

SHORT FILM

CULPRITS

FROM A TRUE STORY

I WAS A CHILD, THAT
MONSTER ADULTS CREATE
WITH THEIR REGRETS..

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WITH THE SUPPORT OF BAT 47 & TRANSPA

SYNOPSIS



Lior, with his lawyer and his mother Laura, is preparing for the custody trial.

The teenager fled Bangkok to escape the cult his father is involved in.

However, Laura remains torn about Lior, still resentful toward him for choices made long ago.

INTRO. BLACK SCREEN

"I was a child, this monster that adults create with their regrets."

— Jean-Paul Sartre

1. EXT. ALLEYWAY – EVENING

A Parisian alleyway on a winter evening. Night has fallen. The green neon of a 24-hour pharmacy illuminates the passage.

[SCENE READ IN REVERSE – Slow upward movement of clothing]

Clothes, as if pulled by an invisible force, rise along the side of a building. They float past the first window.

In the window frame, a couple argues playfully at the table, accompanied by a small child.

The child seems both embarrassed and amused by the situation. He curiously watches the floating clothes through the window.

The clothes continue to rise and return to where they were thrown: from a black messenger bag shaken by a woman from a window.

2. INT. LAURA'S LIVING ROOM – EVENING

LAURA, in her fifties, walks backward, placing the bag on the floor. She backs up until reaching a large oak table, immediately showing her delicate features and charming smile. Her eyes gleam mischievously. Her slightly disheveled hair gives her an elegant yet casual appearance.

She sits at the table in a large, old-fashioned living room. The walls are plain, covered with dark wood paneling. The ceiling is adorned with discreet moldings. The shelves are dark brown wood, and the floor is parquet. A bottle of whiskey lies in front of LAURA. She pours it, and the bottle refills itself halfway.

Facing LAURA, LIOR (15), a skinny teenager, sits at the far end of the table.

[END OF REVERSE READING]

An old wooden clock with a pendulum ticks steadily. The sound distorts slightly before resuming its regular rhythm.

LIOR watches the clock while nervously shaking his leg and clenching his jaw. He wears dirty, torn clothes. LIOR's flip phone vibrates incessantly on the table. He glances at it: "DAD," then looks back at the clock.

GABRIEL (26), a young man in a suit, walks in from the kitchen with his coffee cup. He leans against the bar between LIOR and LAURA. He wears a well-fitted suit, an immaculate shirt, and a slightly loosened tie. He takes a sip from his cup, which reads: "Coffee first, Justice later."

GABRIEL smiles, trying to ease the tension in the air. He places his cup down and picks up a file from the bar. GABRIEL, with methodical gestures, studies and sorts his sticky notes inside the file. He places a few of them on the bar to set them aside.

LAURA grabs the whiskey bottle and pours herself another drink before putting it down. The sound of the bottle hitting the table echoes in the room. The clock strikes 10:00.

GABRIEL, avoiding eye contact, awkwardly stands up and pulls a pen from his pocket.

GABRIEL

Lior, I need to know what happened over there.

LIOR's phone vibrates again: "DAD." LIOR looks at the vibrating phone. His gaze alternates between the clock and his phone screen.

GABRIEL
(hesitantly)
Lior?

LIOR stares at the phone without reacting to the question. LAURA looks at him with disgust, then pours herself another glass of whiskey. She drinks it in one go and turns to GABRIEL.

LAURA
(mocking, slightly drunk)
You really think you can win?

GABRIEL
(assuring himself)
Your ex-husband's lawyer has prepared his defense well. But if I prepare us well too...

LIOR's phone continues vibrating, but he now fixes his eyes on the clock. LAURA, irritated, looks at LIOR.

LAURA
(to LIOR)
Can you turn that off?!

LIOR, clenching his jaw, reluctantly silences his phone. LAURA looks at him with disgust.

LAURA
You could look at me too, I exist.

LIOR stares at the clock.

LAURA, annoyed, looks at her empty glass and tips it over. She pours herself another drink.

LAURA
(childishly)
Let's give him back to his father, they'll both be happy that way.

GABRIEL
(embarrassed, insisting)
It's not that simple considering your ex-husband's accusations. They go beyond just custody...

LAURA
(still smiling)
What an asshole that guy is.

LIOR throws a revolted glance at LAURA. He clenches his jaw. LAURA glares at LIOR.

LAURA
I can't stand this look! It's weighing me down, actually.

LIOR looks away and grips his phone in his hand, his eyes fixed on the screen.
LAURA finishes another drink.

LAURA
(smiling, her eyes gleaming with madness)
You know what I feel? I feel a heaviness in the air, don't you?

LAURA gets up, and LIOR doesn't dare look at her. GABRIEL is uncomfortable.

LAURA

You know, I think we can't escape the energy of places, nor the energy of people. You don't want me, I can feel it.

LAURA picks up LIOR's black bag.

GABRIEL

Laura, you're going to regret this.

LAURA heads toward the door. GABRIEL blocks the door. LAURA laughs. She rushes to the window and throws everything out. LIOR turns his head toward LAURA and fixes her with a blank stare.

LAURA

I'm doing everyone a favor this way!

GABRIEL is stunned. LIOR stands up, grabs his phone, and heads for the door. Before leaving, he turns to LAURA.

LIOR

(guilty)

Sorry, mom.

LIOR exits the apartment.

LAURA

(shouting)

It's LAURA to you!

GABRIEL makes a grimace, desperate about the situation.

3. EXT. ALLEYWAY – EVENING

LIOR exits the building and finds himself in the alley beneath his mother's apartment.

He receives another call from his father. He hesitates, then types on his keyboard: "I'll call you later?" which ends the call. His father calls him back immediately, and LIOR, filled with remorse, finally puts his phone away.

He grabs his bag and a few items and stumbles upon a cassette. There are words written on the label with a marker: "Learning to be a good follower."

LIOR panics suddenly. He frantically searches through his scattered clothes on the ground, then packs them into his bag. He still holds the cassette in his hand.

A GRUMPY MAN in a wheelchair stops on the sidewalk. His feet are in plaster, and he wants to pass, but LIOR's clothes block the way. LIOR rushes to pick up his things and clear the passage.

LIOR

(ashamed)

Sorry.

The grumpy man doesn't reply and continues his way.

The wheelchair's wheel crushes a sheet of paper. LIOR hesitates, then rushes to pick it up and wipe it with his hand. It's a page torn from a notebook. The words "purification" and "devoted follower" are written on it.

LIOR calms down, folds the sheet in two, and keeps the paper and cassette tightly in his hand. LIOR walks to the other side of the sidewalk, where his jacket is.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The origin of the story

The story I want to tell is that of my best friend. His story seems almost unreal, as if it were taken straight from a novel: cults, money laundering, running away, kidnapping... But beyond this series of improbable events, I wanted to ground the narrative in a reality much closer to us. A reality that my friends, my loved ones, and I have experienced — and in some cases, are still experiencing — in different ways: emotional manipulation. This form of manipulation affects circles of friends, but also even more intimate spheres: families, whether united or separated. I have seen my friends suffer from it, question themselves, and even feel guilty. On a personal level, I have also felt that pain on several occasions.

The character of Lior

Through Lior's perspective, I want to convey the invisible yet ever-present weight of emotional blackmail, which inevitably leads to toxic relationships. Lior endures this manipulation at an extreme level, similar to what I have witnessed around me: a mother openly expressing her disappointment and refusing to speak to her child, a father slamming the table and unleashing a flood of insults at his son...

Through the behavior of both his parents, I aim to capture the distress of a 15-year-old boy who feels utterly alone and lost, abandoned by the very people who are supposed to protect him, each parent absorbed in their own self-interest. Lior's torn and worn-out clothes reinforce this image of a neglected child, left adrift by those meant to care for him. Despite the traumas he endured within the cult, Lior remains deeply attached to his father, the parent he grew up with and still considers his only true family. This love reveals itself in subtle ways, such as when Lior ignores his father's repeated phone calls, which immediately triggers feelings of guilt. Yet he feels trapped with his mother, despite their conflicted relationship, because his greatest fear is returning to Bangkok — where his father and the cult await — and falling back into that nightmare.

Laura's manipulation

Laura manipulates her son's emotions to make him feel guilty. She blames him for having preferred his father over her when he was younger. With her strong-willed nature, she tends to dramatize events, and instead of showing the unconditional love a parent should offer, she burdens him with an oppressive sense of guilt. Under the influence of alcohol, her dark thoughts and inner turmoil rise to the surface, intensified by her drunken state.

Gabriel, between strictness and emotion

Gabriel tries to calm the situation. He finds himself caught in a case where family tensions and hidden secrets influence his decisions. Skilled and outwardly composed, he is torn by moral dilemmas: how can he defend his client with the necessary rigor while also taking into account the emotional weight of the case? Despite everything, he strives to guide everyone's thinking, subtly steering them toward the information needed to move the case forward.

The presence of the father

Regarding Lior's father, I want to make his presence felt without him being physically there, aiming to illustrate the emotional grip he has on his son. His physical presence is replaced by incessant phone calls, which reflect the oppression and control he exerts over Lior. Manipulated by the cult, particularly by Armand, the father remains blind to the suffering he inflicts on his son, offering him no respite.

The living room, a courtroom

I want every detail of this living room to contribute to creating the atmosphere of a true courtroom. The space is vast and old-fashioned, yet remains sober and elegant. The ceiling is adorned with discreet moldings. The shelves are made of dark brown wood. The floor is hardwood, and the long table around which the characters sit is oak. Their arrangement around the table reinforces the impression of a courtroom: Lior and his mother face each other, while the lawyer sits on the edge of a bar. He is set apart, like the judge in this case, maintaining additional distance from the situation and allowing him to have a broader perspective on their conflict.

The light, a symbolic contrast

I also want to establish a visual duality: the green neon lights, associated with knowledge and hope in Asia, will contrast with warm light accents, representing the warmth and conviviality expected from a home. Green, while conveying a positive message, also has an unsettling, almost menacing dimension that disturbs the viewer. This contrast reinforces the ironic and absurd nature of the story, despite the anticipated dramatic outcome.

The frame, between freedom and captivity

The way of framing differs between the outside and the inside of Laura's apartment. On the outside, in the alley, the shots are dynamic and in motion. Filmed with tracking shots or handheld camera, they give a sense of freedom. Inside, in the living room, everything is still, frozen, nothing moves anymore. Lior, trapped within this frame, finds no escape.

A personal story

This story, although fictional in its structure, is directly inspired by the reality of my best friend, who deliberately fled his mother to join his father in Paris. A victim of maternal control, with her own involvement in a cult in Asia, he endured deep trauma. His story deeply moved me. We had lost contact for two years, and I had no idea of the horrors he was living through. When he returned to France, he was unrecognizable — skeletal and weakened by what he had just gone through. He then told me everything, and I discovered his story through his eyes. Today, our friendship holds an essential place in my life, and it is crucial for me to share his journey, out of love and support. Through this film, my goal is not only to denounce, as mentioned earlier, emotional manipulation within certain families but also to show my support by exposing the harmful effects of cults, especially those that continue to affect his mother.

MOODBOARD



Euphoria (2019)



Irrational Man (2015)



Paris, Texas (1984)



The Place Beyond the Pines (2012)



Waves (2019)



American Animals (2018)

AUTHOR'S PROFILE

SCREENWRITER - DIRECTOR

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HITO (Nikon 2024)

2023 / Fiction short film, CGI / Screenplay, direction / 2'

«Hito» takes us on the imaginary journey of a young boy. Based on Japanese mythology, the Raijus use electricity to protect the world from a dreadful ember creature. This marks the first collaboration between my brother and me, combining graphics, CGI, and traditional footage.

SIR TEEN (Nikon 2023)

2022 / Fiction short film, comedy / Screenplay, direction / 2'

Sir Teen, a luxury hotel manager, is accustomed to peacefully staying in one of his rooms. However, this time, his employees seem to be trying to ruin his plans... Reality seems to surpass fiction. Are the employees truly against him? Will they really go all the way to the 13th?

IMPRISONED (2022)

2021 / Fiction short film, drama / Screenplay, direction / 5'

Nicolas, a senior high school student, is traumatized when he receives a poor grade in mathematics for his mock exam.

The pressure gradually mounts, and he finds himself alone, facing others' misunderstanding and lack of support. This leads him into an anxious spiral, paralyzing him from taking action and getting back to work.

CONFINÉS SAUF LES JOURS DE PLUIE (Nikon 2021) - Youth Film Festival California

2020 / Fiction short film, comedy / Screenplay, direction, editing / 2' / Watch the film

Deep within the state, it's time to implement new government measures. Let's play the cards on the table! Alice, a young intern, will discover the dark side of the process...



As a young screenwriter and director, I write and direct self-produced short films that have been selected in festivals across various categories. After completing two years of a Filmschool at Cannes, specializing in image, I am currently working as an assistant director (2nd or 3rd AD) on fiction and advertising projects. I also took a course at the Cours Simon in Paris, where I studied acting for seven years, which taught me a great deal about directing.

After a year and a half of work dedicated to this short film, and having gained some distance from my friend's story, I am now seeking a production partner to finance this project.

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FLORIAN RAYÉ

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3RD/2ND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Trilingual: French, German, and English

PERSONAL PROFILE

Having studied at Cannes Film School and being passionate about logistics, I work as an Assistant Director on film sets in both France and Germany. I have experience working on feature films, TV series, and commercials.

CONTACT



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SKILLS

- **Driver's License** : Category B
- Proficient in : MovieMagic, Fuzzlecheck, DaVinci Resolve.

FICTION

Feature films

2022-2025

- **1st Assistant Director** : "Tod meiner Jugend" from July to September 2024 - Berlin - Jacobs Production
Director: Timo Jacobs
Executive Producer: Kwan Jao
Production Manager: Uwe Kamitz
- **3rd Assistant Director** : "Rave" from February to March 2024 - Berlin - Thelos Pictures
Director : Nikias Chryssos and Viktor Jakovleski
1st AD : Martin Zillmann
Production Manager : Andro Steinborn
- **Additional Assistant Director** : "La Récréation de juillet" in the summer of 2022 - Paris - Cowboys Films
Directors : Pablo Cotten and Joseph Rozé
Producers : Antoine Playoust, Nicolas Tzipine and Martin Playoust

Television

2022-2025

- **3rd Assistant Director** : "Un Si Grand Soleil" session 126 from June to July 2023 - Montpellier - France TV
Director : Sara Prim
1st Assistant Director : Quentin Le Carrouer
- **2nd Assistant Director** : "Le MacBook Air M2 conçu pour durer est chez Darty" July 2022 - Paris - Henry TV - Advertising
Director : Didier Barcelo
1st Assistant Director : Léo Belaish

- 3rd Assistant Director : “A chaque ticket son histoire”
UGC June 2022 - Paris - EICAR - Advertising
Directors : Léa Généau et Ethan Cohen
- 2nd Assistant Director : “L'Occasion parfaite” Heycar
May 2022 - Paris - Henry TV - Advertising
Director : Didier Barcelo
1st Assistant Director : Franck Percher

Internship

2018 - 2024

- Rental Company - Cosmik Vidéo (2023)
- Cannes Film Festival - CST - Camera Operator (2023)
- Cannes Film Festival - Vogue France - Camera Operator (2023)
- UGC - Film Production (2018)

EDUCATION

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- BTS Audiovisual, specializing in camera and light at Lycée Carnot in Cannes (2022 - 2024) - Graduated
- École Massillon - Paris (2010 - 2022) - High School Diploma with honors (Très Bien)
- Acting Training at Cours Simon - Paris (2015 - 2022)
- Languages: French/German (native), English (C1)