

Screenplay by

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registered WGA

FADE IN:

EXT. RIVER THAMES -- UNDERWATER - DAY

We travel along the Thames, half submerged and borne by the current, from London Bridge to the Houses of Parliament. At times we dive beneath the muddy waters - sediment and particles dancing in the faint rays of sunlight that penetrate the surface. At others, we briefly re-emerge, as though looking through the eyes of someone struggling to stay afloat. As we rise and fall in the turbulent waters, we find ourselves alternating between the London of today and that of the 17th century.

EXT. LAMBERTH MARSH FIELDS - CONTINUOUS

LONDON, 1684 -- A man's hand holds a paintbrush, mixing small amounts of paint as he searches for the right colour.

A gold Renaissance-style ring on his index finger. The face is octagonal and engraved with the initials WC. Beneath the initials is a shield with a picture of a fish wearing a crested helmet.

The paintbrush searches the pallet for another colour, then begins to paint the outline of a face.

The painter is WILLIAM CANE, 30s. Dressed elegantly in the Baroque style with long hair parted down the middle and a thin moustache.

We watch from over the shoulder of a WOMAN with long, wavy RED HAIR, the subject of the painting, as the painter's head pops out from behind the easel, smiling sheepishly.

The WOMAN gets up and runs playfully away.

EXT. FIELD IN ESSEX - DAY

We follow the RED-HAIRED WOMAN from behind as she runs through an open field. She tries to corral a group of Ryeland sheep into a pen. Dotted around are modest houses and trees stripped bare by the harsh winter. All of a sudden, the woman stops to look at an unknown object floating in the sky above: A BLUE BALLON.

In the distance, we hear the opening bars of Mozart's Cosa Mi Narri?, from Le Nozze Di Figaro.

MAIN TITLE: F R O S T F A I R

INT. FAMILY APARTMENT - MORNING

LONDON, PRESENT DAY - A termite is being drawn in permanent marker on the surface of a deflated white balloon. The cuticles of the hand holding the marker are in a bad state. The hand, splattered with bits of paint, connects the neck of the balloon to a gas canister. As the hand turns the valve, the balloon begins to inflate with helium. As it expands, so does the termite drawn on its surface.

The sound of breathing. TERESA WEBB, 38. She's not good with eye contact, so you're never quite sure if she's talking to you or to someone else. Thin, with long, dark hair that's difficult to keep under control.

She adds small details to the flawless drawing.

In one of the rooms of her spacious apartment, Teresa has set up an artist's studio. Paintings, easels, work benches with fragments of half-finished works.

Next to Teresa is her daughter LISA, two and a half years old. She waits excitedly for her mother to finish. Teresa cuts a length of ribbon and ties it to the end of the balloon.

LISA

A termite!

TERESA

Which is an insect.

A lit cigarette is burning itself out on the work bench. Teresa picks it up and takes a drag, then opens the window and exhales the smoke. Through the window, a view of London stretches out far below.

TERESA (CONT'D)

From the order Blattodea, to be precise, same as cockroaches. Almost all termites are blind. Just imagine. Must be a fucking pain in the arse.

LISA

You swore!

TERESA

Sorry, but it would be a pain in the arse. Cover your eyes.

Lisa puts her hands over her eyes.

TERESA (CONT'D)  
Now try and walk around.

Lisa wanders about trying not to bump into anything.

LISA  
Fucking pain in the arse.

Teresa goes to hand her the ribbon attached to the balloon, but as she does so, she lets it slip through the Lisa's hands and escape.

LISA (CONT'D)  
Mum!

TERESA  
You swore!

The balloon floats up to the ceiling, out of reach of Lisa.

LISA  
I'm hungry.

TERESA  
I'm really late hun, tell your dad  
when he comes to get you.

We follow Teresa through a large living room. When she passes the record player, she turns up the volume of Le Nozze di Figaro and carries on hurriedly into the bathroom. As she opens the door, steam pours out into the flat.

TERESA (CONT'D)  
Shit.

Teresa quickly turns off the hot tap, takes off her clothes and lies down in the bath, which is right on the verge of overflowing.

TERESA (CONT'D)  
Five minutes! You better be here  
when I open my eyes, ok?

She closes her eyes, holds her breath, sticks her head under the water and holds it there. The sound of the music stops dead --.

TERESA (V.O.)  
I don't know what I'm doing here.

## INT. FIRST DEPOSITION - AFTERNOON

The room has glass walls on two sides and through them we can see the river Thames. Teresa is sitting by herself at a large wooden conference table.

RUTH

Under the Hague Evidence Convention, I am allowed to deposition witnesses on behalf of my client who is, as you know, American.

Teresa is wearing a hoodie and tracksuit bottoms, unlike the rest of those present, who are all formally dressed.

On the opposite side of the table is THOMAS BALNAVES, 46, her ex, in a tailored suit. By his side are RUTH LINWOOD, his lawyer, and two junior associates clutching large folders of paperwork. A stenographer is typing their conversation. At the far corner of the table is the EXAMINER.

EXAMINER

(to Teresa)

I am aware that you are a public figure, Ms Webb, but I would like to reassure you that the deposition won't be made public.

RUTH

Well, not until it goes to court.

EXAMINER

I have been appointed to supervise this deposition. As you are aware, an anonymous call was made to Social Services, alleging that your daughter Lisa Webb was a victim of emotional neglect.

TERESA

Anonymous? The person responsible is standing right here in front of me.

Teresa points to Thomas.

THOMAS

I'm done arguing! Let's see what the courts have to say!

Ruth gestures for him to stop.

RUTH

You attended weekly appointments with a Dr Courtney Hadwin over the course of three months. Could you remind us what they were for?

TERESA

Sleeping disorders and migraines. You can talk to her.

RUTH

We already did.

Ruth closes the folder and slides it over to the examiner across the table.

RUTH (CONT'D)

What I'd like to understand is whether Ms Webb has been suffering from some kind of psychological disturbance, hallucinations perhaps. She's talked before about the "altered state" she experiences when she paints.

Teresa looks up.

TERESA

(sarcastically)

Just because Dalí painted melting clocks or Picasso painted women with blue faces doesn't mean they were mentally ill. I think you're confusing hallucination with imagination love.

RUTH

Did you know that benzodiazepine use can trigger psychotic episodes?

TERESA (CONT'D)

Seriously? This is getting a bit desperate don't you think?

RUTH (CONT'D)

Do you habitually use antidepressants?

TERESA

I take the medicine prescribed by my GP for my migraines and to help me sleep.

Ruth stands up energetically and looks at the other people around the table.

RUTH  
Your daughter died in the middle of your custody battle with my client, your ex-husband, while under your supervision. Is that correct?

TERESA (CONT'D)  
That's correct.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
Just the two of you in the apartment, nobody else.  
(a beat)  
I hope you realise that with your history, if this goes to court, you'll end up in Rampton High Security Psychiatric Hospital.

TERESA  
I'm not crazy.

Ruth takes a seat. She reads from another of her notes.

RUTH  
How many pills did you take the evening before your daughter's death?

EXAMINER  
(to Ruth)  
Unless formal charges are brought, Ms Webb doesn't have to answer.

RUTH  
Benzodiazepine abuse strikes me as relevant to our case, and I'm sure a jury would agree.

Ruth holds out her hand and passes over some more pages from the folder lying on the table.

RUTH (CONT'D)  
If you read the divorce proceedings, he was adamant that he should retain sole custody, and made clear reference to the fact that his ex-wife was both unwell and violent.

TERESA  
That isn't true.

RUTH

You punched a journalist in the face for daring to question your work. It's on YouTube, 2 million views.

Ruth leans back in her chair.

RUTH (CONT'D)

I know you have a conscience. And I know you must see this isn't right. The sooner you accept your guilt, the sooner you'll find closure.  
(a beat)  
Do you believe in God Teresa?

TERESA

I believe in what I can see with my own eyes. I've never seen God.

EXAMINER

Is this really relevant?

RUTH

She swore in the name of God that her testimony would be true...

EXAMINER

Ms Webb, you are aware you have the right to a solicitor?

TERESA

He knows full well I haven't got the money for a fancy lawyer.

RUTH

On 8 July, between 9.40 and 9:44 am, the cleaner comes in and finds you unconscious on the bathroom floor.

TERESA

I've been very clear on this point.

RUTH

Doesn't it strike you as a bit convenient that your memory is blank precisely at the time of the accident or is just me?

TERESA

I loved my daughter, I could never have hurt her. So tell me, how exactly is it convenient?