

STORY

written by

Emily Siegel

Nora May & Daniel Vang
3 Arts Entertainment
310.888.3200
nmay@3arts.com
dvang@3arts.com

BEGIN MONTAGE:

Welcome to Salton City, a desolate desert town one hour past the oasis of Palm Springs.

-A single CAR cruises down a dark highway. Its HEADLIGHTS illuminate a CARVED SIGN: SALTON SEA, CALIFORNIA'S BIGGEST LAKE. The words glimpsed through a thick cloud of red dust.

-Flies devour a rotting FISH CORPSE. Barely any water remains in the "LAKE." Just 350 square miles of flat, dry earth.

-Not even a coat of cheery blue paint can prevent this single story CHURCH from more closely resembling a mobile home than a place of worship.

-A car door SLAMS in a PARKING LOT full of PICK-UP TRUCKS. A SHADOWY FIGURE enters BOB'S BAR, a dive with NEON SIGNS in the window. We catch a whiff of CONVERSATION and COUNTRY MUSIC before the door closes, and we're plunged us back into SILENCE. Nothing to hear but the dust-blowing WIND.

-A ruined neighborhood of RANCH HOMES. Some vacant. Others with FOR SALE SIGNS that promise reduced prices on the lawn.

End montage.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT.

We HOLD ON a modest, white HOUSE. Its windows dark and drawn. A MAILBOX with the name HERNANDEZ written in neat letters. The whole place is ordinary... Except for its second story.

Suddenly, or perhaps finally, SOMEONE enters the frame. Moving toward the house with both CONFIDENCE and URGENCY. They wear a SKI MASK and their body is slight-- either a woman or a small man.

The Intruder veers at the FRONT PATH. Changes course. Hoists themselves over a rusted FENCE at the side of the house.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS.

DIRTY SNEAKERS land, sending up more DUST.

The Intruder pauses to make sure no lights click on in the house... Then creeps along the yard's perimeter en route to the BACKDOOR. Passing: a TREE SWING flailing in the wind; PATIO FURNITURE covered in dirt and grime; a large DOGHOUSE that fails to deliver on its promise of a snarling beast.

Soon, the scorched grass beneath their feet turns to concrete. An UNSCREWED LIGHT means the Intruder maneuvers the PORCH in the darkness.

They reach for the doorknob with a GLOVED HAND and a KEY that reads DO NOT COPY... Then remove their shoes before entering.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

The refrigerator hums. Straining to stay cold. On its door are PHOTOS, DRAWINGS and a GROCERY LIST-- the markings of an organized young family.

CLICK! The Intruder ignites a FLASHLIGHT. Its blaze pointed at a PORTRAIT on the fridge: MOM (35), DAD (35), SON (6) and GERMAN SHEPHERD.

They pause. Study the photo. Touch the Woman's face... Then slide the acrylic out from under the magnet and pocket it.

Creak! A DRAWER opens. But even this family's junk drawer is neat. Making it easy for the Intruder to rifle past SCISSORS and GLUE STICKS-- to find a WAD OF CASH.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The Intruder tiptoes in with flashlight extended. They move with ease. Know WHEN and HOW to evade each piece of FURNITURE. Like they've been here before.

Although modest, this room has been looked after with care. PLASTIC FLOWERS. COASTERS. BLANKETS. Everything in its place.

The Intruder heads toward the front of the house when their SOCKED-FOOT meets an errant LEGO. Plastic JAMS into FLESH. They shove a hand in their mouth. BITE. Stifling any howls.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS.

The Intruder peers around the corner, then pull back. Sharp. They look again, more careful this time, and clock a heap of MOTIONLESS FUR. Sprawled across the floor. The Shepherd!

They approach. Kick the dog's belly. Note the dried WHITE FOAM around its snout. Then step over the corpse. Carry on.

INT. STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS.

Step by step, the Intruder creeps up the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT.

The Intruder finds FOUR DOORS on the second floor-- three closed and one open. They turn off their flashlight and approach the FIRST CLOSED DOOR. Their 10-INCH HUNTING KNIFE glinting in the moonlight streaming in through the windows.

They turn the knob. The door opens at an unbearably slow pace. Inch... By inch... Until they can see inside.

The elaborately pillowed GUEST ROOM is empty. Neat as a pin.

But wait! There's someone in there!

The Intruder panics... Only to realize the "person" is a MEN'S JACKET. Hanging, forgotten, on the closet door. *Phew.*

They pull back and head for the SECOND DOOR. Both CLOSED and LOCKED. The name DYLAN written on it in bright STICKERS.

CUT TO:

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

DYLAN (6) sleeps. Unaware of the knob jiggling behind him.

There's a series of HANDWRITTEN NOTES taped to the door frame, written in the same script as the mailbox. They remind Dylan to BRUSH HIS TEETH and PICK UP HIS TOYS.

The LAST NOTE, scrawled in a messier, hurried penmanship, demands that he keep his door shut and locked AT ALL TIMES.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS.

They pass the THIRD DOOR, an empty BATHROOM, before focusing on the FOURTH DOOR at the end of the hall. CLOSE ON their FEET as they creep toward it. Rocking from BALL to HEEL.

A SOUND! They sidestep into the shadows as... Dylan, half-asleep in Star Wars pajamas, stumbles into the bathroom. A beat before we hear URINE meet PORCELAIN.

They retrace their steps. Look into the bathroom. Fingers tightening around the knife's shaft as they watch Dylan sway over the toilet.

FLUSH! They pull back. Dylan returns to his room and locks the door with a CLICK!

Unable to risk another interruption, they block Dylan in with a nearby CHAIR... Then refocus on the FOURTH AND FINAL DOOR.

It, too, is locked. And like Dylan's door, it lacks a keyhole. Just a CIRCLE into which they insert a BOBBY PIN.

JIGGLE! JIGGLE! POP!

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The door creaks open. There's a WOMAN on the BED. BLACK HAIR spooling onto on a pillow. As we yearn for her to wake up...

The Intruder creeps in. Removes a CELLPHONE from the bedside table. Points their flashlight at the woman and IGNITES.

Sheets fall away as MARY (35) sits up. Her pupils dilating in the focused LIGHT. Face turning from CONFUSION to ALARM.

MARY
W-who are you?

The Intruder steps forward, and Mary clocks their knife.

MARY (CONT'D)
What do you want???

Another step. Mary reaches for her phone, but it's gone.

MARY (CONT'D)
Please. My son. He's in his room.

Another step. Mary backs up against the HEADBOARD. Gathering the floral bedding around her nightgown-clad body. She removes her ENGAGEMENT RING and holds it out. It's not a large diamond, less than a half-carat, but it's something.

MARY (CONT'D)
Take this. And there's some cash in a drawer in the kitchen.

But the Intruder doesn't take the ring. Instead, they set their flashlight on the nightstand, illuminating Mary in a V-shaped beam, and perch on the edge of the bed. Mary musters what remains of her courage:

MARY (CONT'D)
My husband has a gun. He should be here any-

Mary stops. Noting the ROPE in the Intruder's hand. She nods, resigned, and holds out her wrists to be bound.

Next, they reveal a pair of white, cotton UNDERWEAR. Built for comfort, not appeal. Mary recognizes them as her own.

MARY (CONT'D)

H-how did you... Have you been wat-

SHOVE! The panties go in Mary's mouth. The Intruder mounts her, as if about to rape. Their faces close enough for a breath to rustle Mary's hair.

Then, for no apparent reason, they hesitate. As if uncertain.

That is... Until Dylan YELLS and BANGS on his door.

DYLAN (O.S.)

Mom! Help! I'm stuck!

Mary's eyes are wide and pleading. *Please. Don't.* She watches as they unsheathe their knife with a SWHING!

Mary has no time to register what's happening before the Intruder SLICES her carotid artery. Blood pours from her neck. She tries to speak. A gurgle escapes. But it only accelerates the bleeding. They stroke her hair and shush her. As if soothing a child. Mary gives a final heave. Then DIES.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Dylan HURLS himself against the door.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT.

A DRUNKARD staggers down the sidewalk. He thinks he hears a noise in Mary's house... Pauses... Then shrugs. Carries on.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The Intruder rests Mary's head on a pillow. Pulls the sheets up to cover her wound. Strokes her cheek. Her eyes stare up at the ceiling. Giving us a glimpse of her masked attacker.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Dylan POUNDS on his door as the Intruder walks past.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The Intruder considers the immaculate living room.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Dylan hurls himself against the door one last time... Then collapses, exhausted, to the floor.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The room has been ransacked. Titled PICTURE FRAMES. SHARDS OF GLASS on the carpet. A COFFEE TABLE balanced on its side. A brighter space on the CONSOLE where the TELEVISION once sat.

FEMALE HOST (V.O.)

Although initially investigated as a homicide, the Imperial County Sheriff has since ruled Mary's death a robbery gone wrong.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

SARAH HALSTED (37) slumps over her desk. Feels someone's gaze upon her. She opens her eyes. Panicked.

Acting on instinct, Sarah SHOVES her stalker to the ground. Accidentally knocking out an EAR POD in the process so that a PODCAST fills the room at a loud volume.

FEMALE HOST (V.O.)

Her body showed no signs of forced intercourse. And there was no semen, no blood, no DNA of any kind found at the scene. Which makes me think whoever did this, robber or not, knew what they were doing.

Sarah scrambles to alight a LAMP. Her face, pretty and just starting to succumb to middle age, falls when she realizes the person is... Her daughter, RILEY (9). A mini Sarah.

SARAH

Riley? What are you-

FEMALE HOST (V.O.)

But then why tuck her in after? It seems like such an odd thing to do after slitting someone's throat.

She needs to turn this off. Now. Before it traumatizes Riley.

FEMALE HOST (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Two months later, and without so
much as a suspect-

The podcast stops. Sarah's hands go to her hips.

SARAH
You're not supposed to be in here.

RILEY
I can't sleep.

Sarah's anger turns to sympathy-- to love.

SARAH
Thinking about tomorrow?

Riley hesitates... Then nods. Sarah touches her cheek.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Go back to your room. I'll be there
in a second to read you a story.

Riley doesn't want to leave her mother, but does as told.

Once alone, Sarah sits at her desk. Lets her heart rate slow.
Her fear over-the-top for someone startled by her own child.

She stands, revealing the hardwood floor to be covered in
MAPS and NEWSPAPER CUTOUTS: Sarah's investigation into Mary's
death. We glimpse headlines, all from SMALL-TOWN PAPERS:

SALTON CITY RESIDENT KILLED IN OWN BED.

LOCALS DEMAND ANSWERS IN UNSOLVED CASE OF SLAIN MOTHER.

INTEREST WANES AFTER HERNANDEZ DEATH RULED A ROBBERY.

Sarah gathers it all into the top drawer of a FILING CABINET
beneath her desk. A TEQUILA BOTTLE goes in the bottom drawer,
surrounded by other fine liquors-- a makeshift OFFICE BAR.

She locks the cabinet and hides the KEY under a MUG OF PENS.
There's a PICTURE printed on the ceramic-- Riley grinning
atop the Empire State Building. Sarah clocks it with a smile.

On her way out, she pauses to look inside one of the many
CARDBOARD BOXES that fill the room. Like they just moved in.

She flips past a COLUMBIA JOURNALISM SCHOOL DIPLOMA and finds
a series of FRAMED ARTICLES from *The Daily Inquirer*. And
whose should be on the byline except her own. SARAH HALSTED.

She studies them with longing before turning out the light.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, RILEY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

NOTE: ALTHOUGH SARAH'S OFFICE IS FULL OF BOXES, THE REST OF THE HOUSE IS IMMACULATE AND UNPACKED. A TIDY DREAM HOME.

Riley lies in bed. Bathed in the warm glow of a nightlight. Cuddling the family's Golden Retriever, CHARLIE (2), as Sarah reads from an old, worn BOOK. Gesturing dramatically.

SARAH

The little mermaid parted the purple curtains of the tent and saw the beautiful bride asleep with her head on the Prince's breast. The mermaid bent down and kissed his shapely forehead. She looked at the sky, fast reddening for the break of day. She looked at the sharp knife and again turned her eyes toward the Prince, who in his sleep murmured the name of his bride. His thoughts were all for her, and the knife blade trembled in the mermaid's hand. But then she flung it from her, far out over the waves. Where it fell the waves were red, as if bubbles of blood seethed in the water. With eyes already glazing she looked once more at the Prince, hurled herself over the bulwarks into the sea, and felt her body dissolve in foam.

RILEY

(a beat, then)

The Little Mermaid dies?

SARAH

Not in the movie. But in the book.

RILEY

What? Why?

Sarah studies her daughter. As if deciding how honest to be.

SARAH

So all the little girls like you would like it. But sometimes, when you change the ending, you change the whole story.

RILEY

But-

SARAH
-Enough. Time for bed.

Sarah tucks the sheets tight, kisses Riley's forehead and heads for the door. Pausing.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Sleep tight, Baby Bear. I love you.

She waits until Riley closes her eyes before closing the door. Leaving it ever so slightly ajar. Once alone, Riley's eyes flicker back open. Her face full of DREAD. Of CONCERN.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Sarah slips into bed beside her sleeping husband, TOM HALSTED (38). She kisses his neck, and he stirs without waking. She tries again. He murmurs with drowsy frustration:

TOM
I'm sleeping.

Rejected, Sarah grabs her pillow and stalks toward the door. When she opens it, we hear a SCREECHING SOUND and CUT TO--

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING.

Sarah wakes to her PHONE ALARM. Hunched over her LAPTOP. Like she's been there all night. She straightens. Rubs her neck. We wonder why she seems so disoriented... Until we spot the (now empty) TEQUILA BOTTLE on its side.

Sarah stops the alarm and opens Instagram to a DIRECT MESSAGE CONVERSATION with @LuluTrueCrime. They've been trading notes about Mary. Lulu's last message still awaiting Sarah's reply.

ON THE SCREEN:

If you agree the robbery looks staged... 2100 S Marina Dr.

Sarah squints at the address, when:

TOM (O.S.)
Babe? Have you seen my blue tie?

It takes all of Sarah's self-restraint to pocket her phone... But not until she logs out of Instagram and closes the app.

SARAH
One sec. I'll help you find it.

She locks both her investigation and the tequila away in the filing cabinet. Hides the key under the mug. Only once the room is purged of her obsession does she finally exit.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

The Halsted family owns a large, traditional home in upscale Pasadena. Every yard on their block is mowed and perfectly manicured. The only blight? A small HOLE in the Halsted's picket fence. We PUSH IN on it.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah slathers jam onto bread. The kettle SQUEALS. She rushes to turn off the stove. Leaving a STICKY STREAK on its dial.

SARAH

Shit.

She sucks her finger and wipes the jam with her robe's sleeve. Tom enters, amused and broad-shouldered, as he knots the blue tie. The finishing touch of his suit.

TOM

Everything ok in here?

Sarah whips around. STARTLED, once again, by her own family. He takes the kettle and pours Sarah a cup of tea.

TOM (CONT'D)

Here.

SARAH

Thanks.

Noting how disheveled she looks in comparison, Sarah tightens her robe and finger combs her hair. But Tom barely notices her. Too busy eyeing the half-made sandwiches on the counter.

TOM

Is one of those for me?

SARAH

Ya, but don't get too excited. It's just PB&J. I still have to go groc-

TOM

-Shit. I should have told you. Mom's taking me to lunch with some of the other partners.

SARAH
Why should you tell me that?

TOM
I don't know... Listen. About last night-

SARAH
It's ok. Really.

TOM
-I know it's been a while since...

It's awkward as he fumbles for the right words.

SARAH
I know. It's been hard for me too.

TOM
(blushing, embarrassed)
No. Of course. It's obviously harder for you... I just want you to know that... We'll get there.

Tom smiles. She smiles. A brief moment of camaraderie before he notes the TIME and gets distracted. Picks up his pace.

TOM (CONT'D)
You sure you'll be ok?

SARAH
What do you think I'm going to do?
Burn the house down?

TOM
(laughing awkwardly)
What? No... But maybe you could call my sister? Let her take you to lunch?

Sarah pulls a face. *No way in hell she's doing that.*

SARAH
Remind me again why I agreed to live so close to your family?

They continue to tease one another. Playful:

TOM
Because you love me?

SARAH
Hm... That doesn't sound right.

TOM
Because you couldn't resist showing
off Big Blue?

Tom flexes and kisses his biceps.

SARAH
Oh. Yes. How could I possibly live
without people knowing I snagged
the star quarterback of the 2001
high school football season?

TOM
(laughing, then)
I know it's been a few months since
the move, but today feels good.
Like life is finally starting...

Sarah smiles. He heads for the exit, then turns back.

TOM (CONT'D)
Before I forget. Did we ever get
that hundred grand?

SARAH
I think the bank said Friday?

TOM
Jesus. Escrow should have closed
weeks ago. We could really use the
money now that you aren't working.

It's as if Sarah's been SLAPPED. She lashes out.

SARAH
Then would you be able to fix that
hole in the fence?

TOM
(surprised, sour)
I told you I would fix it this
weekend.

SARAH
Hey. Don't blame me. I'm just
trying to avoid another note from
you-know-who.

TOM
I said I'll do it.

They stare. The atmosphere no longer loving, but tense.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Tom approaches one of two gleaming AUDIS in the driveway. His? A slick sedan. Hers? A marmish SUV. He opens the door and looks back at the house. Equal parts ANGRY and CONCERNED.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Riley enters as Sarah watches Tom get into his car. Once again STARTLING her mother. Sarah is quick to force a smile, but Riley doesn't miss a thing. Oddly perceptive for a fourth grader.

SARAH

Hey there, Baby Bear. What do you want for breakfast? Yogurt? Cereal?

Riley plops down at the table. Grumpy.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Cereal it is... So are you excited?

She procures Riley's breakfast and takes a seat. A beat.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Look. I know it's hard. Starting at a new school. But you've never had trouble making friends before... And your cousins will be there!

Riley makes a face. Identical to the face Sarah made earlier in reference to Tom's sister. *These Halsted women are twins.*

SARAH (CONT'D)

I know. They are kinda weird.
(imitating)
Splatoon 2 is like, so much better than Fortright.

RILEY

(giggling, cheered)
It's called Fortnite, Mom!

SARAH

Shit. I swore I'd be nicer about your dad's family. They're the only reason you got into Westbridge.

Riley shrugs, unimpressed by both her school and the swear word, and watches a BUS pull to the curb outside the WINDOW. Not a yellow one, but a MERCEDES VAN.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You ready?

CUT TO:

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY.

Riley runs outside. Her Disney's LITTLE MERMAID BACKPACK bouncing. Sarah starts after her... Then FREEZES in the door.

Riley turns back. Notes Sarah's fear. Offers a comforting smile too mature for her age. And boards the van with a wave.

When the Mercedes pulls away, Sarah spots a cluster of MOMS (30s) gathered across the street with matching BLOWOUTS. She PANICS, caught off guard by their sudden appearance, as the clique's leader, CINDY, whispers to the group:

CINDY

She doesn't work. She can't keep house. Have you seen that hole in-

Sarah SLAMS and LOCKS the front door. Grumbling to herself:

SARAH

And who says LA doesn't get cold...

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah enters with Charlie in tow. She approaches a STACK OF BOXES. Reaches for one on top, and they all tumble down.

OLD ISSUES of *The Daily Inquirer* tabloid spill onto the floor. As Sarah picks them up, her eyes land on a headline:

CRIME REPORTER OUT AT INQUIRER FOLLOWING ATTACK.

She shuts her eyes. Remembering.

INT. SARAH'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - FLASHBACK.

Sarah writhes on the floor. Gagged. Bound. Alone in her living room. Lit by the city lights outside the window.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, FAMILY COMPUTER ROOM - PRESENT DAY.

Charlie's LICKS bring Sarah back to reality. She shoves the tabloids back into the box, trapping the memory inside, when her phone BEEPS with an event reminder for THERAPY. *Ugh.*

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah opens the front door, keys in hand. But again she STOPS at the threshold. Unable to go outside. She takes a breath. Sticks a toe onto the porch. Only to PANIC and RUN inside.

Cindy clocks Sarah's behavior from the house next door.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - DAY.

Sarah's therapist, LAUREN (40s), is on VIDEO CHAT. Noting the MESS OF BOXES in the background of her patient's shot.

LAUREN

I was hoping I'd finally get to meet you in person. It's Riley's first day, right? That must be hard after having her home all summer.

Sarah avoids eye contact and looks outside. Thinking she either doesn't want or doesn't need therapy.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

You know, Sarah... Rape used to be something women didn't talk about. Something we bottled up. But things are different these days.

SARAH

People cope in different ways.

LAUREN

And Tom? How's he coping?

SARAH

Good. Other than the fact that he's repulsed by my naked body.

LAUREN

I see... A lot of men struggle with intimacy after these types of incidents... And what about Riley?

SARAH

What about Riley?

LAUREN
How's she handling everything?

SARAH
She's *nine*. We haven't discussed it with her.

LAUREN
I'm sorry. It's just, I thought...
Wasn't she home during the attack?

SARAH
She was asleep.

Lauren doesn't agree, but says nothing.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah locks the door, then slides her VANITY in front of it.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah basks in the hot BATH. The same PODCAST flows from high tech speakers. The host sounds young. Almost immature:

FEMALE HOST (V.O.)
Guys. The response to my first episode has been *amazing*. I've gotten sooo many messages asking why I care about this case. Why I've dedicated my life to solving it. And while I wouldn't say Mary and I were friends, we did cross paths a few times at the diner where she worked. And wouldn't you want to help if someone you knew got murdered?

Sarah shakes her head. Closes her eyes. Listens.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY.

Charlie barks as Riley enters and drops her bag to the floor.

SARAH
How was it?

RILEY
Ok. Do we have Pop-Tarts?

SARAH
How about an apple?

But she can't resist Riley's puppy dog eyes.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Fine. But only one!

Riley scampers off, forcing Sarah to yell after her:

SARAH (CONT'D)
And no telling Dad! You know how he
is about healthy snacking.

She picks up Riley's backpack and hears a CLANGING sound. Unzips it. Looks inside and finds SCISSORS. Not the arts and crafts kind but the ultra-sharp gardening kind. *That's odd...*

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY.

Two Pop-Tarts SHOOT out of the toaster.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - DAY.

Sarah enters with Charlie at her heels. She fights the urge to lock the door. Leaves it ajar so she can hear Riley.

QUICK CUTS AS: Sarah gets the key, unlocks the filing cabinet and procures her investigation.

She reaches for the liquor drawer, then sees the mug with its photo of Riley. Decides not to drink and sits at her desk.

She finds @LuluTrueCrime on Instagram. LULU (21) is young, lithe and pretty. More influencer than murder investigator.

Lulu's feed is a mix of SELFIES and PROMOTIONAL POSTS for her new podcast. *Is this really who Sarah's been listening to???*

In her most recent post, she wears glasses to appear serious. Despite making duck face. Its caption reads: WHY DO DUCKS MAKE GREAT DETECTIVES? BECAUSE THEY ALWAYS QUACK THE CASE.

Sarah rolls her eyes and reads the comments.

ON THE SCREEN:

Why does everyone assume it's a guy? Girls kill too.

90% of murders are committed by men.

Can we please talk about the dog obviously being poisoned?

Sarah furrows her brow and scratches Charlie's head... When, suddenly, she's STARTLED by her VIBRATING phone.

SARAH

H-hello?

A long beat during which Sarah panics. *Who would call her?*

CHRISTINE

Thank fucking God I caught you.
Things are insane over here.

We INTER CUT between the two women. CHRISTINE (50s) is hard at work in her tiny Manhattan office. She's gruff. Grizzled from years editing *The Daily Inquirer*, but still trying to maintain a youthful appearance with MAKEUP and TIGHT CLOTHES.

Sarah checks the time. 5:00 PM here. 8:00 PM out East.

SARAH

Right. Almost time to go to print.

CHRISTINE

(typing, distracted)

Mhm. If Alex ever finishes writing this Le Coucou review. That guy. I swear... Listen. I got your email. Both of them. Aren't you supposed to be retired?

Christine forks DELIVERY SALAD into her mouth. Chewing when:

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

You're really into this Salton City thing, aren't you?

SARAH

The Sheriff insists it's a robbery. That she must have caught them off guard. But then why leave her engagement ring? And why tuck her in after? If you killed someone out of a panic, wouldn't you want to get out of there as soon as physically possible?

Christine opens a drawer. Reveals a DESK BAR identical to Sarah's. Washes down her half-chewed salad with a VODKA SWIG.

CHRISTINE

I hear you, but there's a reason the story hasn't gone national. Maybe if Mary were White. Or if the kid had died too.

(MORE)

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

But a middle-aged woman gets killed
in the boondocks? Who's gonna care?

SARAH

I wouldn't call 35 middle-aged. And
What's scarier than having your
throat slit with your son in the
next room?

CHRISTINE

Ya. That part's good. Less so the
part where she's a poor waitress...
Have you already forgotten the
rules? Are they young? Wealthy?
Powerful? Attractive? Good victims
need to be enviable.

SARAH

I just think-

CHRISTINE

-Listen. I know how addictive this
shit can be. I literally sit here
all day hoping for bad things to
happen to people I don't know. How
fucked is that? But after what
happened last year... I suggest you
quit cold turkey.

(then, enthusiastic)

Wait! You live in LA! If you want
drama, why not write a screenplay?

Sarah rolls her eyes.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT.

Tom returns from work to find Sarah and Riley eating dinner.

TOM

(light, but judging)

PB&J and Easy Mac in the same day?
Damn, Riley. It's your lucky day.

Sarah winces. Tom sits and snags a bite of Riley's pasta.

RILEY

Hey! That's mine!

TOM

Daddy tax!

Riley laughs. Tom avoids Sarah's gaze and takes another bite.

SARAH

How was work?

TOM

Busy. But it's actually kind of good to be busy, you know? TO be needed. You have to see my office. It's got Insane views of Echo Moun-

Sarah tunes him out. Her mind elsewhere.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT.

Sarah brushes her teeth. Tom opens the MEDICINE CABINET and hands her a PILL BOTTLE with an encouraging smile. The label says it's CLOZAPINE-- a powerful antipsychotic. He opens the bottle and shakes one out. Hands it to Sarah. She pops the pill... Only to spit it out when Tom turns away.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT.

The glow of Tom's ESPN APP lights the otherwise dark room. Sarah kicks a leg in frustration. Hoping he'll wake and turn off his phone. But he doesn't, so again she slips out of bed.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

Sarah hits play on the SECOND EPISODE OF LULU'S PODCAST. Half listening as she opens the filing cabinet and pours tequila.

LULU (V.O.)

You're not gonna believe it, but...
(makes drum roll sound)
I managed to get my grubby little paws on the crime scene photos!

Sarah stops in her tracks. Glass raised to her lips.

LULU (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I'm sure you're all dying to know how I snagged these bad boys, but a reporter never reveals her sources. And let me tell you, the whole thing looks fishy as fu-

PAUSE. Anxious to understand the girl's big break, Sarah opens Instagram to Lulu's last message. Still unanswered.

ON THE SCREEN:

If you agree the robbery looks staged... 2100 S Marina Dr.

Sarah GOOGLES the ADDRESS-- a DINER three hours away in Salton City. Compared to one of her marked-up MAPS, it's the same diner where Mary worked and less than a mile from Mary's house. She furrows her brow. Chugs what's left of her drink.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING.

Riley boards the Mercedes. It pulls away, revealing the same moms across the street. Cindy glances at Sarah and whispers. Presumably telling them about Sarah's odd behavior yesterday.

Sarah SLAMS the door.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - DAY.

Sarah rants to Lauren on Zoom. She's riled up. Her cool veneer from the previous session? G-o-n-e.

SARAH

I don't know why the Sheriff isn't taking it seriously. This guy knew to unscrew the porch light. Knew about the dog. About husband being out of town. Who spends that much time watching someone, only to attack when they're home? Most rob-

LAUREN

-Sorry to interrupt, Sarah. But is it possible you're focusing on someone else's tragedy in order to avoid your own?

Sarah looks outside. Made even angrier by the HOLE IN THE FENCE. She looks, sharply, back at Lauren. In the eyes.

SARAH

Have you ever been raped?

LAUREN

No.

SARAH

Then how could you possibly know?

LAUREN

I'm not saying I can empathize, bu-

SARAH

-You know what? This isn't working.

LAUREN

Hang on. Let's talk about thi-

Sarah slams her laptop shut, opens Instagram on her phone and types a hasty response to Lulu.

ON THE SCREEN:

Today. Noon.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DAY.

Again, Sarah FREEZES in the doorway. Exhales. Then steps out. But it sticks this time. She rushes to lock the door. Scans her yard for HAZARDS as she runs to her car and squeals away.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

As Sarah drives, the LA suburbs giving way to barren desert.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

There's no cell signal after Palm Springs. Spotify cuts out. Sarah scans the radio. Passing stations of STATIC, COUNTRY MUSIC and HISPANIC FOLK SONGS before stopping on:

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

There's no question you've broken some of the most important stories of the decade. And the reporting in your 2019 best-selling book is undeniably cinematic. But you've also been accused of omitting any details that could dampen the drama. Of inserting yourself too much into the story. How much if at all does that concern you?

INTERVIEWEE (O.S.)

Not at all, Rachel. I wrote my book *because* people want to know about me. How it felt for Harvey Weinstein to have me followed. For NBC to kill my story out of fear.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

But isn't it true that the latter, at least, lacks compelling proof? That some worry you lack ethics?

INTERVIEWEE (O.S.)

I resent that accusation. At some point, every journalist has to ask the question: Is it better to be accurate? Or to be heard?

Sarah stares at the speakers. As if she can see the words flowing out and then dissipating into the air.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

As Sarah passes the sign for Salton City, her car clocks 112 DEGREES. She turns onto the pathetic, one block strip of DOWNTOWN. BOARDED BUILDINGS; OVERWEIGHT PEOPLE with OXYGEN TANKS. The only lively business? Bob's Bar. From the opening.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

Sarah parks behind the DINER. Grabs her purse, giving us a glimpse of the HANDGUN inside. She opens the door, instantly overwhelmed by the STENCH. Covers her nose as she exits.

INT. DINER - DAY.

A BELL announces Sarah's arrival. The diner falls silent. Its few PATRONS staring at the urban stranger in their midsts.

Sarah is relieved to spot LULU, smiling and waving, in a CORNER BOOTH. She heads over, passing a PHOTO MEMORIAL FOR MARY on the wall-- Mary at the diner; Mary with her son.

As Sarah slides into the booth, she can't help but stare at Lulu. *She knew the girl was young, but not this young. Not an overly made up child.*

Lulu bangs out the last few words of a text and puts her PHONE face up on the table. Noting Sarah's stares, she beams.

LULU

Not what you expected, right? But true crime isn't just for housewives anymore. We're mainstream.

Lulu doesn't notice Sarah wince at the word *housewives*. Too focused on the waitress, MELANIE (50s), arriving with JUICE.

MELANIE

OJ on the house for our local Barbara Walters.

LULU

Thanks, Mel. You're the best.

Lulu is beaming. But as soon as Melanie turns away, she drops the smile. Pushes the glass aside.

LULU (CONT'D)

I can't even drink orange juice with my reflux. But free is free.

SARAH

You know, back when I interned at the *Times*, we couldn't even accept a free glass of water.

LULU

Well, it's a good thing I don't work for the *Times*. I'd ask if you were hungry, but there's nothing here for less than 3,000 calories. It's like, come on people. Have you heard of açai? ... Anyways, I'm so glad you're here. When I saw you were a journalist, I was like, *Holy shit. She's perfect.*

Sarah doesn't admit she's no longer a journalist.

LULU (CONT'D)

I actually read about what happened to you. Have you ever considered doing a podcast? I just wish they hadn't caught the guy. It's way scarier when they don't catch the guy.

SARAH

Isn't that kind of the point?

LULU

Oh my God! Of course. I'm just saying. That HBO show got so boring as soon as they caught the guy.

BUZZ! BUZZ! Lulu reveals another cellphone. Sarah wonders why she has two, but doesn't ask.

LULU (CONT'D)

Sorry. Thought I put them both on silent. Things have been so crazy since we launched last week.

As Lulu sends a text. Gets a text. Sends a text:

SARAH

... So how can I help?

Lulu looks up. Puts this phone FACE DOWN, unlike its sibling.

LULU

(looking up)

We both agree this wasn't just a robbery. But it hasn't gotten any attention in the press. And what does a lazy press make? Lazy cops.

Lulu beams. Seemingly finished. Pleased with her conclusion.

SARAH

I'm still not sure what-

Lulu rolls her eyes. Wishes Sarah could keep up.

LULU

-We need to light a fire under their ass. So I'm thinking, what if you write about it for the *Inquirer*? And if you can mention my podcast, even better.

SARAH

Honestly, there isn't much to say that you haven't already covered. I was actually wondering what you we-

LULU

-That's where you're wrong.

She procures a BINDER. It falls to the Formica with a SMACK.

LULU (CONT'D)

This is where I track everything. Never let it out of my sight.

Sarah stares at it. Yearning.

SARAH

... Can I?

Lulu nods and slides the binder across the table. Sarah flips through. Pausing on the gruesome CRIME SCENE PHOTOS-- dusty footprints, the unscrewed patio light, the ransacked living room, the dead dog... Mary tucked beneath bloody bedding.

SARAH (CONT'D)

How did you get these?

LULU
 (smiling, coy)
 I have my sources.

Sarah turns the page-- POLICE RECORDS of Mary reporting HANGUP CALLS in the days leading up to her attack.

SARAH
 I didn't know she got hangup calls.

LULU
 Mhm. Everyone just thought she was paranoid. That it was a prank. No one believed she was in danger. Not the cops. Not her gross husband.

Lulu's voice has started to attract stares. Sarah darts an apologetic glance at a nearby DINER. Then, softer:

SARAH
 Ya. What about him? Could he have had something to do with it?

LULU
 Nope. He's got a rock hard alibi. Was out-of-state on his trucking route when it happened. So unless he hired someone...

Lulu's second phone buzzes again. But she resists answering.

LULU (CONT'D)
 What's weird is she wasn't sexually assaulted, so this wasn't about sex. And they left her ring, so it wasn't about money either. If you ask me, I think it was about power. About someone's need for control.

Lulu's intuition catches Sarah off guard.

LULU (CONT'D)
 Which brings me to my point. The real reason I asked you here today.
 (taking time, relishing)
 There's been another attack.

SARAH
 Another attack?

LULU
 It actually happened a few weeks before Mary. And this time, there was a survivor.

SARAH
A survivor?

LULU
Are you going to repeat everything
I say?

SARAH
No. It's just... This doesn't seem
like the kind of guy who would let
someone go.

LULU
I know, right?

SLOW MOTION as Lulu reaches into her purse. Sarah panics, for some reason worried she's about to be attacked, but all Lulu procures is a PIECE OF PAPER that she hands to Sarah.

ON THE PAGE:

Lisa Anderson.

SARAH
Is this them? I don't understand.
Why hasn't it been in the news?

LULU
Rumor has it the Sheriff doesn't
wanna scare our last few tourists.
Salton City used to be something of
a celeb hotspot, you know. Frank
Sinatra and the like. But those
days are over. O-v-e-r.

SARAH
Have you tried talking to this Lisa
person?

LULU
Bitch keeps slamming the door in my
face. Says she doesn't want to bait
the guy or something... That's
where you come in. I was hoping she
might talk to a real journalist.

Sarah's chest puffs with pride. *Real. Journalist.*

SARAH
What makes you so sure the cases
are tied?

LULU

30-something woman attacked after reporting hangup calls. No man in the house. Only difference is this chick managed not to die.

SARAH

Why haven't you covered it?

LULU

My source wants it kept quiet.

SARAH

Wait... So even if this woman tells us something, we can't publish it?

LULU

Don't worry about that. We'll cross that bridge when we get to it.

SARAH

Ok... But who's your source?

Avoiding the question, Lulu pretends to look out the window.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You have to tell me if I'm going to help you.

LULU

(a groan, then)

It's possible I have a secret boyfriend... Who's a cop.

SARAH

You're dating a cop?

Lulu panics. Eyes darting around to ensure no one has heard.

LULU

Sh! I said it was a secret. And technically he's a sheriffs deputy. But ya. He keeps me in the know.

As Sarah internalizes this bombshell...

LULU (CONT'D)

Have you ever been on a press trip? They sound so glam.

CUT TO:

EXT. DINER - DAY.

Lulu walks Sarah to her car. Unbothered by the STENCH.

SARAH

Can I ask? About the smell?

LULU

Oh. Like rotten eggs, right? It's hydrogen sulfide. Courtesy of our "lake." You'll get used to it... So when can you get back out here?

SARAH

I'm not sure. I'll have to check my schedule and get back to you.

LULU

Right. You've got a kid.

SARAH

H-how do you know that?

LULU

Dunno. Must have seen it on social. Anyways, this was great. Talk soon.

Lulu hugs Sarah, oblivious to her stiff discomfort, and heads toward the BUS STOP. Leaving Sarah to rush into her car.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Sarah locks the doors and opens Instagram. She hasn't posted anything in over a year. And there are no mentions of Riley. The first thing on Tom's feed, however, is a photo of Riley on her first day of school. *Fucking. Tom.*

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

Sarah drives down residential blocks. Passing RANCH after RANCH that reminds us this was once a mildly prosperous area. Some houses are vacant. Others are collapsed, marked only by a tall FIREPLACE. By RUSTED CARS and COUCHES on the lawns.

LULU (V.O.)

It's crazy how much this place has changed.

INT. DINER - FLASHBACK.

LULU

People used to come from all over. At one point, we actually had more visitors than Yosemite. But the lake started to evaporate around the time I was born. That's why I started the podcast. To get out.

SARAH

Where would you go?

LULU

Anywhere, I guess.

SARAH

What about your boyfriend?

Lulu shrugs.

End flashback.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - PRESENT DAY.

Sarah reaches the HIGHWAY... But decides not to merge.

EXT. MARY'S HOUSE - DAY.

Sarah parks and gets out. Her shirt instantly drenched with SWEAT. Her shoe sticking to a forgotten strand of CRIME SCENE TAPE as she walks up the path to the dark house. The FRONT DOOR is locked, so she walks to the side and hops the fence. *Mimicking the Intruder's path.*

NOTE: AS SARAH SEES EACH PIECE OF EVIDENCE, WE WILL FLASH IT'S MATCHING CRIME SCENE PHOTO.

EXT. MARY'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah procures a NOTEPAD and looks around. Summer hasn't been kind to this yard. The grass is scorched. Everything covered in a film of red dust. She writes down the words SWING and DOGHOUSE, then lets herself in the unlocked backdoor. But not without noting the unscrewed PORCH LIGHT.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The room is UNTOUCHED since the cops were here. Like it all just occurred. Sarah's shoe CRUNCHING GLASS as she enters.

Her investigative brain works at superhuman speed, clocking: LATEX GLOVES; BLACK SOOT from fingerprint dusting; some HANGING PICTURES, still somehow straight on the wall. She's most interested in the OVERTURNED COFFEE TABLE, still resting on its side. Approaches it and is able to flip it over with a slight FLICK of the finger. She puts the table back and makes another note-- COFFEE TABLE NOT FULLY FLIPPED?

She hears a NOISE! JUMPS! Looks at the KITCHEN with dread.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE, KITCHEN.

Sarah enters. Cautious. Follows the SCRATCHING SOUND to the BROOM CLOSET. She takes a breath before opening it, terrified of what she'll find, only to discover... A RAT gnawing on spoiled food in the TRASH CAN. She shakes her head.

EXT. MARY'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah tosses a BAG into the TRASH BIN.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE, HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS.

She pauses where the dog died. Closes her eyes. Pictures it.

PODCAST FAN (V.O.)
Can we please talk about the dog
obviously being poisoned?

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Although beckoned by the door at the end of the hall, Sarah stops to glance in every room. It all looks totally normal. Dylan's room still a shrine to the kid who once lived here. Finally, she reaches Mary's door. Hesitates before opening.

INT. MARY'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The MATTRESS is gone, but dried BLOOD abounds-- on the WALLS; on the END TABLE; on the BED FRAME. It's a horrifying sight.

She closes her eyes and sees MARY'S CORPSE before her.

Sarah collapses to floor. Spies a pool of BLOOD where it must have soaked through the mattress. She chokes, as if about to vomit, and clenches her eyes. Tries to make it disappear.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - FLASHBACK.

Sarah writhes on the floor. Gagged and bound. Her muffled PLEAS for help. But this time, there's a MAN with a SKI MASK and GLOVES atop her. RAPING HER.

End flashback.

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY, HOURS LATER.

BUZZ! The phone's vibrations JOLT Sarah back to reality. She misses the call, but sees several TEXTS from Tom. Stunned to learn that it's 4 PM. *Where did the time go?*

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

Sarah pulls up. Disappointed to see a PORSCHE CAYENNE in the driveway.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT.

Sarah finds her family eating dinner with Tom's sister, LILY (38), and her twin SONS (9). Riley's head the only non-blonde one of the bunch. As Charlie rushes forward, tentative:

SARAH

Sorry. Guess I lost track of time.

No one looks at Sarah except Riley, who seems sympathetic.

TOM

And forgot to be here when your daughter got home from school?

LILY

Come on, kids. Let's go watch PBS.

Lily gathers the children and shuttles them out of the room.

TOM

... So are you going to tell me what finally inspired you to leave the house? Or is that another one of your secrets?

SARAH

Secrets?

TOM

Don't do that. Don't act like you haven't been hiding something.

(then, with eye contact)

This was supposed to be a fresh start, Sarah.

SARAH

It is.

TOM

It doesn't feel like it.

SARAH

(tentatively honest)

Well... Maybe that's because you made me quit my job and move across the entire country.

TOM

No one *made* you do anything.

SARAH

Come on. You wanted me to stop working the day I had Riley.

TOM

That is so unfair.

SARAH

Why else would we move here?

TOM

Because I was never going to make partner in New York. Because Mom was the only one who would pay me enough to sustain our lifestyle. And there are newspapers in LA if you really need to work.

SARAH

What am I going to do? Get a job at *People*? That's even worse than the *Inquirer*. And why are you posting photos of Riley on Instagram when I specifically asked you not to?

TOM

Seriously? You wanna talk about social media right now? Ok. Fine.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

Well, I highly doubt any of my 200 followers care what Riley wore on her first day of fourth grade.

SARAH

Then why post it?

TOM

I don't know. It's what people do.

SARAH

But your profile is *public*. Anyone can see.

TOM

Jesus, Sarah. When did you get so paranoid?

He regrets the words as soon as they're out of his mouth.

TOM (CONT'D)

That came out wrong. What I meant to say is... We can't live scared.

THROUGH A CRACK IN THE DOOR: Riley watches her parents fight.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, RILEY'S ROOM - NIGHT.

Sarah tucks Riley into bed. Charlie at her feet, per usual.

SARAH

Sorry I wasn't here when you got home from school.

RILEY

That's ok.

Riley opens her mouth... about to say something, when:

SARAH

Good night, Baby Bear. I love you.

RILEY

Love you too.

Sarah turns out the lights. But Riley's eyes stay open.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

QUICK CUTS AS: Sarah unlocks the filing cabinet, pours a drink and turns on her computer. She types LISA ANDERSON into Google and finds something in the SALTON CITY POLICE BLOTTER.

ON THE SCREEN:

Salton City resident Lisa Anderson reported a break-in on the 400 block of Bruner Place at 10 PM on Sunday, May 3. The suspect fled upon encountering the homeowner. There were no signs of forced entry, and nothing was reported stolen.

Sarah visits WhitePages.com. Finds a number for Lisa Anderson. Writes it down, then clears her browser history.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Sarah watches Tom buckle Riley into the backseat of his car. Waits for the ignition to start before calling Christine. We INTER CUT between the two women.

CHRISTINE

Sarah. I didn't expect to hear from you again so soon. Listen, I'm kind of in the middle of some-

SARAH

-I went to the house. The robbery was clearly staged. And nothing had been touched, which makes me think cops still consider it an active scene. Also, I found out there was another attack. And a survivor.

CHRISTINE

Well, haven't you been a busy bee?
(types on her computer)
I don't see anything about another attack.

SARAH

That's because the Sheriff's suppressing the story.

CHRISTINE

What? Why would he do that?

SARAH

Doesn't wanna scare tourists.

Christine pushes back her chair. Suddenly interested.

CHRISTINE

Corrupt cop stories are très hot right now, you know.

SARAH

I know.

CHRISTINE

But where are you getting this deluge of info?

SARAH

(coy, imitating Lulu)
I have my sources.

Christine looks up. Her ASSISTANT hovering in the doorway.

CHRISTINE

Listen. I have to run. But if you can connect the attacks *and* find a corrupt cop angle, then maybe we can discuss an article... You trust your source, right?

SARAH

(a beat, then)
I do.

CHRISTINE

Good. Go back out there. See what you can find. And make sure to get every gory detail. I want to know what color her panties were. If they were grannies or a thong. Sometimes our readers care more about that shit than what actually happened.

Sarah nods.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY.

Lulu texts as Sarah loads the dishwasher.

ON THE SCREEN:

When should we visit Lisa?

Sarah pockets her phone without responding.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - LATER THAT DAY.

Sarah calls Lisa. Someone picks up, but doesn't speak...

SARAH

... Hello? Lisa? My name is Sarah Halsted, I'm a journalist with-

CLICK! The line goes dead. At first, Sarah is stunned. Then she sets her jaw and strides out of the room. Determined.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY.

Keys in hand, Sarah heads for the front door when she realizes... There's someone in her house. She panics, then:

SARAH
Riley? What are you doing here?

RILEY
I don't feel good.

SARAH
What? How'd you get home?

RILEY
You weren't answering, so Aunt Lily got me.

Sarah peers out the window, but doesn't see Lily's car in the driveway. She approaches Riley. Puts a hand to her forehead.

SARAH
You don't feel warm.

Lulu texts again.

ON THE LOCK SCREEN:

Hello???

SARAH (CONT'D)
How bad are you?

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

Sarah drives with Riley and Charlie in the backseat.

RILEY
Where are we going?

SARAH
Mommy has to work.

Riley opens her mouth, presumably to remind Sarah that she doesn't work, then decides better.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY.

Sarah refuels in Salton City. The off brand gas station as decrepit as the rest of town. It's surfaces faded from the desert sun. The MALE ATTENDANT stares, then looks away when Sarah makes eye contact. It feels ominous. Threatening.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

Sarah parks and turns to Riley and Charlie.

SARAH

You sure you're ok? I won't be long.

Riley nods. Sarah grabs her purse and exits.

EXT. LISA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah approaches the FRONT DOOR of the dark, seemingly uninhabited house. Suddenly STARTLED, when:

VOICE (O.S.)

Hey!

Sarah whips around. Pulls out the gun and points at Lulu, whose hands fly into the air.

SARAH

Lulu? What are you doing here?

LULU

Not pulling guns on innocent friends, I'll tell you that much.

Sarah puts the gun away. Glances back at Riley, who is too busy petting Charlie to have noticed anything.

LULU (CONT'D)

Why do you have that thing?

SARAH

I'll tell you if you tell me how you knew I was here.

LULU

Steve called from the gas station.

SARAH

And how does Steve know who I am?

Lulu gestures toward Sarah's Audi. Now covered in dust.

LULU

You don't exactly blend in... I can't believe you were going to interrogate her without me.

SARAH

I think you mean interview.

LULU

Whatever. You knew I wanted to come.

SARAH

I was going to call you after. I just thought Lisa might be more willing to talk woman-to-woman.

LULU

And what am I?

SARAH

That's not what I meant... It's just... You're here now. You may as well come.

The trust between these two women has begun to unravel, but they set it aside for the task at hand.

They head for the front door. Sarah prepares to knock, but Lulu beats her to the punch.

A series of LOCKS click open. The door cracks. Its CHAIN still in place. We can just glimpse a sliver of LISA (30s).

SARAH (CONT'D)

Hi. I'm Sarah Halsted with *The Daily Inquire*-

LISA

-I know who you are.

The door starts to close, but Sarah blocks it with a FOOT.

SARAH

We spoke briefly on the phone? I believe what happened to you is related to the death of Mary Hernandez.

LISA

No shit.

Lisa tries to shut the door again when... Riley appears. Hopping from foot to foot.

RILEY
 Mom? I have to go!

Softened by a child's presence, Lisa groans and steps aside to let them in. Her eyes nervously combing the lawn.

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Lisa plops into a LaZ-boy, wheezing, and puffs her INHALER.

LISA
 Highest rate of asthma
 hospitalizations in the state.
 (then, pointing)
 Can's down there. Be quick.

Riley disappears. Glancing back at her mother.

Sarah scans the room, instantly clocking: the half dozen LOCKS on the door, the RIFLE against the sofa, the EMPTY CANS dangling from the windows to alert Lisa to any intruders. Lulu, of course, is too busy texting to see any of this.

SARAH
 Can you tell us what happened?

LISA
 So you can tell me I'm lying too?

SARAH
 Lisa. Can you just consider for a second that I might really want to help you? That I'm being sincere?

She holds Lisa's gaze, who sighs. Then, begrudgingly:

LISA
 A few weeks back, my phone started ringing off the hook. But I'd pick up... and there was no one there.

Lulu pockets her phone. Suddenly interested.

SARAH
 They didn't say anything?

LISA
 No, but I could hear them-

Riley appears. Which Lisa uses as a chance to stop.

LISA (CONT'D)
 Thank God. Was about to get chatty.

She ushers her guests to the door. Anxious for them to leave.

EXT. LISA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Riley and Lulu head for the Audi. Sarah lingers on the porch.

SARAH

Thanks again. You know where to
find me if you ever want to talk.

Lisa has started to close the door when Sarah spots a DOG
BONE lying in the grass and turns back.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Can you answer one more question?

LISA

Will you leave if I don't?

SARAH

Do you have a dog?

Riley and Lulu look back. Intrigued.

LISA

Used to. But she ran away last
week. And here I thought us bitches
were supposed to stick together.

SARAH

Got it. Thanks for your time.

LISA

And I don't wanna hear a word of
this on your little podcast, ok?

Lulu opens her mouth to retort, but Lisa shuts the door.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

Sarah drops Lulu outside her crumbling APARTMENT COMPLEX. A
few dozen units with outdoor hallways.

LULU

I can't believe she said it was
little. It's like, hello. I had
1,000 downloads last week.

SARAH

... So what'd you think?

LULU

That she was kind of a bitch.

SARAH

You can't call the victim a bitch.

LULU

She said it first!

SARAH

Sources can be this way. Especially after something traumatic. It's our job not to make them clam up.

LULU

Or... Maybe she's just a bitch.

SARAH

Give it time. I'll get her to talk.

Lulu gets out of the car, then leans back in the open window.

LULU

Just call me next time, ok? You don't wanna see *this* bitch angry.

Lulu smiles. Then turns, head already buried in her phone. Leaving Sarah to wonder if that was a joke or a threat.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

They're halfway back to Pasadena, when:

RILEY

I didn't really have to go to the bathroom. I made it up so that lady would let you in her house.

Sarah looks in the rearview. Shocked.

SARAH

Riley! You shouldn't lie like th-

RILEY

-Why'd you ask about the dog?

SARAH

(considering, then)
Mommy's looking for a bad guy. And whoever they are, I think they have a thing for dogs.

RILEY

Dogs?

SARAH

Dogs give people a false sense of security. You leave windows open, forget to lock the door. But if something happens to the dog-

RILEY

-You're toast.

Sarah watches Riley imitate dragging a knife across her neck.

SARAH

Maybe we should cut down your screen time...

CUT TO:

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

Sarah's surprised to find the house dark despite Tom's sedan in the driveway. Her cell full of MISSED CALLS from him.

RILEY

Don't worry. I won't tell him.

Surprising Sarah again with her odd behavior.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

The front door is AJAR. Sarah stops in her tracks. But Riley and Charlie race inside.

SARAH

Riley, wait-

But it's too late. They're already gone.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah enters. Leaves the front door open *just in case*.

SARAH

Tom?

She looks around, but nothing seems askew.

TOM (O.S.)

You're back.

He turns on a lamp. Revealed to be sitting alone.

TOM (CONT'D)
The school called. Apparently Riley didn't show up today.

SARAH
She came home sick.

Tom cocks an eyebrow in disbelief.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Seriously. Ask your sister. She picked Riley up.

TOM
You really think I didn't call Lily? You were gone for hours!

SARAH
I'm sorry. We didn't mean to worry-

TOM
-At least you've finally overcome your agoraphobia. That's what? Two days in a row? So where were you?

Sarah opens her mouth to respond, but Tom cuts her off.

TOM (CONT'D)
You know what, forget it. Whatever you say would just be another lie.

He storms out of the room. Sarah staring after him.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT.

Tom reads *Sports Illustrated* in bed. Sarah enters and approaches the dresser. She applies eye cream and considers Tom in the mirror.

SARAH
I really am sorry.

Tom looks up. Waits for her to say more. But she doesn't.

TOM
I've tried everything. Giving you space. Not giving you space. But no matter what I do, it's wrong.

Sarah goes to sit beside him. Perched atop the bedding.

SARAH

I know. I just... miss us.

TOM

I do too.

She leans in, about to kiss when...

TOM (CONT'D)

Wait-

At first, he resists her lips on his. Then things intensify. He slides her nightgown off her shoulder. Pulls her atop him.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING.

Sarah hums as she waits for the kettle to boil. Tom enters and wraps his arms around her from behind. Kisses her neck. She moans, but doesn't startle. Already less anxious.

Riley enters as her parents kiss.

RILEY

Ewwwwww!

TOM

Hey, little lady! You're in luck. Daddy can take you to school. We wouldn't want your mom kidnapping you again, would we?

He winks to show Sarah he's kidding.

RILEY

Can I eat breakfast in the car???

TOM

Sure. But nothing too crumby.

RILEY

Can I sit in the front seat?

TOM

Don't push it.
(then, to Sarah)
Talk tonight?

She nods. They both smile. Tom ushers Riley toward the door.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Sarah watches Tom buckle Riley in. His car gleaming next to hers, covered in dust. She's surprised when her phone rings. Even more surprised that it's... Lisa.

SARAH

Lisa. I'm so glad you called-

LISA (O.S.)

-Ya really think you can catch him?

SARAH

I think I'm your best shot.

LISA

Ok, then. Let's talk.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah takes notes as Lisa talks.

LISA (O.S.)

Like I said. It all started with the phone calls.

CUT TO:

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK.

Lisa's LANDLINE PHONE rings. She answers.

LISA

Hello? ... Hello?

A beat, then HEAVY BREATHING. Lisa STARTLES, then recovers.

LISA (CONT'D)

What? You having an asthma attack?

LISA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

I assumed it was a prank. It gets so hot here in the summer. Everyone goes a little crazy.

CUT TO:

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK.

LISA (V.O.)
But they kept calling.

The landline rings. Lisa answers, already irritated.

LISA
Whoever this is, you gotta stop.

HEAVY BREATHING.

LISA (CONT'D)
Don't make me call the police.

Then, their voice manipulated:

VOICE (O.S.)
Go ahead.

Lisa slams down the phone.

SARAH (O.S.)
That's all they said? Go ahead?

LISA (O.S.)
At first. But then...

CUT TO:

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - FLASHBACK.

The landline rings. And rings. Lisa, microwaving a TV dinner in her messy KITCHEN, tries to ignore it. But it's incessant.

LISA
I'm not kidding, I-

VOICE (O.S.)
(manipulated voice)
-I'm gonna slit your throat.

She GASPS and RIPS the cord out of the wall.

End flashback.

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - PRESENT DAY.

SARAH (O.S.)
Did you call them? The police???

LISA

What do you think I am? Stupid? The fuckers didn't believe me. Or at least not that I was in danger.

SARAH (O.S.)

So... They did nothing?

LISA

Nope. Nada. Zilch. Not even when things got worse.

CUT TO:

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK.

Lisa enters wearing a UNIFORM from a local grocery store. Puzzled to find a WINDOW, which she's sure she closed, open.

LISA (O.S.)

It started to feel like someone had been in the house. Things were missing. Out of place.

She shuts the window. Peers through the glass.

SARAH (O.S.)

Did you call the cops again?

LISA (O.S.)

Why? So they could blow me off twice? Anyways, there was no time. He attacked the next night.

CUT TO:

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - FLASHBACK.

Lisa enters, in uniform, and tosses her purse onto the sofa.

LISA (O.S.)

I always work the late shift on Tuesdays. Get home around 10, 10:30. Fucker musta known that. What he didn't know is that I'd have a friend with me.

CHRISTIE (20s) enters in the same uniform. Shuts the door.

CHRISTIE

I'm so sorry to put you out. Can't believe I forgot my keys.

LISA
 Stop apologizing. You're fine...
 Want something ta drink?

CHRISTIE
 Sure. Whatever you got.

Lisa nods and heads into the...

KITCHEN.

She grabs two BEERS. Failing to notice... The Intruder hiding on the other side of her fridge. Eyes wide behind their mask.

LISA
 It's almost a full moon. Whaddya
 say we drink in the yard?

CHRISTIE (O.S.)
 Fine by me.

The Intruder looks at the BACK DOOR and panics. Realizing the women will have to walk right past them to get outside.

LISA
 Wanna sweater? It's hot as hell all
 day, and then poof! Antarctica!

CHRISTIE (O.S.)
 Sure. Thanks.

Lisa puts down the drinks and exits. The Intruder flattens their body against the fridge. Trying to be invisible.

Christie saunters in. Cracks her beer. Snoops around. She studies the FRIDGE PHOTOS, then opens a DRAWER. Finds a FOIL, NEEDLE and SPOON. She slams it shut. As if they might bite.

Lisa wanders in with a sweatshirt for Christie.

LISA
 I'll meet you out there. Just gotta
 get the opener.

Christie nods, awkward, and takes the drinks outside. Lisa opens a different drawer. Rummaging for the bottle opener.

Suddenly, the Intruder JUMPS out! Brandishing their knife!

Lisa SCREAMS. With her hand still in the drawer, she procures a CHEF'S KNIFE and points it at the Intruder. They stare at the blade... At Lisa... Then bolt. She starts after them, but stops in the doorway and screams:

LISA (CONT'D)
 You're lucky I have bad knees!

The FRONT DOOR slams. Christie runs in from the yard, panicked, to find Lisa wielding the knife.

CHRISTIE
 What's going on?

Lisa turns. The blade points at Christie, who recoils.

LISA
 Th-there was someone here!

Christie follows Lisa's gaze... But sees nothing.

End flashback.

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - PRESENT DAY.

Lisa lights a cigarette and inhales.

SARAH (O.S.)
 That's it? They ran???

LISA
 Yup. Pussy. Clearly didn't expect Christie to be there. Although I don't know why he'd be scared'a her. Tiny thing weighs all of 100 pounds... Man, I wish he woulda tried me. I could have fucked-

SARAH (O.S.)
 -Christie. She didn't see anything?

CUT TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - FLASHBACK.

DEPUTIES interview Lisa and Christie separately. Christie telling them about the drugs she found in Lisa's house.

LISA (O.S.)
 Nope. Bitch told the cops I was an "unreliable witness." See if I ever waste my Blue Moon on her again.

SARAH (O.S.)
 And you're sure it was a man? No way it could have been a woman?

End flashback.

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Lisa considers the question, then:

LISA
They were pretty small... But no. I don't think so.

SARAH (O.S.)
Did they take anything?

LISA
Just some old panties. And a watch.

CUT TO:

INT. LISA'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - FLASHBACK.

Lisa enters, exhausted from the tumultuous evening, and peels off her shirt... Only to notice that her UNDERWEAR DRAWER is OPEN and RANSACKED. She goes over to the drawer and digs.

LISA (O.S.)
It belonged to my father. Cops said I musta lost it, but it's not the kind of thing you lose. I think the fucker wanted a trophy.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - PRESENT DAY.

SARAH
And the cops didn't reach back out after Mary?

LISA
Nope. Those idiots could barely get a cat out of a tree...

As Lisa's voice fades out... We PUSH IN on Sarah's face.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah is locking the filing cabinet when Charlie runs in. Desperate for pets. Sarah obliges her, failing to notice that... She drops the KEY in the process.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - DUSK.

Sarah talks to Lulu on the phone while boiling pasta. We INTER CUT with Lulu's tiny apartment and its MAKESHIFT RECORDING STUDIO, where she has Sarah on speakerphone.

LULU

He just ran??? Without taking anything???

Sarah pictures the WATCH... Considers being honest...

SARAH

Just some old underwear.

LULU

Just like Mary. What a perv. Can't believe I missed that call. I didn't even hear my phone ring.

SARAH

Actually... I thought it might be better if I talked to Lisa alone.

LULU

Sarah...

SARAH

What? She *hated* you!

LULU

So you went behind my back? Talked to *my* source without me?

SARAH

She called *me*, Lulu.

LULU

You could have conferenced me in!

SARAH

I did what was best for the investigation.

LULU

Did you? Or were you trying to cut me out? Hog all the glory?

SARAH

It's not about that. I don't know why you're so upset. We got the information we needed.

LULU

I just think it's weird. Like you were trying to hide something...

SARAH

What would I be trying to hide?

LULU

I don't know, Miss Carries A Glock In Her Purse. Don't they always say it's those closest to the case that are the most suspicious?

SARAH

In what world am I the closest person to the case? I didn't even know Mary... You knew Mary.

LULU

Are you seriously accusing?

A MAN enters Lulu's apartment. He wears a SHERIFF'S DEPUTY UNIFORM, but is only seen from behind. The SECRET BOYFRIEND!

SARAH

Only because you accused me! Why even tell me about Lisa if I wasn't allowed to talk to her?

SECRET BOYFRIEND (O.S.)

LULU!

Lulu, who thought she was alone, FREEZES. Caught red-handed.

LULU

Shit.

SARAH

Who is that?

LULU (CONT'D)

I've gotta go.

SARAH

Lulu, wait-

CLICK! The line goes dead. As Sarah stares at her phone...

INT. LULU'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS.

... Lulu fights with her Boyfriend. His face still hidden.

LULU

Babe. I can explain.

SECRET BOYFRIEND

Explain what? That you blabbed
confidential information?

LULU

Well... Ya... That's pretty much
what happened.

SECRET BOYFRIEND

I try to help, and this is how you
repay me? I could get fired, Lulu!

LULU

No one will suspect you. I swear.
No one even knows we're dating.

He PUNCHES the wall, narrowly missing Lulu's face, and storms
out of the apartment. Leaving Lulu stunned.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - THAT NIGHT.

Sarah ladles BUTTERED NOODLES out to Riley and Tom.

TOM

Pasta again? Are you trying to
fatten me up?

SARAH

Don't worry. There's only mac this
time. No cheese.

Tom laughs. Riley doesn't get what's so funny, but is
thrilled to see her parents getting along.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING.

Sarah wakes up, happy to be wrapped in Tom's arms. She rolls
over and checks her phone. Surprised to find SEVERAL MISSED
CALLS from Lisa. Takes her cell and tiptoes into-

THE HALLWAY.

Lisa answers on the first ring.

LISA (O.S.)

Well, would you look who it is.

SARAH

Hey, Lisa. What's up?

LISA (O.S.)
What's up? What's up?

SARAH
Is something wrong? I just woke up.

LISA (O.S.)
Why don't you ask your friend?

CLICK!

Sarah's fingers shake as she pulls up the THIRD AND LATEST EPISODE of Lulu's podcast, which published that morning.

ON THE SCREEN:

THE SURVIVOR. How One Woman survived Mary Hernandez's killer and corruption at the Imperial County Sheriff's Department.

Furious, Sarah calls Lulu. We INTER CUT between the women:

LULU
Lulu speaking.

SARAH
How could you?

LULU
How could I what?

SARAH
You stole my interview!

LULU
So? You stole my lead! It's a shame, really. We could have worked well together. Me, the young upstart. And you, the older journalist. But it's such a drag doing things-
(imitating Sarah's voice)
They way they're meant to be done.

SARAH
There's a reason we have ethic-

LULU
-Whatever.

CLICK!

SARAH
(sotto, distraught)
Can people stop hanging up on me?

Tom appears in the hallway. Groggy. Ruffling his hair.

TOM
Is everything ok?

SARAH
Ya. Everything's fine.

TOM
Come back to bed.

He extends a hand. Sarah forces a smile and lets him lead her back into the bedroom.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - DAY.

Sarah watches Tom put Riley in the car, then calls Christine.

CHRISTINE
Well, would you look who it is. My little Truman Capote. You know, I was just talking about you-

SARAH
-I spoke to the other woman. The survivor. The two cases are almost identical, other than the fact he didn't kill Lisa. Which I'm starting to think was a mistake... We need to publish something. Now.

CHRISTINE
Ok... But what's the rush?

SARAH
The rush is my source fucked me. The rush is we need to warn the public before he strikes again.

CHRISTINE
Did you find any proof linking the cases?

SARAH
How could they not be? The hangup calls, the underwear, the dogs-

CHRISTINE
-And you don't have any proof of police wrongdoing? Nothing you can use to make it look that way?

SARAH

No... But the Sheriff's totally fucking up this investigation! They still think Mary was a robbery gone wrong!

CHRISTINE

Listen. Sarah. I understand why you're anxious to write something. But I can't publish a story just so you can get back at your source.

SARAH

You've published articles for less legitimate reasons. Or have you forgotten the time we accused an innocent man of murder just to beat *The Daily Mail* to a scoop? We sent the cops in the wrong direction for weeks! They might have caught the guy if it weren't for us.

CHRISTINE

Sarah. You need to calm down.

SARAH

(a breath, then calmer)
How many serial killers did I profile for *The Daily Inquirer*?

CHRISTINE

I don't know. Maybe a dozen?

SARAH

I know how these guys work. Better than anyone else. He's going to strike again. Soon. He's probably already chosen his next victim.

(then, voice cracking)
I can't let what happened to me happen to anyone else.

CHRISTINE

... Ok. Fine.

SARAH

Really???

CHRISTINE

Yes. But only a web piece. And only if you publish under a pseudonym.

SARAH

A pseudonym?

CHRISTINE

These are my terms. I want 700 words in the morning. And remember. The gorier, the better. I want tears. Actual tears while I'm reading it.

SARAH

Understood.

Sarah hangs up and immediately texts Lulu.

ON THE SCREEN:

Daily Inquirer. Tomorrow.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DUSK.

Sarah parks in front of the GROCERY STORE and checks her phone. Wondering why Lulu hasn't responded to her text.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT.

As Sarah enters with GROCERIES, Riley runs up. Warning:

RILEY

Mom-

TOM (O.S.)

-Riley, go to your room.

Tom walks in behind her. His face stern.

RILEY

But-

TOM

-Now.

Riley looks at her mom... Hesitates... Then does as told.

SARAH

What's going on?

TOM

What is this?

He holds out a key-- the key to her filing cabinet. *Shit.*

SARAH

Tom. I can explain.

TOM
Did you at least tell the police
what you found this time?

Her silence indicates that she hasn't. Tom shakes his head.

TOM (CONT'D)
I can't believe you. It's your *job*.

SARAH
Actually... No. It isn't.

TOM
Ok. Maybe it's not your *job*. But it
is your duty as a human being.

Sarah shrugs.

TOM (CONT'D)
You do realize this makes you just
like them. The criminals. Getting
off on other people's misery.

SARAH
The cops already have their theory.

Tom sinks into a chair. Head in his hands. Totally spent.

TOM
And here I thought therapy was
finally working.

She puts down the groceries and approaches him. Tentative:

SARAH
Actually... I quit therapy.

TOM
Jesus, Sarah. Really? I thought
you'd learned your lesson.

SARAH
(a beat, then furious)
Learned my lesson? It's not my
fault I got raped.

TOM
You know that's not what I meant.
It's just... You're going to make
us a target again.

SARAH

See. There it is. Blame... Well then I should probably tell you that I talked to Christine.

TOM

Your old boss Christine? Why?

SARAH

She wants me to write about it.

TOM

You can't be serious. After everything we've been through.

SARAH

I'm publishing under a pseudonym. But if there's something I can do to catch this guy, I have to do it.

TOM

There is something you can do. You can call the fucking cops!

(beat)

You know what... Maybe Riley and I should stay with Mom for a while. Until things calm down.

SARAH

Seriously? You're just gonna leave?

TOM

I think it'd be best... For Riley.

Sarah opens her mouth, then decides not to object.

SARAH

Ok. Fine. Maybe you're right.

Although Tom suggested it, he was hoping she'd object.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - NIGHT.

Sarah stays up all night. Drinking and writing her article. Looking at the mug with its picture of Riley.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - THE NEXT MORNING.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Sarah watches Riley KICK and SCREAM as Tom loads her into the Audi beside SUITCASES.

TOM

Riley! Stop! You're going to scratch the leather.

She's about to chase after them when Christine calls. INTER CUT:

CHRISTINE

Um, hello. Your article is blowing the fuck up.

SARAH

Really? I didn't know it'd gone up.

Sarah puts Christine on speaker and opens her article on her phone. Scans through the HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF COMMENTS.

CHRISTINE

Everyone loves the detail about Lisa's watch. About the Star Wars posters in Dylan's room. It's all so tragic. I want a follow up ASAP.

Sarah NODS.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Sarah?

SARAH

I'm nodding.

CHRISTINE

Good. And let's lay off the personal anecdotes this time. Don't think I missed the bit about the author being a young mom. If and when we catch the guy, we'll tell everyone who you are. Until then, you need to lie low.

SARAH

Ok. I'll head back out there. See what I can dig up.

CHRISTINE

Good girl.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah can't believe Lulu still hasn't responded to her text.

She opens Instagram. Surprised Lulu, who posts constantly, hasn't in over a day. Her last photo? A SELFIE of Lulu on a hike. Its caption reads: **Think outside. No box required.**

SARAH
(sotto)
Fucking puns.

She opens her *Daily Inquirer* article. Scans the new comments.

ON THE SCREEN:

Another case??? If the pigs had taken it seriously, maybe Mary would still be alive.

How'd the podcast miss the detail about the watch? Not that it changes anything. But still.

A bit risky to conduct your own murder investigation with a child in the house, don't you think? Even in a place as safe as Pasadena.

Sarah rereads the last comment. She types CONTROL+F and searches for the word Pasadena. *It's nowhere in her article.*

Only two people know where she lives. Christine and... Lulu.

Sarah reopens Instagram. Studies Lulu's smile in that selfie. *Is Lulu outing her? And if so, why?*

Suddenly, the LANDLINE rings. Sarah STARTLES and answers it.

SARAH (CONT'D)
H-hello?

There's a long beat. Sarah panics. *Is this a hangup call???*

SARAH (CONT'D)
Hello??? Who is this?

TELEMARKETER
Hi! I'm calling from Rusnak Audi to discuss your extended car warranty-

She SLAMS down the phone.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - LATER.

Sarah loads both Charlie and an OVERNIGHT BAG into her car.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Meanwhile, back inside, the LANDLINE rings... And rings...

EXT. TOM'S PARENTS' HOUSE - DAY

Sarah parks before the tasteful MANSION where Tom grew up. Tom's mother, CLAIRE HALSTED (65), peers out a window. She watches Sarah ring the bell, then lets the curtain close.

Tom opens the door. Confused to see his wife.

TOM

Sarah? What are you doing here?

SARAH

I have to go out of town for a few days.

TOM

Ok... I'm sorry... It's just... How is that even possible? You couldn't even leave the house a week ago.

SARAH

I guess I just needed a reason.

TOM

And we weren't enough of a reason?

SARAH

I was hoping to see Riley.

She peers around Tom into the house. He hesitates. Steps aside.

INT. TOMS' PARENTS HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY.

Tom and Claire play BRIDGE as a HOUSEKEEPER bustles behind them. Seen more closely, Claire is the definition of a WASP. The kind of woman who won't leave the house without lipstick.

She looks outside, where Sarah and Riley swing, and TUTS.

TOM

Calm down, Mother. I can feel the judgement zinging off of you.

CLAIRE

Sorry. I know it's awful what happened to her.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

But you can't waste your life
waiting for Sarah to get better.
You have Riley to think of.

TOM

PTSD fries the brain. Makes you see
threats where there aren't any.

CLAIRE

(then, looking outside)
What do you think she does all day
while you're at work?

TOM

How should I know?

CLAIRE

You don't know how your own wife
spends her time?

Tom looks through the window and considers this thought.

EXT. TOM'S PARENTS' HOUSE, BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah and Riley swing. Charlie DIGS in Claire's ROSEBUSHES,
which Sarah notes with a smile.

RILEY

Why can't I come?

SARAH

I wish you could, Baby Bear. But
it's only one night. Maybe two.

RILEY

B-but Charlie.

SARAH

Charlie loves it here. She's a huge
fan of Grandma's prize-winning
roses.

RILEY

(starting to cry)
But-but you said...

SARAH

What did I say?

RILEY

About the bad man and dogs.

SARAH
 (puzzled, then
 remembering)
 Oh, Riley. I'm going to be fine.

She musses Riley's hair. Kisses the top of her head.

EXT. TOM'S PARENTS' HOUSE - LATER.

Tom walks Sarah to her car. Sees the luggage in the backseat.

TOM
 It isn't just one story, is it?
 (beat)
 Maybe, when you get back, we should
 discuss our future.

Tears fill Sarah's eyes as she nods.

EXT. TOM'S PARENTS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

WIDE SHOT: Someone watches Tom and Sarah. STALKING from afar.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - DAY.

Sarah slows as she drives past Lulu's apartment building. She calls, but is sent straight to voicemail.

LULU (O.S.)
 You've reached Lulu. Leave a
 message, and I'll call you back
 when TikTok gets boring.

BEEP! Sarah opts not to leave a message.

EXT. MOTEL - DUSK.

Sarah parks at a BUDGET MOTEL. Its VACANCY SIGN half-lit. The whole place is 1950s. When Salton City used to be in style.

INT. MOTEL LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER.

The stout receptionist, CAITLIN (20), looks up from the rerun of *The View* that she's watching on an old CRT TV. Sarah squints to read her NAME TAG.

SARAH
 Hi, Caitlin. Do you have any rooms?

CAITLIN
 You wanna view of the parking lot
 or a view of the highway?

SARAH
 Uh... Parking lot, I guess.

CAITLIN
 Good choice.

As Caitlin procures a key, Sarah reaches for her WALLET.

CAITLIN (CONT'D)
 Cash in the morning is fine.

Sarah nods. Heads toward the smudged glass DOOR, then pauses:

SARAH
 Is there a liquor store near here?

CAITLIN
 Across the street.

Sarah nods... About to leave...

CAITLIN (CONT'D)
 But it closed. Nothing stays open
 around here. If you wanna drink,
 you'll have to go to Bob's.

SARAH
 Bob's?

CAITLIN
 Up the street. On your left. Just
 follow the stench of Wild Turkey.

SARAH
 Got it. Thanks.

Caitlin watches Sarah leave, then picks up the rotary phone.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah enters the shabby room. Notes its MUSTY SCENT and
 STAINED CARPET. A forgotten TOENAIL CLIPPING on the bedding.

SARAH
 Well, Toto. I've a feeling we
 aren't in Pasadena anymore.

She heaves her suitcase onto the bed.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT.

QUICK CUTS AS: Sarah unzips her bag, puts her toiletry kit in the bathroom and checks the MINIBAR-- if you can call a few NIPS in a broken fridge a minibar.

She takes the booze to the bed, puts a TOWEL over the decades-old comforter, and shoots a nip. Reaching for her LAPTOP when her cell rings. She scrambles for it, hoping it's Lulu. But it's Tom. And that's good too.

SARAH

Tom. I'm so glad you-

RILEY (O.S.)

-Mom?

We INTER CUT with a panicked Riley. Her bedroom at Claire's house is frilly, pink, out of date. Likely Lily's old room.

SARAH

Riley? Is everything ok???

RILEY

Ya. I just wanted to talk to you.

As Sarah's heart rate slows, she tries to make conversation.

SARAH

What'd Shelly make for dinner?

RILEY

Prime rib.

SARAH

Mmm. I would kill for her prime rib. The only good thing about that house is the food. You should see the restaurants out here. There's not even a McDonald's.

Sarah pulls back the CURTAIN. Stares at the empty street. Her stomach GROWLS. Sarah stands and heads for the door.

SARAH (CONT'D)

You've got your presentation tomorrow, right? Who's it on again?

RILEY

Alice Roosevelt.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah emerges with the phone to her ear. She approaches the VENDING MACHINE at the end of the open hall. Feeds it a buck.

SARAH
Remind me who she was again?

RILEY
Teddy Roosevelt's daughter.

SARAH
Right. The one with a drug problem.

RILEY
Mom!

Sarah presses the buttons for a SNICKERS.

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS.

WIDE SHOT: Someone watches Sarah from the parking lot. We can't see them, but we can hear their BREATHING.

EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah thinks she feels their gaze upon her. Looks around, but doesn't see anyone.

RILEY
You're the one who says not to judge a story by its cover.

SARAH
Sorry. You're right.

She fishes her Snickers out of the machine.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT.

Sarah crawls back onto bed and bites the Snickers. Her jaw fighting the stale caramel. She can't resist opening Lulu's Instagram again. For what feels like the millionth time.

Finally, there's a NEW POST. LULU and a FEMALE FRIEND (early 20s). Making faces and hugging. The caption reads: JUST ANOTHER NIGHT WITH THE GIRLS.

But wait. Where's the pun? It doesn't sound like Lulu at all.

Sarah's about to put her phone away when she spies a MAN in the background of the photo. Zooms in, but can just glimpse his profile. She closes her eyes and remembers:

LULU (V.O.)
 It's possible I'm seeing someone...
 A cop.

She opens the IMPERIAL COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT WEBSITE. Finds a list of all the deputies. She scans their HEADSHOTS. Compares each face to the photo. Identifies a possible match.

MITCH HAYES (40s) smiles up at her from the screen.

Sarah shudders, turns out the light and goes to bed.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT.

As Lulu approaches a NEWS STATION, she chats on the phone.

LULU
 It's just local channel, but I'm
 psyched. I've never been on TV.
 (she pauses, listens)
 I think they said six. God. I hope
 Paul's the one who interviews me.
 He's so hot.

Hearing footsteps, Lulu stops in her tracks. Looks around. Until distracted by her phone conversation.

LULU (CONT'D)
 Of course, I brought my own
 foundation. What am I going to do?
 Have my face not match my neck?

She's about to enter the building when... a GLOVED HAND appears and CHLOROFORMS her with a TOWEL. Lulu passes out. Her phone clatters to the ground. The kidnapper picks it up.

EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT.

Lulu wakes in a truck bed. She hears COUNTRY MUSIC blaring in the cabin. Looks up at the expansive sky. She can tell she's in the middle of the desert from the lack of light pollution.

She tries to stand, but her feet are tied. Her hands knotted behind her back. Strains against the rope, but it won't give.

Lulu stops... Thinks... Remembers her second phone.

She can just reach her jeans pocket. It takes some wriggling, but the device FALLS out and SLIDES to the back of the truck.

Lulu pauses to make sure the driver hasn't heard anything... Then crawls toward the phone. Her face close to the screen.

LULU
Siri, call 911.
(then, louder)
Siri, call 911.

The phone lights up. Lulu relieved to see ONE BAR of service.

SIRI
Calling Sarah Halsted.

LULU
What? No!

But it's already calling.

LULU (CONT'D)
No! Siri! Call 911!

The music turns off. *Shit. They must have heard her.*

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah rolls over. Doesn't wake. Misses the call.

CUT BACK TO:

INT./EXT. TRUCK BED - CONTINUOUS.

We can barely hear Sarah's recorded VOICEMAIL MESSAGE.

SARAH (O.S.)
Hi. You've reached Sarah Halsted.
Please leave a message, and I'll
return as soon as possible.

BEEP! Lulu hisses:

LULU
Pick up your fucking phone, Sarah.
I know you're in town.

The truck stops.

LULU (CONT'D)
I've been kidnapped!

A door opens and closes. Footsteps approach.

LULU (CONT'D)
I'm not joking. I'm in the middle
of the fucking des-

The TAILGATE opens. Lulu screams as the attacker grabs her ankles and drag her to the back of the truck. She thrashes, rolls onto her back and seems to recognize them.

LULU (CONT'D)
Seriously? You?

They yank. Lulu lands in the dirt and is CHLOROFORMED again.

We PUSH IN on Lulu's phone. Still lit up, still recording its message. Until a GLOVED HAND picks it up and ends the call.

EXT. SALTON SEA - NIGHT.

Lulu comes to on the dried lake bed. Her eyes struggling to adjust to the darkness. She gags at the stench of several dead TILAPIA floating a few feet away in the shallow water.

But where's her attacker?

She fights against her ligatures to no avail. Gives up and screams. Breath escaping her mouth in the cold desert air.

LULU
I know you're out there!

She waits, then tries again. Her tone soft. Almost sweet.

LULU (CONT'D)
I just wanna talk to you. I won't
tell anyone what I saw.

The truck, parked a few feet away in the shadows, ignites its headlights. Lulu blinks. Energized. *Is her plan working?*

LULU (CONT'D)
I know how to keep my mouth shut.

The INTRUDER gets out of the truck and approaches. Wearing their ski mask and gloves.

LULU (CONT'D)
You know I never cared who did it.
I just wanted the-

They pull out their KNIFE. Lulu panics.

LULU (CONT'D)
Please. You've known me my whole-

INTRUDER
-Shut up!

The Intruder forgets to manipulate their undeniably MALE VOICE. Lulu does as told, but can't stay quiet for long.

LULU
You don't have to do this.

INTRUDER
I SAID SHUT THE FUCK UP!

He SMACKS her, not expecting Lulu to fall backwards and SMASH her head on a ROCK. BLOOD trickles out of the wound. Lulu touches her hand to it, then looks at the blood. Passes out.

INTRUDER (CONT'D)
Shit!

He rushes forward. Falls to his knees. Gathers Lulu's head in his lap. She's unconscious. His hands now covered in BLOOD.

INTRUDER (CONT'D)
Come on, Lulu! Wake up!

But she doesn't. He seems oddly distraught given the circumstances. Checks her pulse, then WAILS like a wounded animal. Uses his fingers to close her eyes. Accidentally smearing blood on her face. Whispers:

INTRUDER (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry.

Trembling, he pulls out his knife and... SLITS her jugular. Blood gushes from throat. He cries, rocking Lulu in his arms.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING.

Sarah gets out of bed, pads over to the coffee machine and turns on the TV NEWS while she waits. Sees Lulu's VOICEMAIL.

SARAH
Finally, she appears.

She hits play. The first thing she hears is COUNTRY MUSIC.

LULU (O.S.)
 Pick up your fucking phone, Sarah.
 I know you're in town.

The music stops.

LULU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I've been kidnapped!

A truck door opens and closes.

LULU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 I'm not joking. I'm in the middle
 of the fucking des-

A SCREAM! Lulu's body SCRAPES against the truck bed.

LULU (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Seriously? You?

THUD! Lulu's body hits the dirt. She hears the sound of
 someone breathing, then the message ends.

Sarah whips around. Shocked. Her confusion amplified when she
 registers LULU'S FACE on the TV.

ON THE SCREEN: A REPORTER addresses the camera.

LOCAL REPORTER
 The 21-year-old was something of a
 local celebrity, thanks to her true
 crime podcast investigating the
 murder of Salton City resident Mary
 Hernandez earlier this summer.

Sarah grabs the TRASH CAN and VOMITS atop the empty NIPS.

EXT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY.

Sarah's car SCREAMS into the parking lot. An UNSEEN FIGURE
 watching from a window as she runs inside.

SARAH (PRE-LAP, V.O.)
 You think I care about protocol? I
 need to talk to him. Now.

CUT TO:

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT, LOBBY - DAY.

Sarah glares at a no-nonsense secretary, ROSIE (70s).

RECEPTIONIST

M'am. I'm gonna need you to lower your voice.

SARAH

Do I look like a m'am to you?

RECEPTIONIST

You really want me to answer that?

MITCH HAYES strides in. A giant, hulking, powerful man.

MITCH

Everything alright out here?

RECEPTIONIST

Deputy Hayes. This woman is asking for you. Quite rudely, I might add.

MITCH

Sarah. I thought you might come.

That Mitch knows who she is only furthers Sarah's suspicions.

MITCH (CONT'D)

Why don't we talk in private?

Sarah hesitates... Then lets Mitch put a hand on her shoulder and usher her from the room. Resenting his touch.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Mitch hands Sarah a cup of water. She takes a grateful sip as he sits opposite her. He has bags under his eyes-- a wreck.

MITCH

So she told you about us. She was good at many things, Lulu. But not secrets.

He smiles, as if recalling a fond memory.

SARAH

I think she knew her killer. Her message said, Seriously? You?

Mitch takes Sarah's hands. Muscles rippling in his forearms.

MITCH

I promise you we're gonna find whoever did this. But you have to know it wasn't me. I loved Lulu.

She retracts her hands, but her conviction starts to waiver.

SARAH

If you loved her so much, why not tell people you were together?

MITCH

The Sheriff won't let us date reporters, although I'm not really sure you could call Lulu that. More like a wannabe shock jockey if you ask me... Either way, I could have been fired. Still might if people find out I was helping her.

SARAH

Won't it look worse if you hide it?

MITCH

Maybe.

She looks at a mounted CAMERA. Its light dark. Not recording.

SARAH

So what? What do we do?

MITCH

You stay quiet. Let me do my job.

SARAH

Mitch. We're talking about a serial killer. We need to tell them every-

MITCH

-Whoa. No one said anything about a serial killer.

SARAH

How can you possibly still believe these cases aren't related?

MITCH

Lulu's death has nothing to do with Mary Hernandez or Lisa Anderson. For starters, she was at least 10 years younger. And she never reported any hangup calls. And she was killed in the desert, not her house. Serial killer's don't just change their M.O. like that... No. The only thing these women have in common is that they're from here.

SARAH

And that Lulu's throat was slit.
Just like Mary's.

MITCH

(pained, soft)

Actually, we have reason to believe
Lulu died of a blunt force trauma
to the head. The knife wound seems
to have happened when she was dead.

Sarah turns green. Internalizing this piece of information.

SARAH

You think it's a coincidence that
three women have been attacked over
the course of one summer? That Lulu
dies *one day* after publicly
connecting Mary and Lisa?

MITCH

If it was the same guy, which I'm
not saying it is, Lulu's got no one
to blame but herself.

(beat, under Sarah's
glare)

Oh, come on. You knew the girl.
It's not like she did that podcast
out of the goodness of her heart.
She wanted attention... I told her
not to run her mouth like that. But
she never was a good listener.

SARAH

How could you, Mitch? She's dead!

Mitch stares, then... SCRAPE! He pushes back his chair.

MITCH

You know what? I think we're done
here.

SARAH

But we still haven't gotten to-

MITCH

-You should be careful, Sarah.
Wouldn't want the same thing to
happen to you, now, would we?

Is he staring at her neck? Her hand flies to her clavicle.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah runs into her car and locks the doors. She makes sure Mitch hasn't followed her and calls Christine. We INTER CUT:

CHRISTINE

Thank God. I just opened my computer and saw there was another-

SARAH

-What if this isn't just a case of inept cops? What if the killer is a cop?

CHRISTINE

That would be very interesting. Really amplifies our angle.

SARAH

Whoever did this clearly knows what they're doing. How else do you explain the lack of DNA at the crime scenes? The lack of evidence? And who better to commit the perfect murder than a cop?

CHRISTINE

It wouldn't be the first time. There was the Golden State Killer, Gerard John Schaefer... You have someone in mind?

SARAH

A deputy sheriff named Mitch Hayes.

CHRISTINE

And you have proof?

SARAH

... No. Not yet.

CHRISTINE

(a dramatic sigh, then)
Sarah, we've been over this. It's-

SARAH

-I can't let him kill again.

CHRISTINE

You're the one who scolded me about accusing people without proof.

SARAH

Forget what I said! This is bigger than ethics.

CHRISTINE

Well, Sarah. I have to say. I like this side of you. You were always such a rule follower. It was a little annoying, really... Listen. I'll talk to the lawyers. See where we stand with libel laws.

Sarah's beatific smile denotes satisfaction.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT.

Sarah paces. Checks the fridge, but it hasn't been restocked. Not that kind of place. Gets her purse. Gun is inside. Exits.

EXT. BOB'S BAR - NIGHT.

Sarah passes a fleet of PICK UP TRUCKS en route to the DOOR. Recalling Caitlin's words, she notes the NEON WILD TURKEY SIGN. She enters the bar, failing to notice the MALE FIGURE following her from afar. Walking too slowly to catch up.

INT. BOB'S BAR - CONTINUOUS.

This dive is dirty and more than a little run down. A JUKEBOX plays CLASSIC ROCK. The tables are PACKED. Their wood tops STICKY and SCRATCHED.

The Salton City PATRONS stare at Sarah. She rolls back her shoulders. Stands tall as she approaches the bar. Wondering if these people know who she is and why she's there.

She finds the owner, WOODY (50s), drying glasses with a rag that's even dirtier than the cups are. He looks up and double takes Sarah, as if surprised. Watches her select a stool.

WOODY

Can I get ya something?

SARAH

Tequila soda. You have Casamigos?

Woody stares.

SARAH (CONT'D)

... Don Julio?

WOODY

I can put some Jose in a fancy cup?

SARAH

Ok. Fine.

(then, sotto)

Desperate times.

She SLAPS a TEN DOLLAR BILL onto the bar. Woody pockets it and goes to fix her drink. Keeps his eyes on her. Suddenly:

PATRON (O.S.)

Mitch! Hey! How is it out there?

MITCH (O.S.)

Oh, you know. We're all just doing our best.

She swivels on her stool. Watches Mitch tip his hat to a MAN who is disappointed when the deputy doesn't come over to him.

SARAH

(sotto)

You've got to be kidding me.

Mitch approaches the bar. Sits on the stool next to her. Woody walks over without finishing Sarah's drink.

MITCH

Hey, Woody. How ya doing?

BOB

Better than you, I'd guess. You must need a drink.

MITCH

A beer would be great.

BOB

You sure you don't want something stronger?

MITCH

No, thanks. Whatever's on tap.

Woody nods, glares at Sarah and walks off. She stares straight ahead, avoiding Mitch's eyes as she mutters:

SARAH

I thought someone was following me. Didn't know it was you.

MITCH

Why would I be following you?

SARAH
Because I know.

MITCH
Know what?

SARAH
(louder, staring)
That you killed those women.

People are starting to look. Mitch clenches his fist.

MITCH
You know what, Sarah Halsted?
You're starting to piss me off.

SARAH
Am I? Am I pissing you off?

Woody interrupts. Putting her TEQUILA and MONEY on the bar.

WOODY
Your money's no good here. Why
don't you drink that and go?

SARAH
But-

WOODY
-I said go.

Woody holds Sarah's gaze like a scolding parents as she chugs, wincing at the cheap booze, and slams down her glass. Glancing back at the men as she heads out the door. Mitch shrugs at Woody like, *aren't women crazy?*

EXT. MITCH'S HOUSE - THE NEXT MORNING.

Sarah stakes-out Mitch's RANCH HOME from a few houses down. Ducks as he exits and gets into his TRUCK. Only once he's turned the corner does she hurry to the FRONT DOOR. LOCKED.

SARAH
Shit.

She sneaks around the side and into...

THE BACKYARD.

The DOOR is locked. She slides her fingers along the frame. Checks under the mat. Has to jimmy it open with a BOBBY PIN.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Mitch's house is obsessively, immaculately clean and dark. The curtains drawn. She turns on the lights and scans. Scoffs at a PHOTO of Mitch grinning at his swearing-in ceremony.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

His bedroom has more WORKOUT EQUIPMENT than personal effects. A BIKE, a BENCH, a FUNCTIONAL TRAINER. He must be obsessed.

Sarah rolls her eyes and opens a DRESSER DRAWER. Even Mitch's BOXERS are neatly folded. She rifles through. Finds a THONG hidden amongst his clothing. Studies the delicate red fabric.

INT./EXT. MITCH'S SQUAD CAR - CONTINUOUS.

Mitch is two blocks away when he realizes he forgot his phone. He checks his rearview. Pulls a U Turn. Headed back.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah's eyes catch on a TRASH CAN. She peers inside. Shocked to discover... a BLACK AND WHITE SURVEILLANCE PHOTO of her at the motel. *So he has been following her...*

EXT. MITCH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Mitch parks in the driveway and gets out of the truck.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah hears a key SCRAPE in the front door. *Shit!*

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Mitch enters. Suspicious to find the lights on.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Sarah searches, frantic, for a place to hide.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

As he turns off the lights, he hears a NOISE. Heads into--

THE BEDROOM.

Mitch finds the room... EMPTY.

CUT TO: Sarah. Hiding behind the functional trainer.

Mitch spots his phone under the bed. Reaches for it when...

Sarah accidentally bumps the machine. Making a small CLANG.

He whips around. Hand on his gun as steps forward.

Sarah covers her mouth. Tries to quiet her breath.

Mitch steps closer. And closer. About to reach Sarah when...

His RADIO chirps. Much to his chagrin.

SHERIFF (O.S.)

Hayes. Where are ya?

MITCH

Forgot my phone. Had to turn back.

SHERIFF (O.S.)

Did you bring the Sliter file home?
I need a phone number.

MITCH

Now?

SHERIFF (O.S.)

Now.

MITCH

Ok. Let me get it.

Mitch glances at the machine. Exits. Leaves the door open.

Once alone, Sarah RUNS to the window and opens it. But there's a SCREEN! She punches, but it doesn't give.

She glances over her shoulder, worried Mitch will return at any moment. She can hear him talking in the other room.

Her fingers comb the window. Looking for a way to release the screen. Finally, she finds the PLUNGER PINS and pulls. The mesh gives way.

She hoists herself up and out the first floor window...

EXT. MITCH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah falls to the grass. Her clothes covered in dust and dirt. She runs to her car. Seemingly unnoticed.

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Mitch finds a MANILA FILE on his counter. INTO THE RADIO:

MITCH

Ok. Got it. 760-654-1862.

He approaches a picture window and watches Sarah SPEED off. Unsurprised. Like he knew she was there the whole time.

INT./EXT. SARAH'S CAR - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah speeds home with the SURVEILLANCE PHOTO on her passenger seat. Always checking the REARVIEW MIRROR.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - DUSK.

Sarah leaps out of her car. Halfway up the front path when...

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Sarah, right?

Caught off guard, it takes Sarah a moment to place... Cindy.

SARAH

Sorry, this really isn't a good-

CINDY

-I know it's Fall, but this block has a rule about burning leaves.

SARAH

I'm sorry... What? I haven't even-

CINDY

-Liv has been choking on smoke all morning. She could develop asthma!

SARAH

I don't think that's how it works.

Realizing, she turns to her house. Stares at it with dread.

CINDY

Hello?

SARAH

I-I'm so sorry. I have to go.

Sarah runs to the door. Leaving Cindy on her lawn.

CINDY

I'm talking to you!!!

She takes a deep breath and slides her key into the lock.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

The door creaks open. Sarah enters. But the house is COMPLETELY NORMAL. Everything in its right place. She sniffs the air, and she does smell smoke. Follows the scent into...

THE BACKYARD.

SMOKE rises from a patch of SCORCHED GRASS. Sarah approaches, tentative, and combs through the embers with her foot. What was burned? Dozens of pairs of Sarah's own UNDERWEAR. COTTON PANTIES, LINGERIE-- all different kinds. Sarah turns and...

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

... Runs inside. Locks the door. Backs away while facing it. Suddenly, the LANDLINE RINGS. She hesitates before answering.

SARAH

H-hello? Halsted residence.

A beat... then HEAVY BREATHING. Sarah drops the phone. Staring at it while she uses her cell to dial 911.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Hi. I'm calling from 529 East Fifth Street. We have an emergency.

CUT TO:

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

The FLASHING LIGHTS of SQUAD CARS draw Sarah's neighbors to her lawn. Including the MOMS. Sarah sits. Wrapped in a blanket. Talking to OFFICER KAPLAN (40s) as he takes notes with a pad and paper.

OFFICER KAPLAN

And nothing seems to be missing?

SARAH

I don't know. I called you as soon
as I got home.

She spots Cindy a few feet away. Talking animatedly to a COP.

OFFICER KAPLAN

Your husband. Where's he?

SARAH

He's—we've been having some issues.

Officer Kaplan nods, then flips his pad closed.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I'm telling you, there was someone
here! Why would I torch my own
underwear?

OFFICER KAPLAN

These things happen in domestic
disputes.

SARAH

(then, an idea)

The hangup calls! You must be able
to get those records.

OFFICER KAPLAN

We can't investigate every time
prank call... Why don't you get
some rest? Call us tomorrow if
you're still worried?

SARAH

You're not even going to make a
report?

OFFICER KAPLAN

We don't usually—

SARAH

—Please. It's the least you can do.

He sighs. Exasperated. But reopens his pad.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT.

Sarah waits in the empty lobby. Tom rushes in. Runs to her.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - NIGHT.

Tom parks. Turns off the car. A beat as they sit in silence.

TOM

Sarah-

SARAH

-Don't.

TOM

Things are getting out of control.
I can't... I don't know how to help
you anymore.

SARAH

I don't need you to help me. I need
you to believe me.

TOM

Believe what? That someone broke
into our house just to burn your
things? Why would anyone do that?

SARAH

To scare me. Because I'm close.

Tom grips the steering wheel until his knuckles go white.

TOM

I told you this would happen. That
you would bring back all kinds of
bad memories.

SARAH

You're not listening to me!!!

TOM

I am listening to you, Sarah, but
you sound crazy.

Sarah throws open the door.

TOM (CONT'D)

Sarah, stop. Where are you going?

She runs into the house. He doesn't go after her. Drives off.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

The phone rings as Sarah enters. She glares at the LANDLINE,
then realizes it's her cell. We INTER CUT with Christine.

SARAH
Thank God-

CHRISTINE
-Turn on your TV.

SARAH
What?

CHRISTINE
KTLA.

Sarah wields the remote.

ON THE SCREEN: An overly made up REPORTER broadcasts from in front of the Salton City Sheriff's Department.

REPORTER
-only wish we'd been able to catch the man before the attack of one woman and the death of two others.

SARAH
What's going on?

CHRISTINE
They caught him.

SARAH
They caught Mitch???

CHRISTINE
Just watch.

REPORTER
The Sheriff updated the press at a conference earlier this hour.

THE TV CUTS TO: A PRERECORDED PRESS CONFERENCE. The SHERIFF (50s) addresses REPORTERS from a podium. Mitch at his side. But Sarah doesn't have time to listen.

SARAH
I-I don't understand.

CHRISTINE
Turns out it was just a random drifter. Ugh. What a drag. The corrupt cop thing was good. Would have sold so many copies.

ON TV: BODY CAM FOOTAGE of Mitch handcuffing a DRIFTER. Leads him away from a CAR that's packed to the brim with STUFF.

SARAH

They're wrong. It wasn't him.

CHRISTINE

Then why did he have trophies from all three women in the trunk of his car? A picture of Mary. Lisa's watch. Both of Lulu's phones.

SARAH

I don't know. Mitch must have planted them! What are the chances he caught the killer less than 24 hours after I accuse him?

(then, lighting up)

He had a photo of me in his house, Christine!

CHRISTINE

You broke into his house? What the fuck, Sarah? I know how badly you wanted to solve this. But you're a journalist, not a prosecutor.

SARAH

So what do we do?

CHRISTINE

I asked Alex to write something.

SARAH

The food critic?

CHRISTINE

Listen. I shouldn't have encouraged you. Maybe it's too soon for you t-

CLICK! Sarah hangs up and SCREAMS!

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, SARAH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah checks Lulu's Instagram, which has become a digital MEMORIAL of sorts. But it's also BLOWING UP with news of the Drifter's arrest. Sarah reads the comments on her last post.

ON THE SCREEN:

I miss you already.

Hell ya!!! They got the fucker!

Hopefully Newsom will do something about the homeless now.

Sarah types her own comment. Jabbing at the phone. Muttering:

SARAH

They have the wrong guy. And if the true killer uses this as an opportunity to get off scot-free... Well, then he's a coward. A real murderer would strike again. Somewhere with actual police force.

Replies pour in, but she's already put down her phone.

ON THE SCREEN:

LOL. Wut a psycho.

Give it a rest. They caught the guy.

Way to make yourself a target lady.

CUT TO:

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE - THE NEXT DAY.

A wild-eyed Sarah bursts in, interrupting a SESSION. The PATIENT is shocked... But not as shocked as Lauren.

LAUREN

Sarah?

SARAH

I need to talk to you.

LAUREN

(to her patient)

I'm sorry. It'll just be a minute.

She follows Sarah through the door.

INT. THERAPIST'S OFFICE, WAITING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Lauren folds arms across her chest.

LAUREN

Sarah Halsted. In the flesh.

But Sarah is too manic to respond.

LAUREN (CONT'D)

Are you ok? What's going on?

SARAH

I thought I knew how to get better.
That I had a plan. But everything's
spinning out of control.

LAUREN

Do you feel like you're a danger to
yourself or others?

SARAH

(adamant)

What? No. Nothing like that... It's
just... I think I'm ready to start
therapy again.

LAUREN

In person?

SARAH

In person.

Lauren walks over to her COMPUTER. Checks her CALENDAR.

LAUREN

Tomorrow at noon ok?

(Sarah nods)

And you're *sure* you're ok in the
meantime? Tom and Riley can help?

She nods again. Lauren takes her at face value.

EXT. TOM'S PARENTS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

SCREECH! Sarah pulls into the driveway. Charlie BARKS and
throws herself against a window. Claire races to open the
door before Sarah can knock. Displeased and concerned.

CLAIRE

Sarah. What are you doing here? Tom
isn't-

SARAH

-I want to see Riley.

CLAIRE

Is that a good idea?

SARAH

She's *my* daughter, Claire.

Sarah tries push past, but Claire blocks her. Her voice
placating. Her body language strong.

CLAIRE

Why don't you come back tonight,
and we can all have a nice chat?

Sarah SCREAMS. Lily appears at her mother's side. Both women cross their arms and wait for Sarah to run back to her car. Riley watching everything from an UPSTAIRS WINDOW.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah storms in. SLAMS the door and locks it. The landline RINGS. She runs to answer.

SARAH

Leave me the fuck alone!

Hears HEAVY BREATHING. Then, their voice MANIPULATED:

VOICE (O.S.)

I'm gonna slit your throat.

She THROWS the phone and sets her jaw with defiance.

MONTAGE:

- Sarah walks through the house. She pulls every curtain and locks every external door.

- Sarah gets the GUN from her purse.

- Sarah crawls into bed. Fully dressed. Gun in hand. She stares at the door and sips tequila. Begins her stake-out.

End montage.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - HOURS LATER.

Sarah is atop the comforter, staring at the door, when the HOUSE ALARM goes off! It's time. She takes her gun and exits.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah approaches the front door, weapon extended. There's MOVEMENT in the shadows. She points! Ready to shoot!

SARAH

Don't move! Hands in the air!

RILEY

Mom?

It takes Sarah a moment to realize it's... Riley and Charlie. Charlie whimpers and runs to lick her.

SARAH
Riley? What are you doing here?
Where's your dad?

She peers over her daughter's head. Out the window.

RILEY
I used his phone to call an Uber.

SARAH
He let you do that???

RILEY
He was asleep.

SARAH
You can't be here, Riley. I have to
take you back right n-

She steps toward the front door, then remembers she's drunk.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(sotto)
Fuck.

RILEY
What?

SARAH
Nothing... I have to call your dad.

But Tom's phone goes to VOICEMAIL.

ROBOTIC VOICE (V.O.)
You've reached 917.620.7296. Please
leave a message after the tone.

BEEP! Sarah rushes to get out:

SARAH
Tom. Call me as soon as you get
this. Riley's here. At the house.

Riley watches her mother's panicked behavior.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, RILEY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah ensures all the windows are LOCKED before kissing Riley's forehead. Charlie asleep at the foot of the bed.

SARAH
I'll be right in the other room if
you need anything, ok?

Riley nods. Sarah heads for the door...

RILEY
Wait! Take Charlie!

SARAH
She's sleeping.

RILEY
Please?

SARAH
(after a sigh)
C'mon, girl. Let's go.

Charlie LEAPS UP on command.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I love you, Baby Bear.

RILEY
You too, Mama Bear.

Sarah turns out the light and exits. Charlie in tow.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah slides to the ground. Gun in hand. Together, she and Charlie guard Riley's door. Pats the dog's head.

SARAH
What now, girl? I guess we sleep
here.

A beat before Charlie hears SOMETHING and BOLTS downstairs.

SARAH (CONT'D)
Charlie! Stop! Where are you going?

Sarah runs after the dog.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS.

Charlie's tail disappears through the DOG DOOR.

SARAH
Charlie! No!

She unlocks the KITCHEN DOOR and runs outside.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE, BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS.

Sarah brandishes the gun wildly. Scanning the shadows for the dog. The PATIO FURNITURE and SHED looming in the darkness.

SARAH

Charlie! Come here, girl! Charlie!

But the dog doesn't appear. Sarah's eyes land on that HOLE in the fence. Just big enough for Charlie to squeeze through. The dog, her ally, is gone. And it's devastating.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Charlie, no.

She hears a sound. Maybe a twig's SNAP under someone's foot. Panics and goes back inside with one last look for Charlie.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah crawls onto the bed, tearing, and resumes her stakeout. The open door providing a clear view of Riley's room.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - MIDNIGHT.

Sarah hears someone enter. Turns on the lamp.

It's the Intruder!

They peel off their gloves and mask. Revealed to be...

Woody. The bartender from Salton City.

Sarah's face floods with, of all things, *relief*.

SARAH

Thank God.

WOODY

Were you expecting someone else?
 (then, realizing)
 Are you seriously still on this
 Mitch thing?

SARAH

That asshole *killed* Lulu... Not that there weren't moments I wanted to kill her myself.

WOODY

What are you talking about? Why would Mitch kill Lulu?

SARAH

(realizing)
You didn't...

Woody looks down. Flushed with guilt. Then turns defensive.

WOODY

What else was I supposed to do? She showed up at the bar. Telling everyone it was you. I don't remember anything about *that* in your plan.

CUT TO:

INT. BOB'S BAR - FLASHBACK.

Lulu rants, drunk, to a GIRL FRIEND-- the one from her last Instagram post. Woody pretends to read a newspaper but is actually eavesdropping from behind the bar. A slow night.

LULU

At first, I thought she was this brilliant reporter. But then I was like, No! She's just a bored Pasadena mom. It was weird.

LULU'S FRIEND

Do you think she had something to do with it?

LULU

Honestly, kind of. I'm gonna have Mitch look into her.

LULU'S FRIEND

I still can't believe you two are dating. And that he gave you a secret phone. It's so big city.

LULU

I know, right?

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY.

SARAH

So you killed her? Without talking to me?

WOODY

You told me not to break character on the phone. Not to risk the phone's being tapped.

SARAH

Did you at least get her binder?

WOODY

... What binder?

SARAH

The binder of Lulu's evidence?

WOODY

I got both her phones?

SARAH

Let me get this straight. First, you bitch out on killing Lisa. Then you finally get the balls to kill Mary, only to panic and leave her ring. And don't even get me started on the way you tucked her in after like some kind of nanny of death.

WOODY

(sotto, sad)

She deserved something from us.

SARAH

Says the guy who just murdered the most famous person in Salton City and left behind a binder full of evidence in her apartment.

WOODY

You should have told me about the binder if it was so important!

SARAH

Seriously? You're criticizing me?

Woody clenches his fists, then regains composure.

WOODY

Enough chitchat, Sarah. Where's my hundred grand?

SARAH
I guess you didn't get my note.

CUT TO:

INT. BOB'S BAR - FLASHBACK.

When Sarah pays Woody for her drink that night, she hides a NOTE under the CASH. He pockets it as he turns away.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY.

WOODY
Oh, I got it. I just thought it was insane to change fall guys. Especially to a deputy sheriff.

SARAH
Well, I really wish you'd told me that before I broke into his house.

CUT TO:

INT. MITCH'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - FLASHBACK.

While going through Mitch's drawers, Sarah steals a SWEATER.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY.

Sarah brandishes the SWEATER.

SARAH
How am I going to explain this to the cops if he was never in my house? But that's not even close to our biggest problem.

Woody's anger turns to... We're not sure. But he's quiet.

WOODY
... I know.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. WOODY'S TRUCK - FLASHBACK.

Woody sits in his pick-up truck. Watching the DRIFTER sleep in his car. He makes a call on a BURNER PHONE.

VOICE (O.S.)

911. What's your emergency?

WOODY

Ya. There's a guy acting strange outside the Von's on First. Looks like he's living in his car.

VOICE (O.S.)

Ok. We'll send someone over. Can I get your name?

(beat)

Hello? Sir?

Woody hangs up and drives off.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY.

SARAH

How am I supposed to get attacked if the killer's already in custody?

WOODY

I've been thinking... Maybe he was working with someone? Maybe he attacked you before he got arrested? But you were unconscious and couldn't call for help?

SARAH

None of that works.

WOODY

(exasperated)

I dunno, Sarah. Maybe we let the whole thing go. You got your story.

SARAH

Or... Maybe I turn you in?

BOB

I'd just tell everyone it was you.

SARAH

And you think they'll believe that?

WOODY
They will when they get this.

Woody holds up a TAPE RECORDER. That's been recording this entire time.

SARAH
You piece of shit.

WOODY
I guess I got tired of trusting you.

RILEY (O.S.)
Mom? What's going on?

Both Woody and Sarah clock Riley, standing in the doorway, at the same moment.

WOODY
Hey. You said you'd be alone!

Sarah's demeanor changes from ANGER to FEAR. She reaches for her gun. Speaking to Woody in a calm, soothing voice.

SARAH
Woody. I need you to listen to me. My daughter showed up at the last second. She has nothing to do with-

WOODY
(looking around wildly)
-Your husband. Is he here too? What about the fucking Pope?

SARAH
She's just a kid, Woody. She doesn't understand.

Woody stares at Riley. Deciding what to do. Everyone still.

WOODY
I wish I could go back to the night we met. I'd do it all so different.

CUT TO:

INT. BOB'S BAR - FLASHBACK.

Woody wipes down the bar after hours. Sarah enters.

WOODY
Sorry. We're closed.

SARAH

Aw. Come on. Help a girl out.

A beat, then Woody waves her in. Sarah selects a stool.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I'll take a Tequila soda, please.
Whatever you've got.

Woody nods and starts to make her drink.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Are you Bob?

WOODY

Nah. Bob was my dad.

Sarah looks around. Sees a PHOTO of Woody, smiling and happy, with his FATHER from the 1950s. From the bar's heyday.

SARAH

Well, it looks like your dad's bar
is the only gig left in town.

WOODY

And I don't even know how much
longer that will be true.

Sarah accepts her drink. Woody leans on the bar. Assuming they're about to flirt. And pretty psyched about it.

SARAH

Oh no. Money problems?

WOODY

More than problems.

SARAH

Well... Maybe I can help.

WOODY

(unaware she's serious)
How's a pretty thing like you
supposed to help? By attracting
male customers?

Sarah smiles beatifically.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY.

SARAH

Oh my God. Enough with the Daddy issues. It doesn't change the fact that you're a murderer.

WOODY

I trusted you. But all you ever cared about was your *story*. And now you're sitting here, hands clean... It ain't right. So I'm thinking, maybe you need some skin in the game.

Suddenly, Woody lunges forward. Grabs Riley.

RILEY

Mom!

He holds the knife to Riley's throat.

SARAH (O.S.)

Don't you dare hurt her!

WOODY

Or what? What are you gonna do?

SARAH

Or I'll shoot you!

She POINTS the gun at Woody and COCKS.

WOODY

Well? Go ahead. What are you waiting for?

A beat... Then Sarah's hand falls to her side.

WOODY (CONT'D)

That's what I thought. All bark. No bite. Otherwise, you wouldn't need me to do your dirty work.

Riley's skin bulges on either side of the blade.

SARAH

What do you want? I'll do anything.

WOODY

What I want is to know why? You told me what, but never why. I should have asked then, but I'm asking now.

(MORE)

WOODY (CONT'D)

Were you so bored with your own life that it was worth risking everything? Risking your family?

SARAH

It wasn't about that.

WOODY

Then what?

Sarah stares back.

WOODY (CONT'D)

That's what I thought.

Riley whimpers. Her neck slightly bleeding from the pressure of the blade on her skin. Sarah debates what to do...

WOODY (CONT'D)

Well, Sarah. I think it's time we-

Suddenly, she hurls herself across the room and tackles Woody. His knife sliding away as they tumble to the floor and writhe. A heap of panicked limbs. The two roll over. Woody on top. Holding her down. He wraps his hands around her throat and starts to STRANGLE her.

RILEY

Mom!

WOODY

Don't worry, kid. You're better off without her.

Sarah fights... GASPING for air... Then closes her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S NEW YORK APARTMENT - FLASHBACK.

Gagged and bound, Sarah gets raped. It's a familiar scene. But this time we see... Riley watching in the hallway. She does nothing to help Sarah. Hence Riley's concern. Her guilt.

Note: Sarah doesn't notice her daughter.

End flashback.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - PRESENT DAY.

Riley throws herself onto Woody's ankle. Bites down on his flesh. He cries out and kicks. Riley flies into the dresser.

Sarah's face turns purple as he tightens his grip. Her eyes BULGE out of her head. Veins about to burst.

Suddenly, a few drops of BLOOD fall onto her face. She looks up and sees the BLADE sticking out of Woody's shoulder.

Woody has just enough time to register confusion before he releases his grip to pull the knife from his flesh. Blood pours from the wound. To Riley:

WOODY

Why'd you have to do that?

Woody grows pale, then slouches. Unconscious. Atop Sarah.

Riley runs over as Sarah crawls out from under Woody and rubs her neck.

RILEY

Mom. I didn't know what to do.

Sarah tries to talk, but her throat is raw. She wraps an arm around her daughter. They embrace, failing to notice...

Woody's eyes open. He comes to. He crawls toward them with knife in hand. Almost reached them when...

RILEY (CONT'D)

Mom! Watch out!

Woody grabs Riley's ankle. She falls. He pulls her body toward him. Her fingernails clawing at the hardwood.

Sarah watches. Panicked. Momentarily frozen. Then scans the room. She sees a LAMP. Grabs it and rips the cord out of the wall, plunging them into darkness. We watch in the moonlight as she BLUDGEONS Woody. Over. And over. At first, he fights back. Arms wailing. Trying to cover himself. Then he goes still. Dead.

The Halsted women stare down at his corpse. Its skull smashed in. So much blood that it's no longer red, but deep purple.

Sarah puts her hand on her daughter's shoulders, forcing Riley to look away from Woody's body. She kneels and looks into her daughter's eyes.

SARAH

Riley. Go call the police.

Riley nods and runs out of the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT.

SQUAD CARS and AMBULANCES flash. PARAMEDICS treat Sarah and Riley with oxygen. POLICE swarm the property. The local moms, including Cindy, have gathered to rubberneck on the lawn.

For the first time... Cindy smiles at Sarah. Sarah stares, then smiles back. A truce.

Tom's Audi SQUEALS to the curb. He throws open the door and runs to his family. Practically rabid with worry.

TOM

Thank God!

He envelops Riley in a hug. Then, after a beat, Sarah too. He kisses her head and speaks into her hair:

TOM (CONT'D)

I'm so sorry I didn't believe you.

Tom pulls back and looks around.

TOM (CONT'D)

Charlie?

SARAH

She went through that hole in the fence. I-I'm so-

TOM

-Don't worry about that right now. I should have fixed it.

Sarah studies her husband's face, then nods in agreement. Officer Kaplan appears as they kiss.

OFFICER KAPLAN

Well, you were right. I called the Sheriff in Salton City. It all matches up. They're on their way here now. In the meantime, we'll need you all to come down to the station. Make a statement.

Tom pulls his girls close.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER: THREE DAYS LATER.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING.

Sarah wakes up. Stretches. Enjoys the sunlight streaming in through the window. The most relaxed we've ever seen her.

She gets her phone on the nightstand. Opens Instagram. Notes, smiling, that she's gained THOUSANDS OF FOLLOWERS overnight.

She checks *The Daily Inquirer* website for her latest article. This time, she's on the homepage. With a photo.

ON THE SCREEN:

SARAH HALSTED: HOW I CAUGHT AND KILLED A SERIAL KILLER.

She clicks on the article and scrolls straight to the bottom. Reads its many, many comments.

What a fucking beast.

I love this woman.

Can someone please make this a movie?

A TEXT arrives from Christine.

ON THE SCREEN:

Have you thought about my job offer? You could work remotely.

Sarah doesn't respond. Deletes their entire conversation. *She's graduated past Christine and the tabloid now.*

Tom enters with a cup of tea. Sarah puts her phone away and accepts the mug. Tom watches her take a sip.

SARAH
Ok, stalker.

TOM
Sorry. It's just... I feel awful. I should have believed you.

SARAH
It's ok. Really.

TOM
It's not just about the other night. Ever since last year... Since your rape... I haven't known how to act around you.

SARAH
 (a hand atop his)
 It's ok. You don't have to-

TOM
 -Please. I need to stay this.

Sarah nods. Waits for him to get the words out.

TOM (CONT'D)
 I felt so helpless, so emasculated,
 that I withdrew. From you. From our
 marriage. I'm so sorry, Sarah...
 Can you ever forgive me?

She considers his face, then nods. They kiss.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER.

Sarah pads downstairs in sweatpants. She sees Tom in the kitchen and sneaks past him. Headed for the front door.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS.

The porch is covered with FLOWERS and FAN MAIL. A shrine to Sarah's bravery. She's reaching toward a TEDDY BEAR when:

REPORTER #1 (O.S.)
 Oh my God! It's her!

Three REPORTERS have gathered on the lawn. They go APESHIT.
 SARAH! SARAH! SARAH!

Sarah pauses with her hand on the stuffed animal... Acting bashful... Then stands. About to go back inside when...

REPORTER #2
 Can I ask a question?

Sarah considers, then waves them over. They rush forward with MICROPHONES extended. A PASSERBY on the sidewalk pulls out their CAMERA PHONE and starts to record, although unsure what's going on.

All three reporters ad lib questions, but Sarah can't make out any one voice over the cacophony.

SARAH
 No questions, but I will make a
 brief statement.
 (then, with a sigh)
 (MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

There's no question this has been a dark week for our family. I thank God for giving me another chance at life. For giving me another chance with my family. I know I'm the story of the week, but the fact that this hasn't gotten national attention is the real issue. Because violence against women is still a second rate story in this country. And until that changes, there will be no progress. Thank you for your time.

She smiles. Goes back inside as they clamor for more.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - LATER THAT MORNING.

Sarah enters to find Tom cooking at the stove. Takes a seat.

TOM

You didn't go out there, did you?

SARAH

Is someone jealous they're not the only celeb in the family anymore?

TOM

Yup. That's definitely it. Maybe I should go out there and toss a football around for them... Look! I finally learned how to scramble eggs!

SARAH

That's great, honey.

But she's distracted. Staring at the TV as it plays KTLA.

ON THE SCREEN: A REPORTER addresses the camera.

REPORTER

All anyone in LA wants to talk about these days is Sarah Halsted, the Pasadena mom who caught and killed an alleged serial killer in her home on Thursday evening. Later today, Mrs. Halsted will be joining us for an exclusive interview-

Tom mutes the TV and puts a PLATE before of Sarah.

TOM

No more TV until you eat something.

He kisses Sarah on the forehead, although she wants his lips, and puts the pan in the sink. Starts to scrub. Sarah ignores her food. Focused on the muted TV, which now shows a PHOTO they must have gotten from her old Instagram feed.

TOM (CONT'D)

Is something wrong? Are the eggs overcooked?

SARAH

What? Oh. No. It's not that. I'm just not very hungry. Must be nerves about the interview. I might actually get some air if that's ok?

TOM

Ok. Sure.

But something about Sarah's behavior strikes Tom as odd. Even as she pauses to kiss him with her hands on his chest.

SARAH

Oh. I forgot to tell you. The bank called. The money should be released from escrow in a few days.

Tom nods and watches Sarah exit the BACK DOOR.

THROUGH THE WINDOW: Tom watches Sarah enter the SHED, then looks back at the TV, where the NEWS TICKER reads...

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH SARAH HALSTED TONIGHT AT 6 PM PST.

He shakes his head, then resumes doing the dishes... Until he hears Sarah SCREAM.

SARAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Tom! Quick!

He drops the PAN, which clatters in the sink, and runs.

EXT. SARAH'S BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS.

Both Tom and Riley burst out of the house to find... Sarah, crouched in the grass with Charlie. The dog licking her face.

SARAH

Look who I found!

Riley runs to hug Charlie. But Tom hangs back. Aware Sarah doesn't seem surprised. Riley sniffs and wrinkles her nose.

RILEY

She stinks. Can we give her a bath?

SARAH

Sure.

(playful, to Tom)

Want to help?

TOM

Be there in a second.

Sarah follows Riley and Charlie inside. Glancing back at Tom.

Tom waits for the door to close, then sneaks into...

INT. SHED - CONTINUOUS.

Tom inhales the scent of earth. Everything seems normal. LAWN FURNITURE. GARDENING SUPPLIES. He's about to leave when he spots... a makeshift DOG BED of folded tarps in the corner.

As he walks toward it, his foot kicks a pill bottle. He picks it up. SARAH'S CLOZAPINE. *What are his wife's meds doing in here?*

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - FLASHBACK.

TOM

Before I forget. Did we ever get that hundred grand?

SARAH

I think the bank said Friday?

TOM

Jesus. Escrow should have closed weeks ago. We could really use the money now that you aren't working.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - FLASHBACK.

TOM

You do realize this makes you just like them. The criminals. Getting off on other people's misery.

INT. SARAH'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - FLASHBACK.

TOM

Maybe Riley and I should stay with Mom for a while. Until things calm down.

SARAH

Seriously? You're just gonna leave?

TOM

I think it'd be best... For Riley.

Sarah opens her mouth, then decides not to object.

SARAH

Ok. Fine. Maybe you're right.

Although Tom suggested it, he was hoping she'd object.

End flashback.

INT. SHED - PRESENT DAY.

Tom gets out his phone. Finger hovering over the number NINE.

SARAH (O.S.)

What are you doing?

Tom turns around. Startled. Hadn't heard Sarah come in.

TOM

I was just about to come help you.

But he's figured it out, and Sarah knows it. She approaches her husband like an animal she doesn't want to scare.

SARAH

I had to do it, Tom. It was the only way.

TOM

(feigning ignorance)

Only way to do what?

SARAH

Readers don't care about methodical, well-researched stories anymore. They don't care about facts. All anyone wants these days is entertainment. Michelle McNamara catching the Golden State Killer. Andrew Jarecki trapping Robert Durst.

(MORE)

SARAH (CONT'D)

Most editors won't even hire you unless you have thousands of followers.

TOM

So that's what this is about? Fame?

SARAH

No.

TOM

Then what? I make enough money.

She stares at her feet. Embarrassed to admit this next point.

SARAH

I've seen how you look at me since I stopped working.

TOM

I don't know what you're talking about.

SARAH

Really? You don't think a *little* bit less of me? Staying at home all day to make sandwiches?

He knows she's right. Tries to change topics. Regain control.

TOM

The hundred grand. Did you really think I wouldn't notice?

SARAH

I was going to replace it with whatever I made.

TOM

And if your plan didn't work?

SARAH

Better Riley be raised by a mom in prison than a mom without agency.

TOM

I don't understand how you can possibly think that justifies killing people.

SARAH

You wouldn't.

TOM

-And you really think I'm going to let a murderer raise my daughter?

SARAH

Technically, I didn't murder anyone. And you don't have to let me do anything ever again.

A beat as they stare at each other. Sarah's hand inching toward a pair of GARDENING SHEERS on a shelf.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I don't want to hurt you, Tom.

Tom turns to run out of the shed. But he trips and falls. Splayed on the dirty floor, he reaches for his phone. Hand stretching toward it when... Sarah KICKS the device away.

Suddenly, Riley's shadowy figure fills the doorway. She assesses the situation. The sheers in her mom's hand-- the same ones she once had in her backpack.

Tom watches Riley pick up the phone. Her tiny fingers closing tight around the plastic.

TOM

Riley. Give me the phone.

Riley hesitates.

TOM (CONT'D)

Riley, we have to call 911.

Riley looks between her parents.

CUT TO BLACK.