

Skinfish  
written by  
Cieran Ryan

[www.cieran.co.uk](http://www.cieran.co.uk)

©Cieran Ryan 2022

Contact: [hello@cieran.co.uk](mailto:hello@cieran.co.uk)

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY - Archive footage shows TV coverage of a regional diving competition: Each diver's name and team is introduced at the bottom of the screen. We see dives, followed by their scores.

B) INT. SIOBHAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY - Pulling away from the archive we see it presented by a TV. SIOBHAN is watching with one eye, another on her young daughter, Niamh, who examines painted wooden blocks with cautious curiosity.

On the TV, MAIRI climbs the steps to the high board. As her name is announced, Siobhan springs to attention. Even Niamh looks up.

C) INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY - Archive footage shows Mairi preparing from her dive. We see her card come up: "Mairi Lynch, 23 yrs - Binkley Diving Club"

D) INT. BOHEMIAN ROOM - DAY - KRISTINA watches the stream on her laptop.

E) INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY - Archive footage shows Mairi's coach, PAUL, encouraging from the poolside.

Mairi steps to the edge of the board and positions herself facing backwards.

Paul's support holds. He flickers with nervous anticipation. Mairi leaps backwards from the board, spinning and twisting ambitiously.

F) INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY - Close in to Mairi, the world around her slows.

A black shadow ripples through the water beneath her, for a second it looks like something is in the water.

Mairi's eyes roll back. Vision around her darkens. The shadow starts to rise out the water.

Suddenly, we see it is her shadow and the shooting pace of her descent returns.

Mairi breaks tragically into the water. Legs and head hang limp as her wretched spine floats in unnatural shapes.

G) INT. SWIMMING POOL - DAY - Snatches of consciousness show Paul swimming with Mairi to the edge of the pool; paramedics setting her onto a bed; voices of crowds drifting away.

INT. MAIRI'S BEDROOM - DAY

The archive footage freezes and rewind arrows appear at the top of the screen. The footage rewinds showing Mairi's dive in reverse, as we pull away from a TV screen at the end of Mairi's bed.

Mairi plays the dive again. Her throat lumps. Her eyes are red and starved from almost-tears.

She heaves herself out of bed and into crutches. We see her bedside table: a clutter of prescription packages, vitamin supplements, herbal teas. Mairi strafes through them to an e-cig.

She achingly treks the six feet between her bed and the ensuite. She sits, out of view. A puff of e-cig vapour snakes past the doorframe and "Six months later" appears in titles. Mairi winces slightly.

INT. SIOBHAN'S KITCHEN - DAY

A soft "blump", as the herbal tea bag sinks into a glass mug. A metal spoon follows and stirs the drifting red weight into the water. It dances gracefully, bleeding the water crimson.

Siobhan takes the spoon out and absently pops it in her mouth. She's on the phone.

SIOBHAN

(into phone)

Yes, sun was out all day. We must've been there 'til gone 5.

Siobhan looks over to Niamh, tumbling confidently around the living room. Niamh looks up, then tumbles away excitedly.

SIOBHAN

(into phone)

Oh yeah, she loved it. She was just shoving her arms in the sand and throwing it about everywhere.

SIOBHAN

Weren't a fan of the water though, were you darling?

(into phone)

Not like her sister-

She stops herself, and takes her mug into the living room.

INT. SIOBHAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The sofa's leather creaks as Siobhan adjusts her position a few times. Beside her tea, a plush ball and the tumbling toddler, the room is sharp and pristine. So is Siobhan.

SIOBHAN

(into phone)

Mairi... I wasn't think- No, I didn't-  
How- how has it been, honey?

Siobhan adjusts her position again and reaches for the tea, a little restless. Niamh picks up the plush ball, drops it and repeats. The cycle offers endless entertainment.

SIOBHAN

(into phone)

Oh, that's good. Have the vitamins helped at all? I can get some more if- Okay, okay I know you're dealing with it. Look, while we're on the topic, I found- no, please can you listen Mairi, you don't have to say yes, please can you just listen to your mother? Thank you.

Siobhan puts the tea back on the coffee table without a sip. She takes the teabag out and rests it on a saucer.

SIOBHAN

(into phone)

I've been doing some research into recovery and there's this great thing about going in cold water and doing some breathing exercises, lots of athletes are doing it now. Just search up 'cold water breathing' or-

Niamh careers across the room and grabs the teabag by the string, dangling it pendulum-like. Siobhan glances warily.

SIOBHAN

(into phone)

Yes, that's it. Rant over. I just think you should think positively about- oh, baby are you in pain? Are you taking those painkillers? Okay, okay, just... if it gets worse you can always come home. Okay, love you.

Mairi hangs up without a response. Niamh drops the dripping

tea bag in the centre of the glass coffee table. It lands with a wet splat and pools red berry juice.

Niamh gasps excitedly. Siobhan slowly puts her phone down and breathes deeply: in through her nose, out through her mouth.

INT. MAIRI'S BEDROOM - DAY

Mairi breathes out deeply, her fingers reaching for her knees. She winces, then commits forcefully.

Mairi sits with her legs stretched forward on a yoga mat. Facing her, a laptop flashes a webcam seminar: Hosting, is an intoxicatingly positive yoga teacher: KATHRIN.

KATHRIN

(from laptop)

Don't force yourself here, especially anyone with injuries around the core and lower back - I know some of you like to push yourself, Mike? Lana? Just keep it gentle...

Mairi groans and releases some of her force. The ache returns. She coughs, then grunts from its strain on her.

KATHRIN

(from laptop)

And, when you feel ready, slowly come back to that relaxed, straight-back position. We'll close our session with a breath - focus on that intention and breath in... and out...

Mairi catches her breath and reaches for her water. She slings half back before catching her breath again and taking two large painkillers with the next swig.

KATHRIN

(from laptop)

Just to remind everyone, next week is the Tuesday morning session only and I'm now doing 1-to-1 recovery therapy with techniques from aromatherapy, meditation and ice bathing, which have had rapid results for many of my students.

Mairi grabs her phone and flicks up Kathrin's Instagram.

## INT. KATHRIN'S STUDIO - DAY

Kathrin's home studio is the complete influencer package: a quality webcam sits on a tripod in the centre of a ring-light. Bohemian throws drape the walls; incense burns.

KATHRIN

We'll close our session as we like to do, by inviting you to come on camera and show your love to the class.

On Kathrin's screen, webcams flick on to students making a heart with their hands. Mairi's stays off.

KATHRIN

Wow, it's great to see so many of you sharing this support. How are you feeling this week, Mairi? We'd love to see you if you feel able... Okay, well thank you for your love and efforts today everyone and hope to see you on Tuesday!

Students drop off the call. Mairi's name holds for a moment, then disappears and Kathrin ends the call. The window closes on her screen, revealing a video of Mairi's dive.

Kathrin leans in and plays the dive again, closely observing the fall. She pauses as Mairi touches the water and zooms in.

A notification flashes up on her phone. Mairi has followed her Instagram. Kathrin smiles and takes the phone through the studio into her kitchen.

## INT. KATHRIN'S KITCHEN - DAY

Small and homely. Jars of loose tea sit alongside myriad herbs and spices; amid them a pestle and mortar.

Choosing a wooden board, Kathrin takes a side of tuna from the fridge and slices thin strips with a long fish knife. She places them on a side plate and puts the rest away.

## INT. KATHRIN'S SHOP - DAY

Shelves of spices; towers of tinctures. The shop breathes with a vapour of oils and balms. You can taste it. Kathrin emerges from a curtain and slips the tuna slices into a murky fish tank. One remains, stubbornly, on the plate.

Kathrin's phone flashes up again: a message from Mairi begins

"Hi do you still have spaces for recovery thera..." Kathrin's smile grows wide. A shadow in the fish tank whips through the dark. Kathrin flicks the final cut of raw tuna down her throat.

INT. MAIRI'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

A hot tap screams. The bath rises close to the edge and Mairi turns it off. The room is thick with steam.

She lights a candle, sets it on the edge of the bath and turns out the main light. She tests the water with her hand. Painted with candlelight, Mairi's foot slips into the water.

INT. POOL - NIGHT

Mairi plunges into the dive pool. She is dressed in competition gear: leotard, goggles and cap. The water's dark.

A shadow whips through the murk. Mairi turns toward it, but it's gone. She swims gently, cautious; investigating.

Her cap and goggles float away as she glides. Hair dances. Suddenly, she can't feel her feet. Her legs fuse stiff.

Mairi coughs out a fit of bubbles. Hands plunge into the water from above her, first one then ten. She whips her arms.

INT. MAIRI'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Mairi flies into view, wet hair coating her neck. She coughs up a lung of water. Her gasping mouth hangs wide.

Her eyes widen. Weak, she stumbles an elbow onto the bath edge. It knocks the candle off and the black consumes her.

INT. MAIRI'S KITCHEN - DAY

Low, early morning sun pierces through the kitchen window. Too early for Mairi, she stares down her toast with contempt.

She takes a small bite, but tastes only her stomach's sour emptiness. She fills a mug with water and sinks it.

The doorbell rings once. She makes herself look well and bins the toast.

INT. MAIRI'S HALLWAY - DAY

The old woodwork seems held together by layers of paint that crack like leather. Kathrin and Mairi's legs drift into view

through the banister as they begin the ascent up the stairs.

KATHRIN

It's so nice to see you finally, we'll keep it easy for the first session - just doing some breathing exercises and try a cool bath if you're feeling up to it, you have a bath in the en-suite?

Mairi hums affirmative as she swallows back a stabbing pain, plants her crutch ahead of her and takes on another stair.

KATHRIN

Perfect, we can have some privacy there - I'm sure you'll have something comfortable to wear, being a swimmer!

INT. MAIRI'S BEDROOM - DAY

Tidier, but still as small - a desk and mirror opposite the bed. Kathrin stands central, commanding the room.

A tap thunders from the closed door to the en-suite.

KATHRIN

Give me a shout when you're changed and we'll begin.

Mairi pokes her head around the door, questioning. Kathrin's eyes shoot to Mairi's toes, peeking out behind the frame. Kathrin catches herself and snaps back to Mairi's face.

KATHRIN

I just said give me a shout when you're ready.

Mairi nods and shuts the door. Kathrin glides over to the desk. She opens a drawer to a clutter of make-up: blushers, brushes, lipstick.

Kathrin traces her fingers over them and graces a lip balm. She opens it and smells it. Then puts some on.

The en-suite door handle turns. In a flash, the balm is replaced and the drawer closed. Kathrin strides to the en-suite, smacking her lips.

KATHRIN

Well, let's begin.



INT. MAIRI'S BATHROOM - DAY

Light bounces around the small bathroom from a single window, but there's no fog of steam - the water is cold and still.

Kathrin arranges oil diffusers. Mairi stands anxiously in her diving leotard. She leans a crutch against the wall and steps a foot in. It's cold.

Kathrin's arms appear behind her, supporting under the shoulders as she lowers Mairi into the water.

In fluid motion, Mairi sits into the cold bath. Crashing into Mairi's face, we see her breathing race, eyes open wide with shock, and fear.

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

We see flashes of past dives, fish, shadows in the water: cutting in and out of Mairi's wide eyes and pacing breaths.

INT. MAIRI'S KITCHEN - DAY

Red herbal tea pours neatly into a mug. Mairi takes it. The sun has passed over the kitchen now, the light has softened.

Mairi sits, swallowed by her dressing gown. She softly blows steam from the tea and holds it close.

MAIRI

It was only cold for a moment, at first. Then, I think I was so shocked that I forgot about being cold.

She takes a satisfying sip: the temperature's perfect.

MAIRI

I forgot about everything, I think, I don't know - I was just black, but not empty, like - clear. I didn't feel my body. Like, for a moment, it was separate.

Kathrin gets up, sipping the end of her tea.

KATHRIN

I'm really proud of how far you've come already, you've got such a strong spirit - it's so empowering to see.

Mairi gets up and walks Kathrin to the door.

INT. MAIRI'S HALLWAY - DAY

Mairi waits by the staircase. We see her face catch some stray sunlight. She stands taller, confident.

KATHRIN

Well, I'll see you again, we can do next-

MAIRI

Oh, I haven't paid you!

KATHRIN

It's okay, we can sort it next time.

MAIRI

It's okay, I'll grab my phone, one sec-

Mairi turns to face the stairs, then pauses - struck.

MAIRI

Where's my...

KATHRIN

You left your crutch upstairs. See you next week, Mairi.

Stunned, the door bears open a shaft of light then closes, swallowing it before Mairi can turn around. She is left alone, processing. Open-mouthed.

Suddenly her back cramps and a pain shoots up to her neck. Wide-eyed and winded, she steadies herself on the banister.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

Shallow green lawns, patio walls and hedges trim either side of the tarmac, redbrick terraces spike high behind them.

The quiet late-spring afternoon is overcast. Mairi pulls a coat around her with one hand, the other occupies her crutch, walking her slowly but firmly.

She is on the phone via earbuds:

SIOBHAN (V.O.)

-so, now she does nursery mornings while 12 on a Wednesday, then I take her to Tots & Tunes at 1 while 2:15.

MAIRI

What do they actually do there though,  
just dance about?

SIOBHAN (V.O.)

It's meant to encourage social ability  
so when she's at school she-

Crossing a sideroad, Mairi's misjudges the curb - plunging  
her foot heavily through vacant air onto the road. She grunts  
with pain as the twist sings up her back and waters her eyes.

SIOBHAN (V.O.)

Baby are you okay? How far are you, I  
can-

Mairi gets her breath back.

MAIRI

I'm good. Just still a bit tender.

SIOBHAN (V.O.)

You don't need to push yourself love,  
you can ask to get the prescription  
delivered.

MAIRI

It's fine, I want to be out. It looks  
like summer soon, I didn't even notice  
the seasons change.

SIOBHAN (V.O.)

Hope so, still no sign of any sun!  
Well, we should catch up properly.

Mairi has emerged onto a row of local shops: she passes  
cafes, charity shops and barbers.

SIOBHAN (V.O.)

I saw there's a diving fundraiser on  
at 'parks next month, it's only a  
local thing, maybe if you were feeling  
a bit better I could take you down in  
the car? It could be good to-

Another voice comes through the line: Siobhan's partner,  
LUKE.

LUKE (V.O.)

What're you telling her that for?  
She'll break her back for good if she

tries-

SIOBHAN (V.O.)  
 (shouting back to Luke)  
 I'm not saying she's going to dive,  
 I'm saying just going to watch! Sorry  
 about this Mairi-

Mairi turns the call volume down a few stops and searches for the event on her phone.

We see Mairi walk past the chemist.

LUKE (V.O.)  
 You know what she's like Siobhan,  
 she's going to try and show off and  
 end up hurting herself again.

SIOBHAN (V.O.)  
 She can probably hear you, you know.  
 You need to support these things, or-

Mairi arrives outside Kathrin's shop.

MAIRI  
 I'm at the pharmacy now mum, I'll chat  
 later okay? Bye!

Mairi hangs up.

INT. KATHRIN'S SHOP - DAY

Ethereal wood chimes announce her arrival as Mairi steps into the misty herbalist's. From the entranceway, tall shelves veil the shop's borders, invoking the seemingly endless pathways of a second-hand bookshop.

Mairi decides on a route. Tracing the shelves for context, she could as well be reading Latin. In some cases of the stacked tubs and vials, she is.

Kathrin emerges from the bead curtain to the back carrying a tray with a teapot and dishes of herbs.

KATHRIN  
 Mairi! Welcome. I've closed the shop,  
 so we can chat as long as you like.

Mairi takes some tea absently. It smells beautiful. She sips.

INT. KATHRIN'S STUDIO - NIGHT

Mairi looks up, disorientated. They're both lounged on cushions around the coffee table, apparently warm, as Mairi's jacket is draped on the wicker chair. She doesn't remember taking it off.

Kathrin laughs warmly, routing Mairi's attention back to her.

KATHRIN

You've gone all red, honey. Better slow down on the kombucha!

MAIRI

Wh- I thought we were drinking tea...

KATHRIN

It's got hardly any alcohol really, but could affect you if you're taking medication.

Mairi flicks her eyeline down to the coffee table: the pot of tea is empty. A bottle of homemade kombucha stands semi-corked, half-full of the fizzy golden liquid.

She notices half a glass of it in her hand.

KATHRIN

I think it's a great idea though. When we go back to training, we're challenging our fears and telling ourselves we're in control of change.

MAIRI

You mean with yoga?

Kathrin flashes a face of sweet concern.

KATHRIN

Oh honey, you look confused - do you need to lie down? You were telling me about going back to the pool with your trainer - Paul?

MAIRI

Paul Myres? That's my diving coach.

KATHRIN

Right. You said he can help you train for the fundraiser.

Kathrin walks through into the shop, Mairi follows unsurely.

INT. KATHRIN'S SHOP - NIGHT

Mairi reads her phone. There's a message conversation between her and Paul - they're meeting at the pool tomorrow morning.

High on a shelf to the side, the murky fish tank ripples. The lid is open and a plate of tuna sits beside it. Mairi winces.

MAIRI

I don't know if-

Kathrin places a hand on the back of Mairi's head and holds her close into her chest. Kathrin breathes deeply.

KATHRIN

You've made so much progress, Mairi. I really think this is something you can do. Why don't you come with me to my swim tonight? I was just about to head out when you got here. We can support each other.

MAIRI

Where do you go to swim?

KATHRIN

I'm actually an outdoor swimmer, there's this amazing forest lake I drive out to.

Mairi puts her kombucha down and shakes off the dizziness. A little stiff, she stands and reaches for her jacket.

INT. KATHRIN'S CAR - NIGHT

Suddenly, in the car. Trees arch spectrally overhead.

Mairi tries to focus out the window, but it moves too fast.

She rolls and slumps with the bumpy ride - no seatbelt. Fumbling a hand onto the door she pats the lock down, pulls it up, pats it down again, her glazed gaze observing blankly from three inches away.

Close in to the rear-view, Kathrin's eyes watch the road: they are white and bulging with a sharp dot pupil.

She blinks and one eyelid sticks. Rubbing it invasively, it wrinkles back into position revealing a blank white eye.

The white eye swivels around, a tiny pupil dot focusing back on the road.

Kathrin pulls in to a passing place on the side of the road.

KATHRIN  
Hey, we're here.

Mairi looks up. Her head spins again.

MAIRI  
I... don't have my kit.

KATHRIN  
It's okay, we picked it up on the way.

Kathrin leans past her, passing through a bag from the back seat.

She gets out and opens Mairi's door. Mairi gets out and stumbles into the early evening.

EXT. WOODLAND - NIGHT

Mairi looks around, disorientated: they're parked on a dark forest road, trees arching either side.

On the other side of the car, Kathrin leans into the wing mirror and smudges a dot of superglue along her hairline.

Mairi turns to find Kathrin, but she appears beside her.

Kathrin's eyes glint strangely in the moonlight; pupils small, piercing dots.

Kathrin and Mairi step into the treeline, dissolving into the shadows.

EXT. WOODLAND LAKE - NIGHT

Underwater. Mairi's hair parts and floats, we swim through it like seaweed.

Closer, on her face, her eyes open. They're softly clouded. An air bubble weeps from the corner.

Deeper, she swims.

EXT. WOODLAND LAKE SHORE - NIGHT

Kathrine silhouettes, stood in the shallows of the moonlit

lake.

Her dress falls from her shoulders, draping her back in a liquid mix of dancing shadows and light - as oil on the surface of water.

She breathes a pause, but her breath is shrill and chattering.

Long, sharp fingernails reach for the front of her face and stretch open her mouth. She pulls the suit of skin over her head and off to the floor, leaving only a sleek shiny-black shadow, curled in its discarded skin like a snake.

The shadow ripples and writhes: armless, legless - a finned black eel slips into the midnight lake. Then silence.

INT. POOL - DAY

Bursting out of the water and up for air, another of the diving team: LANA. She waves to family.

ANNOUNCER  
(through tannoy)  
Lana Pietrzyk, Midlands: Seven and a half.

In the audience, Niamh reaches to grab the hairclip of a girl sat in front. Siobhan pulls her back, laughing.

SIOBHAN  
Niamh! Leave her alone.

LUKE  
What's she doing?

SIOBHAN  
Doesn't matter. Are you filming?

LUKE  
The camera's better on yours-

Siobhan sighs and juggles holding Niamh and getting her phone out from a white handbag. The phone's white, too.

At a pop-up desk, the Announcer looks down his list. The names are typed, except for one handwritten entry:

ANNOUNCER  
(through tannoy)  
Mairi Lynch, West Yorks.



We don't catch her face. Mairi has already stepped, jumped, turned. Flashing through the air like a thrown mirror.

She slips into the water silently, shot deep as an arrow.

INT. CHANGING ROOMS - DAY

Pulling the swim cap from her head, Mairi walks confidently toward a changing cubicle. Lana passes her.

LANA  
Congrats, Mairi!

Slipping into a cubicle, Mairi peels away the bathing suit. Along her spine, there's a sudden flourish - and the outline of a long fin.