**5/10/24; The real victims of Baby Reindeer**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

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NOEL KING (HOST): In 2016, a Scottish comedian wrote and performed a play about a crazy time in his late twenties / when, he says, he was the victim of a stalker - a woman he’d met in a bar.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chvli2h-TSc)*> RICHARD GADD: “Mistake number one, wearing shorts and a t-shirt. I was practically asking for it. Am I right ladies!? (NERVOUS LAUGHTER)*

NOEL: Four weeks ago, Netflix dropped a series / based on the play, based on his real life, called Baby Reindeer. It’s since been viewed 56 million times. And people can’t stop talking about it.

*<CLIP> Strong Black Lead (twitter): Quite frankly, I don't think I've ever watched anything quite like this.*

*<CLIP> Cardi B talks about Baby Reindeer: I haven't been able to finish watching it because I kind of, like, traumatized me a little bit. Like it freaked me out.*

*<CLIP> TikTok*

*@shanaannrose: that should not be allowed to be shown on screen. There’s no reason for us viewers to see what that man went through…*

NOEL: Meantime… the internet identified the stalker. And the woman who’d been identified said: yes, I knew Richard. But I didn’t do ANY of these things. That’s coming up *Today, Explained*: and there are spoilers in today’s episode!

**[THEME]**

NOEL: It’s Today, Explained. I’m Noel King.

Baby Reindeer opens with a man named Donny / in a police station / reporting a crime /and a title card tells us: this is a true story.

Meecham Whitson Meriwhether, a culture writer for The Ringer, and Vulture among others - says the show’s creator Richard Gadd claims that Donny’s story is his story - the story of HIS life. Which for a time was not going well.

MEECHAM WHITSON MERIWHETHER (CULTURE WRITER, THE RINGER): Basically our character Donny, played by Richard Gadd, you know, who this happened to is a comedian and he has a very strange, like, unique sense of comedy. Now.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*Donny: I know what you're thinking, Venus Williams let herself go. Oh, so God, no, I said the wrong name.*

MEECHAM: That really doesn't catch on with a lot of people. But he's, like, desperate for show biz.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*Donny: I moved to London to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a comedian. I had arrived with such grand plans to be someone as though my brand of wacky bullshit comedy was exactly what this world leading city was missing.*

*Audience member: You're shite.*

MEECHAM: And so you really find him at the beginning of this show, just kind of doing these really strange standup jokes, using these really strange props.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*Donny: It's a mink cap. But instead of actual mink, it's a mink hat. But instead of actual mink, it’s a mink stapled to a hat.*

MEECHAM: And you're just like, how can this guy keep going on? It's like really sad. It's really desperate. But he again, is a comedian who compartmentalize is everything, his trauma, his friendships, his job, his sexual preferences, a lot of things. They really just become a catalyst for this breakdown. And it really leads him to unpacking all of his trauma in front of a lot of people.

NOEL: What is the plot of the show? Where does this? Where does the show start?

MEECHAM: So it takes place in a bar. The bar that Donny, our main character, works in and this woman comes in. This woman's name is Martha.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*Donny: Can I get you something?*

*MARTHA: No, thanks.*

MEECHAM: She can't afford anything.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*Donny: Not even a cup of tea?*

*MARTHA: No.*

MEECHAM: But he offered her a cup of tea.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*Donny: How about I give you a cup of tea on the house?*

MEECHAM: But as their exchange is happening, she kind of presents herself as this high powered lawyer.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*MARTHA: Trained. In criminal law, moved to England, retrained, opened up my own practice, won several awards and now leading adviser to the government.*

MEECHAM: She really just presents herself like she is this woman who has it all, but she really can't afford a drink in a bar. And so it's that thing that really ties them together. After he offers her that cup of tea, and then she begins to stalk him.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DONNY: Everyday now, Martha would come in each time with new makeup, new hairstyles, like a kid playing dress up. She always opened the conversation by saying.*

*MARTHA: I've got to go.*

*DONNY: But then would stick around for the entire shift.*

MEECHAM: and then it becomes kind of a running joke with he and his barmates.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*BARKEEP: Why don't they? Are you going to introduce us to your girlfriend?*

*MANAGER: So is this the one you've been telling us about? The super model?*

*MARTHA: Well, you said that. Really?*

*BARKEEP: Yeah. So come on, Donnie. How was it? When are you two going to shag?*

*DONNY: Don't believe in sex before marriage.*

MEECHAM: And so somehow she goes onto his website for him as a comedian and then gets his email.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DONNY: Then came her emails around eight a day, continuing long into the night. Her address a random series of numbers and letters like spam. But the writing exactly like she spoke unhesitatingly, unfiltered, unapologetically raw.*

MEECHAM: It's all this, like, really kind of grotesque. But it's really all of these things that are a culmination of this woman is not mentally well. It's like watching a horror movie and watching someone go into a room where you know they're going to be killed. You know, this is bad, and we want to yell at the television and tell him this is bad, but we don't have to because he already knows.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER  
DONNY: I couldn’t believe i’d had done it. Was it a moment of madness or an attempt at self destruction? I went to unfriend her many times. But I always stop myself . She is ill. Misunderstood. There are two sides to every story.*

NOEL: And this is where I think the show got really interesting. At least this is where it hooked me, because this woman is clearly lying about some things, right?

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*MARTHA: God doesn't like a bragger. But when you're the go to for the biggest political minds in the game, you've earned a brag or two. No no! I’m not gonna say who. Don’t go there. Fine. David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Alec Salmond. But you didn't hear that from me.*

NOEL: She's flooding him with messages, with attention, with affection.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*MARTHA: Really manly hands, haven't you?*

*DONNY: Oh, yeah.*

*MARTHA: BIG deep voice, chiseled jawline should be illegal to have a bone structure, too, you know.*

NOEL: And it's clear that something is wrong. But, Donny. Keeps going.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DONNY: Everything about her intrigued me. Her endless confidence, her weird turn of phrase, the surprising poetry that slipped through the cracks of her madness.*

NOEL: We've all been stalked. I'm sorry. It's 2024. We all know. We all know how to shut it down. He doesn't do anything to shut it down. And then the show begins to delve into why. Why did he let this happen? Where does it go from there?

MEECHAM: So it kind of just manifests itself because I think, I mean, as a comedian, you really want attention. And no, no offense to anyone out there as a comedian, but you really want that attention. And I think that she makes him feel something. And it's that like desire that we all crave that really moves forward, his desire to keep interacting with her. I think the thing that separates Donny from, like, your average person who's being stalked is, you know, we don't want this to happen, and we try to nip it in the bud. With Donny, it's this very strange sensation of him. Enjoying it, but also just being desperate for the attention that she's giving him. And it's not just Martha. You know, these things have happened with someone else and that we meet in later episodes, especially in episode four. So in episode four, we meet another character in Donny's life who we really find out has caused him trauma. Donnie is again doing stand up. It's not going well like it's always has been, and he goes to a bar and he meets these guys who worked on one of the shows that he absolutely loved. These people are so close and tangible when it comes to show business that he's like, oh my God. Like, am I really in the circle?

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DONNY: Look, I'm doing the show up at the hoppy bar. Come down and see if you can.*

*WRITER: We'll try.*

MEECHAM: But later on, you know, in that same exchange, he meets Darian, the like head writer on the show.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DARIAN: Wankers aren’t they?*

*DONNY: Yeah.*

MEECHAM: And this guy is really, you know, sweet to him. He's nice to him, and he offers to help him with his writing, with his show, and they start working together. And eventually Darian invites Donnie over to his home, for a brainstorming session. That brainstorming session is like followed by Darian offering Donnie drugs and really not even offering. It's more of a coercion into doing these drugs.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DONNY: What was their secret, by the way?*

*DARIAN: What do you mean?*

*DONNY: Like, what did they all do to get where they are today?*

*DARIAN: Listen to me.*

*DONNY: <laughs>.*

*DARIAN: 'm serious. They threw themselves into everything I asked of them.*

*DONNY: What's all this?*

*DARIAN: It's the bomb of MDMA. And this is GHB that relaxes you. Trust me. You haven't experienced anything like it.*

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MEECHAM: And so what happens is Darian begins to fondle him, and it really ends up as Darian sexually assaulting Donnie. And, you know, this exchange that we just witnessed is really, really harrowing. And it's like heartbreaking because we see the realization that Donnie realizes this person I trusted, this person that, you know, I care for and who I thought cared for me is sexually assaulting me. And so essentially, he leaves, but he goes back and he goes back multiple times. And the same thing really happens. He is coerced to do drugs. He's like out of it. And eventually Darian really like fully raped semi sexually this whole time.

*<CLIP> BABY REINDEER*

*DONNY: I would love to say I left by stormed out and never went back, but I stayed for days afterwards. In fact, come Monday I got an infection and lay in his floor as he bathed it in salt water. On Tuesday I fed his cat while he took phone calls. On Wednesday I finally went home.*

MEECHAM: But again, Donnie keeps going back and this is really the root of the trauma. It's that desperation to be loved, to be, you know, believed in, that someone believes in what you can do, even though, you know, their showbiz career is not going well. He continues to go back for it..

SCORING OUT

NOEL: It's really interesting what happens in this show. And I think, again, the reason so many people watched it, because number one Richard Gadd says this really happened, right? This is a true story. It's a true and terrible story. But number two, we're familiar with these dynamics where a powerful man says, I'm going to make you famous. Just come over to my apartment. Hey, here's a drink. But generally, women are the victims. That's what we're USED TO, right?

MEECHAM: Exactly. Yeah.

NOEL: Here we have a man who's a victim who then leaves that behind but doesn't entirely leave it behind in the way that trauma victims often don't. And then he finds himself being victimized by a woman, by Martha. What do you think this show is trying to tell us about who the victim is.

MEECHAM: One of the things I really like about this show is that it's not black and white. It's not a bad person is doing a bad thing. It's good people do bad things sometimes. Bad people do bad things, but they're also do good things. I think this really puts into perspective that there is no perfect victim. I think we could all be victims at different times, and we can all be perpetrators. The way that Martha is stalking Donny really makes him a victim in that circumstance, but also the way he kind of keeps going back and egging her on and, you know, making her the butt of the jokes when they're in the pub and kind of just not ending it once and for all. I think it's really hard to say, ‘victim,’ even though this really awful thing happened to him. Is he a victim when it comes to Darian? Yes. And he's also just a part of these events. These aren't just things that are happening to him. And I think it's really hard to say who a victim and who's not.

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NOEL: Meecham Whitson Meriweather, culture writer. Coming up: Martha Speaks .

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: It’s *Today, Explained*. Meredith Haggarty edits the culture at Vox-dot-com. So what has happened in the real world since Baby Reindeer appeared on Netflix?

MEREDITH HAGGARTY (CULTURE EDITOR, VOX): So this show is adapted from two pieces of theater that were adapted from the creator, Richard Gad's real life. And because of that, there are real people who are implicated in some very bad behavior. So for some folks, like the most active audiences, the main appeal of baby reindeer seems to be this real life mystery. Who are the real people that Gadd based his show on?

*<CLIP> TIKTOK*

*Theogpopqueen: so watch how crazy this gets. So not only did they find out who martha is, her name is Fiona Harvey, but they found her old twitter too…*

MEREDITH: So, internet web sleuths did what internet web sleuths do, which is they dug in as much as they could with the information they had from the show. They cross-reference news reports with incidents that were mentioned. They went digging into social media to see who tweeted at Richard got a whole lot. And they also did the third thing they might do, which is kind of just guessing.

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The clues about the male director in the show were a little bit more oblique. It's definitely less clear who that was based on, but fans found a prominent British theater director and began harassing him. After that, he contacted the police, and Richard Gadd himself went to social media to say, this is not the man that my show is based on. Please leave this man alone.

*<CLIP> TIKTOK: Baby Reindeer creator richard gadd has asked fans to stop speculating who the real life people are from the show…Richard then shared on his instagram story saying “hi everyone! People i love, have worked with and admire including Sean foley are unfairly getting caught up in speculation…*

MEREDITH: The details about Martha were perhaps a little bit less obscure, and so people online were able to find her pretty easily because of a criminal history that was mentioned in the show, because of her history of using social media to reach out to Richard Gadd. And first, that started with the web sleuths harassing her to some degree, the Daily Mail, finding her The Sun of the British tabloids, having conversations with her, and then the woman who Martha is supposedly based on, a woman named Fiona Harvey, revealed herself on Piers Morgan to be supposedly the real Martha and was interviewed by Piers Morgan.

*<CLIP> Piers Morgan Uncensored*

*Fiona Harvey: It's taken over enough of my life. i find it quite obscene. I find it horrifying, misogynistic. Some of the death threats have been really terrible online. people phoning me up, it’s been absolutely horrendous.*

SCORING OUT

NOEL: How did that interview go? What did she have to say?

MEREDITH: So that interview aired yesterday, and it was an hour of a woman who, you know, does not necessarily seem to be completely in control of a situation trying to deny having stalked Richard Gadd, having been obsessed with him, having sent him all of these emails or letters, having sexually assaulted him by a canal.

*<CLIP> Piers Morgan Uncensored*

*Piers Morgan: and your 100% sure it’s not you?*

*Fiona Harvey: yea. Absolutely. This Martha character seems to smash up a bar um sexually assaulted him in a canal been to prison um there are a number of other allegations there…*

*Piers Morgan: and none of that is true*

*Harvey: that's not true*

MEREDITH: There were a lot of specific things in the show that she was really adamant that she wanted to deny, but she does maintain that she is the basis for Martha, and he has impugned her in this way.

*<CLIP> FIONA HARVY: they have billed it as a true story so has he and it's not it's blatantly not even if the email thing was true the rest is not*

*Morgan: why would you qualify that*

*Harvey: sorry why would I what?*

*Morgan: why would you suddenly qualify even if it's true about the emails*

*Harvey:I'm just playing devil's advocate here…*

MEREDITH: So in my estimation, it was a pretty messy waste of time for an hour. Morgan didn't come with any hard evidence that would nail Fiona Harvey on her stalking past, but he also didn't treat her with any particular empathy. So instead, we're just left with an hour of denial and evasion.

NOEL: Okay, I really liked it, but but but <laughs>

MEREDITH: fascinating.

NOEL: But I hear your point. I mean, okay, so you point to the lack of hard evidence. I noticed that, too. Yeah. This woman, Fiona Harvey, in real life, she has faced accusations of stalking. Now is a different person, not Richard Gadd. How did Piers Morgan address that with her?

MEREDITH: So in the past, Fiona Harvey has been accused of stalking a woman named Laura Wray and her husband, a solicitor who had previously hired Fiona Harvey and Fiona Harvey's reaction to that was that yes, she had been hired by miss Wray and yes, they had not gotten along. Yes, she'd been fired, but she had never actually served an interim interdict because, as she explained it, Laura Wray messed up her attempt to serve her with this what is effectively a restraining order, which is perhaps not the strongest rebuttal to the idea that you've been stalking people, that they didn't do a good job of serving you a restraining order. So, you know, it ended up in just a little bit of an impasse. But it seems pretty clear that Fiona Harvey has had troubled relationships in the past with other people who did not appreciate her contact.

NOEL: Her response to that, you know, there's a technicality here, guys, that actually seem to me to be the response of a lawyer. And it's worth noting Fiona Harvey says she has a law degree.

MEREDITH: I think the understanding is that she does have a degree from Aberdeen University in law. Whether she continued beyond that is unclear, but that is what led her to get a job with Laura Wray in the first place.

NOEL: And she says she's not going to let this go, right? She's she seems very aware that he has made some sweet Netflix money. Yes. And they talked about specific numbers. Do we know how much Piers Morgan asked her. She has her theories. She's going to sue everybody is what she's claiming.

MEREDITH: She's going to sue everybody. And I think actually, she asked Piers Morgan if he knew how much yes, I'd made right. Which I thought was a really compelling moment in that interview.

*<CLIP> Piers Morgan Uncensored*

*Fiona Harvey: can I ask a question do you happen to know how much he's made made out of this Netflix thing*

*Piers Morgan: I would imagine several million pounds*

*Harvey: yes I I would say three to four million a lawyer I know well thought he was a wee knowbody and he suggested 750 to 100,000 I said no I think you're looking more about 3 or four million and I think the more he publicizes um it goes up um you know according to how how much it's streamed I don't know I don't know what the contract they signed I think he's done bloody well*

MEREDITH: So, yes, Fiona Harvey, I think on the one hand seems extremely hurt by what has happened. I think that seems true and real. And also she sees what a cash cow this is. And she mentioned it a number of times while talking about both Richard Gadd and the actress who plays the character of Martha, whose name is Jessica Gunning.

NOEL: I love when she was like, her accent wasn't quite right. That's a different Scottish accent that the accent like, I don't know, I don't know. I found her fascinating.

MEREDITH: There was a part in there where Jessica Gunning was speaking for herself just again, and is actually a British actress, and Fiona Harvey pointed out she doesn't sound Scottish at all. And Piers Morgan had to be like, yeah, she's not Scottish. Like, that's a British woman.

*<CLIP> Piers Morgan Uncensored*

*Fiona Harvey: she doesn't even sound Scottish in that interview her accent seems to be varying Piers Morgan: well well she's not she's English she's an actress …*

NOEL: The problem at the heart of all of this as, as Fiona Harvey argued, is that Netflix made the contention that this is a true story. What what is the problem with that, and how has Richard Gadd responded to all of this?

MEREDITH: The show does start with explicitly the words this is a true story, which is unusual. Often stories that are based on real life. We'll start with this is based on a true story or this is a true story kind of or, you know, sort of hedging language like that. This is also, I would say, primarily a piece of autofiction, which is a genre that sort of blurs the line between memoir and fiction. It is not, say, a piece of true crime, which is the kind of genre where I think they're a little more careful about what is true and what is untrue. So what Richard Gaddis had to say about all this is he had made the Martha character unrecognizable. He said, we've gone to such great lengths to disguise her to this point that I don't think she would recognize herself. And I will say, if Fiona Harvey is Martha. No, he didn't know. He sure didn't.

NOEL: It took like days. It was like days before people found her.

MEREDITH: It was almost no time at all. It was really quite fast. Also, a thing to bear in mind here is if the character that he depicted who is, you know, a a lonely, needy and insecure woman, but who also has a bit of a megalomaniacal streak. There's no way that person wasn't going to take their time in the spotlight. So it's feels a little bit inevitable.

NOEL: One of the things we can take away from stories like these is that when the public gets interested in a thing and then gets online, the public really can wreck some people's lives. And even when I was watching the interview last night, Martha's interview, Fiona Harveys interview, I felt pretty bad. I felt pretty bad. I was like, I don't know anything about her. I don't know that she deserves this, but she is maintaining her innocence. She's saying, I did not do this, and he had no right to do this to me. Do you think there is an ethical way to be an engaged viewer of a show like Baby Reindeer?

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MEREDITH: It's complicated because I think Richard had what he wanted to discuss with the show, and what he wanted to bring up are the really nuanced pieces of having a crime committed against you, of being engaged with a person who is perhaps unwell in some way. And he has argued that both he and Martha are victims. He says, I can't emphasize enough how much of a victim she is in this. So I think knowing that that's the centerpiece here, that should dictate perhaps how you engage with this particular show. Other shows ask for different things. But this show was really about how difficult it can be just to be a person in the world to some degree. And I think that maybe should be a signal that we don't need to dig everything up at the same time. People are curious. People are bound to behave this way. And it's it's pretty hard to legislate how people behave about a piece of art once you put it out there. So I think this is just sort of par for the course these days. If you are going to traffic in the line between truth and fiction.

NOEL: Vox’s Meredith Haggarty. Today’s show was produced by Hady Mawajdeh and edited by Amina al-Sadi. Patrick Boyd engineered and Matt Collette fact-checked. I’m Noel King. It’s Today, Explained.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**