

## Perfect

Written by Ken White.

Directed by Luke Hodges.

When her mother is taken ill on a family holiday, a teenage girl has to deal with her mother's psychotic boyfriend while protecting her little brother.

"Perfect" is a low budget psychological drama that explores the cracks that appear in the veneer of the "perfect family" while they holiday in Northern France.

Told from the daughter's point of view, we witness the destruction of the supposedly perfect family unit when her mother's partner relapses into alcoholism and psychosis.

With a fragile mother and a younger brother to protect, the pressure on the daughter increases to an unbearable pitch as the man's behaviour steadily worsens and the focus of his psychosis turns towards her.

Her problems are furthered by the appearance of a ghostly old woman who seems to be watching her. Is she real or a manifestation brought on by the stress of the situation?

## Location

Set in a remote Normandy farmhouse surrounded by dramatic rolling hills and cliffs the area offers many possibilities for atmospheric cinematography that is conducive to the story.

## Main Characters

Stuart Coleman has been living with Rebecca and her kids for 5 years. He is a recovering alcoholic on anti-psychosis medication, although 4 years "dry". When sober and on his meds, he is easy-

going, loving and hard working. He is very focussed and with a tendency to fixate on things, for instance, bebop jazz. He knows his obsessions get under the skin of those around him so he plays on it for his self-effacing amusement. When he relapses, his character changes completely, he becomes menacingly volatile.

Rebecca has periods of fragility. She suffers from stress-induced asthma. Although quite functional most of the time, any strong emotions can trigger her illness. Where once a sense of fun dominated her personality, the years of worrying her partner's condition have taken their toll. The last few years have been improving as Stuart's sobriety and absence of mood swings have lessened her stress.

Abigail is 16 and on the brink of becoming a young woman. She is strong-willed, witty and resourceful. She tries to please everyone and secretly feels trapped and wants to run away. She longs for the freedom of being her own person but instead has found that everyone relies on her to make up for her mother's shortcomings. She remembers Stuart having some very bad episodes and is sometimes wary of him because of this.

Magnus hero-worships Stuart. Having no real memory of the bad old days, he believes the man can do no wrong. He looks to Stuart as a father figure. Magnus is curious and quick to learn but also has the naive enthusiasm that can sometimes lead him into trouble.

## Story

When the perfect family holiday is shattered by the mother's boyfriend's neglecting to take his anti-psychotic medication, his violent mood-swings trigger his partner Rebecca's severe asthma. As a result, Rebecca has to recover in hospital for a few days, leaving Abbie, her teenage daughter to keep things together by dealing with Stuart while also shielding her young brother.

When Abbie meets Mathilde, a girl in a local town, she realises that her home life is suffocating her and the two girls plan to run away together. Abbie has the chance to escape the suppression

of her home life and being drawn into her mother's relationship or having adventures and freedom with her new friend. She has some serious choices to make.

Abbie's life is further complicated by the repeated appearance of a ghostly old woman.

While Rebecca is recovering, Stuart's behaviour becomes more erratic and his attention towards Abbie becomes uncomfortably lascivious. When Rebecca's parents arrive, Abbie sees an opportunity to get herself and her brother away from Stuart, only to have her plan thwarted by Stuart.

Against medical advice, the mother discharges herself in the hope that she can calm the situation, but his psychosis escalates.

Abbie tells Rebecca about the old woman. Magnus has also been seeing an older man watching them, but has been too frightened to say anything about it. The mother explains that she had the same experiences up until her mid-teens and that the apparitions are emotional connections with their future selves who are remembering the unfolding events and that they are nothing to be afraid of.

Later things escalate Magnus sees Stuart attack his mother and sister, he hits him with a model plane that he and Stuart had been making together and runs from the house towards the cliffs. Followed by Abbie.

Magnus falls but is saved by Abbie.

In a climactic scene, Stuart arrives and fights with Abbie and Magnus. Stuart tries to throw the two over the cliff but they are saved by the appearance the old lady and Magnus's man, who seem to force Stuart over the edge of the cliff. He falls to his death.

When Abbie and Magnus return to the house, they tell a recovering Rebecca that Stuart has left and said that he won't be coming back.

## Beats

The family are travelling down to a holiday cottage that is owned by Rebecca's parents.

It is a long journey in the car. Stuart enthuses about the bebop jazz he's playing constantly on the car stereo,

Abbie amuses Magnus by telling him stories.

Rebecca is worried about whether everything got packed. It is all well spirited and upbeat.

Rebecca offers to do some driving rest but Stuart tells her he is fine.

Abbie makes up a story for Magnus all about a girl and her brother who have to escape from a ruined planet but need to develop their super-powers.

When they arrive at their cottage, it is revealed both Rebecca and Stuart have medication, her for asthma and Stuart for psychosis. Stuart has failed to pack his tablets.

As the family settle into their holiday. Stuart starts to have the occasional beer or glass of wine, much to the consternation of his Rebecca.

As Stuart drinks there are subtle changes in his personality, he becomes a little edgy and short-tempered.

The attention he gives Abbie starts to become a little uncomfortable. All the while, Magnus is oblivious to the changes in the dynamics of the family.

Stuart and Magnus work on a model aeroplane that they'd started the previous year. Stuart presents Magnus with his own set of woodworking tools.

The family play board games in the evening and Stuart is a bad loser.

The following day they visit a quiet beach, Stuart starts to stare more at Abbie, noticing her developing maturity. She starts to feel self-conscious. Rebecca notices how Stuart is looking at her daughter and becomes stressed. Abbie sees an old woman watching them from a distance.

Stuart starts to drink more as he gets into the spirit of his holiday.

When Rebecca asks him to cut down on his drinking as he had been sober for three or so years up to that point, he insists that everything is under control, but gets angry with her.

While shopping Abbie buys some postcards and meets a girl of a similar age. This is Mathilde, she lives locally but tells Abbie that her home-life is getting her down and she wants to run away. Abbie says she's like to do the same.

Mathilde invites Abbie to her house. It's a chateau. She has everything she could want, why would she want to leave?

Mathilde explains that she wants to be an artist, so her parents have bought her all the materials she could want. Which isn't the point. She wants to be a struggling artist. Her parent's lavishing her with everything takes away the romance and replaces it with guilt. She tells Abbie that once she asked for a horse riding lesson as she always wanted to try it. The next thing she knew she had a pony and all the problems that went with it.

Abbie has a fun time with her but must return to the cottage.

Later that night, Stuart comes into her bedroom while she is writing a postcard to a boy from school. Stuart is a little bit drunk and gets jealous about the postcard and rips it up. Abbie is upset and tells Magnus that she is running away with Mathilde.

Outside the old woman is watching the house.

In the morning, Rebecca's asthma has flared and so a doctor is called. He insists that she goes to the hospital for checkups and rest.

Stuart becomes more demanding of Abbie and stricter on Magnus. The boy is confused as to why Stuart is acting the way he is.

Abbie calls her grandparents and tells them about her mother being in hospital. They drive down to see her, but Stuart makes it difficult for them to do so, putting up obstacles and objections.

When the grandparents suggest that they take the children back with them, Stuart says no.

All the while, Stuart's attention on Abbie is increasing.

One night he gets very drunk and goes to her bedroom and tries to kiss her. She stops him and he cries and apologises. The old woman appears outside the cottage.

The following morning at breakfast, Stuart acts like nothing has happened but jokes with Magnus that Abbie sometimes tells lies so he shouldn't believe everything she tells him.

Saying that she must buy food, Abbie makes her way to the town. She goes to the hospital and tells her mother that Stuart is acting unbearably strange. Against the wishes of the doctors, Rebecca discharges herself and returns to the cottage.

Abbie goes into town, does the shopping and sees Matilde. She tells her she wants to go with her but must make sure her mother and brother are safe first.

Rebecca is now back at the cottage feeling a lot better, although not completely recovered. Abbie tells her about the old woman. Magnus says he sees a man appear sometimes. He thinks it's a ghost. Rebecca tells them that who they are seeing aren't ghosts but explains that their future selves are remembering events that they have strong emotional connections with. So strong that they can be seen by their younger selves. She experienced it until her mid-teens then the appearances stopped. They shouldn't be frightened.

Stuart, drunk, shouts at them to stop talking and go to sleep.

Rebecca and Stuart argue. Magnus goes into Abbie's room and starts crying. The children hear a slap, then a thud and then all goes quiet.

Abbie tells Magnus to wait in the bedroom while she goes to investigate. She finds her mother on the floor, unconscious or dead, she doesn't know. Stuart turns on her saying it was time she became a proper woman, he pushes her up against a wall and tried to force her to have sex.

Magnus appears behind them and stabs him in the shoulder with a chisel from his woodworking tools, distracting him enough so that Abbie can escape. Thinking that he's killed Stuart, Magnus runs from the house towards the cliffs. Abbie runs after him.

When Abbie finds Magnus, he is on the edge of the cliff saying he is going to jump as he doesn't want to go to prison. Abbie tries

to explain that he won't go to prison as it was self-defence. He was saving her. Magnus isn't too sure.

Stuart arrives and seeing he isn't dead, Magnus runs to Abbie only to be caught by Stuart.

The three fight as Abbie tries to get Magnus away from Stuart, but the man is too strong. He takes the two children to the edge of the cliff and is ready to throw them off.

The future selves appear and are seen by Stuart who startled lets go of the children and falls to his death.

Abbie and Magnus return to the cottage to find Rebecca sitting up, sore but generally OK. They tell her that Stuart has decided to leave and never come back.

## Closing image.

The Volvo is travelling through the little French town. Abbie is in the front passenger seat. Rebecca is driving. In the back, Magnus looks at a video game. They all look relaxed. We pan across from Magnus to an empty seat.

Abbie puts on some music. Any music, just not bebop!

As they leave the town, there is a hitch-hiker. It's Mathilde. They pull over for her.

As they drive off we see that they are being watched by an old woman and a man.

The End.