

"REDLETTER"

Michael J. Schneider

(red·let·ter); **1)** *n.* Exclusive, breaking news coverage of a major story or event, featuring a headline printed in red type. **2)** *adj.* Memorable; especially important or happy. *Today was a redletter day in her life for all the wrong reasons.*

A PROCESSION OF ABBREVIATED CLIPS FROM VARIOUS TV SHOWS

Like we're flipping through channels. Until we land on --

A NIGHTLY LOCAL NEWS PROGRAM

Striving for quality and of course ratings in a competitive market. Irascible co-host CHRISTA REYNOLDS (41) is speaking mid-stream --

CHRISTA

...was stabbed an extraordinary number of times - 53 in total - with the great majority of those wounds coming post-mortem. Whoever committed this heinous act continued attacking well after the time of death.

Christa's blonde hair is just a little too big. Her blouse is just behind the trend. No one tells her though because she can be brutally abrasive. Recently, behind the scenes, she has been demanding her own "special comment" segment.

As Christa speaks, her humble co-host, veteran network personality CLAY DESSNER (64), looks on from his position next to her at a long table in the shape of a half-hexagon.

Clay is a gray-haired newsman who supplies gravitas at a budget. Unambitious and a bit meek, he views journalism as a public service. He never speculates or rushes to be first... his career won't last much longer.

Christa is on the left side of the screen; Clay is on the right. Both have iPads in front of them. Clay picks up where she left off.

CLAY

A suspect or suspects have yet to be identified. For more on this, let's go live from our studio here in Atlanta to nearby-

He is cut off when --

THE CHANNEL CHANGES, UP TWO CHANNELS, THEN BACK DOWN TWO MORE, ULTIMATELY RETURNING TO THE NEWS PROGRAM

The co-anchors are now in SPLIT-SCREEN with alluring and approachable field correspondent, ISABEL FLORES (26).

It is nighttime. She is standing in front of an average middle class home in the suburbs. The neighborhood is dark and shadowy, heavy with foliage.

Isabel could have had a cozy in-studio on-air job, but she wanted to break news, not just report stories after the fact. More than anything, she wants to make an impact.

Inevitably, local news won't be able to keep her for long.

ISABEL

...Marty and Liza Koston have lived for the past 15 years, where they returned from work a few short hours ago upon hearing that tragedy had befallen their only daughter.

CHRISTA

And this is by no means an area accustomed to violence is it...

ISABEL

Not by any stretch of the imagination.

As Isabel continues, a box at the bottom of the screen rotates between the title of the program - "WCGG Eyewitness News at 10" - and the headline "Exclusive: Savage Murder in Seven Pines."

On the opposite side, there is a GRAPHIC indicating that the broadcast is LIVE, along with the time, 9:04 PM eastern.

In between these graphics is a standard NEWS CRAWL that periodically provides details for how the audience can interact with the program using social media and the web.

ISABEL

I finished speaking with the Kostons 90 minutes ago, and as you would expect, they're flooded with emotions - confusion, anger, the deepest of sorrows - but most of all they're still in shock.

The split-screen panels reduce in size to allow room for a third panel that shows B-roll of a quaint, middle-class housing development called SEVEN PINES.

To add an extra bit of character, the community is GATED.

ISABEL

Seven Pines, where I am now, is a gated development made up of about 20 homes, tucked away in the cozy bedroom community of Wellington.

As she continues, a MAP appears on-screen, pinpointing the location of Wellington - 90 minutes northwest of Atlanta.

ISABEL

There has *never* been a homicide in Seven Pines. Literally, this kind of crime does not happen here.

CHRISTA

Why do you believe the Kostons agreed to sign you in at the gate, Isabel, and talk to you so quickly, amidst all the turmoil?

ISABEL

I think we could relate to one another since - as most of our viewers know - I lost my fiance a year ago to violent crime.

Clay, an ever-supportive father figure to the junior reporters - which they sincerely appreciate, even if they see him as a cautionary tale of career mediocrity - chimes in.

CLAY

We can figure they've heard a few things about your track record generating arrests, too.

(to Christa)

She can be relentless, can't she?

Christa nods then quickly changes the subject, uninterested in discussing the accolades of a colleague (and, in her eyes, competitor).

CHRISTA

Isabel, did either parent have any thoughts on suspects or a possible motive? Or are they as confounded as the police?

The panel of B-roll footage is removed from the feed.

ISABEL

First, I'll say that Marty and Liza have been struck by the show of support from their neighbors, which speaks to the kind of impression that Jess, a talented soccer player who hoped to become a veterinarian-

Isabel JUMPS --

SOMEONE WALKS OUT OF THE DARKNESS AND GRAZES HER SHOULDER.

The stranger is a man in his 20s, unkempt and adorned in ratty-looking clothing.

Something about his demeanor is off. He seems SHELL-SHOCKED. Moreover, he is CRADLING SOMETHING that we can't quite see...

ISABEL

Sorry, sir. Excuse me- Can you back out of the shot? Chuck-

She points to her cameraman, CHUCK DWYER (42), wanting him to re-frame the shot with the shell-shocked man out of it.

The camera had been moving towards Isabel as if to help - now it slides to the side, obedient.

We will never see Chuck, who is chubby, classically plain, and hopelessly in love with Isabel - but also as good of a cameraman as there is at this level of the business.

In-studio, Christa gets impatient --

CHRISTA

Isabel, if you can't- We should roll the clip from the interview.

CLAY

I don't know if we should leave her-

The shell-shocked man sways back into the frame, SHAKING and CRYING, as he exposes what is in his arms --

A LIFELESS BEAGLE, SOPPED IN BLOOD.

SHELL-SHOCKED MAN

Sorry, I'm sorry. Sorry...

And then he's gone, back into the darkness.

CHRISTA

OK, It looks like- Did that man- I'm sorry, was he carrying a dog?

Christa can't quite process what occurred. Neither can Clay. He expresses a look of concern.

CLAY

And was it... I'm not sure what we saw. Isabel, did you-

As a disturbing feeling sets in, Isabel is surprisingly unaffected. Steely, she turns in the direction that the man disappeared.

ISABEL

Hang on back there, guys.

She waves Chuck in for a private consultation. As everyone gets their bearings, Christa massages the interruption.

CHRISTA

Let's go ahead- Why don't we show the first clip from the interview?

PRE-RECORDED INTERVIEW

A brief montage of home movie clips featuring 17-year-old JESS KOSTON, an all-American girl with the soul of a tomboy. As the montage winds down --

LIZA (V.O.)

I've caught myself saying the word 'why' so many times... with no actual thought behind it, just muttering like a crazy person.

The segment cuts to Jess's parents, LIZA (42) and MARTY (48), sitting in their living room.

A GRAPHIC provides their full names and labels them the parents of the victim.

Liza's eyes are puffy from crying. Marty grips her hand. Across from them, Isabel sits in a chair, compassionate but serious. She leans forward slightly as Liza continues.

LIZA

Why her? Why now? God, why this way? You heard what they did to her. 53 times... I don't understand it. I can't understand it.

Liza has to keep herself from completely breaking down.

ISABEL

Marty, are you asking some of these same questions?

MARTY

I can't. I feel like they don't even apply, like you might as well be talking to an animal. Because whoever did this... nothing about it is rational.

He pauses. Liza is now crying. It seems like he is about to add something else when the segment unexpectedly concludes.

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

Clay's look of concern has deepened; Christa is energized but ill-prepared.

CHRISTA

OK, we're... cutting the interview short to get you breaking news. Isabel, fill us in.

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Isabel tracks towards a different house, where a PATROL CAR with a PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANY LOGO is in the driveway --

ISABEL

I've moved about a block south of the Kostons', where there's activity involving the security company that patrols Seven Pines.

All of a sudden she flinches, then stops, then steps aside... as the camera strafes, opening up the shot to reveal --

A CIRCLE OF AT LEAST 20 BLOODY DOGS LYING DEAD IN THE YARD.

THE SHELL-SHOCKED MAN SITS AT THE CENTER, SOBBING.

SHELL-SHOCKED MAN

He made me do it. I'm so sorry. He made me...

In-studio, the anchors are too startled to immediately react. Isabel, however, proceeds, approaching the circle with her mic extended...

ISABEL

He made you do what?

Settling, Christa and Clay react --

CLAY

Isabel, leave him alone. He's dangerous- He-

CHRISTA

It looks like- There are maybe 20 or 25 dead animals. Dogs. Somebody's pets...

The shell-shocked man rambles on while Isabel steps over a Pit Bull with a broken neck and into the circle --

SHELL-SHOCKED MAN

I'm sorry. He made me do it. I don't know how. So sorry. So...

ISABEL

Who made you do this? Who is he?

A SECURITY PATROLMAN THROWS OPEN THE DOOR TO THE HOUSE --

SECURITY PATROLMAN

GET OFF THE PROPERTY!

The camera whips towards him as he disappears back inside.

CHRISTA

What was that?

Isabel is still. Something about the house catches her eye. She is drawn towards it, away from the shell-shocked man.

CLAY

Isabel, where are you headed?

CHRISTA

Tell us what you see.

Following her, the camera silently provides the answer --

AN ELABORATE ROOM-LENGTH AQUARIUM, MOSTLY SHATTERED, WITH A SMATTERING OF GORE BEHIND IT ON THE WALL.

But only for a flash, as the security patrolman crosses into the frame and unknowingly blocks the view.

He appears frightened, haunted even...

Before Isabel or the anchors can verbally react, there is *the sound of a fast-moving vehicle*.

Isabel spins away from the window --

ISABEL

The police.

In the same breath, the shell-shocked man takes off RUNNING while a Wellington POLICE OFFICER gets out of his vehicle and bee-lines for the house.

ISABEL

Officer, was there a homicide here?

POLICE OFFICER

Get away from the house!

Seeing all of the dead dogs, the cop freezes.

ISABEL

Do you know what this is? Do you know what happened inside?

POLICE OFFICER

Turn off the camera! You're on private property!

ISABEL

There was a man here, a possible suspect, who just fled the scene-

He draws his gun and pushes past her, unable to take his eyes off the graveyard of dogs even as he enters the home.

Isabel addresses the studio.

ISABEL

Obviously, the police are now responding to what the security patrolman discovered, but I can't confirm anything past what we saw since they won't let me inside.

CHRISTA

If you can stay on standby...

ISABEL

I'll report in as soon as I know anything else.

Her feed is cut.

At the co-anchor desk, Clay and Christa re-set the stage, gathering themselves and stalling for time.

CHRISTA

For anyone who may just be joining us, we have breaking news tonight out of Wellington, Georgia, where we are live, the only news organization with a reporter who has been granted access inside the gated community of Seven Pines. Moments ago, we saw images that indicated an act of violence involving numerous dogs and a home invasion...

CLAY

Images that *appeared* - I think we should stress that - to depict violence of some sort.

CHRISTA

Common sense, though, would suggest a homicide, as we wait to hear additional details from our correspondent, Isabel Flores... who had this murder - this likely homicide - occur practically in front of her, while covering another story, another killing. Now what we'll do-

Christa was meandering so that she could finish listening to the producers in her ear. They're done. She restarts.

CHRISTA

I thought we would go to commercial, but my producer is telling me we'll stay right here...
 (turns to the side)
 ...and bring in frequent contributor and friend of the program, former homicide detective Mark Glasgow, who was already scheduled to join us to discuss the murder of 17-year-old Jess Koston.

MARK GLASGOW (48), an ex-cop with a pudgy body, long ago broken nose, and precisely shaven goatee, gives a curt nod from the desk, to Christa's right.

His name, title, and credentials appear in a GRAPHIC.

After being forced into early retirement, Glasgow has his sights set on a future in the media as a law enforcement expert. He believes he's always the smartest and best-looking person in the room. He is rarely either. And never both.

CHRISTA

Mark, let's get your perspective given your background with similar cases.

CLAY

You dealt with pretty horrific - I don't know how else to say this - 'mutilations' both in Atlanta at the end of your career and L.A. at the start.

GLASGOW

Absolutely. And we got convictions on all three cases. The second Los Angeles case was the granddaddy, too, because I consulted a lot with the cops who handled the Manson Family murders back in '69 and '70.

CHRISTA

What I want to ask now though is how the police will proceed at the scene we just saw, knowing that-

Christa stops herself when the feed adds a new panel of video, a soundless, static shot of the house the police are investigating, courtesy of Isabel's camera...

Two Wellington Police Department (WPD) vehicles are parked in front, and the private security patrol car remains in the driveway, as well.

CHRISTA

Hold on, we have a live look at the house the police are investigating. Another car has arrived...

CLAY

Are we getting Isabel back?

CHRISTA

In the meantime, Mark, how do the police respond when this is the second homicide inside Seven Pines in less than eight hours?

GLASGOW

First off, they won't do what you just did and make assumptions. You attached the word 'homicide' to what we saw in that house. Did it look bad? You bet.

(MORE)

GLASGOW (CONT'D)

But a shattered aquarium and some blood on the wall aren't proof of murder. It could have been a terrible accident. We don't know.

CLAY

You're cautioning us, in other words, to not jump to conclusions, even if they seem reasonable.

GLASGOW

Exactly. And until we can confirm without a shadow of a doubt that this disturbed young man did in fact end the lives of those poor animals we don't even have two confirmed *crimes* let alone homicides. We have one - Ms. Koston. And her body was found on the side of the road outside the gate. We don't know yet *where* she was killed.

CHRISTA

But the police called for backup, Mark. Isn't that a pretty good sign of something? Isn't it conceivable, for instance, that the killer or killers are still inside Seven Pines as we speak...

GLASGOW

Is it possible? Sure. But overall unlikely. That's why I have my doubts about that young man. Killers don't hang around and wait for the police. They just don't.

Christa is about to counter when she has to switch gears. The live look at Seven Pines drops out, and the in-studio camera slowly zooms towards her.

A GRAPHIC pops up indicating "BREAKING NEWS."

Christa speaks gradually. The information comes in at the same time she relays it.

CHRISTA

We are now able to report that sources within the Wellington Police Department have confirmed the existence of a body inside the house.

(MORE)

CHRISTA (CONT'D)

The identity of the deceased has not yet been determined, but I repeat, a body has been found. Isabel, are you there?

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Isabel stands one house down from the police activity. Fiddling with her earpiece, she looks off-camera.

CHRISTA

Isabel, can you hear me?

Without answering, she goes from being distracted to becoming fixated on something in the backyard.

CLAY

Maybe it's your mic? Isabel?

If she can hear Clay it isn't apparent. Her mic is working, however, because we hear her say --

ISABEL

Chuck, come with me.

She veers off the sidewalk. The camera follows her into the grass, around the side of the house and into the backyard, which is sparsely lit with artificial lighting.

CHRISTA

(to the viewers)

Please bear with us. She's obviously having technical difficulties.

CLAY

Isabel? It's Clay.

(to Christa)

Where is she going?

Isabel rounds the side of the house and angles towards the backyard. Again, no response. Christa preps to cut the cord --

CHRISTA

OK, why don't- We'll try to get a hold of her again shortly-

But before she can finish, we hear something...

CLAY

Is that a baby?

Curious expressions overtake Christa and Clay. It sounds like a crying baby. Isabel proceeds deeper into the backyard...

CHRISTA

Isabel-

Suddenly, being able to talk to Isabel no longer matters. What matters is at the far reaches of the backyard --

THE CORPSE OF A SHIRTLESS MAN, PROPPED UP AGAINST A TREE.

Additionally, we locate the source of the crying --

A FREAKED OUT TODDLER GIRL, NOW *BAWLING*, CRAWLING UP THE LEG OF THE CORPSE.

Isabel sprints towards the child - AND THE FEED IS CUT.

MUFFLED SOUNDS of the in-studio crew struggling behind the scenes to contain its emotions; the co-anchors don't know how to pick up the pieces; unexpectedly, the broadcast goes to --

COMMERCIAL

A real 30-second spot for an actual company or product.

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

The program returns with title graphics, fading music, and a measured zoom towards the co-anchor desk. Clay and Christa have regained their composure.

CHRISTA

Welcome back to 'WCGG Eyewitness News at 10,' I'm Christa Reynolds. Clay Dessner is here with me tonight, filling in for Eric Moore. Before we continue our exclusive live coverage of violent attacks inside the gated community of Seven Pines, a note about what was witnessed moments before we abruptly went to commercial... on behalf of everyone at this program and at the network, I deeply apologize for the display of graphic imagery.

Her apology rings a bit hollow. She goes on...

CHRISTA

That said, we pledge to fearlessly cover this story. We have an obligation to deliver timely, hard-hitting news. Please understand that viewer discretion is advised.

She re-focuses.

CHRISTA

Isabel, are you at a place where you can talk?

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Isabel is outside of the home where she discovered the dead man and the little girl, albeit now in the street. If she's shaken, as an average person would be, we don't see it.

ISABEL

I'm here, Christa.

CHRISTA

To get right into it... from our vantage point it appeared that you came upon the corpse of a man in a horrifying state. Is that accurate?

ISABEL

It is, Christa. Resting against a tree without a shirt. The victim - a male, probably in his 60s or 70s - was littered with stab wounds.

The grisly details incite a brief pause in the newscast.

CHRISTA

'Littered,' you said? Could you be more specific?

ISABEL

There were so many wounds that they ran together. Over 20, by my estimation. Maybe 30. It was almost ritualistic...

CLAY

Isabel, how's the little girl? What kind of shape is she in?

ISABEL

Physically, she looked unharmed. I brought her to the police to make sure she received proper treatment.

CLAY

We'll pray for the best.

CHRISTA

What have you been able to find out about the house next door? Can you add to the report from our news team that a body was found inside?

ISABEL

I can't, unfortunately. The WPD looks to be scrambling to get itself in order. I would go so far as to say that the officers appear shocked and out of sorts.

CLAY

Frankly, it's hard to blame them. We're talking about a small town force with a lack of experience handling violent crime.

ISABEL

I've seen no evidence, for example, of officers canvassing the area, even after I alerted them again about the individual I encountered earlier on-air.

Christa follows up slowly, a sign that she's talking at the same time she's being fed information.

CHRISTA

Our team behind the scenes has pulled several photos from the web. Isabel, maybe you can give us some color...

DISSOLVE THROUGH A SERIES OF PHOTOS

A vibrant couple in their 60s. Grandparents, still in love after all these years. Christa provides background.

CHRISTA (O.S.)

We're looking at publicly available images of Dick and Rita Verkowski, the registered owners of the home in question, the center of police activity. These pictures were taken from the website of a collectibles store that Mrs. Verkowski operates, as well as from Mr. Verkowski's Facebook page.

Meanwhile, Clay reviews something on his iPad.

CLAY (O.S.)

I'm looking at Facebook now. It's actually a fan page. He has a pretty large following, 6322 likes.

CHRISTA (O.S.)

For what?

CLAY (O.S.)

Apparently he blogged about true crimes. Or, actually, only about Charles Manson and the Manson Family murders. I wonder if Mark is familiar with him at all?

An image of the Verkowskis playing with an adorable little girl appears in the photo stream.

CHRISTA (O.S.)

Freeze the image. Does this girl look familiar to you, Isabel?

ISABEL (O.S.)

She does. From the backyard.

CHRISTA (O.S.)

And what about the man?

ISABEL (O.S.)

I can't draw a fair comparison. The person I saw was too savaged.

A beat. The contrast between the images of the vivacious man on-screen and those of the murder victim sinks in...

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK | LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

CHRISTA

We'll leave it at that. But standby. We'll keep your feed up so we don't miss any developments.

CLAY

Be careful out there, Isabel.

ISABEL

I'll be ready.

She means it. Absent anxiety, she walks out of frame.

CHRISTA

We bring in now our social media reporter, Amanda Price. Amanda?

SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

A stand-alone portion of the studio set. Posted in front of a WALL-SIZED TOUCHSCREEN is the fresh-faced blonde-haired AMANDA PRICE (24).

She is pretty and bubbly, happy to have a job and thrilled that it involves getting to be a tiny bit famous.

The touchscreen depicts a bar graph that instantaneously tracks the amount of traffic to the "Eyewitness News" website and the program's social media accounts.

Video from Chuck's camera - aimed at the crime scenes - remains up in split-screen.

AMANDA

Thanks, Christa. As you probably guessed, the conversation online has *exploded*. People are sharing theories about everything from a possible motive to the chance that this latest attack may be connected to the murder of Jess Koston. One thing I thought was neat...

Amanda hits a tab on the touchscreen, starting a stream of images and MOS video of CHARLES MANSON, his FAMILY, and the TATE-LABIANCA MURDERS.

AMANDA

Amongst our community, a lot of links are being traded using #Manson for Charles Manson, since his name came up a couple times tonight. Mostly it's the Baby Boomers educating us Millenials about the Tate-LaBianca murders that Manson ordered his cult-like followers to commit... I thought-

From off-screen, Christa interrupts --

CHRISTA (O.S.)

Not to cut you off, Amanda, but there's something at the house...

The door opens. A cop peeks out holding an evidence bag.

CLAY (O.S.)

He has an evidence bag it looks like. I can't tell what's inside.

CHRISTA (O.S.)

Can we bring Isabel back?

(a beat)

You're saying she's not there-

In the midst of this chatter, Amanda stands awkwardly still, smiling, while the Manson Family imagery on the touchscreen behind her grows more disturbing...

The cop pops back inside. The door shuts --

And THREE WOMEN venture out of the darkness on the street and into the light emanating from Chuck's camera.

There is a discrepancy between their clothing - tacky EVENING GOWNS that belong in overweight old ladies' closets - and their thin, almost frail figures.

WIGS rest on top of the vestiges of sweaty, messy hair. Dirty SNEAKERS with untied shoelaces shroud petite feet.

The women, in a kind of drugged state, loop towards the camera...

CLAY (O.S.)

Something is wrong.

CHRISTA (O.S.)

Who are these women? What are they doing?

CLAY (O.S.)
Where's Isabel?

The women, we can now tell, are *not* in fact old. They are in their early 20s, with sunken eyes and pronounced cheekbones, on the edge between runway model and malnourishment.

SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

On-screen, the co-anchor desk replaces the social media post. The panel with Clay and Christa is down-sized in favor of the live feed from inside Seven Pines...

CHRISTA
Can't the police see them?

CLAY
Chuck, you should talk to them, or yell for somebody-

CHRISTA
Do it, Chuck. Get us sound.

The audio finally comes on with Chuck in mid-question. He is barely audible from behind the camera.

CHUCK (O.S.)
-live here?

The camera wobbles a bit. Chuck is nervous. He doesn't want to back down because he knows Isabel wouldn't...

The women, who we will refer to as THE BRIDES, act confused. They become submissive, projecting a seductive quality we wish we could ignore.

The BLONDE sort of answers Chuck --

BLONDE BRIDE
Do we *live* here?

The BRUNETTE is giggly.

BRUNETTE BRIDE
What does that even *mean*?

CHUCK (O.S.)
Did you come from inside a house?

The REDHEAD is somewhere between bored and condescending.

REDHEAD BRIDE
Um, our friend lives here.

BLONDE BRIDE

Are you, like, the police? He sent us outside to help.

The brunette smiles, stifles a laugh. The redhead is ready to move on; she wanders off. The blonde wafts away from Chuck, arms extended, an amateur contemporary dancer.

The brunette breaks into heavy laughter. When it ends, she gets quiet and whispers --

BRUNETTE BRIDE

We'll see you later.

She watches the tip of her index finger as she points it at Chuck and then at the lens of the camera... before the blonde grabs her other arm and spins her away into the night.

The camera pans, but its light is weak. We are left staring into the void.

Clay is unnerved. So is Christa. But she is also perturbed.

CHRISTA

I don't know what that was.
Clearly, those women - or better yet those girls - were not right.

CLAY

I saw no sign of criminal behavior, though, did you?

CHRISTA

There may have been drugs involved. I think that would be a fair guess, but we need to get Isabel- I have no idea where she is-

CLAY

There must be an explanation.

CHRISTA

Amanda, finish talking about the internet while we track her down.

Her dismissive tone leads into a transition --

STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Replacing the co-anchor desk on-screen. The live feed from Seven Pines also drops out.

Coming back on, Amanda stumbles.

AMANDA

Umm, OK. Thanks, Christa. I hope Isabel is alright. I'm sure she is. I don't know what you just saw, so... I'll continue where I left off... probably the most interesting thing happening online is what we're hearing from people in and around Seven Pines.

She swipes to a pre-loaded YouTube page on the touchscreen.

AMANDA

For example, viewers pointed us to a video posted by 'Dan88Hut' in the last few hours. Evidence is murky, but the author claims to live on the same street where the homicides occurred. Be ready when it starts because it depicts something pretty strange...

Amanda taps the video --

YOUTUBE

A high-end camera phone video shot through an open window, looking at the house across the street.

Because of the lighting, the angle, and the framing, it's impossible to know if the house is on the same street as the crime scenes. It *could* be. It also very well might not be.

A MAN in his late 20s, CLEAN CUT except for a dirty, sweaty shirt and tie, appears lost, pacing in and out of the light from a street lamp, holding a VINTAGE GAS CAN...

That he then ambles away with, lost to the darkness.

STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

The video ends. Amanda follows up --

AMANDA

I wouldn't want to judge anybody. On whether or not they look like a resident of Seven Pines. But the average person would find a washing machine for those clothes.

Amanda looks off-screen. She is being rushed.

AMANDA

Plus, the old gas can is obviously a *big* sticking point. Now back to you, Christa and Clay.

SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK | LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

The social media post is traded for the co-anchor desk and the live look at the crime scenes, where POLICE TAPE has been posted over the front door and across the driveway and the front yard of the homicide house.

A third police cruiser has also joined the fray.

CHRISTA

Amanda, thank- We have to leave it at that.

Both she and Clay are unsettled and want to say more, but they're being forced to move on.

CHRISTA

We're hurrying now to a spokesman for the Wellington Police Department who has been waiting to talk to us. Officer Fisher...

A GRAPHIC pops up with an image of the WPD shield and the text, "Voice of Officer Harold Fisher, Spokesman."

CHRISTA

You have information to relay to our viewers?

FISHER (V.O.)

Not just information. Critical information. To everyone in Wellington and the surrounding areas, which is why I wanted to get this out ASAP.

Fisher is petulant. He pauses, expecting an apology for being forced to wait. Christa feels there are wiser uses of time.

CHRISTA

You have the floor, Officer.

Clay believes differently --

CLAY

Thank you for your patience.

FISHER (V.O.)

We're all up against a lot tonight. What we want from your viewers is help locating a conversion van that was spotted twice in the past week outside Seven Pines. Unfortunately, what we know is vague. One report called the vehicle 'worn.' The other said it was 'dirty.' But if this means anything to you, please call 770-565-8799. We've opened a special hotline just for this case.

Unexpectedly, the live video of the crime scenes cuts out. The panel stays up, but it consists only of a BLACK SCREEN.

Christa and Clay look at one another. She puts a finger to her ear, focusing on whatever is being communicated from behind the scenes, and gestures for him to go.

CLAY

(to the viewers)

We'll put that number up on the crawl in case you didn't have a writing utensil nearby.

(to Officer Fisher)

Can you tell us if there's anything in particular you want to know about this van?

FISHER (V.O.)

We're hoping somebody noticed the vehicle and thought 'that's strange,' but let it go, and now this jogs their memory, and they give us some additional detail.

Christa re-engages.

CHRISTA

Officer Fisher, when these sightings came in... are you saying there were two separate calls?

FISHER (V.O.)

Correct. One on Saturday and another on Tuesday. An officer was sent to the location to investigate on both occasions, but by the time they arrived the vehicle had already left the scene.

CHRISTA

And you thought pursuing the lead
after that was unnecessary?

Her tone is becoming increasingly critical. He toughens up.

FISHER (V.O.)

You have to understand, we get
these kinds of calls every week.
The great majority never amount to
anything.

CHRISTA

Then can you articulate why you
suddenly find this conversion van
so important?

FISHER (V.O.)

The investigation is ongoing. All I
can say is that it's of interest.

CHRISTA

Forgive me, Officer, but I find it
peculiar that you would address a
vehicle parked on the side of the
road two days ago before you would
say anything about what's going on
right now inside Seven Pines.

She waits for Fisher to respond. When he doesn't do so
immediately she becomes impatient --

CHRISTA

There are two bodies, a host of
slaughtered dogs, potential
suspects lurking throughout the
neighborhood... are your officers
even bothering to search for them?

FISHER (V.O.)

All I can tell you is that police
work takes time...

He is irritated, for sure, but also caught off-guard.

CHRISTA

Our law enforcement expert, Mark
Glasgow, has a question for you.

Glasgow is brought back in next to Christa, as before.

GLASGOW

Officer Fisher, with my experience, I understand police work is nuanced and complex. I get that nothing happens at a snap of the fingers. But what's striking to me is the circumstantial evidence that rogue elements have invaded Seven Pines to embark on a coordinated attack.

CHRISTA

I would call the behavior of these people we've seen cult-like, wouldn't you, Mark?

GLASGOW

I don't want to go too far, Christa. In general, I preach caution. But because of my history working with the Manson people, I have a nose for these things. I think you should be on alert, Officer Fisher. You have to be. A whole lot of innocent residents, including a pair of my colleagues, could be at risk.

FISHER (V.O.)

I respect your point of view, Mr. Glasgow. Unfortunately, you aren't on the ground or inside our command center.

Clay saves Fisher from Glasgow and Christa by relaying a question from behind the scenes --

CLAY

Officer... we're getting some breaking news here. The producers want me to ask if you can confirm that the body inside the house does in fact belong to the homeowner, Rita Verkowski?

FISHER (V.O.)

We have no comment at this time.

After a moment listening to his earpiece, Clay continues --

CLAY

Then can I ask if you know anything about quote 'graffiti' that was written in blood on the walls?

FISHER (V.O.)

I came on your show to seek the public's help with the conversion van. That's all I can discuss.

He has had enough.

CHRISTA

There's nothing else you can say to the residents of Seven Pines or to the families of the victims?

Knowing that he needs to correct course, Fisher both softens and projects confidence.

FISHER (V.O.)

We are doing, and will do, everything we can to resolve this case as quickly and as safely as possible. Please have faith in us.

Fisher's final sentence exudes a grim desperation that was absent in his first sentence. The implication is dark.

CHRISTA

We're rooting for you, Officer Fisher. We'll let you get back to work.

The graphic representing Fisher is replaced with an INFOGRAPHIC: White bullet points over a generic image of a conversion van. The bullet points are as follows --

*Conversion Van; *"Worn"; *"Dirty"; *Last Seen in the Vicinity of Seven Pines; *Reported 2x in Previous Week; *Call 770-565-8799 with Additional Info

CHRISTA

(to the viewers)

A reminder that if you want to sound off on how the police are handling this investigation, our website and social media outlets are the place to do so. Amanda will be combing through those comments. In the meantime, though, it sounds like we finally have Isabel back...

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Isabel stands in front of a manicured hedge at the boundary of a property we haven't seen before. She is not lit well. When she speaks, her voice is soft.

ISABEL

I am. A few minutes ago, I spotted a man stalking through the backyards. Chuck, if you will-

The camera pans away from Isabel towards an adjacent house. In the distant shadows, we see the outlines of a MAN who appears to be on the HUNT.

His pattern of movement is highly regimented, professional. No indication of recklessness.

CHRISTA

Is this related at all to the three women we saw? Where were you then?

ISABEL (O.S.)

I stepped away after noticing this individual. So, no, it's not related.

CLAY

We're just glad you're OK.

The camera pans back to Isabel.

CHRISTA

Do you have any idea who he is or what he's doing? It's not the young man who harassed you, is it?

ISABEL

I believe he's either a resident set on taking matters into his own hands or a suspect.

CHRISTA

Why do you think that?

ISABEL

He's armed with a military grade assault rifle, for one.

A beat.

CLAY

Isabel...

CHRISTA

And two?

She glances off-screen instead of answering promptly. Clay fills the gap, expressing some worry.

CLAY

The police are down the street.
Have you notified them?

Isabel points. The camera pans --

THE HUNTER AIMS HIS GUN AND CHARGES TOWARDS A FENCE.

CHRISTA

Can you see what he's going after?

ISABEL

Not yet.

The hunter SCALES the fence, DROPS to the other side. The camera zooms in, but we can't see through the fence.

The camera zooms out; Isabel re-enters the frame --

Just as she does, a FLOODLIGHT flares on behind the fence, likely triggered by a motion sensor.

CLAY

We're right here, Isabel. Keep talking...

She heads towards the fence... *when two men begin shouting at each other.*

ISABEL

He's in a verbal altercation with someone, maybe-

The hunter climbs back over the fence. The floodlight illuminates him. He is a WHITE MALE in his 40s. Handsome. Close cropped hair, extremely fit. Wearing CAMOUFLAGE.

Upon landing, he sees Isabel and the camera and INSTINCTIVELY AIMS THE GUN AT HER --

She raises her hands.

THE HUNTER

What the hell are you doing, ma'am?

The hunter speaks louder than necessary. His words are firm and strangely articulated.

ISABEL

I'm a reporter. There's a camera with me here.

THE HUNTER

Get closer please ma'am so I can read your lips.

Clay doesn't like this at all.

CLAY

Let it go, Isabel. There's no-

Isabel walks forward with her hands still up... the hunter gets away from the floodlight.

ISABEL

You look like you've been trained, sir. Were you in the military?

THE HUNTER

This is an extremely dangerous situation. You cannot by any means stay within the perimeter.

He points at Chuck and the camera.

THE HUNTER

Turn off that light, sir.

Chuck has been conditioned to only listen to Isabel.

THE HUNTER

I said turn off that light!

ISABEL

Listen to him, Chuck.

Chuck kills the camera light, yielding near total darkness.

ISABEL

Aren't you concerned about obstructing the police?

THE HUNTER

Neither of you realize what's happening, do you? Why do you think they breached the gate, ma'am? Why do you think they butchered all the dogs, sir? What do you think is taking place?

ISABEL

I'm not-

A STEREO TURNS ON.

Everyone, except for the hunter, JUMPS. Even the co-anchors.

Assaultive music plays from behind the fence at a volume too loud to take - which is exactly the point.

Isabel is forced to cover her ears and retreat.

The hunter though is unperturbed... *as alluded to, he can't hear a thing.* He is DEAF.

Nevertheless, he seizes the chance to continue his reconnaissance, merging fully with the night.

Because of the music, the producers shut off Isabel's audio. As she tries to reset, her feed is cut too, leaving us with Christa and Clay, who try to settle themselves.

CHRISTA

Apologies for- The shock of the music. Unless she runs off again, I assume we'll go back to Isabel as soon as she's somewhere quiet. In the meantime, I think we can assuredly say that the armed man is a resident, not a suspect. A vigilante...

Clay's shoulders and chest rise as he takes a deep breath.

CLAY

Who may actually be deaf, too, based on his reactions. I want to be extremely cautious, but I think I agree with you.

CHRISTA

Clearly, the police aren't earning the faith of everyone in the community... which makes this an opportune time for Amanda to fill us in on what you, our viewers, have been saying online. Amanda?

STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Amanda is enthused to report on the touchscreen, which is busy tracking a surge in online traffic for the show's website and social media accounts.

AMANDA

It's exciting, Christa. We're up to nearly ten thousand interactions through our website, Twitter, and Facebook, the most I've seen since I started working here. And that number's rising by the second.

Her statement is proven out visually - the bar graphs on the touchscreen escalate continuously.

AMANDA

The mood of our viewers seems to be dominated by fear and anxiety. Folks are understandably on edge.

She taps a tab on the corner of the screen. The bar graph is replaced with a screen capture of a Facebook wall post.

AMANDA

For example, Christine Bally, who lives in Seven Pines, tells us that she's witnessed 'at least three or four suspicious people' in the neighborhood since the story broke. And she's not alone...

As Amanda swipes through a couple more Facebook posts...

SPLIT-SCREEN: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Chuck's camera is brought up in a small side panel without sound. Isabel walks in heavy shadow through backyards...

Amanda makes no comment on the video, ostensibly ignorant of its presence. She continues discussing Facebook.

AMANDA

...Alvin Carillo warns that there is a 'super tall lurker out there,' while Sadie Berkshire is urging her neighbors to 'keep their doors locked until morning.' But one of the most compelling responses came in shortly after Officer Fisher started speaking...

She presses another tab, and the touchscreen flips to the show's Twitter timeline. She expands an @reply from @CaseTho98 who's using his handle as the name on his account:

"Bros dared me to follow an evil van out of 7pines tue night. Ended up here <https://maps.google.com/maps?q=...> SUPER SKETCHY CROWD"

AMANDA

On Twitter, @CaseTho98 claims some of his friends dared him to follow a mysterious van on Tuesday night.

Amanda presses the link embedded in the tweet. The touchscreen pulls up Google Maps with a pin dropped in an area near the freeway.

Meanwhile, in the feed from Seven Pines, Isabel walks out onto the street in front of the crime scenes and flags down a lone police officer, standing guard outside.

They have an exchange; he gets in his car and drives off.

As Amanda switches to Street View. The images depict an ENCLAVE of around 35 DILAPIDATED ONE-ROOM SQUATTER CABINS. A FREEWAY runs adjacent to it.

AMANDA

He ended up at this location, off I-75, 15 miles west of Seven Pines.

A decayed wooden sign reads "FRANCIS LODGE."

AMANDA

The property used to be a hunting lodge, but it closed in the '80s and has been abandoned ever since.

As the parade of Street View images concludes, activity occurs in the feed from Seven Pines --

THE SHELL-SHOCKED YOUNG MAN FROM THE START OF THE PROGRAM DELIBERATELY APPROACHES ISABEL.

She tries talking to him - without results - before the man removes something SHINY from underneath his shirt.

Abruptly, the feed cuts out; the panel is taken away.

Amanda, unaware, turns to engage Christa and Clay. Her tone is all wrong given what we just saw --

AMANDA

Now, Christa and Clay, I traded DMs with @CaseTho98, and what he said about the 'sketchy crowd' aligns with the fact that, locally, Francis Lodge is known as a gathering place for vagrants.

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

Christa and Clay return, distracted. To buy time, Christa rattles off a follow-up question --

CHRISTA

Did he say anything about the make or model of the van?

AMANDA

Gun to head he'd say it was a Chevy, but he was following from too far behind to tell for sure.

Dead air for a moment then Clay spits out --

CLAY

I can't imagine he got a good look at the inside of the vehicle either? Anyone inside, I mean.

AMANDA

No. And once it parked at the lodge it was too dark to see. Although someone did get out and say something that he can't recall. At that point, for whatever reason, he felt compelled to drive home. Hard to blame him.

Christa nods, but it feels like it's more for the producers than for Amanda. Clay also seems to be getting back on track.

CLAY

Has he told any of this to police?

AMANDA

I suspect the information is finding its way to them now.

CHRISTA

An intriguing wrinkle in this saga, Amanda. We'll see if it produces any results. And, Mark, as we reintroduce you...

The social media post is jettisoned; Glasgow is slotted in.

CHRISTA

(to the viewers)

We're just as anxious as you are to get back to Seven Pines, where I'm being told the altercation involving Isabel has ended - although we don't know how. But while we wait to catch up, Mark, what are your thoughts on this internet tip? How useful is it?

GLASGOW

Francis Lodge reminds me a whole heck of a lot of Spahn Ranch, I can tell you that.

Clay adds color for the viewers. He's wordy as a result of his anxiety over Isabel.

CLAY

This was the location - literally a ranch - where Charles Manson and his followers lived, that became a staging ground for the gruesome murders they committed.

GLASGOW

(nods)

Manson saw those homicides as a means of inciting 'Helter Skelter,' the apocalyptic race war he prophesized to his followers. Disturbing stuff... and a nice piece of trivia I wouldn't have brought up without the Twitter report. But other than that, I take it as a low-value, minimum credibility tip to be filed away for a rainy day.

CHRISTA

Even though you're concerned about the nature and the scope of this assault on Seven Pines?

GLASGOW

Yes because this is just a story some kid posted on social media.

CLAY

Do you think there's an element of strategy involved, then, Mark, in the police giving this van so much attention? As if it could be an intentional misdirection?

Christa steps on the last part of Clay's question --

CHRISTA

Isabel? Isabel, are you there?

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Behind Isabel, a pair of police officers hover over someone sprawled out on the lawn of the first crime scene.

ISABEL

A chilling turn here, Christa and Clay. The officers behind me are tending to the young man I encountered when the night began.

CHRISTA

Give us the full rundown, Isabel. We only saw the start.

ISABEL

I walked the few hundred feet back here to inform the police about the armed vigilante. Afterwards, he approached me. I tried talking to him... but the situation escalated quickly.

CLAY

Did he try to harm you?

ISABEL

Actually, it's my understanding that we can air the footage now.

CHRISTA

If you hold on...

Christa and Clay await clarification from the producers.

CLAY

Yes, Isabel, I think that's...

He looks to Christa for confirmation.

ISABEL

I should warn everyone that it's highly disturbing.

CHRISTA

OK, we have it. Here it is...

VIDEO OF ISABEL'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE SHELL-SHOCKED MAN

When the clip begins, he is 15 feet away from Isabel. Both are on the street. Everything can be seen better this time because there is sound and the video is full-screen.

The shell-shocked man silently approaches. He is excessively calm, to the point that it is unnatural.

Isabel stands her ground. She looks at the camera to make sure Chuck is recording.

ISABEL

Do you want to talk? It's OK. Do you need to confess to something?

The shell-shocked man does not reply. He shuffles towards Isabel, who points at the house --

ISABEL

The police are right there...

THE SHELL-SHOCKED MAN REMOVES A KNIFE FROM UNDER HIS SHIRT.

Isabel is finally alarmed. The camera comes forward - a sign of Chuck preparing to somehow, probably meekly, intervene - when the shell-shocked man HALTS.

He speaks while losing control of his breath, a PANIC ATTACK.

SHELL-SHOCKED MAN

I did it! I don't know why. I killed them all! It was me but it was him. He made me! Somehow...

He continues towards the circle of dead dogs as two officers emerge from within the house. They RUSH at him with GUNS drawn, SHOUTING protocol over one another --

POLICE

Drop the weapon! // On the ground!
// Drop it! // On your knees!

SHELL-SHOCKED MAN

I'm sorry Mom. I deserve- This is what...

The shell-shocked man moves forward.

As the cops close in on him in a pincer formation his knife-hand JERKS towards his chest - and the video FREEZES before fading to BLACK.

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK | LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Christa is flummoxed.

CHRISTA

Is that all there is? Or is that all we're going to show?

She checks around off-screen. Clay hangs his head.

CLAY

I think that's all we need to see to know...

Christa seems to get her answer from the producers; her displeasure is visible.

CHRISTA

Can you at least explain what happened then, Isabel, after the clip was stopped?

ISABEL

He turned the knife on himself.
(a beat)
All indications are that he has since been pronounced dead.

CHRISTA

When you say, 'He turned the knife on himself,' you mean... what exactly did he do?

Isabel hesitates, unsure how to answer - or if she should answer at all.

ISABEL

He stabbed himself in the chest... multiple times.

A harrowing seed for our imaginations. Its effect on Clay permeates to his face.

CLAY

A grisly end. Just... terrible.

CHRISTA

He seemed to be taking responsibility for these crimes. For *all* of these crimes. Would you agree with that assessment, Isabel?

ISABEL

It's difficult to say if that's exactly what he meant, but I came away with a similar impression.

CHRISTA

My thoughts immediately go to the other reports we've received, and some of the images... the girls with the dresses. The individual with the gas can.

CLAY

I think we have to be careful about roping all of these things together. We don't really know if-

CHRISTA

Should we get Mark back in? Mark...

Glasgow re-joins the program.

CHRISTA

You've been a proponent of the idea that Seven Pines could be the setting for a larger assault. What do you think now?

GLASGOW

Just a second, Christa. Have I brought up that *possibility*? Yep, I did. And we're going to have to see where the investigation goes. But I'm willing to be the bigger man here and admit I might have been wrong. You don't see that from experts in my position very often.

CLAY

What changed for you, Mark?

GLASGOW

Besides the obvious? An uncoerced confession? Think about these other elements. Were the drugged out women bizarre? Sure. Does that make them criminals? Not in America.

(MORE)

GLASGOW (CONT'D)

And we have no real proof of where the video of this character with the gas can was shot. Not to mention nothing has been set on fire tonight. You heard my opinion about the tip from Twitter. For all we know, the conversion van belongs to the confessor.

CHRISTA

How about this claim of 'he made me do it' that was uttered multiple times? It suggests a hierarchy. A leader...

CLAY

I don't think we can discount a devotion to a higher power either. I wonder about religious beliefs, the *bad* kind of religious beliefs.

GLASGOW

Or he's a young man suffering from paranoid delusions. Who can say? No doubt the police will have to do a deep dive. Because it could also be the thread that connects the Verkowskis with Jess Koston. We just don't know.

Isabel weighs in.

ISABEL

Especially, Mark, since the surest method would have been to question the suspect, as I tried to do. Unfortunately, that's no longer an option.

As the repercussions of this are digested...

CLAY

Let's all hope and pray that this man's demise means the good folks of Seven Pines have seen the last of tragedy for quite some time.

CHRISTA

Still, so many questions remain. Thank you, Mark. Thank you, Isabel.

Alone on-screen with Clay, Christa sums up the proceedings.

CHRISTA

If the violence in Seven Pines has in fact ended, this latest death will mark the culmination of a sequence of events this community will remember for generations.

She turns to Clay for the sake of discussion.

CHRISTA

Three brutal murders and an equally ghastly suicide, committed in a hail of stab wounds for reasons currently unknown.

CLAY

And unimaginable, really. Truly unbelievable crimes...

Music starts, signaling an ensuing segue to commercial.

CHRISTA

We're going to fulfill our obligations to our advertisers now that the situation has settled. When we return, we'll finish out the hour with more discussion on the violence in Seven Pines.

The music overtakes the rest of the audio, and the show heads to commercial with a jib arm shot of the studio overlaid with a graphic of the "Eyewitness News" logo.

In the shot, we catch a glimpse of Clay losing his studio veneer, showing age and emotional wear and tear, as he tries getting the attention of Christa, who is complaining feverishly to someone off-camera --

A PAIR OF 30-SECOND COMMERCIALS

Again, from real advertisers. The second spot, however, is interrupted --

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

"Eyewitness News" returns with fading music and a slow zoom towards the co-anchor desk. A stage hand hurries off; neither Clay nor Christa is ready.

CHRISTA

A change... a change of plans here on 'WCGG Eyewitness News at 10,' with breaking news on the homicides in the gated community of Seven Pines, where we have uncovered a link between an alleged suspect and the suspicious vehicle that has been a focus of the police investigation. Our field correspondent, Isabel Flores, the only reporter who has been granted access to the community by its residents, is waiting exclusively with the story. Isabel, are you there?

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Isabel is in the middle of a street. Behind her is a cul-de-sac featuring a dark two-story house lit only by accent lights along the driveway and a lamp in the front yard.

ISABEL

I'm here. Across from the Kostons'. Another police car and an ambulance came in and forced me away from the crime scenes, about a block and a half out... perpendicular.

CLAY

Go ahead and tell us what you know about the link between the suspect and the conversion van.

The question throws Isabel off.

ISABEL

No, that's not- In talking with the police, no one has said anything about the van. I haven't been able to uncover a connection between it and the alleged suspect at all.

Clearly, the producers misinterpreted whatever Isabel told them she was ready to report. Beyond irritated, Christa does her best to cover the gaffe.

CHRISTA

Well, where's the logic in that? The *police spokesman* came on our program to talk about the van.

(MORE)

CHRISTA (CONT'D)

Something must have been communicated to the officers at the scene. Otherwise the investigation is being managed even more poorly than I thought.

We may not notice right away, but behind Isabel, at the aforementioned house at the end of the cul-de-sac...

A LIGHT IN THE FAR CORNER OF THE SECOND STORY FLICKERS ON AND OFF, ALMOST AS IF SOMEONE IS TRYING TO SIGNAL FOR HELP...

ISABEL

I'm not privy to conversations between the spokesman and the first responders and the homicide detectives. Surprisingly, I've only seen a handful of police officers. But I'm sure central command-

Christa notices the flickering light. She interrupts --

CHRISTA

There's a light behind you.

Isabel turns around.

CHRISTA

Can you see? It's flickering on and off in the house at the end of the cul-de-sac. On the top floor.

ISABEL

It looks like someone is signaling for help.

Isabel heads for the house. The camera follows.

CLAY

Hopefully it's nothing...

As she reaches the sidewalk, the flickering ramps up.

CHRISTA

Try to get an angle on whatever's going on behind that window.

Isabel peers up at the window then glances off to the side.

ISABEL

I can't see inside, Christa, but hold on- The front door is open.

She moves forward, shifting her attention...

CLAY
 I don't think you should-
 (to Christa)
 She shouldn't go in.

Christa more or less ignores him.

CHRISTA
 Isabel, watch yourself. Tell us
 what you see.

Isabel presses open the front door. The camera goes with her.

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE THE DARK TWO-STORY HOUSE

The light from the camera illuminates something on the side of the wall in the foyer --

RED, WET GRAFFITI... THE WORDS "PIG\$" AND "WAR."

Our first thought is that it was written in BLOOD.

ISABEL
 Someone's been in here...

The camera features the graffiti; Isabel slides out of frame.

CHRISTA
 The letters look like they're
 dripping. Is that a liquid?

CLAY
 I don't know what else it could be.

We hear *the flick of a light switch*. A GLOW infects the shot from off-screen.

The camera pans towards it, picking back up with Isabel, who stands at the edge of the foyer, having just turned on a floor lamp in an adjacent room. In the orb of light --

SOMEONE IS SLUMPED ON THEIR KNEES, FACE SMUSHED AGAINST THE WINDOW, SOFTLY HUMMING.

CLAY
 Isabel... just- It's better if-

CHRISTA
 Is that a man or a woman? Are they-

The someone STANDS.

It is an adolescent GIRL no older than 15. A runaway in boy's clothes, whatever she could grab as she fled a broken home.

Her FACE is smeared with BLOOD.

The window is a CURTAIN OF RED, except for impressions left by her nose, forehead, and mouth.

She will be known to us as THE WAIF.

ISABEL

Are you- Don't do anything too fast. Do you live here? Or did you break in? Did you hurt someone?

The waif crumples to the floor in a childlike state. Her arms and legs wing out, in motion, as if making a snow angel... yet there is no snow only blood.

Isabel steps back...

When a GUNSHOT comes from somewhere else, maybe the basement.

Clay loses his cool, yells --

CLAY

Get out of the house!

CHRISTA

Get upstairs, Isabel. Someone in that room needs help.

CLAY

No! Chuck, get her out of there!

Isabel and the camera have an angle through the foyer and into the kitchen --

Where the CLEAN CUT MAN FROM THE YOUTUBE VIDEO is sitting on the floor with the VINTAGE GAS CAN upside down in his lap.

A beat.

Isabel RUSHES upstairs --

Clay *moans*. He clasps the back of his neck.

CHRISTA

You're being brave, Isabel. You have the chance to be a hero.

Christa knows exactly what to say even if her focus is on how she will be perceived by the audience, rather than on Isabel, who crests the top of the stairs --

At the same time a *commotion* on the first floor indicates the intruders *scurrying* out of the house and *slamming* the doors.

CLAY

What was that?! Did they leave?
(to Christa)
I heard a gunshot! Did they lock
her inside?!

CHRISTA

Tell us what you see, Isabel.

Isabel turns into the long upstairs hallway that extends in only one direction...

ISABEL

I see a single open door at the
very end of the hallway.

CHRISTA

That would be the room where the
light was flickering.

Isabel nods, maintaining her composure.

CLAY

This should be left for the police.

She passes one closed door... then another. And another...
getting nearer to the open room with each step...

When a well-dressed MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN stumbles out into the
hallway and onto her knees, breaking down, sopped in tears.

Isabel runs to her.

ISABEL

It's OK, it's OK. You're going to
be alright. Tell me what happened.

Eager to comfort the skittish woman, she leans into her,
resting a hand on her back...

Which she then SNAPS away. Looking at her palm, she says --

ISABEL

You're soaked.

She sniffs the air, then feels the portion of her blouse that
was pressed against the woman.

ISABEL

Is that- Is that gas?

A PAIR OF ARMS DRAG THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN BACK INSIDE THE ROOM BY HER LEGS.

CLAY

Oh God... no!

Isabel races to the doorway.

It is the master bedroom, in utter disarray. The wardrobes are overturned. The closets have been raided. The mattress is on the floor...

A FIGURE LOOMS OVER THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN.

A GAUNT MAN of indeterminate age, TALL and IMPOSING, visible only in profile, illuminated by the moonlight coming in through the window.

His face is cast largely in shadow. He is unkempt, dressed in shabby clothing, and calm - disturbingly so; in contrast to the middle-aged woman's terror, he is virtually sedate.

One of his hands rests on the light switch, currently in the off position. The other fiddles with a SHINY OBJECT.

THE GAUNT MAN

Kind of you to make it. Kind of you to visit.

His words are addressed to Isabel.

THE GAUNT MAN

You're very pretty. I'm blessed to have you.

ISABEL

To have me? What are you talking about? What is this?

THE GAUNT MAN

My soul needs a window. My vision needs malignancy.

ISABEL

Don't hurt that woman.

THE GAUNT MAN

Be amenable darling and step away.

Isabel refuses his directive.

Staring her down, the gaunt man gently hands the shiny object to the woman, a ZIPPO LIGHTER...

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN

No... no... no... no... no...

ISABEL

Do not hurt her!

The gaunt man nods.

THE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN SPARKS THE LIGHTER, SETTING HERSELF ON FIRE AND IGNITING A BLAZE.

It happens so fast that it's practically incomprehensible to us, to Isabel, to Clay and Christa...

Chuck is the first to act. He waves his arm in front of the lens and bursts out --

CHUCK (O.S.)

Get back!

As the RAGING FIRE provokes the others --

CLAY

Go go go go go!

CHRISTA

Both of you, get out!

Isabel runs towards the stairs. The camera lets her pass and then tracks behind her.

Down the stairs, we see --

PATCHES OF FIRE SPREADING THROUGHOUT THE HOUSE.

CHRISTA

There must be other arsonists...

CLAY

They must be outside the house!

Isabel CAREENS down the steps. FLAMES LEAP over the handrail, CATCHING the SLEEVE of her BLOUSE --

FLAMES LICK OFF THE FABRIC.

Isabel SLAMS her hand over the top, SMOTHERING the flames --

As she TRIPS down the last of the stairs and PITCHES towards the entrance, COLLIDING with Chuck, who OPENS the door --

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

And then they're both OUTSIDE, pulling away from the house. By nature of their path, the shot widens...

There are no signs of the intruders.

CHRISTA

There's no one outside. They're gone. They're-

CLAY

We can see well enough where you are, Isabel. Chuck, pull back.

But the window at the far corner of the house is once again illuminated, this time thanks to the flames...

And the gaunt man is standing in front of it, seemingly unmoved by the heat and the fire building all around him...

CHRISTA

That man- He's back in the window. Isabel, track him-

ISABEL

I'm trying to get an angle-

She was already in motion, but the challenge from Christa only intensifies her efforts. The camera moves in accordance.

CLAY

It isn't worth it! No!

A POLICE CAR SPEEDS DOWN THE CUL-DE-SAC.

A pair of OFFICERS exits. They hurry towards the house, as the cop that told Isabel to get off the property at the original crime scene arrives on foot --

POLICE OFFICER

You've gotta clear out. Go!

Isabel withdraws just enough to satisfy him and yells --

ISABEL

Someone's inside! There's a suspect on the second floor!

The three police officers storm towards the front door, but the smoke is piling up. The heat from the fire causes them to recoil. At the same time --

THE WINDOW THE GAUNT MAN IS STANDING BEHIND EXPLODES, a by-product of the fire consuming all the oxygen in the room.

The cops stumble backwards from the sound and debris. Isabel instinctively turns sideways, covers her face.

The gaunt man, however, is at ease...

HE DESCENDS THROUGH THE FLAMES AND DISAPPEARS FROM VIEW.

CLAY

No. Dear God, it looks like- We're going to lose him. Another suspect.

CHRISTA

Isabel, what are the chances he survives? Or escapes?

Smoke, debris, and sparks from the fire are everywhere. Isabel covers her head, shifts, and shouts an answer --

ISABEL

He might get out. He just passed through the flames and-

The volume of the *roaring flames* blows out the audio. The rest of Isabel's response is inaudible.

CHRISTA

We have to hold on here for a moment due to the audio...

(hesitates, listening)

As we welcome in viewers from affiliate networks across the country...

She is shaken but eager to indulge what has become a once in a lifetime opportunity to raise her profile. Visions of a spot on a national news program propel her forward.

CHRISTA

I'm Christa Reynolds. With me is Clay Dessner...

With tortured eyes, Clay nods, doing his best to maintain an air of professionalism.

CHRISTA

For those just joining us... OK, her audio is clean? Isabel?

The producers deem it safe to raise the level on Isabel's mic as she moves further away from the fire.

ISABEL

I'm here, Christa. Live inside the once quiet gated community of Seven Pines, where yet another attack has occurred, this time a woman in her 40s who was somehow... bullied or threatened into setting herself on fire as part of a systematic group assault, the result being the house behind me that is in flames...

CLAY

And from what we heard, Isabel - what I'm pretty sure you must have heard, too - there was a gunshot, and likely at least one other victim inside the house. I'm still trying to wrap my head around everything... we all are, I think.

ISABEL

Yes, Clay. Even as I hear fire sirens approaching, there is an overwhelming sense here that we are in a very dangerous environment, with as many assailants as police and no feeling that the latter is in control.

CHRISTA

Of course nothing will prevent us from pursuing every fact about this story for our viewers, who deserve the complete and unvarnished truth. I know you agree, Isabel.

ISABEL

Absolutely, Christa.

CHRISTA

Stay right with us then, please, as you prepare for the arrival of the fire department...

Their doggedness in the face of tremendous risk makes Clay more apprehensive than he already was.

CLAY

Please, Isabel. Be careful.

She nods, staying engaged with the studio while remaining as near to the burning house as the trio of increasingly disorganized police officers will allow her to be.

Her panel of video is downsized; Christa continues --

CHRISTA

We welcome back now our law enforcement expert, Mark Glasgow...

Glasgow is reintroduced on-screen. Christa turns to him.

CHRISTA

Mark, how would you attempt to reconcile your earlier dismissal of the threat to Seven Pines with what just occurred? Regrettably, I don't think you can.

GLASGOW

When I said my initial gut instinct might have been wrong, I never imagined it would end up being this *right*. I *cannot shake* the parallels to Manson. That's what I see, Christa. Too many parallels. The lesson is to always trust your gut.

CHRISTA

Then what are the similarities?

GLASGOW

The suspects share basic physical characteristics - crummy clothes, a disheveled appearance. We saw them work together as a unit in that house. There's copycat graffiti. And this commune at the abandoned hunting retreat, an obvious fill-in for Spahn Ranch, that can't be dismissed as a fairy tale anymore. All of this is straight out of the Manson Family playbook.

Glasgow is on the highway to hysteria. Isabel, who has been listening while watching for something off-camera, jumps in --

ISABEL

Christa, if I can add to your question. What difference do these parallels make, Mark? What are you suggesting to the people in and around Seven Pines who are already scared?

GLASGOW

You may not know, Isabel, that the Tate-LaBianca murders were planned to service an apocalyptic war-

CHRISTA

'Helter Skelter,' we know. You said as much earlier.

Christa's frustration with Isabel for cutting in to her question shows in her shortness with Glasgow, who is demonstrative in his response.

GLASGOW

Point being, Christa... Manson had other operatives at Spahn Ranch preparing to strike. The possibility that the same situation exists at Francis Lodge is high. That other neighborhoods will be attacked. If there's anything else to be afraid of - and I know there's a lot already - this is it.

A beat, as Isabel continues to be perplexed by whatever is or isn't happening off-screen... and the focus shifts to Clay, who has been preoccupied with his iPad.

CLAY

One second, everyone. Bear with me. Behind the scenes has breaking news. I'm going through it now...

Glasgow is dismissed in favor of an additional video panel --

SPLIT-SCREEN: NEWS CHOPPER FOOTAGE OF THE GATED ENTRANCE

We watch from above as FIREFIGHTERS hustle out of a FIRE TRUCK parked in front of the entrance to the gated community.

The gate is LOCKED and CHAINED. Three firemen use AXES in an attempt to BREAK THROUGH. So far they have been unsuccessful.

In-studio, Clay proceeds slowly, reading from his iPad.

CLAY

We've learned that the Wellington Fire Department has been unable to gain entrance to Seven Pines, that something is wrong with the gate... we have a news chopper-

CHRISTA

Actually, Clay, we can see it now.

Her tone is condescending. At the same time, the information provokes Isabel --

ISABEL

Clay, Christa, you may have noticed me looking off down the street. This is exactly why. I thought the fire trucks should have been here by now...

CHRISTA

Should you head to the gate then?
(to the producers)
Should she?

ISABEL

We will, yes. We'll go there.

Isabel moves out. Clay tries to get her attention --

CLAY

Can she still hear us? Officers trying to get over the fence at various points around the perimeter have been turned back by gunfire.

Indeed *intermittent gunfire* can be heard coming from somewhere on the ground, off in the distance.

Christa spots a point of interest in the helicopter footage --

CHRISTA

It looks like something has been setup behind the gate, too. It hasn't just been locked. I wish I could tell precisely- Can you see that, Clay?

He isn't fast to respond. She faces him, prepared for the possibility that his anxiety and her earlier tone have caused him to drift.

CHRISTA

Clay, do you-

CLAY

Look at the guard shack.

THE GLASS IS SPLATTERED WITH RED.

CLAY
 We have to tell the firefighters.
 (looks off-camera)
 What about Isabel?

CHRISTA
 I'm being told that we need to
 quickly go to Amanda-

CLAY
 We have to inform them-

CHRISTA
 People are on it, Clay.

She's telling him to shut up so they can move on to --

CHRISTA
 Amanda, you have information on a
 lead...

SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

As Amanda is reintroduced, the helicopter footage is
 shepherded to the lower right corner of the screen.

AMANDA
 Absolutely, Christa. About 20
 minutes ago, we noticed a commenter
 on Instagram saying she had video
 of the conversion van the police
 were so stressed about. After
 seeing the video, we decided it was
 something we have to share with our
 viewers right away.

While she says this, the firemen retreat from the gate.

CHRISTA
 Hang on, Amanda. The firefighters
 are backing away from the gate...

CLAY
 Are they giving up? What would that
 mean?

CHRISTA
 That the gate is impenetrable.

CLAY
 No one can get in...

CHRISTA

Or out.

(a beat)

It means we have the only reporter in Seven Pines and she's trapped inside with a cult of savage killers.

Framing the most lurid aspect of the story, she feels a surge of adrenalin. Clay pushes his fist against his mouth, shadowboxing hopelessness.

CLAY

Can't we get to her?! She has to find a way out.

CHRISTA

OK, we can talk now. Isabel, go ahead.

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Counter to what's expected, Isabel remains in the vicinity of the burning house, which is moving ever closer to collapse.

ISABEL

Christa, I stayed to report on a helicopter-

The sound of the aforementioned helicopter overwhelms her.

A SPOTLIGHT enters the fray, coming from the chopper, searching the area around the cul-de-sac...

ISABEL

Unprecedented 911 calls. A police chopper- Here for- Suspects.

Her voice cuts in and out, from audible to inaudible, as a result of the shifting position of the helicopter.

CLAY

The gate is sealed off, Isabel. Can you hear me?

It doesn't appear that she can. Christa looks over to the social media post --

CHRISTA

Amanda, you're saying your commenter also called 911? And she's closer to the gate?

As Amanda answers with her mic off, Isabel turns and shouts at the police. The background noise drowns her out; furthermore, the spotlight douses her, blowing out the image.

CHRISTA

OK, Amanda, if you have it setup then let's talk to this girl. I hope you can ease her nerves.

SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST | SKYPE FEED, FROM INSIDE THE HOME OF SHAWNA PATTERSON

Amanda, embracing the moment, accepts Christa's handoff adjacent to the touchscreen, which is running Skype.

SHAWNA PATTERSON, a button-cute 15-year-old brunette with glasses, sits on the sofa in front of her laptop.

A window in the background allows police lights and the ambient noise of a devolving neighborhood into the house.

AMANDA

Thanks, Christa. I'm here with Shawna Patterson. Hi Shawna.

Shawna is too terrified to reciprocate a greeting.

At the same time, without being noticed by her or Amanda...

THE WAIF, BATHED IN BLOOD, WALKS PAST THE WINDOW WITH A RIFLE FIT TO KILL AN ELEPHANT.

She disappears quickly, so fast that we might not see her at all - or know what we saw if we did.

AMANDA

You told me you've been home alone while your mom and step-dad are away on their honeymoon. Where were you when you took the video our viewers are about to see?

SHAWNA

Getting stuff for Instagram and Vine.

A FLASHLIGHT shines on the window then turns off.

Amanda flinches. She almost says something but lets it go.

AMANDA

Why don't we show the video, OK?
(to the camera)
(MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

To everybody who sent me feedback about the footage of Isabel and the alleged suspect cutting out too soon... we're listening. I'm pretty sure you won't have the same complaint this time around. Go ahead and roll tape, guys. This is from about 50 minutes ago.

Shawna must think that the feed has already switched over because she asks, almost begging --

SHAWNA

Can you protect me?

Then the feed actually does switch, with no time for Amanda to react or respond.

CELL PHONE VIDEO

It is dark.

A pair of COPS we haven't seen approaches a vehicle parked on the side of the road inside Seven Pines, a dirty off-white CONVERSION VAN full of dents that looks like someone may have been living inside of it. The license plate is visible.

As the cops shine their flashlights, the doors open...

AND THE THREE "BRIDES" WHO SPOKE TO CHUCK EARLIER SLINK OUT.

They are dressed in black, ratty, boyish clothing; this must have been shot before they acquired the wigs and the dresses.

Seeing that it's *just* three skinny girls, the cops let down their guards. COP #1 does all the talking.

COP #1

Do either of you own this vehicle?

The blonde bride shrugs first, then the brunette. The redhead bites her lip.

We notice they are holding their hands behind their backs...

BLONDE BRIDE

We're just waking up for the day.

BRUNETTE BRIDE

Our friend set our alarm clock.

COP #1

Who's your friend? Is it their car?

REDHEAD BRIDE
He's pretty cool, right?

The redhead eyes the other two brides, who look at each other. The brunette giggles like a school girl with a crush.

COP #1
Anything inside we should know
about? Better to tell us before we
find it. Drugs? Weed, pills? What?

The blonde and the brunette laugh, as if recalling the same inside joke, while the redhead offers nothing.

Giving up on them, the cops arc towards the car...

WHEN THE BRIDES POUNCE WITH BUTCHER'S KNIVES, RAMMING BLADES
INTO FLESH LIKE PISTONS.

SHAWNA (O.S.)
Oh my God, oh my God, oh my God.

Not as quickly as some would hope, the camera turns and the image BLURS, a product of Shawna running away.

**SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST | SKYPE FEED,
FROM INSIDE THE HOME OF SHAWNA PATTERSON**

The feed returns to Shawna and Amanda, as they were.

AMANDA
You're so brave for getting that-

Shawna looks up at the ceiling. When she looks back down, she stiffens.

AMANDA
Did you hear something?

A PEBBLE pings off the window sill. Like it fell from the roof. Shawna swivels.

AMANDA
That sounded like a rock...

A SECOND PEBBLE hits. Then, rapidly, a third and a fourth.

SHAWNA
Is it Isabel? Did you send her-

A SQUIRREL drops down onto the sill. It isn't moving, and its fur looks to be coated in some kind of grime...

AMANDA

She might be heading your way, I don't know.

Shawna loses her breath. Her eyes snap towards the ceiling - there is definitely something on the roof.

AMANDA

Here, Shawna. The squirrel probably just got scared out of his home with all the commotion. Do you want to tell our viewers-

Trembling, Shawna jams closed her laptop, killing the Skype connection and stymieing Amanda.

AMANDA

Why don't we... Let's- Let's go back to you, Clay and Christa.

SPLIT-SCREEN: STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK | NEWS CHOPPER FOOTAGE OF THE GATED ENTRANCE

A two-shot of Christa and Clay. The helicopter footage is in one corner of the screen.

Additional police cars, officers, and ambulances have joined the fire trucks and firemen outside the gate. Spinning red and blue flashers abound. Local news trucks are also present.

No one can get inside.

At the edges of the shot, inside the perimeter, STREAKS OF MOVEMENT can be seen... SPECKS OF ALL BLACK; METALLIC GLINTS.

The echoes of intermittent gunfire persist.

Christa aims her energy at a visibly worried Clay.

CHRISTA

A very anxious moment there after a shocking video. And we're hearing that viewers might have noticed more than Amanda outside the window-

A fireman with an axe strapped to his back climbs the gate...

CHRISTA

And wait. There goes one of the firemen. What is he doing?

Clay looks off-screen. Someone speaks without a mic so their voice is muffled.

CLAY

Mark says they're trying to see if they can open the gate from the other side. That would mean Isabel and Chuck could leave...

As the fireman perches on top of the gate, Christa adjusts her earpiece. She needs to listen to the producers not Clay.

CHRISTA

A point of clarity being fed to me now... in the wake of the video, the Wellington PD confirms that- No, this has to do with the house. The main suspect in the arson, a male described as 'well over six feet tall,' is still at-large and likely on foot. Additional officers are being sent to the area for what has now become a manhunt.

CLAY

They can't get inside though. How can there be a manhunt when they can't cover the terrain?

CHRISTA

Mark, can you answer that? Or how about when an entity with better resources - like the state police or the National Guard or the FBI - is going to show up?

Glasgow briefly joins the program.

GLASGOW

Without question, Christa, one, two, or all three of those agencies have to be en route. But the same issue remains. If they can't get inside, what good can they do?

He is excused. Meanwhile, inside Seven Pines, a VAN drives towards the gate and parks.

CHRISTA

If we look now - maybe we should go full-screen - there's a van...

CLAY

That's our news vans isn't it?

The broadcast gets choppy, as the helicopter footage goes full-screen for two seconds and then goes away entirely.

CHRISTA

Alright, it seems that Chuck and Isabel are moving towards the gate... we have... a lot of news is coming in. Clay, you have more on the conversion van?

Clay's speech starts and stops as the story is delivered through his earpiece.

CLAY

I do, I- Should we go to Chuck's camera? No? OK, well... the news team has dug up some history using the license plate... pulled from Shawna's video.

He breaks from the script, pleading --

CLAY

One of the police officers inside Seven Pines should be headed to her house right now. To Shawna's.

Christa scolds him.

CHRISTA

She's not your responsibility, Clay. She'll be fine. What do we know about the van?

He gets a grip, remembering that he has a job to do. Going along, he gradually regains his center.

CLAY

The van... a white 1992 GMC Safari was the target of a carjacking in Atlanta a little over a month ago. Police sketches of the suspects were sent to the media...

SPLIT-SCREEN: POLICE SKETCHES

Christa and Clay are taken off-screen.

The news chopper footage is minimized but left up. Chuck and Isabel walk towards the gate from the van, while the fireman finds another spot on the fence closer to the guard shack.

Four police sketches are shown. Central to our interests is a GAUNT FACED MAN with a scraggly BEARD...

CLAY (O.S.)

The man seen at center-right - the oldest of the four - was noted as being 'exceptionally tall.'

CHRISTA (O.S.)

Like the suspect we saw tonight.

CLAY (O.S.)

And he was described by the victim as - this is a direct quote - 'the one in charge.'

The sketch under discussion is enlarged to take up the entire screen. At this size, its resemblance to the man Isabel encountered in the now burning house is unavoidable.

CLAY (O.S.)

The victim was struck in the head repeatedly with a tire iron, resulting in a near-fatal brain hemorrhage. To date, none of the assailants have been apprehended.

The sketches are replaced with the co-anchor desk. The helicopter footage is sized up.

The spotlight from the police helicopter enters the frame, shedding light on the previously shrouded dark specks and metallic glints...

Our instincts tell us they are ATTACKERS, swarming in and around the same general space as the gate.

Having charted a location away from the van, Chuck and Isabel stop and reposition.

CHRISTA

Isabel is near the gate. She should be able- Isabel, are you with us?

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

The gate is visible behind Isabel. The police and news choppers buzz above, causing her to shout and pick her spots.

ISABEL

I'm here, but it's loud.

CLAY

Did you pass by Shawna's, Isabel?
Do you know if she's safe?

ISABEL
 Shawna? I'm sorry, Clay. I don't
 know who-

Christa jumps over Clay to ask what is in her mind a far more
 pressing question --

CHRISTA
 What's behind you, Isabel?

Isabel steps aside to give the camera more room, drawing our
 eyes to the CONTRAPTIONS that have been rigged to the gate...
 LONG WIRES running off of hastily covered WOODEN CRATES.

ISABEL
 I'm not an expert by any means,
 Christa, but to my untrained eyes
 they look like crude explosives-

The fireman on top of the gate WAVES and SHOUTS to get her
 attention. She rotates and takes a few steps towards him,
 getting dangerously near the explosives. She yells back --

ISABEL
 Can you see over here? There are
 bombs rigged all across the gate.

The fireman, inaudible, points at the bloody guard shack.

CLAY
 Isabel, watch where you're going.

CHRISTA
 We could use a close-up of the
 explosives. Chuck?

As opposed to listening to Christa, the camera moves in step
 with Isabel, who veers towards the guard shack... where,
 extending out of the open doorway, lies a UNIFORMED CORPSE -
 a private security patrolman.

CLAY
 I see a body. I see-

CHRISTA
 Give us details, Isabel.

But before Isabel can answer her co-anchors, the spotlight
 from the police chopper wavers into frame --

AND HEAVY GUNFIRE COMES FROM OFF-SCREEN.

One massive booming shot after another.

CLAY
Isabel! What's going on?!

CHRISTA
What are you seeing?!

The fireman perched on the gate looks up, as does Isabel --
THE SPOTLIGHT CYCLONES.

The fireman jumps off the gate, back outside the perimeter.

CLAY
Get out of there! Go! Go!

Isabel and Chuck RUN away from the gate, away from the
explosives --

The footage from their camera is frenzied; it stabilizes for
an instant, long enough for us to see --

A HULK OF METAL SPIKES INTO THE CONCRETE.

CHRISTA
Oh my God. Was that-

CLAY
The chopper! They shot the police
helicopter out of the sky.

The mangled form of the helicopter settles about a hundred
feet from the gate, a safe distance from the explosives.

Although the camera is clearly mobile, Isabel is unseen.

CLAY
Isabel, are you OK?! Say something.

As Clay waits for a response, the news chopper flees the
area, passing over the burning house, now fully engulfed in
flames, and then its camera goes dark.

CHRISTA
To try to explain, it seems- It
appears that a police helicopter-

Isabel staggers into frame, interrupting Christa's reset.

CLAY
There you are-

ISABEL

I don't think we need- I'm not sure what you were able to see in the studio and for our viewers-

CHRISTA

We saw it, Isabel. The helicopter crash. After hearing gunshots-

ISABEL

Yes. Yes. Not a cannon but something significant.

She looks towards the gate.

ISABEL

The explosives are intact. The police and the firefighters have backed away... and I can't see any movement in the wreckage.

With the sudden absence of both helicopters, the night takes on a preternatural quiet.

CLAY

I think you should go, Isabel.
(to Christa)
I think we should end this-

ISABEL

No I'm fine. Chuck, are you good?

CHRISTA

They're fine, Clay. We're covering an unprecedented-

An unbearable whimpering sound severs the broadcast. Isabel JOLTS. Her attention turns off-camera.

CLAY

What is- That sound. It's-

CHRISTA

Isabel-

Unconscionably, the *whimpering* persists. The camera points away from Isabel to the source --

SHAWNA PATTERSON DRAGGING HER LEGS ACROSS THE SIDEWALK.

She is incapacitated but desperate to flee. Isabel, shaken, ventures towards her.

ISABEL

There is... there's a girl-

CLAY

No... this can't be happening.

Clay is distraught.

CHRISTA

It's Shawna Patterson.

Even Christa is rocked. A few minutes ago she assured everyone the girl would be "fine."

ISABEL

And she's- She looks like she's been... mangled.

CLAY

You need to go, Isabel. You need to go now.

She is too stubborn, too committed to listen.

FOUR UNKEMPT INDIVIDUALS EMERGE FROM THE DARKNESS.

Three grizzled, disheveled men surround Shawna and prop her up... while the waif paces towards her with a SWORD.

ISABEL

Stop! We have a camera! We're recording all of this!

THE BLACKNESS GIVES BIRTH TO THE IMPOSING GAUNT MAN.

He motions and steps in front of a *howling* Shawna, blocking her from view...

The sound of metal plunging through flesh.

CLAY

We shouldn't be showing this! None of this should be on-air.

He's yelling at the producers. Behind the scenes, a *commotion* bleeds over the co-anchors' mics. Christa counters --

CHRISTA

This footage could be crucial to the investigation. Staying live protects Isabel-

CLAY

She needs to run!

Isabel backpedals. The gaunt man walks towards her...

THE GAUNT MAN
My pleasure seeing you again.

The light from the camera illuminates his face.

By all measures, he is "the one in charge" from the police sketch.

ISABEL
Chuck, go to the van.

She SPRINTS --

CLAY
Yes, Isabel. Come on...

The camera tracks with her, RACING back to the van, DIVING inside, SLAMMING THE DOOR --

ISABEL
Get the doors locked. Get them locked!

A glimpse of Chuck's hand power-locking all the doors --

ISABEL
Keep recording. Where are the keys?

CHUCK (O.S.)
In the ignition. I left them-

Isabel climbs into the front. Christa reassures --

CHRISTA
Everything will be alright, Isabel.
Chuck, you'll get out of there.

The camera rebalances, aims outside --

The gaunt man, in no hurry, approaches the van... as do the waif and his other followers.

However, they are in a hurry.

And there are suddenly MORE of them, dungy, bedraggled men breaching the darkness like bats in the night.

Isabel starts the engine --

A DOZEN ATTACKERS DESCEND ON THE VAN --

And Clay spots something at the edge of the frame.

CLAY

The window- It's down!

Chuck drops the camera. We hear *the sound of a power window scaling up. Then the hilt of a knife smacking glass.*

ISABEL (O.S.)

They're slashing the tires! They're-

Chuck reclaims the camera, capturing the gaunt man as he closes in on the van and speaks directly to Isabel, the volume of his voice deadened by the steel and aluminum walls.

THE GAUNT MAN

Tonight, you capture the tidal wave of blood. You herald its destiny, to consume humanity whole. Without you, I am impossible.

He stares directly into the camera --

THE ATTACKERS BATTER THE VAN WITH THEIR KNIVES.

Abruptly, the feed GLITCHES --

AND THE STUDIO LOSES ITS CONNECTION TO ISABEL.

For the first time tonight, Christa cannot speak. Contrarily, Clay is as agitated as she is stunned.

CLAY

What was that? Why did we lose them? Tommy, get the feed back up!

Clay's loss of composure inspires Christa to take hold.

CHRISTA

We're fighting technical difficulties-

CLAY

You don't know that.

CHRISTA

They're professionals. They'll get through this.

She does not sound confident.

CHRISTA

(to the viewers)

Keep in mind this is unprecedented territory for a news program...

(pausing)

(MORE)

CHRISTA (CONT'D)
Hold on, we think Isabel's signal
is live again-

CLAY
Can you hear us?

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Isabel's feed returns. Only the back of her head is in sight.

She is DRIVING. The van is on the move, but it's LOUD and ROCKY; presumably, they're rolling on FLAT TIRES.

The camera is angled out the front windshield where --

A FILTHY, BEARDED MAN STRUGGLES TO HOLD POSITION ON THE HOOD.

From his knees, he SLAMS his WHOLE ARM against the van, which BUCKS and RATTLES along with the image --

CLAY
Isabel, no! No! Stop the van-

CHRISTA
Don't stop! Go *faster*. Swerve him
off!

ISABEL
Someone is shooting! Chuck-

Between the bumpiness of the footage and the interfering noise, we are unable to process the rest of the exchange.

CLAY
What? Chuck, are you-

A BULLET BLOWS THE HEAD OF THE BEARDED MAN APART.

His body RICOCHETS off the windshield then to the ground.

Our view of the background opens up, revealing THE HUNTER, disappearing into the hedges with his assault rifle --

BEFORE THE FEED CUTS BACK OUT.

CLAY
Oh my God, I can't- Where did they
go?! Where the fuck did they go?!

He is so beside himself that he doesn't even realize his error. Christa delivers him a look; it does no good.

CLAY
Someone was shooting, Christa!
Didn't you see?!

CHRISTA
Yes, Clay, I saw-

CLAY
Was that the vigilante?!

She glances off-screen then sets her jaw and looks back at the camera while he calls out to the studio --

CLAY
Why the hell do we keep losing
them?! Can anybody tell me?!

She talks over top of him, with more force --

CHRISTA
We're handing the reins to Amanda
while we re-group and try to reach
Isabel.

She eviscerates Clay with her eyes and doesn't bother to reintroduce Amanda.

STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Amanda is in her usual position in front of the touchscreen, which currently displays the show's logo.

AMANDA
Alright, Christa. A number of-

She's bowled over when Christa suddenly starts shouting --

CHRISTA (O.S.)
Where the hell is your head at?!
We're being benched because you
can't keep it together?!

She's yelling at Clay. An open mic error.

CHRISTA (O.S.)
Now it's going to be all about
Isabel, Isabel, Isabel-

CLAY (O.S.)
We shouldn't even be on-air!

Amanda tries to alert them --

AMANDA

Christa and Clay, you guys-

Someone playing catch up behind the scenes misinterprets "Christa and Clay" as a transition; adding to the gaffe, they throw it back without either of them realizing --

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

Christa lays into Clay --

CHRISTA

What business do you think you're in? This the news people want.

CLAY

The FCC has regulations-

CHRISTA

You don't think Don is already talking with the lawyers? It's a trade. Fines for ratings.

CLAY

What about Isabel? What about her, Christa?

CHRISTA

This is the best hour of TV I've ever done. Get your shit together-

Her mic is faded then killed. The feed switches back --

STUDIO FEED, SOCIAL MEDIA POST

Amanda proceeds, uncomfortable and inexperienced.

AMANDA

Sounds like... we had more technical difficulties. I'm sorry- I was saying that a number of- I don't know what to call them besides weird, cryptic messages are coming in.

Not only does she look disturbed, she sounds it. The producers' decision may be backfiring.

She activates the touchscreen with a quivering hand. The "Eyewitness News" Facebook page appears. She tries to highlight a specific post, but the touchscreen freezes.

It's not clear whether the glitch is because of user error - say, Amanda's shaky, sweaty hand - or an actual malfunction. She tries once more then gives up.

AMANDA

The board doesn't seem to want to cooperate, but a bunch of anonymous accounts are talking about 'Family.' We're... I have no idea what it means. No one will respond.
(looks off-camera)
What's that? Mark, you have-

Nervous, she motions "come here." Glasgow walks on.

GLASGOW

I have a pretty good idea that it's more unoriginal, copycat behavior. 'Family,' always with a capital 'F.' As in 'the Manson Family.' There's a pattern here, Amanda.

She acknowledges him; he exits.

AMANDA

Thanks for helping with that, Mark. Maybe keep close in case you have any more insight. And on Twitter...

She presses the tab to switch to the show's Twitter account. Mercifully, the touchscreen complies.

AMANDA

You can see here, another anonymous account mentioning something about 'the one who was created special.'

The tweet reads: "EVIL LIVES IN THE ONE WHO WAS CREATED SPECIAL"

AMANDA

Not long after the first reference, it started coming up more and more.

She cracks her knuckles, cycling through a flood of @replies, seemingly overwhelmed. All of the tweets include a mention of tonight as the start of something larger and widespread.

AMANDA

Honestly, it could be nothing. Our younger viewers, especially, know what can happen. A topic starts trending. A meme gets created.

(MORE)

AMANDA (CONT'D)

People with poor judgment follow the leader. That's why we want to hear from everyone. Please, even if you're watching on one of our affiliates, follow us and chime in. The more information the better.

Amanda tries putting her best foot forward, then looks towards the co-anchor desk --

AMANDA

Christa, over to you.

The transition stalls. The control room is gun shy. Then --

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

A two-shot of the co-anchors. Clay borders on dejected. Christa is a wounded prize fighter between rounds. She nods in the direction of Amanda and then addresses the viewers.

CHRISTA

I hoped we'd know the well-being of Isabel and Chuck...

(pauses)

We do not. For now...

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: NEWS CHOPPER FOOTAGE OVER SEVEN PINES

The news chopper hovers near the extreme back corner of the gated community. The NEWS VAN is stopped in the road and SURROUNDED on two fronts --

The first perimeter consists of THE GAUNT MAN AND HIS CULT.

The second is made up of FOUR POLICE CARS, parked defensively at separate points around the circle.

A pair of officers is at three of the four cars with guns drawn, using the doors as shields. One officer and the private security patrolman are at the fourth car.

CHRISTA

...you can see that the news van has come to a stop at the edge of Seven Pines, where it is currently surrounded. I'm assuming these are the officers who were already inside when the perimeter was sealed off. Clay? Would you agree?

CLAY

Yes, I would say so.

He is monotone. On auto-pilot.

CHRISTA

We do not, unfortunately, know for certain if Chuck and Isabel are still in the van, as we've been unable to reach them, and the chopper only came online after the pursuit ended. Obviously, we'll keep both eyes on this standoff...

A GRAPHIC appears, indicating a PHONE INTERVIEW, along with the text, "Miguel Mendoza, Gordon County Parole Officer."

CHRISTA

But right now with us via phone, is Miguel Mendoza, the parole officer for the leader of the carjacking in Atlanta, the man we believe to be at the center of these attacks. Mr. Mendoza, you're saying his name is Joseph Krause?

MENDOZA (V.O.)

Yeah, Joseph Krause. When he was on parole for kidnapping and assault, he was my parolee. Last summer.

CHRISTA

What kind of kidnapping and assault?

MENDOZA (V.O.)

Imprisonment and torture. He was living at that old, abandoned hunting lodge, like you talked about before. The victim was there, too. Krause would have went to jail, I think, but the prosecutor couldn't prove that he did anything. I mean directly.

CHRISTA

I'm not sure I follow, Mr. Mendoza.

MENDOZA (V.O.)

He talked a lot. Gave impressive speeches. Some that I heard. But even the victim testified that Krause never touched him. You know, it was the people around him.

CLAY

So he was released and given parole? Just like that?

The leniency offends Clay, lifting him from his stupor.

MENDOZA (V.O.)

I'm telling you, with Krause, it was never a normal situation. All he talked about was how he was 'created special,' but the world was too distracted to recognize it.

The mention of 'created special' freezes Christa and Clay.

CHRISTA

'Created special'... you saw that reference being made online?

MENDOZA (V.O.)

That's the reason I called. Everything clicked. I remembered how he said the world would keep ignoring him until we reached some time or some event, and then everyone would know his name. I had no idea what he was talking about.

CLAY

You never asked for details? You never reported him?

Clay is angry, as if Mendoza could have prevented tonight.

MENDOZA (V.O.)

I just thought he was ambitious. Troubled too, but... one of those types. And maybe something else, I don't know.

CLAY

Something else? What do you mean?

MENDOZA (V.O.)

I mean I wondered sometimes if maybe he wasn't human. The way he could influence people... I left my wife because of him. Just cause he told me to.

(a beat)

I know it sounds crazy. I didn't come on here to say that, but...

He can't seem to finish his thought.

CHRISTA

Mr. Mendoza, are you there?

The line is dead. The interview graphic disappears.

CHRISTA

We seem to- We seem to have lost Mr. Mendoza... we'll try to get him back, but we're waiting for confirmation that Isabel is standing by...

Meanwhile, the helicopter footage depicts an interaction between the gaunt man, whom we will now refer to as Joseph Krause, and the police.

CHRISTA

From the air, it looks like the purported leader of these attacks - allegedly a man named Joseph Krause - is engaging the police.

CLAY

I think he's talking to them.

Krause enters the area in between the circle of attackers and the police...

CHRISTA

Hang on, do we have Isabel?

CLAY

We have her and Chuck?

CHRISTA

We have to lose the helicopter because the noise is disrupting the police? Then do it. Go to Isabel.

The news chopper camera goes dark as the helicopter leaves the area, and the broadcast switches to --

SPLIT-SCREEN/INTERCUT: LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE THE NEWS VAN/SEVEN PINES

Isabel is crouched in the second row of the van. Although she shows no sign of physical injury, she is deeply discomposed, a jarring contrast to her prior steadfastness.

CLAY

Isabel, there you are. It's an incredible relief to see you again.

(MORE)

CLAY (CONT'D)

And Chuck... I have a good feeling.
I think this is almost over.

ISABEL

If you'll- I need to hear what's
being communicated...

Through the window behind Isabel, attackers loiter and Krause partakes in a muffled dialogue with the police. A bemused look overtakes her face.

ISABEL

He's saying something to them about
a package that was delivered to the
studio in Atlanta, explaining his
origins.

CHRISTA

Here? To our studio?

ISABEL

I believe so.

CHRISTA

We'll have to check... somebody on
the crew? Go and do that.

Now Christa is worried. Clay swivels in his seat, paranoid.

ISABEL

Now it sounds like... they're
asking him to let us go, Chuck. I
think they want him to surrender.

CHRISTA

What? After all this, how could
they expect him to just give up?

ISABEL

I heard him mention that he
couldn't bear to see another member
of his 'family' wounded. A suspect
who attacked our van was shot-

She stops so she can listen to the ongoing dialogue.

ISABEL

He's going to surrender. *They're
all going to surrender.* Chuck, get
the door-

We hear *the sound of the van sliding open*. The camera backs up outside. Isabel goes with it in anxious disbelief...

CHRISTA
Why would he just quit?

CLAY
Keep your guard up, Isabel. Please.
Be careful...

Isabel slides along the side of the vehicle, staring down the wall of attackers that stands between her and the police.

Krause shouts a directive --

JOSEPH KRAUSE
Be Moses my brothers and sisters.
Part the waves for them.

The attackers open up a gap... that Isabel passes through, with the camera trailing closely behind...

She makes eye contact with Krause - and stops.

ISABEL
Why did you do this? Now is your
opportunity to tell the world.

JOSEPH KRAUSE
We're all here for the same reason
you're here. Now what was it I did?

He stares at her... and then she's moving again, RUNNING all the way past the nearest police car and out of the circle.

Sounds of relief come from in-studio, from Clay and the crew behind the scenes. Christa, though, is cold and tense.

CLAY
Isabel, I don't understand. Is he
claiming he's innocent?

Isabel stakes out a new position. The camera turns around so that it can frame her with Krause in the background.

ISABEL
I don't think he's saying anything,
Clay. I think that's the point.

Christa's concern turns inward --

CHRISTA
Where are we at with this package?

She doesn't receive an answer.

On the ground, Krause puts up his hands.

Five of the seven police officers move in...

COPS

Get down! // Everybody to the
ground! // Hands behind the head!

Krause nods. His followers oblige the orders... although he remains standing... towering over the cops by at least eight inches a piece as they SURROUND and HANDCUFF him.

ISABEL

They've got him. They've got him.
It's over. I think it's over.

A cheer courses through the studio.

CLAY

Unbelievable work, Chuck and
Isabel. We're so thankful that
you're safe.

Contrary to Clay and Isabel, Christa has never been uneasier. She can feel her moment fading away.

CHRISTA

Did you forget that the gate is
sealed off with explosives?

CLAY

I'm assuming that will be taken
care of in time. Maybe Mark-
(to the producers)
Can Mark come in and tell us how
the police will manage the gate?

He looks off-camera to the in-studio personnel...

CLAY

What's that? He's busy searching
for the package?

Christa takes command of the inquiry --

CHRISTA

So now you're saying there is a
package, but you don't know what's
in it?

The cops lead Krause towards the two occupied cruisers. Although he is in cuffs, it feels as if he is somehow in control... a feeling that escalates when he abruptly stops.

CHRISTA

Can't somebody open the package and figure out what's inside?

Krause's lips move. He is speaking to the officer over his left shoulder. The field mic can't pick up what's being said.

CLAY

What's he doing?

ISABEL

They're having a conversation...

Another cop goes to Krause's front and tries getting him to be quiet, as the officer Krause has been chatting up COVERS his ears and begins to SHAKE...

ISABEL

I don't know what's wrong with-

Suddenly, Krause goes FLAT, and the disturbed officer GRABS his PISTOL --

CLAY

He drew his gun! Isabel-

The officer SHOOTS the interjecting cop in the HEART then turns and GUNS DOWN an officer at his car.

Retreating, one of the cops near Krause FIRES back. The first bullet TEARS into the disturbed officer's gut --

But he is able to get off two more rounds, KILLING TWO MORE COPS, before being DROPPED by a SECOND BULLET to the NECK.

ISABEL

I don't know how- He made him do it. Four cops, now five, all dead! We just witnessed-

CHRISTA

Something unnatural. That was-

Krause retrieves a key from the dead shooter while his followers GET UP and CHASE DOWN and KILL the remaining cops and the private security patrolman...

CHUCK (O.S.)

Isabel, we gotta go. We need-

ISABEL

Where, Chuck?! We're trapped. The gate is sealed off.

CHRISTA

Don't lose this story, Isabel. Do
not lose this story.

Christa yells off-screen, presumably to a stage hand --

CHRISTA

If there was a DVD in the package
then cue it up. What the hell are
you waiting for?!

Krause calmly unlocks one handcuff then the other. After
dropping them on the ground, he stalks towards Isabel and
Chuck, who back away...

When suddenly the feed is overtaken by what looks like --

A SUPER 8 FILM TRANSFERRED TO DVD

Depicting a bohemian indoor setting from the late 60s/early
70s, possibly a barn.

A SHORT NAKED MAN WRITHES ON TOP OF A FREAKISHLY TALL WOMAN.

BLOOD seeps out of PUNCTURE WOUNDS on his WRISTS.

On the floor underneath the woman, BLOOD STAINS form the
shape of a FIVE-POINTED STAR.

Near the copulating couple, YOUNG WOMEN stand and watch,
openly DROPPING LSD...

While a LONE MAN with a beard and bowl-shaped hair that
covers his ears and eyebrows uses a BLOOD-SOAKED SPONGE to
CONNECT the POINTS of the STAR with a CIRCLE...

HE IS PAINTING A PENTAGRAM MADE OF BLOOD ON THE FLOOR.

To complete the symbol, the lone man collects and uses blood
from the fornicating man's punctured wrists... moments before
the couple climaxes, and the broadcast switches back to --

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

Clay and Christa are stunned. Glasgow, who has returned to
sit with them, can barely contain a tragic fervor.

CHRISTA

That wasn't supposed to go up
before we knew what was on it!

Borderline apoplectic, Glasgow talks over her --

GLASGOW

That's Spahn Ranch... I recognize it from photos! He's claiming he was conceived during a satanic ritual at Spahn Ranch!

CHRISTA

Are you telling us he's Manson's son?! Is that what-

GLASGOW

I'm not convinced. I don't see-

CLAY

My God... the parole officer was right. He's not-

GLASGOW

Where's the person that delivered this? Where are they?!

Glasgow goes on the HUNT, brandishing a GUN that can be legally concealed in Georgia, as the in-studio feed ENDS.

LIVE FEED, FROM INSIDE SEVEN PINES

Krause is still stalking towards Chuck and Isabel, who are still backing away...

ISABEL

Clay, can you hear me? Christa? Is anyone there. Are we live, Chuck?!

CHUCK (O.S.)

The feed is live, but I don't hear them. I can't-

JOSEPH KRAUSE

It's just us, isn't it? How does it feel? Me and you. You and me. He who was born special, the eye, and the muse. Were you aware that all of the pigs inside the pen were dead? Were you aware that none of the other pigs could get inside?

THE CLEAN CUT MAN BURSTS IN AND SEIZES THE CAMERA --

Wet, stomach-turning *crunches* follow as he uses it to CAVE IN CHUCK'S SKULL.

The shot goes completely chaotic - stars grass flesh blood bone, blurring swirling crashing together until --

The camera drops to the ground and wobbles... coming to a rest and reclaiming focus with a canted angle on a *screaming*, devastated Isabel and an emotionless Krause.

ISABEL

Why did you do that?! Oh my God.
Not Chuck... no. Why?!

She *wails*.

The clean cut man puts the camera on his shoulder, an amateur videographer. He frames Krause and Isabel...

She quickens her pace.

Krause folds his hands and lopes after her.

The camera tracks after them. The clean cut man will always try - but sometimes fail - to keep both of them in-frame.

JOSEPH KRAUSE

What happens now... the one who was born special pursues the muse. And the camera records our dance through the colony to inspire those who watch. To pay homage to my father, whose talent was passed to me tenfold through ritual.

A VOICE rises from the background, echoing at an incredible volume from SPEAKERS attached to the gate around Seven Pines.

A RECORDING OF KRAUSE'S VOICE, his musings...

Grandiose. Apocalyptic. Maddening. A twisted variation on the "logic" and ideology of Manson. "Helter Skelter" but not a race war. A war against all who are not followers.

Through the noise, Isabel hears an *engine running* - on the opposite side of the imaginary circle formed by the four police cars around the news van.

She DASHES through the area where the cultists disappeared after the false surrender, potentially a gauntlet --

Krause, with little sense of urgency, trudges after her.

JOSEPH KRAUSE

Where is there to travel? What is there to arrive at without me?

The darkness erases Isabel from the shot.

Sounds of people running. A slash. A scream. An incision. A body hitting the ground.

Krause scours the terrain ahead of him, the concrete below...

A cultist DRAGS a body across the pavement, out of his way, a middle-aged man HEMORRHAGING from the throat.

Not Isabel. MARTY KOSTON, recognizable from the interview.

JOSEPH KRAUSE

Be proud. Show the world your work.

He comes upon the idling police cruiser.

Isabel is not outside attempting to get in - and she isn't inside behind the wheel either.

He circles the vehicle, trying the (locked) doors, and peering through the windows to be certain she isn't hiding...

The camera circles with him.

Somewhere far off in the direction that he came from, a *gunshot*.

Krause looks up, searching.

The camera is inquisitive, too.

ISABEL IS CAUGHT IN THE GLOW OF A STREET LAMP.

RACING around the circle, towards the next closest cruiser, near where all the cops were shot.

JOSEPH KRAUSE

Run or hide, pretty baby. It all ends inside my mind.

Krause gravitates towards her.

Isabel drops to her knees, scrounging amidst the corpses. She comes away with multiple sets of *jangling keys*.

She tries to use them to start the open car in front of her.

Nothing... nothing...

Krause is getting closer.

She SPRINTS, cutting across the diameter of the circle, DODGING Krause as if he were a linebacker in the open field.

She heads for another car.

Striding ahead, Krause remains as calm as ever.

Miraculously, the car is open, and the first key Isabel tries fits the ignition.

She starts the engine and closes the driver side door.

The passenger door is open, a remnant from the police using it as a shield during the standoff.

Krause is near...

There is no time to close it.

Isabel STOMPS the gas pedal --

In the rush, she LOSES CONTROL before ever having it --

SHE CRASHES INTO AN SUV PARKED IN A DRIVEWAY.

The camera follows Krause towards the crash site...

Isabel's head is visible through the back windshield. She remains in the driver seat, UNSTEADY and DAZED.

Upstairs in the house, the lights are on - we see an entire family HANGING from the rafters with ROPES around their NECKS, not yet dead, still in the throes of ASPHYXIATION...

There is very little time, probably 20 seconds, until Krause is on top of Isabel.

As if sensing his presence, she steadies.

She gets out of the car.

Frantic now, she thinks to try the trunk.

She unlocks it.

By the grace of God or something else she locates a SHOTGUN.

She aims it at Krause.

He points both arms at the sky in a "V."

CULTISTS ASSEMBLE OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

They join Krause. The same male dominant pack that marauded the news van, that also includes the waif.

Krause badgers Isabel --

JOSEPH KRAUSE

Your art isn't artillery. I know
more from watching you than you
know from being inside your skin.

ISABEL

You don't know me. What do you
know? You don't know shit.

She YANKS the trigger.

She does it again. And again. And again.

TWO CULTISTS DROP.

Krause whispers into the ear of the waif. In turn, she says --

THE WAIF

Pull the trigger! Pull the trigger!
Helter Skelter! Helter Skelter!

The others, including the cameraman, take up this mantra,
turning it into a chorus.

Isabel does pull the trigger. Once. Twice.

THE WAIF IS SHREDED.

Isabel yanks the trigger again --

THERE ARE NO BULLETS LEFT.

Krause collects a KNIFE from the waif's dead body. He kisses
her bloody face...

And goes on.

Isabel grips the shotgun, ready to use it like a club.

She LIMPS, banged up from the crash...

BLOOD runs down her ankle.

She chooses the backyards instead of the road, the darkness
instead of the streetlights.

Krause and his followers and the camera tail her.

The group passes through a backyard, where through sliding
glass doors, we see NEWLYWEDS watching TV - this exact
broadcast on a 7-second-delay.

Krause points his followers in their direction.

The camera frames them as they converge on the glass doors, waiting until they appear on TV... until the newlyweds realize what is happening...

Then the cultists RIP the doors off the hinges and BURST inside the house, as the man and woman PANIC...

ARTERIAL SPRAY MISTS INTO THE AIR.

JOSEPH KRAUSE (O.S.)
Over here now.

The camera pans back onto Krause, probing for Isabel...

It finds her CLIMBING a tree.

She's slipping though.

KRAUSE, NOW ON HIS OWN, TREADS AFTER HER.

He GRABS her leg and WRENCHES her off the trunk.

She FALLS face first, SMASHING her mouth and nose.

From the ground, Isabel SWINGS the shotgun, BASHING Krause's ankle before rolling away.

She RUNS.

Even slower now. Krause drags his foot across the grass...

He gets over it quickly.

Isabel runs out onto the main road --

SHE HAS A STRAIGHT SHOT TO THE GATE.

She SCREAMS to whomever is outside.

ISABEL
Help! Help! I need help!

Krause bears down on her.

Crying, she faces him, backpedaling through the intersection, getting ever closer to the explosives and the gate...

JOSEPH KRAUSE
Oh muse, you will never soar away.

There is a gunshot.

LEAD EXPLODES THROUGH KRAUSE'S SHOULDER.

He wavers then stands tall.

THE HUNTER COMES OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

It was him, the vigilante, who pulled the trigger - now unencumbered on his way to line up a kill shot.

JOSEPH KRAUSE
That gun would look good between
your teeth, my brother.

When the hunter fails to respond, Krause turns incredulous --

JOSEPH KRAUSE
I said to put the fucking gun in
your mouth.

It's then that Isabel realizes --

ISABEL
He can't hear you. He's deaf.

She says it more for her than for Krause. Her soul fills with hope, as she reactively covers her own ears...

The hunter AIMS. He has a CLEAR SHOT on a suddenly reeling Krause --

But behind him we see movement...

THE THREE BRIDES COME OUT OF THE DARKNESS LIKE SPECTERS.

Isabel SHOUTS and WAVES to warn him, but it's too late --

THE BRIDES STICK THE HUNTER WITH METAL CROCHET NEEDLES.

Into his gut, into his eye, through his throat.

They pile on, needle after needle...

He COLLAPSES, FLAPPING like a grounded fish.

Isabel SCREAMS.

Krause composes himself.

He makes up the distance between them.

She levels the shotgun at his head, SMACKING his skull more than once, CUTTING him open.

Krause accepts the pain as if it were a nutrient.

She pleads --

ISABEL

I was just trying to do my job...

JOSEPH KRAUSE

Me too.

Isabel is out of energy. The shotgun falls from her hands.

Still, she reaches for it.

Krause snatches her arm with his free hand.

The blade he commandeered from the waif is right in front of Isabel's wild, wide, tear-filled eyes...

He leans in towards her ear, which he cups with his hand...

So he can whisper into it while dampening his words. So the field mic cannot pick up what he says. So we cannot hear...

He hands Isabel the KNIFE.

HE LEAVES HER.

Looking at the cameraman, he says --

JOSEPH KRAUSE

Stay with her.

The camera goes still. Isabel is framed holding the knife... with a completely and utterly tangled mind, terrorized, altered forever.

Krause reaches the lens. Into it, he declares --

JOSEPH KRAUSE

We're coming.

He moves past it.

The camera does not pan with him.

KRAUSE IS GONE.

As the camera zooms in on Isabel until her face takes up the entire frame and the broadcast feed switches over --

STUDIO FEED, CO-ANCHOR DESK

In medias res, in total disarray.

A WALL OF AGHAST VOICES.

CHRISTA

Oh my God... oh my God.

CLAY

Isabel- She looked like a ghost...

He is nearly in tears. Christa is a shell of herself. Their newscaster facades have been eradicated forever.

CHRISTA

We have to figure out who brought that tape-

CLAY

She battled back so well- She had such a brilliant future ahead. *Has*. She still has a future...

Even he suspects he's lying to himself.

CHRISTA

Clay, listen to me. Will somebody-

Glasgow is heard YELLING off-camera --

GLASGOW (O.S.)

I see intruders over there! Under the graffiti. There are more!

The sound of running --

GLASGOW (O.S.)

Stop! Just stop!

Gunshots. Metal into flesh. A body DROPS.

SUDDENLY, THE LIGHTS IN THE STUDIO FLICKER.

CHRISTA

What's going on? That was Mark-

CLAY

I don't know. Are we having-

Christa stands up, as if getting ready to run. Shaking hands weaken her effort to unclip her mic when --

THE LIGHTS GO OUT.

Screens of tablets and phones provide an aura of illumination for the FLURRY that comes next, for the HOWLS and SHRIEKS that are like shots from a nail gun to the spine.

Both Christa and Clay try to run --

They are STOPPED by *the sound of metal UNSHEATHED* --

AND IMAGE AND SOUND ARE RIPPED AWAY, as the plug is pulled on the entire broadcast.

A TEST SIGNAL whines over COLOR BARS before the screen goes SILENT and BLACK.

Finally, the words "NO SIGNAL" appear in a box that hovers from one corner of the screen to the next, perpetually, until we are left to believe the signal will never ever come back.

ROLL CREDITS.

Once the credits finish --

THE CHANNEL CHANGES, UP INTO THE PREMIUM CHANNELS, ULTIMATELY LANDING ON A NIGHTLY CABLE NEWS PROGRAM

A handsome reporter, ROBERT GRANDON (28), stands in front of an average suburban home. A GRAPHIC at the bottom of the screen indicates the location as Visalia, California.

ROBERT

It was less than 8 hours ago that Sharie and Tom Wickham learned of an unspeakable tragedy... their daughter, Nicole, 17, stabbed brutally to death, the recipient of over 65-

He is cut off, BUMPED by a GRUNGY YOUNG MAN dressed in MUSSY CLOTHES... and we get a terrible feeling about where this is going, but we won't know for sure, not now, because the image abruptly --

GOES TO BLACK.