

ON YOUR DOORSTEP

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

An overcast sky looms over the tall trees. Persistent drizzle adds to the gloom. All is quiet. Eerily peaceful.

A PAIR OF BOOTS splashes through a puddle, breaking the silence. More follow. Sounds of DOGS BARKING. DOZENS OF PEOPLE walk abreast through the forest's dense underbrush. Faces grim.

It's a SEARCH PARTY. Community members. POLICE OFFICERS. DOGS sniffing intently.

OFFICER MCBRIDE (PRE-LAP)
When was the last time you saw Kaylie?

GIRL (PRE-LAP)
Yesterday. At school.

INT. HOUSE -- DAY

A GIRL (12) sits on the couch, eyes red from crying. Thin figure, discount clothes, cheap makeup. She's hunched over, the weight of the world on her shoulders.

OFFICER MCBRIDE (20s) and several other COPS stare down at her. Her MOTHER off to the side, watching expectantly.

OFFICER MCBRIDE
Had she mentioned anyone new to you?
A boyfriend maybe? Someone older?

The Girl shakes her head 'no.'

OFFICER MCBRIDE
Anything unusual about the way she
was acting? Did anything seem
strange... Or different?

She shakes her head again.

OFFICER MCBRIDE
What about last night? Do you know
if she might have gone somewhere?

The Girl hesitates. A tear streams down her cheek.

OFFICER MCBRIDE
Carmen, you understand that every
minute counts right now. Do you have
any idea where Kaylie could be?

She stares at the floor, unable to make eye contact.

CUT TO BLACK.

TITLE OVER: FIFTEEN YEARS LATER

EXT. WATERFRONT PARK, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON -- PREDAWN

A dreary, wet morning with low clouds hanging over the city. There are few people out at this hour, only the diehards, one of which is --

CARMEN BANKS (late 20s), running down the boardwalk along the Puget Sound. Petite and pretty, she's dressed in dark athletic clothes to ward off the drizzle. This isn't a person who runs to the beat of pop music for pleasure. This is someone who punishes herself. Her watch beeps and she picks up her pace even more. An uncommon intensity in her eyes.

She turns up a street, leaving the waterfront behind as she continues to run deeper into the city.

INT. OFFICE, SEATTLE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER -- MORNING

Carmen walks in, cleaned up, dressed in professional attire. She turns on the lights to reveal an old building that's been converted into a modern, open workspace. A SEATTLE INDEPENDENT banner on the wall. No one else here at this hour.

She walks to her desk, takes off her coat and pulls out her laptop to get to work.

INT. KITCHEN, SEATTLE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER -- LATER

Carmen refills her coffee cup and takes a sip, refueling.

COWORKER
You didn't sleep here again, did you?

CARMEN
(smiles)
Not this time. Maybe tonight.

An ASSISTANT (20s) pokes her head in.

ASSISTANT
Hey Carmen, Eric wants to see you.

Carmen looks over, surprised.

CARMEN
Really?

INT. ERIC'S OFFICE, SEATTLE INDEPENDENT -- DAY

Carmen steps into the empty office. Stylish and minimalist. She takes a seat, waiting awkwardly. Notices a NOTEPAD on the desk with something scribbled on it.

She can't help but lean forward and tilt her head, trying to read it --

ERIC (O.S.)
You always snoop around other people's stuff?

Carmen sits back abruptly as her boss ERIC MOORE (40s) strolls in. Business casual, affable demeanor. He sits and immediately starts typing on his computer, not focused on Carmen.

CARMEN
You wanted to see me?

ERIC
Councilman Stevens called me at 3 AM about the piece you wrote on his 'alleged' real estate bribes. It must've been good. He was pissed.

CARMEN
Well unfortunately for the Councilman, all of it is true.

ERIC
I believe it. I like reporters who can open up a can of worms.

Carmen smiles at the compliment, still a bit nervous.

ERIC
Tom says you've really been busting your ass out there. He also says you're a big pain in the ass. Don't think I haven't noticed both.

CARMEN
I hope that's a good thing.

ERIC
It's an observation. But it tells me you're ready for something bigger.

He turns to face her. Carmen's sits up a little straighter.

ERIC
A story broke this morning and I thought of you. I'd usually send Harris for something like this, but given your unique background, I'm thinking about sending you.

CARMEN
Unique background in what?

ERIC
You grew up in Willow Creek, right?

CARMEN

Yeah. Why?

ERIC

When's the last time you were back?

CARMEN

About ten years. My mom passed away right after I finished high school. Didn't have much of a reason to visit after that.

ERIC

Well, I've got a reason for you. Do you remember this girl?

He spins his monitor to reveal a PHOTO OF A YOUNG GIRL, KAYLIE HARPER (12). MISSING in bold letters above it.

ERIC

Kaylie Harper. Disappeared awhile back. No witnesses, no suspects. She was about your age. Did you know her?

Carmen hesitates.

CARMEN

She lived down the street from me.

ERIC

Well, her remains were just found this morning. They were buried in a stream about a mile from her family's house. I need someone to cover the story.

Carmen stares in disbelief, trying not to betray her emotions.

CARMEN

What's the angle?

ERIC

You tell me. If I just wanted straight reporting, I'd send someone with more experience. But you know the town. You know the people. Talk to them. Talk to the police. Talk to the girl's family. Then write the story that no one else can get.

Carmen nods, masking her apprehension.

ERIC

We'll get you a company card to cover your expenses, and I'll have Jessica book you a hotel.

CARMEN

I don't need a hotel. My mom's old house is still up there.

ERIC

You never sold it?

Carmen shakes her head. Eric notices her discomfort.

ERIC

Carmen, look, I know this one probably hits a little close to home... If you can't handle it, I'll send someone else.

Carmen meets his gaze, determination in her eyes.

CARMEN

Send me. I can handle it.

INT. BATHROOM, SEATTLE INDEPENDENT -- DAY

Carmen closes the door behind her. She goes to the mirror, clinging to the sink for support as she takes unsteady breaths.

But after several moments, she begins to calm, able to look at herself in the mirror, her cool facade returning.

EXT. FERRY -- DAY

Carmen stands at the rail of the ferry, the Seattle skyline shrinking over the ship's wake.

EXT. FERRY PORT -- DAY

Carmen drives her CAR onto the landing.

EXT. HIGHWAY / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- DAY

A two lane state route cutting through the dense, northwest forest. Carmen drives, hands firmly set on the wheel.

A SIGN reads WILLOW CREEK. She steels herself as she drives into town.

EXT. WILLOW CREEK, WA / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- DAY

Carmen's newer car sticks out from the surroundings, an outsider in her own hometown.

Willow Creek is a small, LOWER CLASS LOGGING TOWN whose best days have long since passed. SMALL HOMES AND TRAILER PARKS in various states of disrepair. MODEST SHOPS and BOARDED UP STOREFRONTS. Paint dull and faded. All under the constant OVERCAST SKIES and NEVER-ENDING RAIN of the Pacific Northwest.

Something terrible happened here a long time ago. And from the looks of it, this town has never recovered.

RESIDENTS glare as Carmen drives past, wary of strangers, especially those who have achieved success. Their faces worn by years of hard labor, disappointment and cynicism.

Several NEWS VANS are parked along the road, REPORTERS speaking into cameras nearby.

Carmen drives past and turns down a small road, heading deep INTO THE FOREST.

EXT. CARMEN'S STREET / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- DAY

A single lane gravel road that winds through the forest. The SCATTERED HOUSES are old, small and SEPARATED BY THICK TREES. A quiet, isolated place.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen's car pulls into the driveway of her MOTHER'S HOUSE, parking beside a PICKUP labeled "NELSON CONTRACTING." The house is old and weathered, paint chipped, moss on the roof.

A LADDER leans against the eave. GLEN NELSON (40s) comes down as Carmen gets out of her car. Gruff, blue-collar physique, faded good looks.

GLEN

I didn't expect you to come.

Carmen gives him a hug.

CARMEN

It's good to see you, Glen.

GLEN

Welcome home. Sorry about the circumstances.

(motions to roof)

Had a bad windstorm a couple nights back, knocked a few shingles off. But they should be all fixed up now.

CARMEN

I wish you'd cash the checks I mail you.

GLEN

And I wish you wouldn't send them. Your mom was always a good neighbor.

They share a smile.

GLEN

You know, I was always proud of you for leaving, Carmen. But I'm glad you're back. And I know Kaylie's family will be happy to see you.

Carmen forces a nod.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

The door creaks open and Carmen walks in. Old SHEETS ARE DRAPED OVER THE DATED, CHEAP FURNITURE. Carmen pulls one off and a cloud of DUST BILLOWS into the air.

Her eyes are drawn to OLD FRAMED PHOTOS on the wall. YOUNG CARMEN WITH HER MOTHER. We recognize her as THE SAME GIRL QUESTIONED BY POLICE fifteen years ago. Carmen gazes at the photos, a thin smile cracking through.

But her smile fades as she sees her young self in a picture with KAYLIE HARPER. The SAME GIRL FROM THE MISSING POSTER. They're sitting atop HORSES. Smiling, happy, innocent.

EXT. FOREST -- DAY

Carmen makes her way through the trees and dense underbrush. The sound of RUSHING WATER ahead. She steps out to see --

A STREAM cascading down rough rocks, forming small waterfalls. POLICE TAPE flutters in the breeze, tied to nearby trees. Several OFFICERS mill about the scene. And Carmen knows...

This is where Kaylie was found.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE (O.S.)

You can't be here.

Carmen turns to see DETECTIVE MCBRIDE (40s), the same officer who questioned her when she was a child. Older now, more seasoned. His expression hardens as he recognizes her too.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Carmen Banks... You're just about the last person I expected to see.

CARMEN

I'm writing a story for the Seattle Independent. I was just hoping to ask you a few questions.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

You're writing the story? That's an interesting choice for an editor to make.

She doesn't waver, meeting his cold gaze.

CARMEN

Can you tell me anything new about the investigation?

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

It's all in the press release. Her body was buried in the bank. Died shortly after her disappearance from multiple skull fractures. No DNA evidence to find after all these years in the water.

CARMEN

Any new suspects?

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

The investigation is open and ongoing.

CARMEN

So I take that as a 'no?'

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

You can take it however you want. But you need to go, Ms. Banks. This is still a crime scene. You don't belong here.

There's something in his tone that says this is personal.

CARMEN

Well, hopefully you'll have more to tell me next time.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Likewise.

Carmen blinks hard at the jab, then turns and walks away.

She looks back, staring down at the roiling water from the edge of the trees. It's hauntingly peaceful.

PASTOR (PRE-LAP)

The Bible teaches us that there is evil in this world...

EXT. GRAVE SITE, CEMETERY -- DAY

A small gathering. MOURNERS hold umbrellas. Glen stands amongst them, along with PATTY WOODALL (late 20s), LILY CHAMBERS (late 20s) and LELAND PIERCE (40s), all of whom we'll meet later.

Carmen stands away from the group, staring at the framed PICTURE OF KAYLIE beside the CLOSED CASKET.

PASTOR

... But it does not teach us how to understand it. How can any of us possibly understand something so cruel, so wicked. But there is something we can understand. We can understand who Kaylie Harper was. A free spirit with an infectious laugh and a big heart. A loyal friend. A loving daughter and sister.

Carmen eyes KAYLIE'S FAMILY. MRS. HARPER (50s) sits, staring absently at the coffin. JEREMY HARPER (30s) beside her, crying. MR. HARPER (50s) stands behind them, silent and stoic.

Carmen can't help but stare, seeing so many years of pain.

PASTOR

So on this day, let us leave how Kaylie died in the past... And let us always hold dear in our hearts our memories of how she lived.

Jeremy Harper looks towards Carmen.

She quickly averts his gaze.

EXT. CEMETERY -- LATER

Mourners depart in silence. Carmen watches Jeremy help his mother into the car.

She takes several steps towards them but hesitates, unable to bring herself to talk to them. She walks away.

JEREMY

Carmen.

Carmen turns, uncomfortable. Jeremy smiles gently, walking towards her. The difficult years have taken their toll.

JEREMY

Just wanted to say thanks for coming.
It's good to see you.

CARMEN

You too, Jeremy. How have you been?

JEREMY

I'm holding up okay. Been working construction mostly. Some odd jobs here and there.

CARMEN

And your parents?

JEREMY

Dad still lives a couple hours south of here. I go down to visit him from time to time.

(beat)

Mom, she... She never really recovered.

Mrs. Harper stares absently out the car window.

JEREMY

Mostly keeps to the house now. Doesn't say much. I do my best to look after her, make sure she takes her meds.

CARMEN

She's lucky to have you.

Jeremy manages a smile.

JEREMY

It's hard isn't it? Doing what the pastor says. Trying to remember how Kaylie lived.

Carmen nods weakly. Jeremy sniffles, tears filling his eyes.

JEREMY

I still miss her, Carmen. I miss her so much.

CARMEN

So do I.

He hugs her. Carmen reluctantly hugs him back, struggling to contain her emotions.

INT. CARMEN'S CAR / EXT. CEMETERY -- LATER

Carmen gets into her car and shuts her door. She sits alone for a long moment. Then sniffles hard as TEARS BEGIN TO COME.

But she fights them back, wiping her face roughly with her sleeve. Until her eyes are dry once again.

INT. KITCHEN, CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen sits, laptop in front of her, cell phone to her ear. A take out box open on the table, barely touched.

CARMEN (INTO PHONE)

I'm planning to go door to door in the morning. Talk to all of the neighbors who were here when it happened. See what they can remember.

ERIC (FROM PHONE)

You talk to the girl's mom yet?

CARMEN

No... I'll go there too. First thing.

ERIC

Good. You holding up okay?

CARMEN

Yeah, I'm fine.

ERIC

So when do you think you can get me something?

CARMEN

Well, I should finish up here tomorrow. I'll have it to you by the day after. How's that?

ERIC

You're living up to expectations, Banks.

CARMEN

Thanks.

She hangs up. Then looks at her laptop screen. On it, she's written a single line.

"I still miss her. I miss her so much."

MASTER BEDROOM

Carmen climbs into bed and turns out the light. She lays there, eyes open, listening to the silence in the lonely house.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Dark save the porch light. A peaceful, quiet night. Only a light drizzle.

All is calm.

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

Carmen sleeps soundly.

POUND! POUND! POUND!

She snaps awake with a jolt. What the hell was that?

POUND! POUND! POUND! Fast and desperate.

Carmen looks around, disoriented.

POUND! POUND! POUND! From the front door.

She gets up, grabbing her cell phone, fear rising --

ENTRYWAY

The POUNDING CONTINUES as Carmen rounds the corner. Through the darkness she sees --

A TEENAGE GIRL outside the front window, illuminated by the porch light. About seventeen, gaunt, scraggly hair, eyes wide and terrified. SHE MOVES FRANTICALLY, out of control. A panicked, rabid animal.

GIRL
IS ANYONE THERE?! OPEN THE DOOR!

Her voice is high pitched and murder on the ears. She VICIOUSLY POUNDS THE DOOR. SLAMS HER FISTS ON THE WINDOWS.

GIRL
LET ME IN!

Carmen takes a step forward, but hesitates, unsure what to do. The POUNDING INTENSIFIES.

GIRL
OPEN THE DOOR!

Carmen backs away. Her hands shake as she dials "9-1-1."

OPERATOR (FROM PHONE)
Nine-one-one, what's your emergency?

CARMEN (INTO PHONE)
(fast, panicked)
Yes, there's a stranger outside my house. I need the police.

OPERATOR
What's your address ma'am?

The DOORBELL RINGS OVER AND OVER.

CARMEN
Uh, six-eight-two Sycamore.

GIRL
SOMEONE PLEASE OPEN THE DOOR! OPEN
THE FUCKING DOOR!

Carmen flinches as a WINDOW CRACKS under the Girl's barrage.

CARMEN
Hurry, please!

OPERATOR
The police are on their way. Just stay on the line, ma'am. Now can you tell me your name?

MORE POUNDING. DOORBELL RINGING. Carmen cringes.

CARMEN
Carmen Banks.

OPERATOR
And can you describe the stranger?

CARMEN
She's --

Carmen looks outside but the girl is suddenly gone. Silence.

OPERATOR
Ms. Banks? Ms. Banks, are you there?

Carmen steps closer to the window, peering outside --

Suddenly the Girl SLAMS UP AGAINST IT, looking Carmen straight in the eye --

GIRL
HELP ME!

Carmen staggers back, dropping the phone.

The Girl stares at her with piercing eyes, tears streaming down her face. Then SHE LOOKS BEHIND HER, seeing something else. SHE RUNS AWAY, disappearing into the darkness.

The operator's voice continues to sound from the fallen phone.

OPERATOR
Ms. Banks? Ms. Banks, are you there?
Are you alright?

But Carmen doesn't move, too traumatized.

The sound of a POLICE SIREN builds.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A POLICE CAR pulls into the driveway, lights spinning. An OFFICER climbs out and hurries towards the house.

INT. ENTRYWAY, CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen opens the door.

POLICE OFFICER
You alright, ma'am?

CARMEN
She ran away, I don't know where.
She must have gone into the woods.

POLICE OFFICER
What did she look like?

CARMEN
I... I don't know. She...

POLICE OFFICER
What color was her hair?

CARMEN
Blonde. It was blonde.

POLICE OFFICER
How old was she?

CARMEN
I don't know. Sixteen. Maybe
seventeen. A teenager.

POLICE OFFICER
Okay. We're gonna go look for her.
If she comes back, call nine-one-one
again, don't open your door.
Understand?

Carmen nods. He turns and heads off as more police cars arrive. Carmen closes the door and locks it.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Numerous OFFICERS fan out into the woods, flashlights cutting through the darkness.

INT. KITCHEN, CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen sits, clutching a cup of tea, still shaken. A KNOCK at the door causes her to jump. She gets up.

ENTRYWAY

Carmen opens the door to reveal the same Officer from earlier.

POLICE OFFICER
We searched the area. No sign of any
girl. Was about to call it.

CARMEN
You couldn't find her?

POLICE OFFICER
From what you described, it sounds
like it was just some high schooler
who was drunk or having a bad trip.

CARMEN
She wasn't drunk... She was terrified.
(MORE)

CARMEN (CONT'D)

She ran away like there was someone chasing her.

POLICE OFFICER

Or she heard our sirens and was afraid of getting in trouble. All the same, it's a good thing you didn't open your door.

CARMEN

Did you talk to the neighbors? Someone else must have heard her.

POLICE OFFICER

We didn't get any other calls. I don't see any reason to start waking people up in the middle of the night. But give us a call if you see her again. Have a good night.

He heads towards his car, leaving Carmen alone on the doorstep.

As the car pulls away, she looks out into the dark forest.

GLEN (PRE-LAP)

I wouldn't have opened my door either.

EXT. GLEN NELSON'S HOUSE -- DAY

An older home with a small pasture stretching out to the forest's edge, an OLD HORSE grazing. Glen loads lumber into the back of his pickup. Carmen alongside.

GLEN

Some stranger wants to come into my house in the middle of the night? First thing I'd do is get my gun.

CARMEN

How could no one else have seen her?

GLEN

Why's it matter? You called the cops. What more can ya do?

CARMEN

She wasn't just some drunk kid. There was something wrong, Glen. Something really wrong.

GLEN

(sighs)

Carmen, look. This neighborhood ain't like it used to be.

(MORE)

GLEN (CONT'D)

Families still won't move here after what happened to Kaylie. We've got drug problems. Violence. Cops are up here all the time.

CARMEN

What does that have to do with this?

GLEN

All I'm saying is this isn't a place to go meddling in other people's business. Let it go.

There's an intensity to his gaze. But it isn't enough to deter her.

EXT. PATTY WOODALL'S HOUSE -- DAY

Another house. More run-down. Weeds filling the lawn.

PATTY (PRE-LAP)

I don't talk to reporters.

INT. PATTY'S WOODALL'S HOUSE -- DAY

A TODDLER sits in front of the TV, eating cereal out of the box. PATTY WOODALL (late 20s), white trash, holds a CRYING BABY on her hip.

PATTY

You should read what the local paper said about Joel when he went to jail. Takes no spine to kick a man when he's down. Even if he is an asshole.

CARMEN

Come on Patty, we've been friends since we were kids. I'm not being a reporter here.

PATTY

Friends? You left the first chance you got. Never called. Never visited. I'm surprised you even bothered coming to Kaylie's funeral.

Carmen takes a sharp breath, but lets it go.

CARMEN

Patty, did you see anything last night or not?

PATTY

I told you. I don't talk to reporters.

EXT. TRAVIS WHEELER'S HOUSE -- DAY

The dodgiest house yet. Broken windows. Trash clutters the yard. A rusted junker blocked up in the driveway.

Carmen knocks on the door repeatedly.

TRAVIS (O.S.)
I fuckin' heard you already!

The door opens. TRAVIS WHEELER (40s) glares out. Unshaven. Eyes bloodshot. Worn clothes. Smoking a cigarette.

TRAVIS
Who the hell are you?

CARMEN
Sorry to bother you. I was just wondering if you saw a teenage girl running around here last night?

TRAVIS
You a cop or something?

CARMEN
No, just a... Old neighbor.

He scrutinizes her, suspicious.

TRAVIS
Well, I didn't see no fuckin' girl.

He slams the door in her face.

EXT. LELAND PIERCE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen knocks on the door impatiently. A DOG BARKS loudly inside. She peers into a window but doesn't see anyone. She sighs, frustrated.

EXT. MALCOLM REID'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen walks towards another secluded house. This one is very well maintained compared to the others. She knocks on the door. As she waits, she eyes the carefully manicured lawn. The blooming flowers.

The door opens to reveal MALCOLM REID (early 30s). Boyish face, clean shaven, wearing a conservative button-down and slacks. A reserved demeanor about him. He smiles pleasantly.

MALCOLM
Carmen... It's nice to see you.

INT. MALCOLM REID'S HOUSE -- DAY

Malcolm delicately prepares two cups of coffee with the utmost care. Carmen sits at the table.

MALCOLM

I didn't realize you were back in town. You should have called first. I would have cleaned up a bit.

Carmen glances around. His house is SPOTLESS. Obsessively clean. Finely crafted MODEL AIRPLANES as decorations.

He sets down two coffee cups and sits across from her.

MALCOLM

Sorry, I don't have visitors very often.

He sips, smiling self consciously. She smiles back politely.

CARMEN

Malcolm, I was curious... Did anything out of the ordinary happen around here last night?

Malcolm eyes her, confused.

MALCOLM

What do you mean?

CARMEN

Did you hear anything strange? Like someone pounding on your door? Or yelling?

MALCOLM

Who would be yelling?

CARMEN

A young girl.

Malcolm stiffens.

MALCOLM

What are you implying?

CARMEN

(laughs uneasily)
I'm not implying anything. Just asking --

MALCOLM

I didn't see anyone.

He's very uncomfortable. Carmen no longer feels welcome.

CARMEN
Okay. I was just curious.

EXT. MALCOLM REID'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen walks down the driveway towards the road.

She glances over her shoulder to the house and sees Malcolm looking out a window, watching her leave.

EXT. CARMEN'S STREET -- DAY

Carmen walks alone down the quiet road. She glances at her neighbors' homes as she passes, hidden amongst the trees.

Until she reaches another driveway and slows...

EXT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Before her lies a modest home like the others. A pickup truck parked outside. An old barn in the back that looks like it hasn't been used in years. The mailbox reads "HARPER." The aura of tragedy hangs heavy.

Carmen stands at a distance, staring at the old house, unable to bring herself to go any closer.

Sounds of BARKING DOGS and HUSHED WHISPERS build as she remembers --

EXT. FOREST -- EVENING -- FLASHBACK

A search party. YOUNG CARMEN walks alongside her MOM as they make their way through the forest with the others. Her eyes dart about, hoping, desperately hoping.

POLICE OFFICER
Alright folks, I'm calling it so we
can make it out before the sun sets.
Another search team will start at
first light tomorrow.

Carmen's Mom puts a reassuring hand on her shoulder.

CARMEN'S MOM
Come on, sweetie.

But Carmen walks on, alone.

CARMEN'S MOM
Carmen.

Carmen keeps walking, desperate.

CARMEN'S MOM
Carmen, stop! We have to go home.

Carmen finally slows.

EXT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- BACK TO PRESENT

Carmen stares at Kaylie's house, lost in thought.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen opens the web browser on her laptop. She hesitates.

Then types "MISSING PERSONS" in the search field.

Websites pop up. She clicks one - THE WASHINGTON STATE MISSING PERSONS SEARCH. She eyes the various categories - Name, DOB, height, weight, etc. Enters "Female" and searches.

PHOTOS LOAD. Carmen scans through them. Adults, teenagers, kids. All smiling. Happy. Ordinary. Gone. Amongst them is a PHOTO OF KAYLIE. Labeled "DECEASED."

Carmen stares at it for a long moment. Then enters more information in the search field. "Hair Color: Blonde." "Current Age: 15-18." Searches again.

MORE PHOTOS. More smiles. But NONE BEAR ANY RESEMBLANCE TO THE GIRL she saw. She clicks to another page. More photos. More smiles. She keeps clicking. More photos. Still no resemblance. Carmen sighs, frustrated. Clicks one more time.

And freezes.

Amidst the photos, the image of a YOUNG BLONDE GIRL stares back at her. Years younger than the girl on the doorstep. But there's something familiar about her. Her hair. Her face.

Carmen clicks on the image. A larger version pops up along with SEVERAL OTHER PHOTOS. Carmen leans closer to the screen, gazing into the young girl's eyes.

FLASH CUT: The girl outside her door, screaming.

GIRL

HELP ME!

BACK TO SCENE:

CARMEN

Oh my God...

IT'S HER.

Carmen scans the information listed below the photos:

"Name: JOELLE MONTGOMERY. Current Age: 17. Last Seen: APRIL 4, 2008. AGE 12."

Carmen stares, horrified, pangs of guilt rushing through her. Hands trembling, she searches for "Joelle Montgomery."

HUNDREDS OF PAGES POP UP. She clicks, bringing up articles: "Twelve-Year-Old Abducted from Suburban Neighborhood." / "Search Continues." / "Where is Joelle Montgomery?"

Carmen slams her laptop shut. Tears in her eyes.

INT. KITCHEN, CARMEN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Detective McBride sits across from Carmen, glancing through PRINTED PHOTOS and ARTICLES on Joelle. Skeptical.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

So now you're saying the teenager on your doorstep was a girl who's been missing for more than five years?

CARMEN

I know it sounds crazy.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Look, with all due respect, you had just woken up. It was dark outside. You were scared. The responding officer said you could barely describe who you saw.

(picks up photo)

And this is an old photo of a perfectly ordinary looking girl.

CARMEN

That doesn't change the fact that I saw her.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Ms Banks, Joelle Montgomery disappeared five years ago in Collinsville, over a hundred miles away from here. I'm sorry but this is all a little suspect when you're out here writing a puff piece for some online news magazine about your dead friend.

Carmen glares daggers at him.

CARMEN

That has nothing to do with this. I saw this girl --

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

And six officers looked for her.

CARMEN

And they didn't find her. You have to keep looking.

McBride sighs, sitting back in his chair.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

I seem to remember a young girl, twelve years old, calling the police because she swore up and down that she saw her friend who had gone missing months before. We searched for days. And what did we find?

His question hangs heavy in the silence.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Nothing. Because there was nothing to find. We now know that Kaylie Harper was killed the same day that she was taken. You had us out there chasing ghosts. We see what we want to see, Ms. Banks. Then and now.

CARMEN

Detective, that girl could still be out there somewhere.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Then why didn't we find her? If it really was Joelle, why didn't she come running to us?

CARMEN

Maybe she never got a chance.

(beat)

I should have opened my door.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

No, you shouldn't have. If it happened like you said, then you did the right thing.

CARMEN

A person needs help and we should keep our doors closed? That's the right thing?

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Listen, I'll have everyone keep an eye out for this girl. I'll even call the Collinsville P.D. to report the sighting.

(leans forward)

But please try to remember... This town is still trying to get over one tragedy. Don't go looking for another.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen watches out the window as the sedan drives away. She looks over the table filled with pictures of Joelle...

Then grabs her coat and heads for the door.

EXT. HIGHWAY / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- DAY

Carmen's car pulls onto the road, heading out of town.

ERIC (FROM PHONE)
You've reached Eric Moore at the
Seattle Independent. Leave a message.

CARMEN (INTO PHONE)
Eric, it's Carmen. Listen, I'm gonna
be out here a few more days. I think
I've stumbled onto something. Could
be pretty big. I'll keep you posted.

EXT. HIGHWAY -- LATER

Carmen's car passes a ROAD SIGN: "Collinsville - 47 miles."

EXT. COLLINSVILLE BRIDGE -- DAY

Carmen drives across the expansive steel bridge into town.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET, COLLINSVILLE, WA -- DAY

A SIGN reads "HILLSIDE DRIVE." Carmen's car turns onto it.

INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen drives through the MIDDLE CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD, a stark contrast to the place she grew up. A street you'd want to raise your kids on, where bad things aren't supposed to happen.

Carmen slows to a stop. Pulls out her SLR CAMERA with a ZOOM LENS and snaps several PICTURES OF THE STREET.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out a notepad with JOELLE'S HOME ADDRESS: "1257 Hillside Drive." Carmen looks out the window at THE HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET.

Its bright colors make it stand out from the rest, a YELLOW HOUSE with a RED DOOR. It was a happy place once. But the colors have long since faded.

A WOMAN tends to flowers by the house - Joelle's mother, MRS. MONTGOMERY (40s), a faded beauty worn by time. A CAR pulls in and MR. MONTGOMERY (40s) climbs out, grocery bags in hand. Husband and wife exchange a few words. But there is no emotion, no feeling. He goes inside as she goes back to her flowers. The empty monotony of their existence.

Carmen raises her camera and snaps several pictures, looking on with remorse.

EXT. COLLINSVILLE POLICE STATION -- DAY

Carmen parks her car, gets out and walks inside.

DETECTIVE EVERETT (PRE-LAP)
You're not the first person to think
they saw Joelle Montgomery...

INT. OFFICE, COLLINSVILLE POLICE STATION -- DAY

DETECTIVE ROGER EVERETT (late 50s), a slender man who prematurely aged due to his diet of coffee and stress. He sits opposite Carmen sipping from a travel mug.

DETECTIVE EVERETT
People want to see missing children.
They want so badly for them to be
brought back home. So they grasp at
straws. We've gotten hundreds of calls
from around the country over the years.
Of course, after you follow up on
enough of them, you realize that Joelle
looks like so many other home grown
American girls.

CARMEN
Yes, I'm sure she's easily mistaken.

DETECTIVE EVERETT
So why come here? What's her case to
you?

CARMEN
(hesitates)
I just want to know if there's
anything more to the story that didn't
make the news.

DETECTIVE EVERETT
I wish there was. But sadly, this one
was pretty straightforward. It was a
Friday. Joelle left school at
approximately 2:45, walking home like
she always did. Her house was only
six blocks away. And she never made
it. That's it. That's all there was.

CARMEN
There weren't any leads? Any suspects?

DETECTIVE EVERETT
There wasn't a crime scene. I swear
we spoke to half the residents in
town. No one saw anything. The girl
just vanished.

CARMEN

How does a twelve-year-old girl just vanish in broad daylight?

DETECTIVE EVERETT

Most likely because she was taken by a complete stranger.

A beat.

CARMEN

Do you think she's still alive?

DETECTIVE EVERETT

Her case is still open. The mayor wanted to hold a memorial but her parents wouldn't allow it. They still think she's out there somewhere.

CARMEN

But do you think she's still alive?

DETECTIVE EVERETT

Off the record... No.

Carmen absorbs this, considering if she should go on.

CARMEN

What if she was?

DETECTIVE EVERETT

What if she was what?

CARMEN

What if she was still alive?

DETECTIVE EVERETT

You mean what if she'd never been abducted?

CARMEN

No. What if the person who took her still had her?

Everett studies her for a long moment.

DETECTIVE EVERETT

Ms. Banks, I worked homicide in Seattle for twenty two years. In that amount of time, you see it all. The worst recesses of humanity. The truth is that sick and twisted people do kill children. But to hold a child captive for years... That takes calculated planning, deception, patience.

(MORE)

DETECTIVE EVERETT (CONT'D)
You're not talking about someone who's
just deranged, you're talking about
someone who's truly evil. A monster.

Carmen shifts in her seat.

DETECTIVE EVERETT
But that's the problem isn't it? In
the real world, monsters don't have
horns or fangs. It could be anyone,
anyone at all. That's why when you
catch one, the neighbors always say,
"We thought they were so nice. So
normal." The scariest monsters are
the ones we see every day.

EXT. CARMEN'S STREET / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- NIGHT

Carmen's car drives up the winding road. She glances at her
old neighbors' houses as she passes. Suspicious.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen stares at her computer, clicking through web pages as
she scans ARTICLES ON CHILD ABDUCTION AND IMPRISONMENT.

"Locked up for years... Abuse and manipulation... Secret
room... Windowless and soundproof... Gave birth to three
children... Never saw daylight... Chained to the bed."

Then there are the IMAGES. The children with their innocent
smiles. The holding rooms where they were kept. And most
terrifying of all: the faces of the men and women who
perpetrated the most heinous of crimes.

They all look so normal. So ordinary. Carmen glares at them.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen paces in front of her laptop. Eric on Skype.

CARMEN
Our street is miles outside of town.
It was the middle of the night. She
was on foot. She didn't even have a
coat on. She couldn't have come far.

ERIC (ON SKYPE)
So what are you saying?

Carmen hesitates, then --

CARMEN
I think she was coming from one of
my neighbors' houses. The same
neighbor who killed Kaylie Harper.

Eric stares at her.

ERIC

Holy shit, you're serious.

CARMEN

Just look at the circumstances. Fifteen years ago, Kaylie Harper was abducted and murdered here. Now another missing girl shows up on the exact same street. That's a pretty scary coincidence.

ERIC

But if this girl is who you say she is, then why didn't she just go to the police when they came?

CARMEN

Maybe whoever was holding her caught her first.

ERIC

Then how do you know she's not dead?

CARMEN

I don't. But no one's found a body. We can't give up on her yet.

ERIC

I take it you told the police all this?

CARMEN

Of course I did. But these are the same cops who couldn't find a single suspect in Kaylie Harper's murder. If we leave it to them, this girl's dead and gone.

Eric still scrutinizes her.

CARMEN

You sent me here to write a story that no one else could find. This is it.

ERIC

Carmen... Are you absolutely sure it was Joelle Montgomery?

CARMEN

I'm positive.

(beat)

No one else is looking for her, Eric. I can find her.

Eric sees her determination. He sits back, thinking.

ERIC
So how well do you know your
neighbors?

Carmen allows herself the slightest smile.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen's printer spits out a page. She picks it up, examining the GOOGLE SATELLITE IMAGE OF A HOUSE. Pins it to the wall.

CARMEN (V.O.)
There are seven houses on the street
including my mom's and the Harper's.

She pins up images of each of the NEIGHBORS' HOUSES, forming an OVERHEAD MAP OF HER STREET. The houses are all relatively equidistant from hers, separated by thick woods. She pins a PHOTO OF KAYLIE atop the Harper's house.

CARMEN (V.O.)
That means that Joelle could have
come from any of the other five.

She steps back to take in the wall, now covered with PRINTED ARTICLES and PHOTOS from Joelle and Kaylie's cases.

EXT. TRAVIS WHEELER'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen hides amidst the trees, wearing black, shrouded in darkness. She aims her camera, snapping pictures.

CARMEN'S CAMERA POV: Travis takes a pot off the stove and dumps mac and cheese onto his DAUGHTER'S (5) plate. He sits across from her at the table, eating out of the pot.

CARMEN (V.O.)
First up is Travis Wheeler. Didn't
really know him growing up because he
was never around. Turns out he's been
in and out of jail since he was old
enough to go. Assault and battery,
armed robbery, DUIs up the ass. I
couldn't find any employment record,
so it's anybody's guess how he makes
his living. He has custody of his
five-year-old daughter because her
mother is in jail for dealing meth.

EXT. LELAND PIERCE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen spies from the woods, taking pictures.

CAMERA POV: LELAND PIERCE (40s), heavysset and balding, rolls a LARGE TRASH BIN to the curb. His DOG alongside him.

CARMEN (V.O.)

Leland Pierce still teaches seventh grade science at Willow Creek Middle School. Kaylie and I were in his class fifteen years ago. Wasn't exactly the best teacher. Can't really tell you much more about him though. Owns his house. Pays his bills.

Carmen zooms in on Leland as he goes back for a second bin.

CARMEN (V.O.)

Never married. No children. Lives alone.

EXT. PATTY WOODALL'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

CARMEN (V.O.)

Patty Woodall and I grew up together. Nice girl who never really had a chance.

CAMERA POV: Patty and a MAN are engaged in a HEATED ARGUMENT. We can't hear them, but it looks bad.

CARMEN (V.O.)

Her boyfriend Joel just did a six-month stint in prison for domestic violence, his second. But Patty just keeps on taking him back. She was on unemployment for a while, but recently got a job at the local pharmacy. Oh and I'm pretty sure her kids have two separate fathers, neither of which is Joel.

EXT. GLEN NELSON'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

CAMERA POV: Glen and EVE (40s) sit in front of the TV. Eve in a WHEELCHAIR, reading a book. Nothing to say to each other.

CARMEN (V.O.)

Glen Nelson's story is just sad. Once upon a time, he had a nice happy family. Until a drunk driver put his wife, Eve, in a wheelchair and his daughter in a grave. They didn't have any more children after that. He's had problems ever since. It was alcohol for a while. I remember my mom telling me to stay away from him, but he was always nice to me.

EXT. MALCOLM REID'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

CAMERA POV: Malcolm meticulously arranges his dinner plate, silverware and cup on a TRAY.

CARMEN (V.O.)

And then there's Malcolm Reid. Works from home as a copy editor. He's single, never married, no kids. His record is spotless, not even a traffic ticket.

Malcolm opens the door and carries the tray outside.

CARMEN (V.O.)

But I got this really weird vibe when I brought up Joelle to him. So I called in a big favor with a friend in the DA's office. Obviously this can't be repeated but...

Malcolm walks a short distance to a DETACHED WORKSHOP/GARAGE. He unlocks the door.

CARMEN (V.O.)

When Malcolm was seventeen, he was convicted of some kind of sex crime. The victim was a ten-year-old girl. Same age as me at the time.

Malcolm carries the tray into the workshop, closing the door behind him. A LIGHT GLOWS in the window.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen's overhead map is NOW FILLED WITH PHOTOS OF ALL OF HER NEIGHBORS, pinned around their respective houses. She paces in front of her computer, Eric still on screen.

CARMEN

But since he wasn't charged as an adult, he's not a registered sex offender. He could live right next door to a family with kids and no one would know the difference.

ERIC

Did this guy know Kaylie?

CARMEN

He's lived here since we were kids. He even babysat for us once.

ERIC

Jesus.

Carmen stares at MALCOLM'S PHOTO and his DETACHED WORKSHOP.

ERIC

Any idea who his victim was?

EXT. TRAILER PARK -- DAY

Carmen pulls up in her car. The place reeks of desperation. RESIDENTS glare as Carmen drives through. The guys ogle and whisper, not used to seeing someone so attractive around here. She ignores them, looking for her destination.

A YOUNG WOMAN (20s) carries a grocery bag towards her trailer. Thin figure, flannel shirt and torn jeans, dark eye shadow. Someone who was pretty until life caught up with her.

Carmen parks and approaches.

CARMEN

Lily?

LILY

Who wants to know?

CARMEN

I'm Carmen Banks. We used to go to school together. You'd come by to play at my house sometimes.

Lily eyes her, recognizing.

LILY

I thought you lived in the city.

CARMEN

Well, I'm back now.

INT. LILY'S TRAILER -- DAY

Cramped. Filthy dishes. Dirty clothes. Full ashtrays. Piles of catalogs. Carmen sits on a folding chair at the table.

Lily smokes a cigarette as she takes two coffee mugs out of the microwave. Pulls creamer out of the fridge. Sniffs it.

LILY

Cream went bad. Hope you don't want any.

CARMEN

Black is fine. Thanks.

Lily drops the cream in the trash. Hands Carmen a cup and sits across from her, lighting a cigarette. Carmen eyes TAPED UP PICTURES of Lily with her TWO YOUNG KIDS.

CARMEN

How old are they?

LILY

Ricky's five. Marlene's four.

CARMEN
Are they at school?

LILY
No, they, uh, they're living with my
mom. Just for the time being.

Carmen nods, not judging.

CARMEN
Lily... Did you ever know a guy named
Malcolm Reid?

Lily stares for a long moment.

LILY
How did you know about that?

CARMEN
I remember hearing about something
bad happening to you when we were
kids. But I never knew who did it...

LILY
You must be a pretty good reporter
then. My parents did everything they
could to keep a lid on all that shit.
Didn't want no one to find out what
happened. They were so ashamed.

CARMEN
It's nothing to be ashamed about.

LILY
I didn't say I was ashamed.

CARMEN
When was the last time you spoke to
him?

LILY
God, it's been years now. Not since
he was sent away.

CARMEN
Do you think you can tell me what
happened?

LILY
Why?

CARMEN
Because I'm afraid he may have hurt
someone else.

LILY
He's not what you think he is.

CARMEN

What do I think he is?

LILY

I don't know, some kind of devil or something. But he's not.

(beat)

I miss him sometimes.

CARMEN

You miss him?

LILY

He was my friend. Don't you ever miss your friends you can't talk to no more?

Carmen nods.

LILY

A lot of guys used to look at me back then. Malcolm was the only one who looked me in the eye. He made me feel so... Special. I could just be myself with him, you know? He understood me. Way better than my parents did anyway.

For the first time, there's a slight smile.

LILY

We were gonna go on this trip together. Just the two of us. I'd never been anywhere before. I was so excited...

CARMEN

Where were you going?

LILY

It was gonna be a surprise.

She sniffles sharply.

LILY

You must think I was pretty fucking stupid.

CARMEN

No.

LILY

Look, I know what happened, okay? I know what he is. But back then, it didn't matter. He just cared about me so much. I would'a done whatever he asked me to.

CARMEN

So why didn't you go on the trip?

LILY

Cause my parents found out. That's the only reason. And then all of a sudden Malcolm was just... Gone. They told me I could never see him again.

She wipes away a tear before it can fall.

LILY

I did see him this one time though. It was a few years ago at the fair. I wanted to say hi. I knew I shouldn't but I wanted to. But when he saw me he just turned and walked away real fast, like I was nobody to him. Like I was just some fucking girl.

She crushes the remains of her cigarette into the ashtray.

CARMEN

Lily... If you had gone on that trip with him, what do you think would have happened?

A hint of fear in Lily's eyes.

LILY

I like to think we would've had a nice time... But I really don't know.

EXT. MALCOLM'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen crouches in the woods, looking through her camera at Malcolm's detached WORKSHOP, now dark.

She shifts her focus to his house. ONE LIGHT is still on. His bedroom.

CAMERA POV: Malcolm kneels by his bedside, hands clasped, eyes closed. He's praying. After a few moments, he stands and TURNS OFF THE LIGHT. The house is dark.

Carmen lowers her camera and looks back towards the WORKSHOP. Takes a deep breath, steadying her nerves.

Then slowly creeps out of the woods, quietly making her way across the lawn.

WORKSHOP

Carmen sneaks around the side opposite the house. She peeks in the windows but it's too dark to see anything inside.

And then she notices... One of the WINDOWS IS OPEN A CRACK.

She hesitates, considering. Then grips it and PULLS. It slides open with a LOUD SQUEAK. Carmen freezes, on pins and needles. She peeks around the side of the workshop.

The house lights remain dark.

She climbs through the window and pulls herself into --

INT. WORKSHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen puts her feet on a workbench and hops down. Pulls a small FLASHLIGHT out of her pocket and turns it on --

A busy but organized space. A large WORKBENCH in the center of the room, cupboards underneath. On them are MODEL AIRPLANES in various stages of construction. Metal shelves hold boxes and bins. TOOLS hang on the wall, all perfectly arranged.

Like Malcolm's house, it's so clean and tidy it's creepy.

EXT. WORKSHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Light from Carmen's flashlight can be seen dancing in the workshop window. But unbeknownst to her --

THE LIGHT IN MALCOLM'S BEDROOM TURNS BACK ON.

INT. WORKSHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen pans her light around the walls. Over the floor. She LIFTS A PIECE OF CARPET in front of the workbench and looks below. But the concrete is solid.

Her eyes rise to a small HATCH on the ceiling going to the attic. A string hangs down from it.

She pulls the string. The ATTIC LADDER swings down. She unfolds it to the ground and climbs up, step by creaky step --

ATTIC

Carmen pokes her head in, shining her light around the space. Only rafters, cobwebs and dusty insulation. No one has been up here for a long time. Carmen sighs, frustrated.

WORKSHOP

She climbs back down. Folds up the ladder, pushing it back towards the ceiling. But as it rises, she hears --

The RATTLE OF KEYS outside the door.

Carmen gasps and turns off her flashlight, ducking behind the workbench as the DOOR OPENS...

MALCOLM STANDS IN THE DOORWAY, silhouetted by the house lights. He clicks on a flashlight, slowly scanning across the space. Carmen doesn't move, crouched behind the workbench.

Malcolm slowly steps inside, panning his light. Then he notices something --

THE ATTIC HATCH on the ceiling. It's not entirely closed.

Carmen tries to control her breathing, eying the still OPEN WINDOW nearby. She cringes as Malcolm walks near her.

Malcolm pulls down the attic hatch. Unfolds the ladder. He climbs it, step by creaky step. His head disappears into the attic as he shines the light around, searching.

And Carmen makes her decision. She lunges to her feet, LEAPS UP ONTO THE WORKBENCH and JUMPS OUT THE OPEN WINDOW.

Hearing the noise, Malcolm comes down the ladder and catches a glimpse of Carmen before she disappears into the darkness.

EXT. WORKSHOP -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen lands awkwardly, falling to the ground. But she quickly stumbles back to her feet and RUNS AWAY.

EXT. FOREST -- CONTINUOUS

Branches tear at Carmen as she pushes through, not slowing.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Her house is in sight. She races across the lawn, hurriedly taking out her keys. Unlocks the front door and yanks it open.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen slams the door shut behind her, locking it.

She leans against it, catching her breath. Calming.

But outside the window, she doesn't see MALCOLM appear out of the darkness. WALKING TOWARDS THE FRONT DOOR WITH PURPOSE.

POUND! POUND! POUND!

Carmen jumps and turns. The porch light is on but it's dark inside. Malcolm can't see her staring out the window at him.

POUND! POUND! POUND!

MALCOLM

I know you're in there, Carmen!

His voice is calm but firm.

MALCOLM

What were you doing in my workshop?
What were you looking for?

Carmen can only stare, too scared to answer.

MALCOLM

It's about that girl, isn't it? The
one from the other night.

CARMEN

Malcolm, if you don't get the fuck
out of here, I'm calling the cops!

MALCOLM

That wouldn't be wise. You would
force me to tell them that you broke
into my property, and I don't want
to do that.

CARMEN

Then what the hell do you want?!

MALCOLM

I want you to search my house.

CARMEN

What?

MALCOLM

I want you to search my house, so
that you know I have nothing to hide.

A long moment passes. Carmen hesitantly opens her door a
crack. Malcolm looks into her eyes, intense but calm.

MALCOLM

If you were to go to the police, we
both know that they could never get
a warrant. This is your only chance.

He holds up his KEYS. Carmen eyes them.

INT. MALCOLM'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The bolt unlocks and Malcolm steps in, holding the door open
for Carmen. She takes a cautious step inside.

MALCOLM

Be sure to check every room.

He stands just inside the door. She watches him uneasily.
Then turns, taking in the spotless surroundings. As she
reaches the next doorway, she looks back.

Malcolm watches her. He hasn't moved.

Unnerved, Carmen makes her way deeper into the house.

LIVING ROOM

Carmen slowly walks through, footsteps creaking on the wooden floor, the tension palpable in the silent house.

A small couch and easy chair sit in front of a boxy old TV. An end table with a lamp beside it. No knickknacks. No clutter at all. Not even a spot of dust.

And not a single photograph anywhere.

STUDY

Carmen steps in. What she sees unnerves her even further.

The room is filled with TOY MODELS. Airplanes, trains, cars. All intricately crafted, meticulously painted and obsessively organized. A lonely man's work.

STAIRCASE

Carmen makes her way upstairs. She opens a door --

BEDROOM

So sparse it's sad. A twin bed, sheets tucked in crisply. A simple dresser. A COMPUTER on a desk. The walls are bare except for a CRUCIFIX hanging above the bed.

There's a BOOKSHELF filled with old paperbacks, all perfectly alphabetized. The Hardy Boys. Tom Sawyer. Treasure Island. The type of stuff a young boy would read.

She opens the closet. The clothes are hung nicely, sorted by color. She looks around the floor and ceiling, no signs of a hiding place. She pokes her head into the --

BATHROOM

So clean it looks like no one uses it.

BASEMENT

Carmen comes down the stairs, turning on the light. Like the workshop, there are organized shelves stacked with labeled bins and boxes. She looks behind them. Peers under the staircase. But there's nothing to see.

She eyes a door on the far end. Hesitantly opens it.

Inside is a water heater, so clean it looks brand new.

EXT. MALCOLM HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen steps back outside. Malcolm waits on the porch.

MALCOLM

Did you find what you were looking for?

CARMEN

No.

Malcolm considers her for a moment.

MALCOLM

Do you know what I pray for, Carmen?

(beat)

I pray that no other child has to experience what I put Lily Chambers through. Except my prayers are never answered. Because God doesn't listen to someone like me.

A genuineness in his expression.

MALCOLM

That girl you saw... Do you know her name?

CARMEN

Joelle. Joelle Montgomery.

MALCOLM

I remember her face. It was splashed across the evening news for months. You couldn't escape it.

(beat)

Do you think she's still alive?

Carmen nods.

MALCOLM

I can help you find who's keeping her.

A long moment as the unsettling proposition sinks in.

MALCOLM

You're hunting someone who's been hiding for years. You won't catch him by lurking in the woods and peeking in windows. He's far too smart for that. You have to think like him. Feel like him.

CARMEN

I don't need your help.

MALCOLM

You're running out of time.

CARMEN

He hasn't killed her in five years.
Why would he now?

MALCOLM

Because she tried to escape. If he hasn't killed her yet, you can bet he's thinking about it. Fantasizing about it. And the moment he suspects something, the moment he sees you coming, he'll do it.

He slowly approaches, eyes boring into her.

MALCOLM

Carmen... If you want to save Joelle, he can't know that you're onto him. He loves her... But at the end of the day, she can be replaced.

She glares back at him, disgusted.

CARMEN

The only difference between you and the guy I'm looking for is that you got caught.

She turns and walks away. Malcolm watches her go.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen paces, on edge. She glances repeatedly at her map on the wall. At Malcolm's picture.

Her pacing brings her to the window. She pauses there, the sight of the DARK WOODS bringing back another memory...

INT. CARMEN'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

YOUNG CARMEN stares out her window into those very same woods, trepidation in her eyes. Steeling her nerves, she opens a dresser drawer. Rummages through it. Pulls out a FLASHLIGHT.

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS -- FLASHBACK

Carmen quietly opens the door and heads outside, wearing a coat, flashlight in hand. She quickly makes her way across her lawn and into the thick forest.

EXT. FOREST -- CONTINUOUS -- FLASHBACK

Carmen searches, flashlight guiding the way. It's eerily quiet. Fog has settled in amongst the dark trees. She's all alone. But she continues on until she reaches --

A SMALL CLEARING

Where a TIRE SWING hangs from a tree, swaying in the breeze.

Carmen goes to a nearby LOG and reaches inside. Pulls out a PLASTIC BAG. Shines her light on it, revealing a PACK OF CIGARETTES and some UNOPENED BEER CANS inside. She sighs, frustrated, and hides the bag where it was.

She shines her flashlight around.

YOUNG CARMEN

Kaylie! Kaylie! Come on Kaylie, stop screwing around!

Desperation in her voice.

YOUNG CARMEN

This isn't funny anymore, Kaylie!

The tears begin to come.

YOUNG CARMEN

Kaylie, where are you?!

(sotto)

Please be okay.

She continues to search the dark, silent woods.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT -- BACK TO SCENE

Carmen gazes out the window, remembering.

INT. BEDROOM, MALCOLM'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Malcolm lies in bed, eyes wide open.

He gets out and goes to his computer. Searches for "Joelle Montgomery." Clicks on a page. A PICTURE OF A SMILING JOELLE appears. He stares at her young, innocent face.

Clicks again, bringing up a VIDEO LINK. Hits play. An OLD TV NEWS INTERVIEW WITH JOELLE'S PARENTS. A caption reads, "Joelle Montgomery Missing for Two Weeks."

MRS. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER)

It's hardest at night. Before I go to bed, I always used to check on her. Just open her door a crack and make sure she was okay. But now all I see is an empty room. An empty bed. Every time our phone rings, every time there's a knock at the door, my heart stops. I hope for something. Anything. It's the silence that's unbearable.

(MORE)

MRS. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER) (CONT'D)
 Just knowing that my little girl's
 out there somewhere, and I can't
 protect her.

A tear runs down Malcolm's cheek.

INTERVIEWER (ON COMPUTER)
 If you could talk to the individual
 who took your daughter, what would
 you say?

MR. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER)
 Give us back our little girl. For the
 love of God, if there's any good left
 in you, give us our daughter back.
 It's not too late to save her. It's
 not too late to save yourself.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

A new day. Carmen walks through the entryway and notices
 something on the floor --

A WHITE ENVELOPE beneath the mail slot. Carmen picks it up.
 Inside, written with perfect penmanship --

"Kaylie Harper was abducted 15 years ago. Joelle Montgomery
 was abducted 5 years ago. Our urges don't go away. - Malcolm"

Carmen flips to the second page. And is chilled to the bone.

IT'S A LIST OF GIRLS' NAMES: "Emily Crane. Colleen Durst.
 Crystal James. Laurie O'Connell. Alice Parker."

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- LATER

Carmen sits at her laptop, scanning articles. We catch
 snippets of pictures and text as she clicks.

"Ten-year-old Abducted in Rembroke." "Teen Vanishes in
 Flossmoor." "Girl's Remains Identified." "Parents' Worst
 Fears Confirmed." "Disappearance Baffles Police." "Where is
 Alice?" "What happened to Crystal James?"

It goes on and on...

INT. MALCOLM'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Malcolm sits at his workbench, delicately putting the
 finishing touches on a new model airplane.

Carmen appears in the open door. Malcolm sets down his model.

CARMEN
 What makes you think the same person
 took all those girls?

MALCOLM
There are similarities.

CARMEN
In the cases?

MALCOLM
In the victims.

Carmen looks away, troubled by the horrifying thought.

MALCOLM
I know you hate me, Carmen. And you should. But that doesn't mean I can't help you.

She looks back at him with great effort.

CARMEN
Are you... Better now?

MALCOLM
There's a reason why I live alone.
Why I work from home. There's no cure
for what I am. But if I can help save
one child, then maybe when my time
comes, I won't be sent away.

CARMEN
Sent away where?

MALCOLM
To hell.

Brutal honesty in his eyes.

MALCOLM
He forgives, Carmen. I have to believe
that He forgives.

Malcolm needs this just as badly as she does.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen opens the door. Malcolm enters cautiously behind her. He removes his shoes, leaving them neatly by the door. Then steps further inside, taking in the surroundings. Carmen doesn't take her eyes off of him as he moves into the house.

Malcolm looks over the walls of information. The map of the neighborhood. Pictures of the neighbors. Articles.

And a new addition -- A CHRONOLOGICAL TIMELINE featuring photos of FIVE OTHER MISSING GIRLS in between Kaylie's and Joelle's. NAMES, LOCATIONS and ABDUCTION DATES listed below their pictures. Malcolm's eyes scan them.

Carmen keeps her distance from wherever Malcolm stands, unconsciously moving to never let him get too close.

CARMEN

These girls are from all over the region. They were different ages when they were abducted. The two bodies they found...

(points to pictures)

Alice Parker and Emily Crane, were killed in different ways. One shot, the other beaten. Not to mention that none of them look anything alike. So if there's a connection, I'm not seeing it.

Malcolm eyes her curiously.

MALCOLM

Are looks the only thing that matters when you're searching for a partner?

Carmen stares back, trying to mask her disgust.

MALCOLM

You have to start thinking of this individual as a human being. A human being with wants, desires and tastes... Just like you.

CARMEN

He's nothing like me.

Malcolm smiles slightly.

MALCOLM

Could I trouble you for a cup of coffee?

Carmen glares. Then reluctantly pours him a cup. She gives it to him and steps back once again.

MALCOLM

(sips the coffee)

Thank you.

He moves closer to Kaylie's photo on the wall.

MALCOLM

Tell me about your friend.

CARMEN

Why?

MALCOLM

Because I have to be sure that they all relate.

Carmen hesitates.

MALCOLM
I'm trying to help, Carmen.

After a long moment, Carmen speaks quietly.

CARMEN
I don't know. She was... Nice. Kind.

MALCOLM
Every little girl is nice and kind.
I'm asking you to describe your best
friend.

CARMEN
I'd rather not talk about her with
you.

MALCOLM
Every second we waste, this person is
considering whether or not to kill
Joelle for her disobedience. Now
please. Tell me what you remember.

Carmen turns away, stepping to the window. This is very hard.

CARMEN
She was... Very sad. Shy, quiet. Her
parents had just divorced. Her dad
had moved away. She wasn't doing well.
I was probably her only friend. But...
She had the biggest heart of anyone I
ever knew. So compassionate and full
of love. She liked animals, especially
horses. Her mom surprised her with
one on her twelfth birthday. I'd never
seen her so happy. She only got to
ride it a few times before...

She trails off.

MALCOLM
Thank you, Carmen. May I use your
computer, please?

Carmen eyes him. Nods.

Malcolm goes to her laptop and brings up the video of Joelle's
parents that he was watching before. Skips ahead to --

MRS. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER)
We moved around a lot when Joelle was
little. It was really hard on her.
She never had a lot of friends. She
was always pretty shy and quiet.
(MORE)

MRS. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER) (CONT'D)
 But if you could get her to open up,
 she was just the warmest, most
 compassionate girl you'd ever meet.

MR. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER)
 Whenever we were driving past the
 humane society, she'd beg us to stop.
 She loved animals so much.

MRS. MONTGOMERY (ON COMPUTER)
 She got to go on a school trip to a
 ranch last year and rode a horse for
 the first time. She just fell in
 love with it. After that, all she
 wanted to do was go horseback riding.

Malcolm pauses the video. Carmen stares at the still frame
 in disbelief.

CARMEN
 A lot of young girls are shy. A lot
 of them like animals.

MALCOLM
 Of course. But others are outgoing.
 Some like going to the movies or
 playing softball or reading. Everyone
 is unique. And yet --

He motions to the missing girls' photos on the wall.

MALCOLM
 They're all described in similar
 ways. Quiet. Reserved. Few friends.
 Compassionate. Loved animals. Rode
 horses.
 (beat)
 Would you have known any of that
 about Kaylie just by looking at her?

The horror sinks in for Carmen.

CARMEN
 It wasn't some stranger who took
 Joelle... He knew her.

MALCOLM
 He knew all of them. He knew them
 all very well.

CARMEN
 You're saying that this person is
 killing the same type of girl over
 and over?

MALCOLM

Not killing, searching. He's looking for his special someone, just like we all are. And judging by how long he's kept Joelle... He's found her.

CARMEN

But how? The police went through everything, her notes, her email, she didn't have a phone.

MALCOLM

There are other ways to meet people.

The look in his eyes says he knows how.

EXT. MAIN STREET, WILLOW CREEK -- DAY

Many empty storefronts. KIDS who are out of school for the day loiter around.

INT. USED BOOKSTORE -- DAY

Carmen and Malcolm make their way past the shelves lined with used books. A few young and old CUSTOMERS browse.

MALCOLM

This is the sort of place that he would go. It's public. A girl could stop here on her way home from school. Parents let their kids go to a place like this by themselves.
(beat)
They think it's safe.

Carmen eyes a GROUP OF TEENAGE GIRLS chatting over a book.

CARMEN

How would he do it?

Malcolm eyes the teenagers, uneasy. Then shifts his focus --

TO ANOTHER GIRL (12), browsing by herself in an aisle.

MALCOLM

Wait until she's alone...

THE GIRL

Flips through a book. Her style suggests someone trying to fit in but who remains relegated to the fringes. Someone who needs a friend but would never admit it.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Don't pay any attention to her at first.

Malcolm approaches. He doesn't look at her, doesn't pay her any mind. Simply picks up a book and pretends to read.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

You have to wait for your opportunity.
Patience is essential.

The Girl casually glances in Malcolm's direction. He smiles at her. She smiles back, then continues reading.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Then, when she seems comfortable,
ask her a question. About the book
she's reading, about what she read
last, something that feels benign.

Malcolm casually turns in the girl's direction and asks her something. WE DON'T HEAR WHAT HE SAYS.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

She may be nervous at first, so put
her at ease. Make her laugh. Tell
her about the horrible book you just
finished.

Malcolm says something else and the Girl laughs a little.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

All you have to do is keep the
conversation going. Let her do most
of the talking. Show her that you're
interested in what she has to say.

They continue to chat. WE NEVER HEAR A WORD THEY SAY, ONLY
SEE THEIR REACTIONS.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

Find out what she likes. What she
hates. Compliment her but don't overdo
it. You're not trying to seduce her,
you're trying to learn about her.

The conversation continues, the Girl getting more comfortable.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

It may take one encounter. It may
take five. It may take ten. But
eventually she'll decide that you're
safe. That you're her friend. When
that happens, she'll tell you what
she wants. What her parents would
never let her have.

The Girl looks away as she talks, embarrassed by what she's saying. Malcolm nods, understanding.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

It might be cigarettes, alcohol, a new dress, or someone to kiss like all the popular girls. Whatever it is, she has to believe that you can provide it for her.

Malcolm says something and the Girl smiles, a hint of excitement in her eyes.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

But not yet. Not here. You have to leave her wanting more...

Malcolm glances at his watch and sets the book down. The Girl seems surprised and disappointed.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

So offer to meet her sometime later. Somewhere else.

Malcolm makes that offer. The Girl hesitates.

MALCOLM (V.O.)

If she agrees... She's yours.

MALCOLM

Still stands beside Carmen. He glances over at the Girl browsing by herself. HE NEVER MOVED TO SPEAK TO HER.

CARMEN

This is how you met Lily?

MALCOLM

I never hurt her, Carmen... But if I hadn't gotten caught, I don't know how far I would have gone.

The Girl walks past them, smiling politely. Malcolm looks away. Once the girl is gone, he breathes deeper, relaxing.

INT. RESTAURANT -- DAY

A small, local hole in the wall. Only a few tables occupied.

Carmen sits, her sandwich untouched. She watches Malcolm delicately slice the crust off of his grilled cheese sandwich. He takes a bite. Drinks from his glass of milk.

CARMEN

What happened to you?

Malcolm stops mid bite.

CARMEN

Were you always like this?

A MOTHER with TWO YOUNG CHILDREN sit down at a nearby table. Malcolm looks in their direction, very aware of them, before staring back down at the table.

MALCOLM

Some people are born bad. Others are made that way.

CARMEN

Which are you?

MALCOLM

My father was a bad man.

He takes another bite, slowly chewing.

CARMEN

Did he...

MALCOLM

Yes.

(beat)

And now, when I look in the mirror, he's all I see.

Carmen looks at the broken man with a hint of pity.

CARMEN

Did you ever tell anyone?

Malcolm shakes his head 'no.'

CARMEN

Why not?

MALCOLM

Why didn't you open your door?

Carmen glances down at her food.

MALCOLM

We all want to be heroes. We tell ourselves that when the time comes, we'll be brave. But deep down, most of us are cowards. That's why it's so much easier to run. To hide. To do nothing.

Carmen stares back at him.

CARMEN

You know, there's one flaw in your theory about this 'person.'

MALCOLM

What's that?

CARMEN

Kaylie never said anything. If there was some older guy that she knew, she would have said something to me.

MALCOLM

Have you ever kept a secret, Carmen?

Carmen doesn't answer, frightened by the question.

MALCOLM

Most little girls can't keep a secret forever. Eventually they just have to tell someone about their 'special friend.' That's how I got caught.

CARMEN

You think Joelle told someone?

MALCOLM

Possibly. But I'm sure the police questioned everyone.

Carmen weighs this for a long moment.

CARMEN

Police can be pretty intimidating to a twelve-year-old kid...

EXT. RESIDENTIAL ST., COLLINSVILLE / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- DAY

A TEENAGE GIRL (17) walks alone, backpack slung over her shoulder. She's dressed in black, dark makeup. A loner.

Carmen's car is parked at the curb. A CITY PARK across the street. She sits, watching as the girl approaches. Glances at her iPad, displaying a FACEBOOK PHOTO of the same girl.

As the girl passes, Carmen climbs out of her car.

CARMEN

Amanda Martin?

AMANDA turns.

CARMEN

My name's Carmen Banks, I'm a reporter with the Seattle Independent. I wanted to ask you a few questions about your friend, Joelle.

AMANDA

Will you people ever just leave me alone! I don't want to talk about that.

She turns to leave --

CARMEN

Amanda, I think she's still alive.
But I need your help to find her.

Amanda's quiet desperation is obvious as she stares back.

EXT. PARK -- DAY

Carmen sits across from Amanda at a picnic table.

AMANDA

She never mentioned any guy to me.
Her parents would've flipped if they
found out she had a boyfriend. They
never let her do anything. Wouldn't
even let her have her own phone.
They were so protective... Bunch of
good that did them.

CARMEN

Did she ever go anywhere on her own?

AMANDA

Of course. Her parents didn't get
home until six. She'd go to the mall,
coffee shops, the bookstore.

CARMEN

Did she do anything else that her
parents didn't know about?

A long moment as Amanda decides if she's going to answer.

AMANDA

Sometimes.

CARMEN

Like what?

AMANDA

Joelle wasn't this angel like everyone
made her out to be. It's all sorta
bullshit. Her parents thought they
knew her but they had no idea.

Carmen waits patiently for her to go on.

AMANDA

She was... Desperate for friends.
She'd started hanging out with these
older girls. She'd do anything to
make them like her. Stole money,
alcohol, whatever they wanted. But
when she disappeared, they acted
like they barely knew her. Some
friends, huh? Fucking cunts.

CARMEN

Did she ever steal anything from you?

Amanda hesitates.

CARMEN

I'm not a cop, and I'm not writing a word of this. I just want to find her.

AMANDA

She stole my cell phone.

A beat.

CARMEN

Did she have it the day she disappeared?

Amanda nods.

AMANDA

I told my parents I lost it. I didn't want to get her in trouble. And then it was too late. I kept calling and calling, but the phone was off. I tried for days.

CARMEN

You never told anyone?

AMANDA

I was too scared. I was twelve, I didn't know what to do.

Tears break through.

AMANDA

Now she's buried in a ditch somewhere and it's my fucking fault.

Carmen puts a hand on hers.

CARMEN

Amanda, if you could do anything to bring Joelle back, you would, right?

Amanda nods.

CARMEN

Then I need to know who she was using your phone to talk to...

EXT. CARMEN'S STREET / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- EVENING

Carmen drives home. She sees Jeremy Harper walking with his Mother on the side of the road, holding her arm.

They look up towards Carmen. She avoids eye contact and drives past.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen stands alone, staring at her neighbors' photos on her wall, anger building. Hating them.

Her eyes trace over Leland Pierce's photo --

MIND SCREEN - Leland walks his dog across the street from JOELLE'S HOUSE, watching her go inside.

Carmen looks to the next photo. Glen Nelson --

MIND SCREEN - Glen sits in his car watching Joelle play a game with her friends in the park.

Travis Wheeler --

MIND SCREEN - Joelle browses in the bookstore. Travis approaches and picks up a book, just like Malcolm did. A moment passes and then Travis turns towards Joelle --

A KNOCK at the door, jarring Carmen back to reality.

INT. / EXT. ENTRYWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen goes to the door and opens it to reveal Jeremy.

JEREMY

I saw you driving by earlier. Didn't realize you were still in town. Just thought I'd stop by and see how you were doing.

CARMEN

I... I'm fine. Figured I'd stay a few more days. Get some work done on the house.

JEREMY

Oh. Well I was heading on into town to get a bite to eat. You wanna come?

Carmen hesitates.

CARMEN

You know, I'm real tired. Think I'm just gonna head to bed.

Jeremy nods, hurt, but plays it off.

JEREMY

Okay. Well if you need any help with your house, let me know.

CARMEN

Okay.

JEREMY

Have a good night.

Jeremy heads off.

CARMEN

Jeremy?

(he turns back)

Do you ever wonder who really did it? Who really killed Kaylie?

He thinks about it for a long moment.

JEREMY

I used to replay that night over and over in my head, trying to figure out if I could have changed what happened to her. But eventually, I realized that I couldn't. It's like the pastor said. All we can do is remember her and try to move on.

CARMEN

What if we can't?

JEREMY

Then how can you live? I miss my little sister every day, Carmen. But no matter what I do, I can't bring her back. No one can.

Carmen manages a nod. She watches him go and closes the door.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen slowly walks back into the house.

Her CELL RINGS. She answers.

CARMEN (INTO PHONE)

Carmen Banks.

AMANDA (FROM PHONE)

(fast, scared)

I got the records.

Carmen stops in her tracks.

AMANDA (FROM PHONE)

The customer service lady was a total bitch but I threw a shitfit and she finally sent them to me.

CARMEN

Okay Amanda, I'm gonna give you my email address --

AMANDA

I started reading them. I shouldn't have. I had to stop. It's so fucked up. I swear to God, I didn't know about any of this.

CARMEN

Reading them? The phone records?

AMANDA

The transcript.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- LATER

A PAGE comes off the printer, showing a TRANSCRIPT OF TEXT MESSAGES (PHONE NUMBERS followed by the individual TEXTS). Carmen picks it up, reading with trepidation.

"Hey, its Joelle!" / "Hey! So we on for tomorrow?" / "Idk..." / ":(I got what u wanted." / "My parents would kill me if they found out." / "Do u always do what your parents tell you to?" / "Okay, how much \$ should i bring?" / "I've got u covered." / "U rock." / "See u soon :)"

And that's all there is...

Carmen focuses on the PHONE NUMBER in front of the incoming texts. With trembling hands, she picks up her cell. Dials the numbers one by one. Holds the phone to her ear.

After what feels like an eternity, she hears it RING.

And RING.

Then an AUTOMATED VOICE.

AUTOMATED VOICE (V.O.)

We're sorry, the number you have dialed is not in service.

Carmen exhales, regathering herself.

Then a realization hits her. She eyes the phrase "I got what u wanted." Turns to the photos of the other MISSING GIRLS.

She goes to her computer, typing fast. Pulls up a website with a PHOTO OF ONE OF THE GIRLS - "ALICE PARKER." Various information listed below it. She pulls out her cell and dials.

RECEPTIONIST (FROM PHONE)

Riviera Lake Police Department.

CARMEN (INTO PHONE)
Hi, I need to speak with a detective
about the Alice Parker case.

EXT. MALCOLM'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

CARMEN (PRE-LAP)
You're not going to believe this...

INT. MALCOLM'S WORKSHOP -- DAY

Malcolm sits on a stool beside the workbench full of models,
reading the TEXT MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT as Carmen paces.

CARMEN
You said he'd offer her something
she'd want. Something her parents
wouldn't let her have. Joelle was
desperate for friends. She used to
steal stuff for some older girls to
try and impress them.
(points to text messages)
What does this sound like?

MALCOLM
(reading aloud)
I got what you wanted... My parents
would kill me if they found out...
How much money should I bring?
(beat)
Alcohol. Cigarettes. Pot maybe.
Impossible to know for sure.

CARMEN
Maybe not. Two of the other girls'
bodies were found shortly after their
murders.

She pulls out two stapled stacks of paper. Hands them over.

CARMEN
I was able to convince the detectives
to slip me autopsy reports since the
cases are so old.

Malcolm flips into one.

CARMEN
That's Alice Parker, the second girl.
Killed the same day that she was
abducted, just like Kaylie. She had
alcohol in her system. A lot of it.

MALCOLM
What about the other girl?

CARMEN
She had something else.

Carmen turns several pages. Points to text.

MALCOLM
(reading)
Diazepam?

CARMEN
It's an anxiety drug. Emily Crane
was held captive for three weeks
before she was killed. Her system
was loaded with the stuff.

Malcolm thinks about it, realizing.

MALCOLM
He needed to keep her calm. Keep her
manageable.
(beat)
Did Joelle seem drugged when you saw
her that night?

CARMEN
She was out of her mind.

Malcolm stands, beginning to pace.

MALCOLM
I was wrong about him. I thought
he'd be thoughtful, patient. But
he's not. At least naturally.

CARMEN
How do you know?

MALCOLM
Because Diazepam isn't some over the
counter drug. He'd need a prescription
to get it. He'd have to keep refilling
it for years.

CARMEN
And if he's local...

MALCOLM
He's getting it somewhere in town.

INT. PHARMACY -- DAY

PATTY WOODALL WORKS BEHIND THE COUNTER in her lab coat. As
she sees Carmen approaching, her expression hardens.

PATTY
Why are you still here?

EXT. BEHIND PHARMACY -- DAY

Patty smokes a cigarette, shaking her head as she looks over a TYPED OUT LIST OF THEIR NEIGHBORS. Carmen in front of her.

PATTY

No way in hell. Took me eight months to find this job. I'm not gonna lose it by doing some illegal shit.

CARMEN

I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important. All I need to know is if anyone on this list has a prescription for Diazepam.

PATTY

You don't think I see right through this? This isn't about some girl. It's about Kaylie. Well I hate to break it to you, Carmen, but she's dead. If you really cared about her, you'd let her rest in peace.

Carmen takes a breath, fighting back her emotions.

CARMEN

Patty, I still think of you as a friend so I'm gonna be completely honest. I believe there's someone on *your* street who kidnaps, rapes and murders little girls. Right now, he's holding a girl named Joelle Montgomery. He's been holding her for five years. He could be right next door to you. Right next door to your kids. And if I don't find him, he's not going anywhere. Now are you sure you won't help me?

Patty considers Carmen for a long moment.

PATTY

So if you think it's one of the neighbors... Then why aren't I on this list?

CARMEN

Because Kaylie was your friend too. Don't think I've forgotten.

Patty hesitantly looks at the list in her hands.

PATTY

I get off at eight. Meet me back here then.

EXT. PHARMACY / INT. CARMEN'S CAR -- NIGHT

Carmen sits in her car, parked on the street near the pharmacy. She looks over every few seconds, anxious.

Finally, Patty walks out. Carmen steps out of her car to meet her. Patty hands over the FOLDED UP LIST without a word. Carmen unfolds it to reveal --

ALL OF THE NAMES HAVE BEEN CROSSED OFF. A punch in the gut.

PATTY

You had me so paranoid, I checked for everything. None of them have prescriptions for any psych meds. No one living with them does neither.

CARMEN

Are there any other pharmacies in town?

PATTY

It's the only one in twenty miles.

CARMEN

Shit.

PATTY

So what are you gonna do now?

CARMEN

I don't know.

Patty takes out her pack of cigarettes. Motions to Carmen.

CARMEN

Why not.

She takes one and Patty lights it for her. Lights her own. Carmen takes a long drag.

CARMEN

Kaylie used to nab ours from her older brother.

PATTY

She always was a troublemaker.

Carmen smiles a little, remembering.

PATTY

I don't blame you for leaving, Carmen. So many things around here still remind me of her.

CARMEN

It wasn't the memories... It was the stares. No matter where I went, I could always feel everyone's eyes on me. After awhile, I just couldn't take it anymore.

Patty eyes her, torn. Then --

PATTY

You know... The pharmacy isn't the only place to get a drug like Diazepam in this town.

Carmen turns. Patty's hands tremble as she takes a drag.

PATTY

Couple years ago, my little girl got sick. I couldn't afford her meds so some folks told me about this guy I could go to. I only went to him once and would never go back. Prescription meds weren't the only thing he was selling. He's dangerous, Carmen. If I were you, I'd stay the hell away.

CARMEN

Who is he?

PATTY

His name's on your list.

Carmen looks down at the list, shocked by the revelation.

PATTY

Problem is, he was in jail when that Joelle Montgomery girl disappeared. But that doesn't mean he couldn't be dealing to the guy who has her.

EXT. TRAVIS WHEELER'S HOUSE -- DAY

CAMERA POV: A MAN approaches the run-down house, sketchy by the looks of him. He knocks on the front door. Looks around, anxious. The door opens, revealing Travis. An exchange occurs.

The CAMERA SHUTTER snaps, momentarily blacking out the view.

As the image returns, a new MAN stands at the door.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

MEN AND WOMEN (16 to 60) make DRUG EXCHANGES with Travis through the DAY AND NIGHT. The blackout of the CAMERA SHUTTER TRANSITIONS BETWEEN THEM.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen sips coffee, tired but alert. Eric is on the computer screen via skype.

ERIC (ON SKYPE)

When was the last time you slept?

CARMEN

I'm fine.

ERIC

This guy isn't going to sell one pill at a time. Even if you're right, you might have to wait weeks.

CARMEN

Then I'll wait weeks.

ERIC

(sighs)

Carmen, look. You've taken this further than I could have ever expected... But you need to go back to the police.

CARMEN

What? Why?

ERIC

You can prove that Joelle knew her captor. It might help them.

CARMEN

The police had five years to find Joelle and they haven't. They had fifteen years to solve Kaylie's case and they couldn't.

ERIC

So you want to withhold vital evidence from an ongoing investigation? Do you have any idea what kind of shit storm we'll be in if that girl's body shows up in a ditch?

CARMEN

Then for your sake, this conversation never happened.

Eric locks his jaw. Another decision to make him gray.

CARMEN

Just give me a few more days. Once I know who it is, then we can call the cops. When we're sure.

ERIC

A few more days. Then I'm handing
this over whether you've found her
or not.

EXT. TRAVIS WHEELER'S HOUSE / EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

Carmen sits on a log in the trees, bundled up in a dark coat.
A small opening through the branches lets her see the house.

She lowers her camera as the latest client gets into his car
and drives away. Sips coffee from a thermos, fighting to
stay awake.

MALCOLM (O.S.)

Hey.

Carmen jumps. Malcolm approaches out of the darkness.

CARMEN

Jesus Christ, you scared the shit
out of me.

MALCOLM

I thought you might be hungry.

He hands her a tupperware container.

MALCOLM

It's just a sandwich.

Carmen takes it from him, surprised by his thoughtfulness.

CARMEN

Thanks.

She pulls out the sandwich and takes a bite, chewing
ravenously. Malcolm watches her.

MALCOLM

So what will you do when all of this
is over?

CARMEN

Go home. And never come back.

Her response clearly hurts.

MALCOLM

You know, it probably doesn't matter,
but you're the first girl around my
age that I've ever felt attracted to.

Carmen turns, staring at him.

MALCOLM

I don't expect you to feel anything for me. It just made me realize... Maybe there's still hope. Maybe I can get better.

CARMEN

You know, if my father did to me what yours did to you, I'd get as far away from here as I could.

MALCOLM

Did leaving make things better?

Carmen hesitates. Then shakes her head 'no.'

MALCOLM

I thought about moving. But I'd still be hiding. Our demons always find us eventually. Either we confront them, or they consume what's left of us.

CARMEN

Did you ever confront your father?

MALCOLM

I used to fantasize about it all the time. What I'd say. What I'd do. I had it all planned out. Every step...

A long moment.

CARMEN

So what happened?

MALCOLM

He died.

From the look on his face, there's a lot more to it.

CARMEN

How?

Malcolm weighs saying more. Then sees --

MALCOLM

Where's he going?

Carmen turns to see Travis exiting his house. HE WALKS UP A TRAIL INTO THE WOODS, turning on a FLASHLIGHT.

CARMEN

It's a little late for a walk.

She gets to her feet.

MALCOLM
What are you doing?

CARMEN
Following him.

Malcolm watches her go, hesitating.

MALCOLM
Wait.

He hurries after her. They quietly move across the edge of Travis's lawn and make their way through the trees --

TRAIL

Travis's flashlight cuts through the darkness. Carmen and Malcolm follow slowly and silently, keeping a distance.

A LAYER OF FOG hangs in the trees, making the forest even more ominous. But most terrifying of all is the silence. Only the faint sounds of their footsteps and breathing.

MALCOLM
You've done stuff like this before,
right?

CARMEN
Not exactly.

Ahead, Travis's light passes out of sight, obscured by trees.

Carmen and Malcolm pick up the pace, tension rising. The TRAIL TURNS and then OPENS UP to reveal --

A NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE

Threatening on this dark, foggy night. ONE LIGHT glows inside.

CARMEN
That's Leland Pierce's house.

Travis approaches it. But he suddenly slows, as if sensing something. He turns towards them, shining his flashlight.

Carmen and Malcolm step back. They stay still, hidden in the darkness of the trees, holding their breath as Travis's light moves past. He doesn't see them.

Travis turns and makes his way around the side of the house.

They quietly follow, staying in the trees.

But Travis doesn't stop at the door. He keeps walking past the house towards the forest's edge --

Before DISAPPEARING DOWN ANOTHER TRAIL.

Carmen and Malcolm follow him in.

TRAIL

Unlike the last path, it feels like people rarely come this way. It's narrower, darker, more claustrophobic.

CARMEN

Do you know where this goes?

MALCOLM

No.

Travis's light winks in and out as he makes his way through the winding path. Then it DISAPPEARS completely.

Carmen and Malcolm move cautiously ahead in the darkness. The trail winds around another bend --

And opens up into a SMALL CLEARING.

A light glows behind the windows of a DILAPIDATED HOUSE. It's completely isolated, surrounded by trees. A whole new level of seediness and disrepair.

CARMEN

Who lives here?

MALCOLM

No one. It's been abandoned for years.

They watch as Travis walks to the door and knocks. It opens, but they can't see who's inside from their angle. Travis goes in and the door closes behind him.

CARMEN

Well someone's in there now.

(beat)

Wait here.

Malcolm watches nervously as Carmen creeps towards the house.

EXT. DILAPIDATED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen moves silently through the weeds.

She goes to a window, peering inside. It's TOO DARK TO SEE MUCH but there's a light coming from the back of the house. FAINT MUSIC EMANATING from inside.

Carmen carefully creeps around the side of the house. A DIM LIGHT SHINES INSIDE a window. Carmen approaches. Peeks inside --

A pig sty. Torn wallpaper. Holes in the wall. Mold. Clothes, blankets, broken glass, and God knows what else scattered about.

Carmen moves to the next window. Looks in --

A BATHROOM. Or what's left of it. Toilet cracked. A bathtub filled with some dark disgusting liquid, bottles and other trash floating. Syringes on the floor. It's a CRACK HOUSE.

She moves on to the next window. Inside she sees a MAN LYING IN THE CORNER atop a pile of blankets, his shirt off. He stares, deadpan, not at Carmen, not at anything.

CARMEN

Jesus...

Suddenly she sees MOTION BEHIND HER REFLECTED IN THE WINDOW. She turns as --

TRAVIS SLAMS HER into the side of the house, HOLDING HER BY THE NECK. Eyes coldly focused. Carmen squirms but he holds her tight.

TRAVIS

Scream and I'll kill you.

He's chillingly calm. Carmen sees a knife in his other hand. She stops fighting him, eyes wide with fear.

TRAVIS

Care to explain what you're doing out here... *Neighbor.*

CARMEN

I'm looking for someone.

TRAVIS

Well, you found someone didn't ya. Now here's the thing...

He raises the knife, flipping it around in his hand so she can clearly see it.

TRAVIS

I don't like cops. They're takers. Me? I'm a keeper. I'll do anything I damn well please to keep what's mine.

CARMEN

I'm not a cop.

TRAVIS

Then what are you?

He traces his knife down her cheek. Carmen squirms.

TRAVIS

I could give two fucks that you're a woman, makes no difference to me. No one will find you where I bury ya.

Carmen breathes deep, finding her confidence.

CARMEN

How old is your daughter, Travis?

TRAVIS

What did you say?

CARMEN

Because if I were you, I wouldn't leave her home alone at night.

TRAVIS

What the fuck are you talking about?

CARMEN

One of your clients abducts little girls. He's holding one right now somewhere on our street. I don't care about you, you piece of shit. I'm looking for him.

Carmen glares at him.

TRAVIS

You're telling me there's some child predator living down the street from my little girl?

CARMEN

I need to know if you've been selling Diazepam to any of our neighbors. He's been buying for years.

Realization in Travis's eyes.

CARMEN

What's his name, Travis?

EXT. GLEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Through the lit bedroom window, we see GLEN NELSON gently lift his wife, Eve, out of her wheelchair and into bed.

Carmen and Malcolm stand in the dark woods, watching them.

CARMEN

Travis said he always buys in bulk, every month or two.

Inside, Glen delicately arranges the covers. Gets Eve a glass of water. She smiles and takes a sip.

CARMEN

Do you think she knows?

MALCOLM

I've heard of cases where the wife never knew anything. But there are others where they were both in on it the entire time.

Glen goes to the window and closes the curtains. The light inside turns off, making the house dark.

CARMEN

I'd never guess they could do something like this.

MALCOLM

Isn't that what the neighbors always say?

The question hangs in the silence.

MALCOLM

All that we know is he buys pills. We need more than that.

CARMEN

I could just go knock on their door.

Malcolm turns, horrified by the prospect.

CARMEN

They have no reason to suspect anything. They've known me since I was a kid.

(beat)

We are neighbors after all.

INT. KITCHEN, GLEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen sits with Glen and Eve, eating a home cooked dinner. Though the atmosphere is pleasant, there is an underlying tension in Carmen's behavior.

EVE

Carmen, I'm surprised you haven't gotten married yet.

CARMEN

Guess I just haven't found the right guy.

GLEN

Well you sure won't find one hanging around here. I figured you'd leave town right after the service.

CARMEN

Yeah, well, I've just been catching up with some old friends. Thinking about getting some work done on mom's house so I can put it on the market.

EVE

There's an idea. I've always said to Glen that it didn't make sense for you to keep it. And Glen could do some of the work for you. He'll give you a 'good neighbor' discount.

Glen nods, cutting the meat on his plate.

CARMEN

Thanks. That'd be great.

EVE

Carmen, I've been meaning to tell you...

She takes Carmen's hand. Looks into her eyes.

EVE

I am so sorry I couldn't make it to poor Kaylie's funeral. It's hard for me to get places these days. But I wanted you to know that I prayed for her. I'm sure she's in a better place.

Carmen nods, forcing a smile.

KNOCK...

Distant. So subtle that Carmen almost misses it. She turns, not quite sure if she heard it.

GLEN

So you ever find out anything about that girl?

EVE

What girl?

Knock, knock...

Carmen's eyes lock on a FLOOR VENT. THE SOUND IS COMING FROM THE BASEMENT. Irregular tapping on a distant metal pipe.

GLEN

Some crazed teenager showed up at Carmen's door a few nights ago.

Carmen quickly recomposes herself, looking back to her hosts.

CARMEN

It was nothing, really. The police think it was just some drunk high schooler. I really haven't thought about her since.

EVE

Well it's a good thing you didn't open your door. Who knows what kind of trouble you'd have let in.

Knock... Glen and Eve still don't seem to notice it.

CARMEN

What?

EVE

I just said that sort of thing sounds like trouble.

CARMEN

What if it wasn't trouble?

EVE

Beg your pardon?

CARMEN

What if she just needed help?

Eve smiles warmly.

EVE

Sometimes getting involved in other people's problems just makes things worse for everyone. Tell her about your brother, dear.

Glen keeps eating as he speaks.

GLEN

My brother lived in Portland. One night he was walking home and saw a young woman getting mugged in an alley. But instead of calling the police, he decided to play hero.

Knock...

GLEN

Only problem is the mugger had a gun. He shot my brother dead on the spot. Then he shot the woman too. See, if my brother had just minded his own business and walked away, that woman might have lost some money, but she'd still be alive. My brother'd still be alive too.

Carmen stares at him.

EVE

Carmen, you've barely touched your dinner. Would you like me to make you something else?

CARMEN

What? No, I'm fine.

(beat)

I need to use the restroom.

BATHROOM

Carmen washes her hands feverishly. She looks in the mirror, taking a breath, steadying herself.

HALLWAY

Carmen steps out of the bathroom. But she stops, noticing the many FRAMED PHOTOS of Glen and Eve that line the hallway. One stands out from the rest --

An OLD PHOTO OF GLEN AND EVE WITH THEIR DAUGHTER, HEATHER (12). Glen is younger, happier. Eve is standing, before the accident. Heather looks so youthful and vibrant.

EVE (O.S.)

If it was up to me, I'd take that one down too.

Carmen jumps and turns. Eve rolls closer, eyeing the photo.

EVE

Took me forever to convince Glen to get rid of all of Heather's old stuff. It's as if he wanted to be reminded of what happened.

CARMEN

But... Wouldn't you want to remember your daughter?

EVE

Of course. But not how we lost her.

CARMEN

I'm sorry, didn't a drunk driver --

EVE

I spose your mom must have never told you since you were so young at the time.

(sighs)

Glen was the only one who'd been drinking that night. And I was the one who let him get behind the wheel.

Carmen can't mask her surprise.

EVE

It's a hard reality to wake up to, knowing that you killed your only daughter. It took me years to forgive him. He wanted to have another baby, but I couldn't anymore after the accident. I suppose it was God's way of punishing him. Of punishing us.

Carmen stares back at the photo of the happy family, seeing the man she's been looking for. Knock...

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen and Malcolm stand before an OBITUARY PHOTO of HEATHER NELSON, now pinned on the wall next to the other victims. Of all the girls, Joelle looks the most similar to Heather.

CARMEN

After Kaylie disappeared, Glen always checked in on me. Always asked how I was doing. Christ, the bastard was even at her funeral.

She glares hatefully at his image. The monster next door.

MALCOLM

That's not the only place he was. I got anxious waiting for you all day so I started thinking. Only Kaylie was from this town. How did he find all those other girls?

CARMEN

Does it matter?

MALCOLM

Glen's company builds houses. They work all over the area. So I started calling the other towns that the girls disappeared from.

He pulls several papers out of his pocket and unfolds them to reveal PRINTED PERMITS.

MALCOLM

Nelson Contracting filed for construction permits in Spanning, Flossmoor and Riviera Lake around the time that those girls were taken. Glen signed each permit. I'm still waiting to hear from the other offices.

But Carmen doesn't respond. She just glares at Glen's image.

MALCOLM

Carmen... We've got him. We need to go to the police.

CARMEN

We can't.

MALCOLM

Why not?

CARMEN

Because they'll never believe me.

She turns to face him.

CARMEN

They still think it's my fault that they never found Kaylie in time.

A long moment.

MALCOLM

Then what do you intend to do?

The look on her face says it all.

MALCOLM

Please tell me you're not thinking about breaking into their house.

(beat)

Carmen, we don't even know for sure if she's still alive --

CARMEN

She's alive!

Malcolm cringes, startled by the outburst.

CARMEN

I heard her, Malcolm. I heard her knocking. She's locked up in their basement and I'm gonna get her out.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- LATER

Carmen pulls on her coat. Ties her shoes.

She glances at a nearby mirror. A scared young woman stares back at her. But with a deep breath, she steadies herself.

EXT. GLEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The old home is dark and quiet. Only the front light on.

Carmen emerges from the trees and creeps towards the house, making her way around it to a BACK DOOR. She glances around nervously. But it's too dark to see if anyone is watching.

After a moment's hesitation, she pulls out a PRY BAR.

Then PUSHES IT AGAINST THE GLASS WINDOW. Harder. Harder --

POP! The GLASS BREAKS under the pressure.

Carmen stops. Listens.

All is quiet. The house lights remain off.

She reaches a hand in and UNLOCKS THE DOOR. Slowly eases it open and steps inside --

INT. GLEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen makes her way down a dark hallway, carefully lifting each foot and silently setting it back down. Step after tension filled step taking her deeper into the house.

She eyes the NELSON FAMILY PHOTOS on the wall as she walks by. Their smiling faces appearing creepy in the near darkness.

Carmen rounds a corner, passing by an OPEN DOOR. She freezes, hearing SOMEONE BREATHING. Turns to see --

GLEN AND EVE SLEEPING IN THEIR BEDROOM.

Carmen quietly steps past the door -- CREAK!

From the wooden floor. Carmen freezes, looking into the bedroom. Glen STIRS, repositioning himself on the bed. But he doesn't open his eyes.

Carmen exhales. She tiptoes away from the bedroom towards a CLOSED DOOR. Turns the knob --

Squeak. She hesitates, then slowly pulls the handle. The door opens -- But it's just a closet.

Carmen gently closes it and moves deeper into the house. Past more dark rooms. Until she comes to another CLOSED DOOR. She carefully turns the handle. It opens silently to reveal --

A staircase descending into the basement.

Carmen hesitates, gathering her courage.

Then slips through the door and eases it closed behind her, making it pitch black.

Sounds of her coat rustling, and then her small FLASHLIGHT turns on, dimly illuminating the space. The old stairs creak as she walks down into --

GLEN'S BASEMENT

She shines her light around. The basement is partially finished. DUSTY BOXES and OLD JUNK. COBWEBS in the corners.

And then she hears --

KNOCK... Quiet and distant.

Carmen spins her light towards the sound. The beam comes to rest on a PLYWOOD WALL with a DOOR. The space behind it sealed off from the basement. And she knows --

This is where he's keeping her.

Carmen approaches, resting her ear on the door.

Knock... Knock... A little louder than before.

Carmen tries the doorknob. Locked. She pushes her shoulder against the door. It's solid. Tries the plywood wall but it doesn't budge.

Setting her flashlight down, she takes out the pry bar and shoves it into the gap between the door and frame.

She pulls. But the pry bar slips out. She shoves it deeper into the gap and pulls harder. The wood SPLINTERS slightly.

Knock, knock...

CARMEN
I'm coming, Joelle...

She makes progress little by little, splintering wood away around the doorknob.

CARMEN
I'm coming for you..

She goes at the wood with even more determination, pushing the pry bar in and levering against the wood with all of her strength. The wood door frame SPLINTERS OUT. Carmen pulls on it, once, twice, and THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN.

CARMEN
Joelle?

No answer. Only darkness ahead. Carmen lowers the pry bar. Picks up her flashlight and shines it into the dark space.

CARMEN
Joelle??

She trails off as she sees --

A dirty storage room. Filled with BOXES overflowing with a YOUNG GIRL'S BELONGINGS. Toys, clothes, keepsakes.

Carmen rummages through a box and picks up a doll. The name "HEATHER" has been written on the back of it. Confused, Carmen pulls out some PHOTOS. ALL OF HEATHER.

It's all of her old things. Everything perfectly clean, like someone looks after them.

Knock. Knock. Carmen looks up, seeing the source -- The OLD FURNACE. THE METALLIC CLANG COMING FROM INSIDE.

NO SIGN OF JOELLE.

CARMEN

No...

The sound of a SHOTGUN PUMPING A SHELL INTO THE CHAMBER.

GLEN (O.S.)

Stop right there! Don't move!

Carmen freezes.

GLEN (O.S.)

Turn around! Slowly!

Carmen turns, squinting as GLEN'S FLASHLIGHT shines in her eyes. As Glen sees who it is, confusion washes over him.

GLEN

Carmen? What the hell are you doing down here?

The sound of POLICE SIRENS BUILD.

EXT. GLEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Several POLICE CARS are parked. Neighbors have gathered, watching the commotion. Patty, Leland, Travis.

Carmen leans against one of the squad cars, HANDCUFFED, still in a state of disbelief. Detective McBride in front of her.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Mr. Nelson said he's been suffering anxiety attacks ever since his daughter died. He admitted buying meds illegally because he can't afford insurance.

(beat)

Do you have any other evidence to suggest that Mr. and Mrs. Nelson have been holding a girl captive?

CARMEN

(whispers)

No.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Do you have any evidence to suggest
that any of your neighbors have been
secretly imprisoning a missing girl?

Carmen eyes her neighbors gathered in the distance, watching
her. She shakes her head 'no.'

An Officer approaches, whispers in McBride's ear.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

The Nelsons have decided not to press
charges, out of respect to your late
mother. You're damn lucky.

He uncuffs her. Carmen looks to see Glen and Eve watching
her from their window, Eve's face red from crying.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

Listen to me, Carmen...

He looks her in the eyes, trying to keep his composure.

DETECTIVE MCBRIDE

I wanted to find Kaylie too. I never
gave up on her. Not until we found
her bones. And I lost everything
because of it. My marriage. My kids.
If you don't let this go, it will
destroy you too.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Carmen sits at the table, phone pressed to her ear, tears in
her eyes.

ERIC (FROM PHONE)

I sent you there to write a story,
not break into people's houses and
upend their lives.

CARMEN

I made a mistake...

ERIC (FROM PHONE)

No, you lied. You told me that Kaylie
Harper lived down the street from
you. You didn't say that she was
your best friend. If you had, I never
would have sent you there.

CARMEN

I shouldn't have lied, I know, but Joelle is still out there --

ERIC

Carmen, you were just at your best friend's funeral. Be honest with yourself. Was it really Joelle Montgomery on your doorstep... Or did you just want it to be?

Carmen can't bring herself to respond.

ERIC

You need to get out of that town. It's ruined your life.

CARMEN

I'm still gonna finish a story, Eric. I'll have it to you in twenty-four hours.

ERIC

There's no need. You're done with the Independent. I'm sorry.

The line clicks dead. Carmen slowly lowers the phone.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- LATER

Carmen stands in front of the wall of suspects, her obsession. Her eyes drift over the photos, the articles, the text message transcript, the map of her neighborhood. The pictures of Joelle's house and parents. The other missing girls. Kaylie.

And in the center of it all -- Joelle's photograph.

Carmen takes the photo of Joelle off the wall, staring deep into the eyes of the smiling young girl.

Her feet carry her towards the entryway. We hear POUNDING OUTSIDE as we round a corner into --

ENTRYWAY -- FLASHBACK

CARMEN'S FIRST PERSON POINT OF VIEW on the night the girl appeared on her doorstep.

We approach the door, the POUNDING INTENSIFYING as we draw nearer. We see SOMEONE STANDING OUTSIDE.

GIRL

IS ANYONE THERE?! OPEN THE DOOR! LET ME IN!

The doorbell rings over and over as we get closer. Closer.

ENTRYWAY -- PRESENT

Carmen reaches the door. One of the windows still spider webbed with cracks from the girl hitting it. She traces her hand over it and gazes out --

ENTRYWAY -- FLASHBACK

We see a TEENAGE GIRL standing outside the window.

GIRL
SOMEONE OPEN THE DOOR! OPEN THE
FUCKING DOOR!

But SHE'S DIFFERENT NOW. Her hair. Her features.

IT'S NOT JOELLE MONTGOMERY. Just a similar looking girl.

ENTRYWAY -- PRESENT

Carmen hesitates, looking down at Joelle's picture in her hands, far more uncertain. Tears beginning to well up.

KAYLIE (O.S.)
CARMEN! CARMEN!

She looks out the window to see --

KAYLIE HARPER (12), standing on the doorstep.

KAYLIE
CARMEN! CARMEN, HELP ME!

Carmen rips open the door --

But there's no one outside.

Carmen is alone, staring out into the night.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Carmen walks back in, staring at KAYLIE'S PORTRAIT. Pulls it off the wall, holding it close. She collapses to the floor, tears flowing. Years of pent-up guilt unleashed.

FADE OUT:

EXT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

A dreary, rainy day.

MALCOLM (PRE-LAP)
I heard from the Collinsville records
office.

INT. CARMEN'S HOUSE -- DAY

Carmen and Malcolm sit at the table, a somber mood.

MALCOLM

Nelson Contracting has never done any work up there. There's no way to connect Glen to Joelle.

(beat)

I'm still waiting to hear from Rembroke and Cherry Creek. They said they'd email if they find anything.

CARMEN

They won't.

A long moment.

MALCOLM

I should have gone in there with you.

CARMEN

It doesn't matter.

MALCOLM

Yes it does.

(beat)

You asked me how my father died... It was a heart attack, Carmen. An ordinary, run-of-the-mill heart attack. I was fourteen. And I still cried at his funeral... Because I wasn't the one who killed him. Because I was always too damn scared. And I haven't changed.

He sits at the table like a meek little boy.

CARMEN

Why did you believe me when I said I saw Joelle?

MALCOLM

I trusted you. And I still do.

CARMEN

But you never saw her. How do you know I wasn't wrong? How do you know that anything we found was real?

Malcolm doesn't answer.

CARMEN

It was a fantasy, Malcolm. You needed it to be Joelle and so did I.

(MORE)

CARMEN (CONT'D)

But it wasn't her. It was just some girl. Some stranger.

MALCOLM

Carmen... There's still another house on the street --

CARMEN

There's no one to find. Joelle Montgomery is dead. And so is Kaylie. She's not coming back.

MALCOLM

You can't keep blaming yourself for what happened to her --

CARMEN

It was my fault that she was out there! It was my fault they didn't find her in time!

Malcolm stares at the broken woman across from him.

MALCOLM

I'm not the one you should be telling this to, Carmen.

Carmen looks away, knowing exactly what he means. And the very thought of it terrifies her.

EXT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Rain falls on the old Harper home.

Carmen stands at a distance, staring. But this time, she approaches it. Walks across the lawn. Up the steps. To the door. She hesitates.

And then knocks.

A few moments later, the door opens to reveal Mrs. Harper, the same empty expression on her face that she had at the funeral. Carmen smiles weakly.

CARMEN

Hello, Mrs. Harper. It's Carmen. Kaylie's old friend.

Mrs. Harper's expression changes ever so slightly, as if she recognizes her.

INT. KAYLIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

The door opens and Mrs. Harper leads Carmen in. Carmen takes a sharp breath as she sees --

A young girl's bedroom. Unchanged since the day Kaylie disappeared. Everything still in its place. Bed made. Pictures on the walls. A room full of memories from a time that Carmen long ago tried to forget.

Mrs. Harper sits on Kaylie's bed, expression still one of muted detachment. Carmen joins her. A few moments pass. And then finally, Carmen finds the courage to speak.

CARMEN

We used to sneak out into the woods at night after everyone else had gone to sleep. There was this old swing we'd found. It was our spot. Sometimes, we'd swipe a pack of cigarettes or a couple of beers and bring them along. We wanted to grow up so fast. We'd just talk and talk for hours. About leaving this town. Going to college. Raising our own families next to each other.

Carmen takes a deep breath, trying to hold it together.

CARMEN

We'd always walk home together. But that night, we'd gotten into a fight about something. I can't even remember what it was about. But we just went our separate ways... And she never made it home. I...

(beat)

I was the last one to see her alive.

For the first time, Mrs. Harper makes eye contact. And as Carmen looks at her, the words flow out.

CARMEN

The police asked me if I knew where she was. I lied to them. I lied to everyone. I was too afraid of getting in trouble for being out there. I thought that she'd be okay. That she'd walk in the door at any moment. I was so scared. If I had just said something, they would have known where to start looking. They might have found her in time. They might have caught who was responsible. They told me that every minute counts and I let them slip away. The minutes become hours... And then days... And then years.

(beat)

I don't know who killed your daughter, Mrs. Harper. But it was my fault they didn't find her until now.

A long moment passes.

Then Mrs. Harper puts her hand on Carmen's.

Tears fill Carmen's eyes. Mrs. Harper puts her arms around her as Carmen leans her head on her shoulder. And with a quiet but comforting voice, Mrs. Harper whispers.

MRS. HARPER

It's okay... It's okay...

They sit together, Mrs. Harper holding Carmen, lightly stroking her hair as a mother would a daughter.

And as Carmen's eyes glance over Kaylie's old things, she smiles slightly. Remembering her friend.

Until her eyes fall upon a PHOTOGRAPH OF KAYLIE AND HER BROTHER, JEREMY. Standing in a driveway next to a new car. But behind them, right across the street, is a HOUSE THAT LOOKS STRANGELY FAMILIAR. A YELLOW HOUSE WITH A RED DOOR.

Carmen's smile fades as she recognizes it.

FLASH CUT TO -- The photo that Carmen took of Joelle's house. The one that's been hanging on her wall the entire time. It's from nearly the same angle, just from a different time.

Carmen gets off the bed and steps closer to the picture. Staring at JOELLE MONTGOMERY'S HOUSE behind Kaylie and Jeremy.

JEREMY (V.O.)

Dad still lives a couple hours south of here. I go down to visit him from time to time.

Carmen stares at Jeremy's image with disbelief. She turns to another photo. Kaylie and Jeremy smiling at a park together.

FLASH CUT TO -- Carmen sitting with Amanda AT THE SAME PARK.

Carmen backs away, dread building.

CARMEN

I'm sorry Mrs. Harper, I have to go.

She can barely get the words out. She steps out the door, leaving Mrs. Harper sitting on the bed, her blank expression having returned.

HALLWAY

Carmen walks away, trying to steady herself. Then sees that another DOOR IS AJAR. She pushes it open and steps into --

JEREMY'S BEDROOM

Carmen gasps. The walls are COVERED WITH PHOTOS. Kaylie and Jeremy. Kaylie with their parents. Kaylie by herself.

JEREMY (V.O.)
It's hard isn't it? Trying to remember
how Kaylie lived.

Carmen turns, seeing a few HATS hanging on the wall. One of them reads, "NELSON CONTRACTING."

JEREMY (V.O.)
Been working construction mostly.
Some odd jobs here and there.

Carmen takes in everything on the walls, on the shelves, horrified.

MALCOLM (V.O.)
He loves her... But at the end of
the day, she can be replaced.

FLASH CUT TO --

- JEREMY sits on a bench in the COLLINSVILLE PARK watching Joelle play a game with her friends.

- Jeremy dribbles a basketball in the driveway across the street from JOELLE'S HOUSE, watching her go inside.

- Jeremy approaches Joelle in a BOOKSTORE. He picks up a book, just like Malcolm did. A moment passes, then Jeremy glances at her with a warm smile. A smile you can trust.

JEREMY
Hey, aren't you my neighbor?

FLASH CUT TO -- Carmen's NEIGHBORHOOD MAP. Kaylie's photo surrounded by the suspects. But now Kaylie's image DISSOLVES INTO JEREMY'S SMILING PHOTO. The missing neighbor.

DETECTIVE EVERETT (V.O.)
The scariest monsters are the ones
we see every day.

Carmen goes to the bedroom window, looking outside at --

The OLD HORSE BARN behind the house, weathered and unkept.

JEREMY (V.O.)
I still miss her, Carmen. I miss her
so much.

The fear fades from Carmen's eyes, replaced by a cold resolve.

INT. BEDROOM, MALCOLM'S HOUSE -- DAY

Malcolm sits at his computer, his expression making clear that he's unhappy and distracted.

An email arrives in his inbox. From "CITY OF REMBROKE - DEPT OF RECORDS." Malcolm clicks it, skimming over the email blankly before clicking the attachment. An image opens on screen --

A CONSTRUCTION PERMIT FOR NELSON CONTRACTING. But this one is SIGNED BY JEREMY HARPER.

Malcolm stares at the name and signature, suddenly realizing.

MALCOLM

Oh my God...

EXT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- SIMULTANEOUS

Rain pours as Carmen steps outside and walks around the side of the house towards the old barn. She reaches the wooden door, LOCKED shut.

Her CELL RINGS -- "Malcolm." She eyes it, hesitating. Then silences it.

She looks around, seeing a SHOVEL nearby with some other rusty tools. Grabs the shovel and wastes no time slamming it into the barn's lock with all of her strength. On the second blow, the LATCH BREAKS out of the wood.

Carmen tosses the shovel, pulls the door open and steps into --

INT. BARN -- CONTINUOUS

Dank and dusty. The door closes behind Carmen, plunging the space into darkness. She pulls out her flashlight and shines it around. Lumber. A work bench. Junk. And several OLD HORSE STALLS, all closed, gates rusted.

Carmen pulls a gate. It opens slowly with a WRETCHED SQUEAK. But there's nothing inside. Just a few bales of hay.

She moves to the next stall, pulling it open. More hay.

She comes to the third stall, pulling hard. A few old pieces of equipment, dirty and rusted. Carmen turns, frustrated.

Then notices a NARROW DOOR in the back.

Carmen opens it to reveal a WALK-IN STORAGE CLOSET. Shelves line the walls, stacked with tools, boxes, junk. Carmen walks inside, shining her light, checking every inch --

And freezes as she hears a HOLLOW NOISE beneath her foot.

She shines her light down at the dirty old CARPET covering the floor. She STOMPS HER FOOT around, hearing the CHANGING PITCH from solid concrete to hollow wood.

Carmen bends down and finds a cut edge in the carpet by the door. Peels it back to reveal --

A HATCH. With a recessed HANDLE and a BOLT LOCK cut into the concrete floor.

CARMEN

Jesus...

She looks over the tools on the shelves. Grabs a hammer. Sets it aside, eyes falling on a CROWBAR. Takes it.

She wedges the crowbar between the hatch and concrete and pries with all of her strength. The wood splinters around the bolt, and the hatch pops free. Carmen lifts it to reveal --

A STEEP LADDER DESCENDING INTO A HOLE.

Carmen peers down into the dark hole, fear rising...

Then, holding the crowbar and flashlight, she grips the ladder and begins her descent.

INT. HOLE -- CONTINUOUS

The ladder creaks as Carmen climbs down. She reaches the bottom and shines her light around.

The space is made of RED BRICK. HEAVY SUPPORT BEAMS hold everything up. And through a narrow doorway, she sees --

INT. UNDERGROUND LAIR -- CONTINUOUS

A space underneath the footprint of the barn above. Support posts hold up the beamed ceiling.

Carmen slowly advances, her light only dimly illuminating the dark space. It is deathly quiet, only the sound of her heavy breathing. She shines her light into a --

LIVING SPACE

A dirty rug on the floor. A CHILD SIZED CHAIR and table. A small, old TV. CHILDREN'S BOOKS on the shelf. Several DIRTY STUFFED ANIMALS on the ground.

Carmen swings the light around, trying to stay focused. Trying not to crack. She looks through another doorway into a --

STORAGE ROOM

Shelves filled with CANNED FOOD and non-perishables. JUGS OF WATER stacked in the corner. A REFRIGERATOR hums.

DEAD BUGS litter the floor.

There's enough food and water to survive for months.

Carmen creeps on into a --

BATHROOM

A SHOWER with no curtain. A SINK with one child-sized pink toothbrush.

Carmen looks away, steeling herself.

She comes to another CLOSED DOOR. There are heavy latches on the wall but they're not in place. She pushes the door open --

ISOLATION ROOM

No more than three feet square with brick walls. Carmen shines her light to see streaks of DRIED BLOOD on the concrete floor. INSECTS scurry amongst the pieces of BLONDE AND BROWN HAIR.

Carmen stares, breathing fast, struggling not to scream.

EXT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- SIMULTANEOUS

A contractor's pickup pulls into the driveway, a NELSON CONTRACTING MAGNET on the side. Jeremy Harper climbs out.

INT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Jeremy walks inside. Mrs. Harper sits on the couch staring out the window.

JEREMY

Hi mama. You ready for some lunch?

He kisses her on the cheek then walks towards the kitchen.

MRS. HARPER

Carmen stopped by.

Jeremy turns.

JEREMY

Really.

INT. UNDERGROUND LAIR -- SIMULTANEOUS

Carmen moves deeper into the lair. Ahead, a LIGHT GLOWS underneath another door. She tries the handle but it's locked. She steps back, holding the crowbar high --

And SWINGS at the door with everything she has. The wood splinters around the lock. Carmen swings again and again, BEAMS OF LIGHT streaming out through the battered door, casting frightening shadows. The lock is almost broken.

Carmen rams her shoulder into the door and it budes, wood splintering. Again. Again and the door swings open to reveal --

BEDROOM

A small, square room with a bed, dresser, chair, toilet. It's a cell.

And huddling in the corner is a TEENAGE GIRL, eyes closed, covering her ears. The SAME GIRL that appeared on Carmen's doorstep. She is thin, almost gaunt, with long hair and aged clothes that have been hand washed for years. A BLACK EYE on her face.

Carmen almost breaks down on sight of her, but holds on.

CARMEN

Joelle?

The frightened girl opens her eyes.

CARMEN

It's okay. My name's Carmen. I'm gonna get you out of here.

Joelle stares at her, unable to overcome her terror. Carmen slowly approaches. Leans down in front of her.

CARMEN

I'm not gonna hurt you.

Carmen holds out her hand. Joelle looks at her with all of the desperation and desire that has built up over the years.

CARMEN

Joelle... Your parents miss you very much. It's time to go home.

Ever so slowly, Joelle reaches out and takes Carmen's hand.

CARMEN

There you go. Okay.

She gently helps Joelle to her feet.

But Joelle suddenly stiffens, eyes wide as she looks over Carmen's shoulder.

JOELLE

No... No!

Carmen turns to see --

JEREMY STANDING IN THE DOORWAY.

Eerily composed as he takes in the sight of them. A man who has physically labored his whole life, built and imposing.

JEREMY

I'm sorry to see you here, Carmen. I
always liked you.

Carmen shields Joelle, gripping the crowbar tightly.

CARMEN

The police are on their way.

JEREMY

Are they?

He slowly steps towards her as he speaks.

JEREMY

You know, when Joelle ran away that
night, I thought I'd lost her. But
then I saw she went to your house,
and I was so relieved.

CARMEN

Stay back. Stay away!

JEREMY

By the time the police came, my little
girl was back here safe and sound.

CARMEN

You can't keep her here any longer.

JEREMY

Keep her? This is her home.

As Jeremy steps into range, Carmen SWINGS the crowbar. Jeremy
dodges. Carmen backs away, fear rising as he slowly advances.
She swings again but this time he grabs her arm, yanks the
crowbar away and tosses it to the ground.

Carmen struggles with him but just isn't strong enough. He
THROWS HER against the brick wall. Joelle SCREAMS. Carmen
crumples to the ground, wind knocked out of her.

JEREMY

Kaylie wouldn't have wanted it to be
this way...

CARMEN

You killed her...

JEREMY VIOLENTLY KICKS CARMEN over and over. Carmen balls
up, as Joelle continues to scream and cry. But Jeremy's tone
is still calm and controlled.

JEREMY

Why would I kill the person I loved
most in this world? Kaylie was my
best friend.

Carmen gasps for air, badly hurt.

JEREMY

You remember her, right? She may have been quiet, but she was tough. That night... When I tried to show her how much I loved her, she screamed and she ran...

His voice quivers slightly, remembering.

JEREMY

I didn't mean to hurt her... But she wouldn't love me back.

Carmen crawls, struggling to reach the fallen crowbar.

JEREMY

Don't you see? I know how you feel. That emptiness. That loss. But as special as Kaylie was, she wasn't one of a kind. You have to move on. You can find happiness again.

Carmen reaches out for her weapon. Jeremy calmly plants his foot on her hand.

JEREMY

Deep down, I know I can never bring her back. But sometimes, when I look at that face...

He smiles at Joelle as she cowers in the corner.

JEREMY

I see her again. Like she's right here with me. Like she never left.

Jeremy roughly grabs Carmen by the hair, pulling her up, bringing her face close to his. Whispering to her.

JEREMY

It took me years to feel this kind of love again, Carmen...

He doesn't notice as --

MALCOLM steps in the doorway, holding a SHOVEL.

JEREMY

And I won't let you take it away from me --

MALCOLM SWINGS THE SHOVEL with everything he has --

CRACK! Jeremy howls in pain as he doubles over. Carmen collapses. MALCOLM HITS JEREMY AGAIN AND AGAIN!

Jeremy writhes on the ground as Malcolm glares down at him, fury in his eyes.

He drops the shovel and goes to Carmen.

MALCOLM

Carmen! Carmen!

She struggles to speak.

CARMEN

Get Joelle... Get Joelle out of here.

MALCOLM

We're not leaving without you. You have to get up. Get up, Carmen!

He tries to get her to her feet, holding her up.

MALCOLM

That's it. Come on. Come on --

BAM!

A GUN FIRES, HITTING MALCOLM IN THE BACK. He lets out a cry of agony. Joelle screams as he falls to the ground.

Jeremy sits up, holding a HANDGUN. He struggles to his feet, FACE BLEEDING AND BRUISED from the shovel blows, looking every bit the monster outside as he is inside.

He stalks forward, aiming the gun at Carmen. She tries to get up. Tries to move. But she has no strength left.

Joelle stares at Carmen, laid out on the ground, beaten and helpless. Then turns to Jeremy as he approaches. But there's something growing in her eyes that we haven't seen before.

Rage.

Jeremy stands over Carmen, pointing the gun down at her.

JEREMY

You never should have come back.

And JOELLE POUNCES ON HIM! JEREMY DROPS THE GUN. She claws at his face like a frenzied animal, scratching, biting, screaming, crying. Five years of hell and fury unleashed.

Carmen struggles to crawl towards the dropped gun, reaching out for it...

Jeremy throws Joelle against the wall, her scream abruptly cut off. He glares down at her, shock and hurt in his eyes.

CARMEN

Get away from her!

Jeremy turns to see Carmen sitting against the wall, holding the gun with shaking hands.

CARMEN

Get away from her or I'll kill you
right here, I swear to God!

But Jeremy doesn't move. Carmen's hands tremble.

JEREMY

You know what I said to Kaylie, right
before she died?

He picks up the fallen crowbar.

JEREMY

I'll always love you, and I'll never
forget you...

He turns, RAISING THE CROWBAR HIGH ABOVE JOELLE --

BAM! Jeremy is thrown back into the wall. Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

The gun clicks empty, Carmen continuing to pull the trigger as Jeremy slides down the wall. The crowbar falls from his hands as the monster crumples to the floor. His lifeless eyes still open, staring at Carmen.

It is a scene of utter horror.

Jeremy lies dead.

Malcolm stirs, bleeding severely.

Carmen slumps, badly battered.

Joelle crawls towards her. Carmen holds her close as Joelle sobs hysterically. She can barely whisper.

CARMEN

It's okay... It's okay... I've got
you... I've got you...

She reaches out with her other arm, taking Malcolm's hand in hers, holding him tight.

The three of them lie together. Holding onto one another.

EXT. KAYLIE'S HOUSE -- DAY

Numerous police cars. Several ambulances. Cops and EMTs galore. NEWS CREWS on hand, REPORTERS speaking into cameras. ALL OF THE NEIGHBORS watch in stunned silence.

Several Officers try to talk to Mrs. Harper but she can't manage a word.

Malcolm is loaded into an ambulance, oxygen mask on his face, IV in his arm. It quickly drives away.

Carmen is wheeled toward another ambulance. Joelle walks beside her, holding her hand tightly.

Detective McBride watches them pass, dumbfounded.

The EMTs load Carmen into the back of the ambulance. Joelle climbs in with her, not letting go of Carmen's hand.

The ambulance doors slam shut. It pulls away, sirens blaring as it drives away down the street.

FADE OUT:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM -- DAY

Carmen wakes up in a bed. Her injuries have been bandaged.

She turns to see Joelle sitting in a chair beside her, still holding her hand. She smiles weakly at Carmen. Carmen smiles back at her. Outside, the sun shines brightly. Joelle turns and squints, gazing out at it.

Neither of them says a word. They don't have to.

Then the door slowly opens --

And JOELLE'S PARENTS step in.

They see the teenage girl sitting at the bedside. They see their daughter.

Joelle looks up at the two strangers, recognizing them. She turns to Carmen.

And Carmen lets go of her hand.

Joelle slowly stands, walking towards her mom and dad.

Tears stream down her parents' faces as they EMBRACE HER. They hug her tightly, sobbing. They might never let go.

Mrs. Montgomery looks over, seeing Carmen, the stranger who saved her daughter. She shakes her head in awe and disbelief.

Carmen watches from the bed, smiling through her tears.

EXT. CEMETERY -- DAY

A clear day under the crisp blue sky.

Carmen stands before a grave, bouquet of flowers in hand. Malcolm next to her, leaning on a cane.

The stone reads: "KAYLIE HARPER"

Carmen sets the flowers next to the stone, fluffing them up, making them look nice. She smiles, remembering her friend.

Finally at peace.

EXT. ROAD, CEMETERY -- LATER

Carmen and Malcolm walk to their cars, parked nearby.

MALCOLM

So I guess this is goodbye.

CARMEN

Maybe not.

MALCOLM

I thought you were never coming back.

CARMEN

This'll always be home.

Malcolm smiles. He extends his hand.

MALCOLM

Have a safe trip.

But instead, Carmen gently hugs him. Malcolm is surprised at first, then hugs her back. They hold each other tight, like two close friends. Carmen whispers into his ear.

CARMEN

You're not a bad man, Malcolm.

Malcolm smiles, tears in his eyes. It may be the nicest thing anyone has ever said to him.

Carmen climbs into her car. Malcolm waves as she pulls away. He watches as she drives off down the long road. Until her car disappears in the distance.

It's a new day. A beautiful day.

FADE OUT.