

"THE GROUP"

by

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FADE IN:

INT. A VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

We open on a scene typical to many village halls in the evening - a circle of chairs occupied by a group of people, sat around discussing one thing or another. This particular group is eclectic to say the least - different ages, genders, races, cultural groups etc. are present. It becomes apparent that this is a support group of some kind. There is a facilitator sat with a little more prominence than the others, some of whom slouch in their hard-backed plastic seats, some of whom lean forward.

We focus on one individual in particular, GUY, a man in his early twenties and an obvious newcomer to the group, as he seems a little more ill at ease than everybody else. He looks round, a little apprehensively, as he rises to take his turn.

GUY
Hello everyone. My name's Guy and
I'm...

The oddest thing about this is that Guy's voice seems to be that of a person much younger than him - perhaps a boy of no older than twelve or thirteen. As he stops talking, a look of "Oh yeah, of course" crosses his face, as he realises the redundancy of his words in this group. A small smile crosses his face and his body language relaxes, just a little.

Around the rest of the group, good natured smiles break out in gentle recognition that Guy's taken his first step towards them.

Now, instead of speaking Guy closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and raises his hands up, almost in devotion, and begins telling his story. All of the following happens simultaneously.

Colours start to rise from his fingertips, initially the barest hints of anything before becoming golden and warm, rising in brightness and confidence. Sounds start to play, beginning as a low chatter at the edge of hearing, rising to become louder and louder, a cacophony of noise, which, as Guy concentrates, slowly dwindle to a handful, then two, then one voice, his own, laughing and crying with joy. Around him images start to form, indistinct and difficult to discern at first, but increasing in strength, solidifying and multiplying all around him, until he is surrounded by

figures and images rushing past him, threatening to overwhelm him, but again, as he concentrates, they retreat, leaving him standing at the centre of this world of light and noise and picture, but very much in control of it. Then, something happens. A noise off. Hard, sharp, dangerous. Someone, an older boy perhaps, shouting, taunting.

VOICE
(off)
Hey! It's the freak! Hey, freak,
whatca doin'?

At this, the colours sounds and images contract and begin to darken, taking on a much more threatening feel. We hear a loud **SMACK!** of fist on face, and Guy reels from the remembered blow. As we hear a series of blows and kicks, more voices join the abuse directed Guy's way.

VOICES
Freak! Fuckin' freak! How'd'ya like
that freak! It's not natural!
Interferin' wiv people!

Guy shakes with the noises of the battering, and at one point drops to his knees. All around him the group lean forward in his support, light and sounds spilling from them into him. With their help he gets back to his feet as the sounds of the beating diminish, the bullies having had their sport.

VOICE
Fuckin' hell man, that was fun! Did
you see the way his fuckin' nose
fuckin' exploded like that? Never
seen nuthin' like that before, not
even when we kicked that fuckin' cat
to death...

Guy stands in the middle of the group, his eyes on the verge of tears, a "**that's my story**" expression on his face. The rest of the group break into applause, congratulating him for his bravery. Immediately Guy starts crying at the acceptance he has found here.

As he goes to sit, across the space of the room his eyes meet those of a young MUSLIM GIRL in a paisley hijab. They seem to share a more meaningful connection than the rest of the group. Guy sits and allows the next person to get up and share their story.

INT. A VILLAGE HALL - NIGHT

It is the end of the session, and the rest of the group have already left. Only Guy and the Muslim girl remain. Guy and the girl are sharing a private interaction of images and colours before they clasp in a hug. After the hug breaks the girl steps back from Guy. As she speaks, the her voice is that of an older woman.

GIRL

You were extremely brave tonight. I was affected very powerfully by your story.

GUY

Thank you. I can't believe you exist. I wish I'd found you earlier. Then maybe...

Guy can't finish the sentence, but he doesn't need to. The girl puts a comforting hand on his shoulder.

GIRL

The important thing is that you have us now. You'll never be alone again, if you want that.

Guy nods his thanks.

GUY

Same time next week?

GIRL

I look forward to sensing you then.

The girl and village hall fade from view, leaving Guy in darkness. A golden door hangs nearby. He opens it, stepping through.

INT. A PRIVATE HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

A pair of NURSES are going about their business tending to the patients in their care. They move to a private room where a young boy, perhaps no older than twelve is lying in a coma. It is obvious from the casts, bandages and the swelling and bruising to his face that he has been badly beaten. We see his name in marker pen on the whiteboard above his bed - it says GUY MANN. One nurse, a middle aged Muslim lady, wears a paisley hijab.

MUSLIM NURSE
Hi. Transferring from St Barts. How long's he been here?

OTHER NURSE
He was brought in two days ago, practically beaten to death. Bastards. He's been in an induced coma since he came out of surgery. Doctor Low thinks she's been able to save one of his eyes at least.

MUSLIM NURSE
(sighing)
Small comfort I guess. Have the police caught who...

The Muslim nurse notices there is activity on the EEG but she says nothing.

OTHER NURSE
No, not yet.

The Other Nurse completes her business in Guy's room and leaves. Safely alone now, the Muslim nurse places her hand gently on the back of Guy's with the gentlest of touches. Gold light glows around their hands.

MUSLIM NURSE
(in subtitled Arabic)
We're here, Guy.

FADE OUT.

THE END