

# Room (2015)

Rated R. Running time: 1 hour 58 min.

Our content ratings (1-10); Violence 0; Language 3; Sex /Nudity 3.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

*I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs,  
and will tear open the covering of their heart; there I  
will devour them like a lion, as a wild animal would  
mangle them.*

*Hosea 13:8*

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for  
one's friends.*

*John 15:13*

Irish director Lenny Abrahamson's film, made in Canada, is based on the 2010 best-selling novel by Emma Donoghue, the latter also being author of the screenplay. Told largely by Jack (Jack Tremblay), turning five at the film's beginning, it takes up where most films about kidnapping and being rescued leave off. The lesser films end with everyone but the villain happy and ready to return to their normal lives. Not so this one.

Little Jack's hair is so long that we might mistake him for a young girl: the reason for this we come to understand as we learn that his 10 by 10 foot living space is all the world he has ever known. He and his mother, whom we know only as Ma (Brie Larson) watch TV, but she has taught him it is just pretend, that this is the real world and that he dropped from heaven into it. The only other real person in their lives is Old Nick (Sean Bridgers), from whom Ma desperately keeps Jack

away from by sending him to his bed in the closet during the man's visits for sex. Jack can see Old Nick through the louvered door, but only when he is standing right in front of it. Gradually we learn that Ma was kidnapped seven years earlier and confined in the windowless soundproofed shed, with just a skylight through which the sky can be seen. Each night she has to submit to the sexual assault of her captor.

By a clever plan Ma tricks Old Nick into believing that Jack, whose body she has rolled up in a floor rug, is dead and that he should take him out and bury the body in a place with trees around it. She has instructed Jack, when he is deposited in the back of Old Nick's pick-up truck, to unroll himself and jump out of the truck when it stops. Jack follows instructions, but is almost forced back into the truck when Old Nick chases after him. Fortunately a man walking his dog intervenes. Nick drives off, and the police are summoned. Through some gentle but careful questioning of the shy boy, the officers figure out where Ma is being held, and when they drive up to the house, she is freed. The scene of her tearful face looking at Jack through the window of the locked police car is one you will long remember.

After a brief hospital stay, Ma and Jack are allowed to go home with her mother and father, Nancy (Joan Allen) and Robert (William H. Macy). Nancy and Robert had separated years before, the former now married to Leo (Tom McCamus). Robert had flown in when he was notified that his daughter had been found alive. In his grandmother's large house everything is new to Jack, the crowd of reporters clamoring outside the home; the stairs, which take some getting used to; sitting at a table and eating with more than just his mother.

Jack and Ma sit in her old room looking at her picture in her high school yearbook, the bedroom still decorated as it was when she was a teenager. Downstairs, dinner turns out to be tense because Robert cannot stand to look at Jack, knowing that the boy is the result of his daughter being raped. He

excuses himself after Ma yells at him to look at his grandson, and the next day he leaves town to return to his own home.

Jack at first does not speak directly to others, but slowly emerges from his shell with his mother coaching him that he must answer people. The kind doctor from the hospital visits to work with mother and child on their readjustment, but Ma opts out. Life for them both still seems to find them being confined—from the gaggle of reporters outside clamoring for information; even from their loved ones who are trying too hard to return things to normal. Jack talks little and often hides in small places. His step-grandfather Leo, who wisely takes a more indirect approach with the boy, makes a good substitute for the grandfather who has rejected him. As promised, he brings in from the country his dog, the friendly canine and boy instantly liking one another.

Because their lawyer says they will need money for the coming trial, Ma agrees to submit to a paid interview to be broadcast on a talk show. The insensitive hostess asks if Ma had felt so abandoned by God during all those years that she had thought of taking her life. Ma denies this because of her concern for Jack. The woman takes this as a cue, with her next line of questioning suggesting that Ma had been selfish keeping Jack with her when she could have given him up during his infancy so that he could have grown up and had a “normal” childhood. Afterward Ma is so depressed that...

This is an incredibly nuanced story that makes one realize how shallow and frivolous the *Taken* series was, the latter offering only cheap action and thrills. In those quick thrills type of film the bad guy is thwarted, if not killed, and the rescued and rescuer return to their normal pursuits relatively unscathed. Not so Ma and Jack. Especially Ma, who suffers from what we might call post rescue trauma. Filled with relief she is, yet also filled with guilt, exacerbated by her father who cannot accept Jack, and by the TV interviewer who calls into doubt that she was a good mother to Jack.

The cast is superb, especially, of course, Brie Larson and Jack Tremblay, who totally inhabit their roles. Ms. Larson brims with the fierce mother's love set on protecting the boy at all costs, and the young actor ably swings from wonder at the outside world to fearful retreat from its unfamiliarity. Although they spent years in isolation, they now rejoin their loved ones in the web that is life. Ma learns that the same love, courage and creativity that enabled her to raise Jack in captivity are even more necessary in the so-called free world.

Others too have been affected by Ma's forced absence, and they also must learn how to relate with each other again. Robert cannot accept Jack, and so he leaves. Nancy has trouble breaking through to Ma, the two sometimes yelling at each other in their frustration, but she keeps trying. (We can see from where Ma had received the traits enabling her to survive captivity without going mad.) The scenes with Nancy and Jack are tender and touching, especially the one in which he allows her to cut his hair, a small but telling sign that he is healing enough to enter into the larger world, eventually even playing with the neighbor boy. Few films have shown as well the darkness that can warp the human psyche, and also its resilience responding to the love from a family and caring others.

*This film with a set of discussion questions will be in the Nov. 2015 issue of VP, available for purchase on this site.*