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Stockholm, Pennsylvania

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Abstract

This is a film review of *Stockholm, Pennsylvania* (2015) directed by Nicole Beckwith.

Author Notes

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Stockholm, Pennsylvania
(2015)
Directed by Nicole Beckwith

19 years ago, a little girl was kidnapped and taken to a basement by a man named Ben. She was kept in that basement room for 19 years with no exposure to the outside world. She was never allowed to leave the basement and the only window in the room was covered over from the outside. Ben changed the girl's name from Leann to Leia. This is part of her change in identity. Ben provides for all of Leia's necessities—food, shelter, companionship, security—although the result is a young woman who has had no experience of the real world. She lives life on Ben's schedule. Ben tells Leia that she is loved and cared for and safe. He also explains the world in terms of various simplistic clichés.

After 19 years in captivity, Leia/Leann is rescued and returned to her parents. Leia wants to keep her name, expresses concern for Ben's well-being, calls the basement "home" rather than a basement, and continues to speak of the world in the clichés that Ben had taught her. After 19 years, she has come to identify with her kidnapper; thus the title, "Stockholm, Pennsylvania."

In an interesting twist, Leia's mother, Marcy, who wants so desperately to win her daughter back, begins to treat Leia in the same way that Ben did. She is locked in her room. The window is covered from the outside. Food is slipped under her door. She is put on a strict

schedule and required to participate in particular "reconnecting" activities. Her mother always refers to her as Leann, not Leia.

While the story has an eery similarity to that of three women kidnapped and held hostage for many years in Cleveland, it has an even eerier similarity to the ways in which some religions and some cults treat their members. Isolation from the outside world, change in name/identity, strict schedule, needs met, simplistic view of the world, saying "we love you," are all elements in the ways that religions and cults control their members. And, in the case of religious kidnapping, we also find members experiencing Stockholm Syndrome; identifying with the kidnapper. But, then, isn't that the point?