

LET US PREY

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FADE IN:

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

A WOMAN, a pretty young thing, walks down a hallway, stilettos clicking against the tile. She clutches a manila folder as she strides.

INT. DOORWAY - NIGHT

She stops, tucks a loose hair behind her ear. Reaches for the knob and opens the door.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

Buzzing florescent lights glare down on THREE MEN sitting in cheap plastic chairs. A fourth, GLENN (40's) sports an awful comb-over and glasses attached to a chain draped around his neck.

The door opens. The Woman peeks her head in, finds Glenn's eyes as he turns toward her, frustrated. She holds up the manila folder, seeking approval.

WOMAN

I found the file you wanted, Glenn!
It was behind the--

Glenn throws off his glasses, letting them dangle from the chain around his neck. He shoos her away.

GLENN

Natalie, not now. We're still in
session for Chrissake.

Nonplussed, Natalie slams the door shut. Glenn pauses before turning to...

GLENN (CONT'D)

Michael?

MICHAEL (25) is handsome, put together, normal. He stares into space, remembering something-- or maybe, someone-- from long ago.

MICHAEL

Huh?

He drops back into Right Now.

GLENN
You were saying? Before the
interruption.

Michael clears his throat. Takes a sip from a styrofoam coffee cup.

MICHAEL
It began in ninety-five. I was,
um, ten years old.

(**NOTE:** From now on, all "CUT TO:" shots show quick scenes, edited together from multiple therapy sessions over time.)

CUT TO:

PATRICK (21) is roguish, with disheveled hair and razor stubble. He sits, arms crossed, long legs extended out.

PATRICK
From age twelve to seventeen. Five
long fucking years.

CUT TO:

LUKE (18) is a clean-cut, all American boy. His leg never stops shaking.

LUKE
I think I was eight, maybe nine
when it started. I thought it was
normal-- that all the kids got the
same treatment.

GLENN
Did they, Luke?

LUKE
What?

GLENN
Did all the kids get the same
treatment?

Luke shakes his head.

LUKE
Nope.

EXT. SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - DAY

JOSHUA (9) wears a catholic school uniform: dark shorts and a white polo shirt. He sports a smart haircut.

He eyes a jungle gym on the playground. Runs full-speed towards it, screaming with joy. Races to the top and raises his arms in victory.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

MICHAEL

He liked sports. I did, too. That was our common ground, I guess. He told me I could trust him, no matter what.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

We moved to the States when I was eleven. Then my dad died, leaving his mom and me alone in this place.

CUT TO:

LUKE

I stole some stuff from a Koogiemart-- just candy and trading cards. But he found out somehow.

GLENN

What happened?

LUKE

Huh?

GLENN

What happened when he found out?

LUKE

He said I could go to jail for years. But he wouldn't tell-- if I played a game with him.

Luke smiles.

LUKE (CONT'D)

I thought he meant, like checkers or something. I remember thinking, "Cool, he just wants to play a game. No prob."

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - DAY

Joshua is flanked by two other 9-year-old BOYS as they walk down the aisles, each carrying a dirty fistful of candy.

Happy and sweaty, they crack up and jostle each other as they walk to the cashier to pay for their sugary treasures.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

MICHAEL

People didn't question authority in those days. Not his, anyway. My folks certainly didn't.

He coughs uncomfortably.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I don't blame them. I guess.

Liar.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Well, yeah, I do. Actually... I blame them every day.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

No one understood me, except him. He'd tell me that-- over and over again. He said the fact I had no friends was God's way of saying this was supposed to happen.

Patrick snorts defiantly.

PATRICK (CONT'D)

Fuck that.

CUT TO:

LUKE

He used to ask me first, if it was okay. What was I gonna say? No?

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

Joshua sits with a kid's meal in front of him, a silly paper hat perched on his head.

He takes a gigantic bite of his burger, leaving ketchup on his cheek. He chews, cheeks stuffed full like a squirrel.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - NIGHT

MICHAEL

It was always the same. He'd call me outta class. "Mikey," he'd say, "Let's you and me have a talk, man-to-man." Whenever I heard him say that, I knew what I was in for.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

He offered to watch me after school until my mother came home from work. She was so grateful. How could I be safer?

CUT TO:

LUKE

When it wasn't happening, all I wanted to do was please him. When it was... all I wanted was to get it over with.

CUT TO:

MICHAEL

Y'know what he told me? His piss was holy. If I drank it, I'd be cleansed of my sins. Made sense to me, at least it did when I was ten.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

It was very strategic. He'd break me down, drilling deep until he found my weaknesses.

CUT TO:

LUKE

If I cried, y'know... during... he'd say I was letting him down.

Desperation creeps into Luke's voice.

LUKE (CONT'D)

I couldn't afford to let that happen. So I took everything he dished out like a man.

CUT TO:

MICHAEL

He committed suicide when I was fourteen. Just slit his own throat and bled out.

GLENN

How did you find out about it, Michael?

MICHAEL

The police came to my house. They showed my parents pictures he took of me without my clothes on.

Michael drops his head.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

My father never let me forget how ashamed of me he was that day.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

He'd call my mum and ask to send me over. She always did, no questions asked. I think she was glad to get me out of her hair.

CUT TO:

LUKE

He finally got caught fooling around with another kid.

Luke laughs.

LUKE (CONT'D)

For a while, back then, I...

Luke's sentence drifts into silence.

GLENN

What?

LUKE

Nothin'.

GLENN

What were you going to say, Luke?

Luke's silent a second.

LUKE

It's just... When I saw that other guy, I was a little... jealous, that's all. Isn't that messed up? Jeez.

CUT TO:

MICHAEL

He said he chose me because I was special. He didn't mention there were four other boys just as special as me. He took dirty pictures of them, too.

He takes a drink from his styrofoam coffee cup.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Why couldn't he have thrown those pictures away before he offed himself? My parents still took his side. They said I must have done something to provoke him.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

He lied to everybody, then said I made the whole thing up to get attention.

CUT TO:

LUKE

I never told on him. Nobody did. And the stuff I was hiding just got bigger and bigger.

CUT TO:

MICHAEL

Every time I catch a whiff of body odor, I think about how gross it was to have his smell all over me.

CUT TO:

PATRICK

Why didn't my mum try harder to figure out what was wrong with me? With him?

CUT TO:

MICHAEL
I wonder how he made enough piss
for all of us?

CUT TO:

PATRICK
I trusted him--

CUT TO:

LUKE
To everyone else I was invisible--

CUT TO:

MICHAEL
I let my guard down for one minute--

CUT TO:

PATRICK
...so he betrayed me--

CUT TO:

LUKE
...made me feel so disgusted with
myself--

CUT TO:

MICHAEL
...turns out he didn't give a shit
about me at all--

CUT TO:

PATRICK
...just fed me a bunch of lies--

CUT TO:

MICHAEL
All he cared about was--

CUT TO:

PATRICK
The only thing that mattered to him
was--

CUT TO:

LUKE
The guy just wanted to--

CUT TO:

MICHAEL
I was just a little kid. And he
used me to get himself off.

A beat.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
The worst part is... he got away
with it.

Michael drops his head, runs his hand through his hair.

CUT TO:

Patrick's jaw muscle twitches. Through gritted teeth:

PATRICK
That's it. I'm done for tonight.

CUT TO:

Luke looks around at the group sheepishly. All eyes are on him in silence. He clears his throat uncomfortably.

LUKE
Um, can somebody else talk now?

He stares at Patrick, desperate for the eyes to fall off.

LUKE (CONT'D)
(eyes pleading)
Patrick?

Glenn interrupts, rescuing the situation

GLENN
Okay.

He takes his glasses off and lets them dangle by the chain attached to the ear pieces. The air's thick with awkward.

GLENN (CONT'D)
We've covered a lot of ground.
Let's call it a night. I'll see
you all here next week.

The group breaks up. No one says a word.

A FEW MINUTES LATER--

Patrick walks over to Michael.

PATRICK
Mike, let's go lift a pint... or
ten. You're buying.

Luke wanders over.

LUKE
I want to come.

PATRICK
We wanna go drinking. You're too
young.

MICHAEL
I can't. I gotta finish packing.
I'm moving, you guys. Tomorrow.

PATRICK
You've only been living here six
months. Why are you leaving
already?

MICHAEL
Got a new job. I have to go where
they send me.

LUKE
You're not coming to group anymore?

MICHAEL
Maybe there'll be one where I'm
going. Maybe.

PATRICK
That's it? Can't we get some
coffee or something, a final
sendoff?

MICHAEL
No. I got things to do. You guys
take care of yourselves.

LUKE
Okay, Mike. See ya.

PATRICK
Yeah. C'mon, Luke. We'll do
coffee.

Patrick and Luke go off one way, Michael takes another.

INT. MICHAEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Michael places clothes in an open suitcase on his bed. The phone rings. Michael answers it.

MICHAEL

Hello? Yes, I'm leaving tomorrow morning... Maybe this isn't a good idea... Yes, I can appreciate that it's a fresh start... Uh-huh. I know you called in a favor to arrange this.

FADE TO BLACK:

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Of course I'll go, Monsignor.
Thank you again.

Click.

A FEW MINUTES LATER--

Michael carries in a leather belt. Sits on the bed. Loops the belt around his neck. Pulls it tight. Ties the other end of the belt around the headboard.

He lies down. The belt tightens around his neck like a noose. His face turns crimson. He tries to relax, putting even more pressure on the ligature.

After a moment, he panics. He scoots up in the bed and loosens the belt from tightening around his neck.

No suicide tonight. Maybe tomorrow.

He sees his image in a mirror, face so beet-red he looks embarrassed... humiliated. He snarls. Hurls the belt at the mirror, cracking it. His image, rippled by the crack in the mirror, stares back. Accusatory, damning.

MICHAEL

Coward.

INT. SCHOOL OFFICE -- DAY

A wooden office door, upon which a large crucifix hangs. From the other side, there's a soft knock.

A hand grabs the knob and opens the door inward.

Joshua stands there.

JOSHUA
Hi, Father.

MICHAEL
(unseen to audience)
Hey there. You're looking sharp
today. New haircut?

JOSHUA
Yeah. I mean, yes sir. I got this
note in class that you wanted to
see me.

The boys holds out the note to the adult in the room.

CUT TO:

Michael. Wearing a priest's collar and short-sleeved, black
clergy shirt. Michael takes the note from Joshua's hand.

MICHAEL
Come in, Joshua. Let's you and me
have a little talk...

Michael's and Joshua's eyes lock.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
...man to man.

Joshua's eyes. Innocence. Michael's eyes. Predatory.

JOSHUA
Sure, Father Michael. Whatever you
say.

Joshua enters the office. As the boy passes, Michael pats
him on the shoulder. Michael stares into space for a moment,
remembering something-- or maybe, someone-- from long ago.
He smiles darkly.

FADE OUT:

SFX: The door slams shut.

BLACK SCREEN: FILM TITLE

"LET US PREY"

THE END