

UNT. MISSING CHILD

Written by
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OPEN ON:

ENTER MONTAGE: A series of social media posts -

- PHOTO: MARIE OKADA-GREEN (late 20s, Japanese-American) makes a silly face with adorable daughter DAISY (4).
- PHOTO: Marie has made an elaborate fort out of diapers, with her and Daisy dressed up as warriors.
- TIKTOK VIDEO: Marie holds up a snack in gaudy packaging.

MARIE

Let's not pre-judge the packaging.
It's billed as a "healthy kid-
friendly snack alternative." We
shall turn to our expert.

The video CUTS and Marie returns with a shirt covered in
healthy snack alternative SPIT-UP.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Daisy's honest product review,
everyone! Cheese always wins.

She tilts the camera to show a HAPPY DAISY eating cheese in
her high chair instead.

This is not your sunshine and lollipops, motherhood is
sainthood, gentle southern lilt, blonde mommy blogger.

It's self-aware, comedic but personal, Millennial parent -

- INSTAGRAM LIVE: Marie handles the laundry doing an AMA. Her
comment feed scrolls on the side as she chats.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Some of us didn't have any parental
role models to tell you how best to
get toddler shit off of a Zara
jumper. I'm here to take care of
you, and save you from my mistakes.

Gina6234: "YAS pls teach me *prayer hands*"

VTMama<3<3: "no parental role model? where was yr mom?"

MARIE (CONT'D)

If you follow me, you're likely up
to speed on my... mother, Kiki.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

But if you're just catching up, the tl;dr of it all - a manipulative, gambling-addicted, alcoholic con woman? She didn't teach me laundry, she taught me how to fleece.

CeciOnlineGurrlll: "CALL THE PUN POLICE! ARREST THIS WOMAN!"

MARIE (CONT'D)

Haha, yeah, that was bad. Yikes!

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Marie checks in on her Instagram page for comments under her latest video.

One particular commenter stands out with multiple comments in all caps: "OH YEAH BLAME YOUR MOM EASIEST GO-TO. YOU ARE PROBABLY LYING FOR ATTENTION."

Marie genuinely looks hurt by the comment.

But the other commenters POUNCED in defense of Marie.

"You have no idea what she went through with her mom!" // "Go to therapy, your problems are showing" // "Marie is helpful and sweet. harass someone else"

The reactions in her defense seem to help soften the blow.

Marie deletes the hurtful poster's comments and blocks them.

TITLE CARD: "MARIE"

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Marie packs a child's bento box into a small backpack.

MARIE

First day of school. So exciting!

EXT./INT. MARIE'S CAR - LATE MORNING

Marie sits in her car in the small parking lot outside a private pre-K / elementary school. Parents and staff walk children of ages 3 - 9 into the school.

Marie's separation anxiety hits hard. Sniffles turn to sobs.

EXT. MARIE'S CAR - DAY

The car weaves through New Hampshire in early fall, where the highways are single-lane and the foliage is picturesque.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The house is quiet. Marie enters and seems discomfited by it, still emotionally raw from morning drop-off.

With all the time to herself now, Marie goes to her COMPUTER and pulls up files of her OLD ARTWORK.

These are INTRICATE and EERIE works that make great use of PHOTOSHOP and post-processing to create photos that are highly realistic-looking, but have some aspect that is clearly physically impossible or uncanny as a raw photo.

She reviews one in particular- the roots of a tree SEAMLESSLY become a dilapidated house, as if the house grew and aged in the forest [inspired by Jerry Uelsmann's work].

Marie navigates to the RISD WEBSITE, where she has a HALF-COMPLETED APPLICATION to the Bachelor's Photography Program.

The cursor blinks in an empty container for the DREADED PERSONAL ESSAY portion.

Marie sighs. She picks up her phone and ALMOST dials the contact "AUTUMN" but quickly stops herself.

She then enters: avoidance mode.

Marie fills time by tidying up things that are already tidy.

She takes special care with a PHOTO of herself and a handsome guy (we'll come to know as late husband PAUL).

She folds and refolds a blanket and puts it away in the closet, only to discover a SWEATSHIRT that catches her eye.

Marie dials a contact on her phone. It goes to voicemail.

MARIE

(on phone)

Hey Kat! I hope the trip is starting out well. I found your sweatshirt in my closet. Must've left it the last day you were here. Let me know when you're back in the States and I'll mail it to you.

LATER

Marie attempts to make cookies in the kitchen. She reads from a printed recipe that has HANDWRITTEN NOTES all over it.

She strains to decipher a measurement that was written over in messy scrawl. She playfully yells over her shoulder at the picture on the mantle of her and PAUL.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Your handwriting sucks.

DING. She takes out the batch from the oven. Completely burnt bottoms. Shit.

With no other excuses or projects, Marie returns to the PERSONAL ESSAY in her RISD application.

It's time to bite the bullet. She dials "AUTUMN."

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
Hey, is everything okay?

MARIE
I burned what I hoped to be a celebratory afterschool snack, but okay otherwise.

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
Preschool, of course. Sorry, you never... I didn't expect your call. How's the day going?

MARIE
It's definitely hard to break four years of habit.

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
It's an exciting change. And it's really nice to hear your news.

MARIE
(playfully sarcastic)
What, you don't like my content?

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
It's not the same as hearing it from you. More like performance art of your life.

MARIE
I'm kind of calling about that. I'm sort of planning my exit from it? I was thinking of maybe applying for photography programs. Not like I do now, but like I used to do.

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
Marie, that's a great idea!

MARIE
Not monumentally stupid? I can't
even start the personal essay.

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
I speak academia. I could come for
a visit and bang out a few apps?

MARIE
Are you still in a deeply unhealthy
dynamic with our mother?

Autumn doesn't answer. Marie sighs. Didn't mean to go there.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Sorry, with preschool and all...
maybe we just video chat soon?

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
(a bit hurt)
Sure. I just want to help.

MARIE
Shoot, I gotta run to go pick up
Henry now. But really, thank you.

AUTUMN (ON PHONE)
Give Henry a big hug for me.

(Henry. You read that right. We'll get back to that...)

MARIE
I will. Bye.

INT. MARIE'S CAR - DAY

Marie huffs as she's stuck behind a lumber truck lumbering
its way down the road.

INT./EXT. MARIE'S CAR - DAY

Marie pulls into the pick-up line at the preschool. A
TEACHER'S AIDE approaches with a smile and a clipboard.

MARIE
I'm so sorry I'm a little late.

TEACHER'S AIDE
No problem. Who are we picking up?

MARIE
Henry Okada-Green.

Marie watches her call out a name. Check her clipboard. Check it again nervously. She returns to the car window.

TEACHER'S AIDE
Henry was marked absent today.

MARIE
I dropped him off this morning.

The Teacher's Aide grabs her walkie.

TEACHER'S AIDE
(into walkie)
HULA alert, I need eyes on a Henry Okada-Green. Class 1B. He's not at the pick-up line. Over.
(to Marie)
I'm sure he'll be right out.

INT. SKIPTON ELEMENTARY - HALLWAY - DAY

Marie's mind goes a mile a minute as she's led through the school by a no-nonsense ADMINISTRATOR (60s) on the alert.

ADMINISTRATOR
And what time did you drop him off?

MARIE
Nine twenty-five? Nine thirty?

Another STAFF MEMBER runs out of a classroom, shakes her head "no" to that Administrator.

ADMINISTRATOR
It doesn't appear he's in the school. It's protocol now for me to call the Sheriff's office.

Marie's panic level is on the brink of catastrophic.

ADMINISTRATOR (CONT'D)
It's going to be okay. This is just standard procedure.

EXT. SKIPTON ELEMENTARY - EVENING

Marie sits on a bench in front of the school. She stares anxiously into space as OFFICERS nearby organize a search and STAFF cloister around the grounds.

DETECTIVE TERESA LAURENCE (40s) approaches. She has an air of confident capability and a strong pants suit.

DET. LAURENCE
Marie Okada-Green? I'm Detective
Laurence. We'll do everything we
can to get Henry home safely as
soon as possible. I'd like to ask
you some questions.

Det. Laurence pulls out a notebook.

LATER

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
And Henry's father?

MARIE
Paul passed. Just before the birth.

DET. LAURENCE
I'm sorry to hear that. Does anyone
else help you care for Henry?

MARIE
He had a nanny, Kat Leonard.
Because of preschool, she stopped
working for me last week.

DET. LAURENCE
Could she have picked him up by
mistake?

MARIE
She's doing the 20-something Green
Peace in a remote country thing.

DET. LAURENCE
Your family?

MARIE
We don't see each other.

DET. LAURENCE
And Paul's family?

MARIE
Overseas. It's really just... me.

There's something lonely in Marie's voice as she says this. She notices Det. Laurence watching her closely and sits up straighter. Det. Laurence shifts her weight.

DET. LAURENCE
This is delicate, but I have to be
open to all possibilities.

Marie swallows hard. Fear palpable.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
Is there anyone who might have
motive to take Henry?

MARIE
It wouldn't make any sense. Barely
anyone even knows him. This...
going to school was sort of a fresh
start at human contact for us both.

DET. LAURENCE
I understand from the headmistress
that you're a public figure online.

MARIE
I'm not that big. Just a few
hundred thousand followers.

DET. LAURENCE
Sounds pretty big to me. Anything
concerning there lately?

MARIE
Henry has nothing to do with my
job.

DET. LAURENCE
But do you get threats?

MARIE
I mean... of course. I exist on the
internet. I do have this one pretty
persistent shit-poster... but
really... random stranger
kidnappings are some statistical
anomaly, right?

DET. LAURENCE
I'll have an officer look into it.

Marie wipes away tears as the stress of the situation mounts.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
Can you provide a recent photo?

Marie pulls out her phone and scrolls through her PHOTO
GALLERY. Det. Laurence peers over and sees many pics of her
house, toys, and notably... DAISY.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
Is that your daughter?

MARIE
Daisy.

DET. LAURENCE
Is she with you?

MARIE
(without missing a beat)
She's at a friend's. This is Henry.

Marie pulls up a picture and we see Henry for the first time:
4 years old, a curious grin, and a shyness in his eyes.
The photo flies off -

EXT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GROUNDS - EVENING

The officers and search volunteers peer on their phones and
look at Henry's face, before fanning out in formation.

Their boots crunch grass and the cold nips at their faces as
they call out for Henry in repeated, monotonous shouts.

EXT. SKIPTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - EVENING

Det. Laurence walks Marie to her car.

DET. LAURENCE
You can head home.

MARIE
That's it? I just sit and wait? No
fucking way. I need to be out there
looking for him.

DET. LAURENCE
I know it's hard, but it's the best
option in case he finds his way or
someone brings him home. I'll keep
you updated on the search.

Marie watches Det. Laurence check in with her officers near
the school. Det. Laurence looks back, like she's waiting to
see Marie leave.

Marie gets into her car reluctantly.

EXT. MARIE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Marie's house is on a quiet street. Marie gets out of her car to see another car pulling into her driveway.

AUTUMN OKADA (early 30s) exits the car, a bit disheveled in her usually pristine "higher ed faculty" workwear.

MARIE

You didn't have to come.

AUTUMN

Of course I came. Any word?

MARIE

Actually, it's good that you're here. You can watch the house.

AUTUMN

Whatever you need, I can go. You should be home when they find him.

MARIE

I'm not just going to sit here.

AUTUMN

Of course not. I was looking up best practices we can do -

MARIE

What, like some Wiki-How for when your child goes missing? Best practices? It's to look for him!

Marie is breaking into angry tears.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I let him out of my sight for one day and... I fucked up and I'm going to find him and keep him here and he can grow up into a mama's boy weirdo for all I care because he's never leaving my sight -

Her anger dissipates into deeper sorrow.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Please just let me go look for him.

Autumn takes her into a hug. She sobs into Autumn's shoulder.

AUTUMN
(with an air of sarcasm)
Panic is only useful as a last resort.

This makes Marie choke out a laugh. It helps.

MARIE
God, don't use a Kiki-ism at me.

AUTUMN
Well, it got a laugh, didn't it?

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Autumn holds up two instant ramen packets.

AUTUMN
Want an egg on it?

LATER

They both quietly eat. Autumn can't help but keep checking Marie's face, as she monitors her phone, looking tired.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)
We can look into Amber alerts and flyers -

MARIE
I should also tell my followers. I mean, they care about me already -

AUTUMN
What are you going to say about where Henry has been? Or Daisy?

MARIE
Nothing.

AUTUMN
What about to the cops?

Marie sips her broth, avoiding.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)
What should I say if they ask?

MARIE
I - I said Daisy was at a friend's house tonight.

AUTUMN
To the detective?

MARIE
It was on impulse. I didn't want to
distract from Henry.

AUTUMN
Marie, if you don't tell the cops
yourself, it's going to look very
bad. If she pokes about Daisy -

MARIE
I don't give a shit!

Marie gets up and drops her bowl noisily into the sink.

LATER

Marie paces the area, talking into her phone on Insta live.

MARIE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
I know I've never talked about my
son before. It's complicated. But
please, I need your help.

Livestream comments float by her face: "U have a son?!? I
thought it was just Daisy." // "Who cares if she didn't
mention him?? A boy is missing!"

MARIE (CONT'D)
His name is Henry, he is four years
old. You can DM me or call the
police tip line with any info.

LATER

Autumn joins Marie who anxiously watches out the window.

AUTUMN
How're the reactions?

MARIE
The usual. Plenty supportive. Some
are acting like I'm the worst
mother for not putting a GPS
tracker under his skin.

Marie huffs in frustration.

MARIE (CONT'D)
I know how you feel about my blog.
But if there's any chance they can
help... I can't blow it up now.

AUTUMN

It's small, but I have a grad school friend at WNHF 7. It's just local news, but... it's coverage.

MARIE

Thanks.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Marie gets into bed clutching an OWL STUFFED ANIMAL.

On the nightstand is a photo of her younger self and late husband PAUL with his arm around her waist.

She turns away and stares off. Sleep won't come easy. The impulse to check her phone just one more time...

ZOOMING IN ON HER SCREEN -

INT. THE INTERNET VOID

An INSTAGRAM PROFILE for @teresa-laurence pops up.

Lots of family photos of her with her husband and college-aged sons. Picnicking, vacations, family meals. Then some in her uniform at work events. It's clear she values being seen as a cop and a mother.

The cursor clicks on a VIDEO POST:

Teresa Laurence (our Detective) stands on a stage for a academy graduation ceremony with officers in uniform.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Go Mom!

OLDER MALE VOICE (O.S.)

That's *Detective* Mom now to you.

The camera zooms in on Det. Laurence, beaming. She's one of the only women, and the oldest in the group being awarded.

Focusing on her face, the image transitions to -

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: "DETECTIVE LAURENCE"

Det. Laurence is the only one left in the open desk area of the station, still writing up notes. Her eyes heavy.

She's jolted up by the sudden noise of the door banging open.

COLE LAURENCE (21, jock, sweet-faced), her youngest son, enters the bullpen juggling a pizza box and a soft drink.

DET. LAURENCE
Cole, what are you doing here?

COLE
Celebrating your first case! And you gotta eat, Dad said you were still here.

Cole sits down and digs into the pizza himself.

COLE (CONT'D)
So, what's the case? Big drug bust?

DET. LAURENCE
A little boy has gone missing.

COLE
Whoa. Was he kidnapped?

DET. LAURENCE
We don't know. This poor mother.

COLE
I know you'll do whatever it takes to find the kid and stick whatever piece of shit took him in jail.

DET. LAURENCE
My job isn't like TV, honey.

She gives Cole's hand a loving squeeze.

COLE
Not with that attitude.

DET. LAURENCE
Give me that pizza, Watson.

COLE
Who's Watson?

DET. LAURENCE
Who raised you?!

Cole turns his attention to her computer, which has Marie's Insta page up.

COLE
That the mom?

Det. Laurence nods with pizza in her mouth.

Cole browses Marie's feed with plentiful pics of Daisy.

COLE (CONT'D)
I thought you said it was a boy.

DET. LAURENCE
I did.

COLE
Sooooo... she posts all about her daughter, but not her son? Clearly got a favorite. Maybe he ran away.

Det. Laurence is distracted from his comment by a memory.

DET. LAURENCE
You were too little to remember, but this boy in Dustin's first grade class went missing. He was fine. But I remember, I grabbed you and your brother and didn't let either of you out of my sight for days. I don't know any mother who wouldn't keep their babies close at the mention of a missing child.

She stares at a photo of Daisy smiling.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - MASTER BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Det. Laurence can't sleep. Eventually, she quietly gets up, kneels to say a prayer, and tiptoes past her husband.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - MORNING

Det. Laurence is there first, brewing coffee.

LATER

The station is abuzz with activity. Officers organize volunteers and SEARCH DOGS are waiting with their handlers.

CHYRON: "1 Day Since the Disappearance"

Marie enters the station with Autumn. Det. Laurence stops briefing some volunteers and heads straight over.

Marie hands over a STUFFED OWL and a T-SHIRT.

MARIE

He called it Colonel Dumpling. It was his favorite.

Det. Laurence hands the toy and shirt to the dog handlers to give them the scent.

She looks back and sees Marie has on a nice outfit. Her make-up is done. Det. Laurence clocks this with a judgmental air.

EXT. TOWN STREETS - DAY

The police set up a new search party check-in. Det. Laurence oversees and in particular, observes Marie.

Marie is shaking hands, thanking people for coming. She gets on her phone and records herself:

MARIE

Thank you for all the support. If anyone is in the area and is free to help join the search -

When she's finished recording, she clicks away answering commenters and posting with a business-like attitude.

EXT. NEW HAMPSHIRE WOODS - DAY

The dogs and their handlers search the woods, putting down markers and shouting communications to one another.

Det. Laurence takes a subtle look at her phone and glances at Marie's Insta account ~ 342k followers... it ticks up.

INT. SKIPTON ELEMENTARY - MAIN OFFICE - DAY

Det. Laurence sits with the School Administrator from before.

DET. LAURENCE

Marie dropped him off, but the school marked him absent.

ADMINISTRATOR

We do several head counts per day. He wasn't at any of them.

DET. LAURENCE

What's the protocol then? Do you contact their guardian?

ADMINISTRATOR

Normally, yes, but the final fees weren't paid yet. We see this happen sometimes, parents choose another school. We were going to contact her to confirm his un-enrollment, but then she arrived.

DET. LAURENCE

And was there a Daisy Okada-Green enrolled along with Henry?

ADMINISTRATOR

No.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

Det. Laurence pores over her laptop, going through old videos and photos from Marie's presence -

She clicks on the VIDEO from the day of the disappearance:

MARIE (ON VIDEO)

Hey fam, it's Daisy's first day of preschool and... I'm a mess!

Then goes back further, in between the happy and cute photos with Daisy, there are other posts:

VIDEO: A deep cut, near the beginning of Marie's presence before any of the nice lighting or curation. A very exhausted Marie -

MARIE (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)

Ever get so tired that nothing seems real anymore? I can't get Daisy to sleep and I'm... I'm just losing it. Please. Sleep remedies? I'll take anything...

The comments shower her with warmth and support - lots of other new parents in a similar boat. Marie answered each comment sincerely and with lots of other questions. A very different tenor than her current content.

EXT. TOWN STREETS - DAY

Det. Laurence liaises with some officers as the search concludes for the day.

Autumn huddles with Marie, speaking quietly.

Det. Laurence approaches, catching the end of the exchange.

AUTUMN

This might not be a good idea. My friend says the anchor is obsessed with trying to find a scoop.

MARIE

What is she going to do? Tear apart a worried mom on TV? Good look.

AUTUMN

It's just -
(seeing Det. Laurence)
Detective Laurence. Thank you for all your assistance today.

DET. LAURENCE

We'll keep doing all we can.

MARIE

I'll be on WFNH 7 later. Hopefully that'll get us more information.

DET. LAURENCE

Very good. I won't keep you. I'm sure you're eager to see Daisy after such a long day.

She looks pointedly at Marie, who maintains a poker face.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Det. Laurence pokes at her take-out while writing up her report from the day with the wall-mounted TV turned on to the local news. ON TV -

The show gets underway. LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR DELIA KOBRIN (40s) arrives with her bleached teeth and hair.

DELIA KOBRIN

Welcome to WNHF 7 for Southern New Hampshire. I'm Delia Kobrin...

LATER

Det. Laurence perks up as the anchor pivots to Marie's segment. ON TV -

DELIA KOBRIN (CONT'D)

Every parent's nightmare: their child is gone without a trace.

(MORE)

DELIA KOBRIN (CONT'D)
 I'm joined by Marie Okada-Green, a mom-influencer whose 4-year-old son disappeared yesterday. She's been a beacon of grounded parenting advice for so many people, and now she's asking for your help.

Marie looks to the camera, the epitome of vulnerable parent.

DELIA KOBRIN (CONT'D)
 Marie - tell us what happened.

MARIE
 Yesterday, I dropped Henry off for his first day of preschool. He was so excited. He's a curious, imaginative, and silly kid. But he never made it to home-room. He's been missing for 36 hours.

A picture of Henry gets put up on the screen. Seeing his face, Marie chokes up.

But then... a picture of DAISY also appears on screen. Marie suddenly looks a bit annoyed.

DELIA KOBRIN
 Your content with Daisy has delighted and helped thousands. Why leave Henry out of your posts?

MARIE
 I'm here to find my son. Once he's home, I'm happy to clear that up.

DELIA KOBRIN
 The police are treating this like a potential kidnapping. Do you think your fame has made you a target?

MARIE
 I have no idea. We just need information. We have a tip line -

DELIA KOBRIN
 Are you worried that Daisy may become a target as well?

At this, Det. Laurence leans toward the TV, wondering also.

Marie takes a moment, quelling a flare in frustration.

MARIE

I try not to wonder about what ifs.
Daisy is not in any danger. I'm
focused on finding Henry.

DELIA KOBRIN

What do you have to say to the
allegation that you don't have a
daughter named Daisy?

MARIE

What are you talking about?

DELIA KOBRIN

Our station received an anonymous
tip and there's now a growing sub-
reddit accusing you of allegedly
creating Daisy from a deep fake.

The picture on screen of Daisy is enlarged, eclipsing Henry.
Marie is in shock, searching for what to say.

DELIA KOBRIN (CONT'D)

There's several detailed analyses
of the photos of Daisy that show -

MARIE

What is this gotcha bullshit - ?

DELIA KOBRIN

Are you denying the allegations?

MARIE

This is bad faith journalism. You
asked me on to help me find my son -

DELIA KOBRIN

Our viewers deserve to know -

MARIE

Don't gimme that! You're attacking
me with some flimsy sub-reddit?

DELIA KOBRIN

Is Daisy a real child? And please,
watch your language.

MARIE

Who the fuck cares whether or not
Daisy is real when my SON is
missing! You're a piece of fucking
work - you -

BZZT. The program cuts out and awkwardly transitions to commercial. Det. Laurence sits stunned. Then -

DET. LAURENCE
I knew it! I knew there was
something funny about her.

She looks around to see if someone has caught her congratulating herself, but she's alone.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
(quietly)
I knew it.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM - NIGHT

Det. Laurence stands over Marie and Autumn.

MARIE
You think I don't know that this is
hard to explain? That's why I
didn't bring it up. I just wanted
to find Henry.

DET. LAURENCE
(to Autumn)
Can we have the room?

Autumn sheepishly leaves. The door closes.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
And what is the explanation?

MARIE
I was raising a baby alone. No
friends in town and I couldn't
leave because of the pandemic. So I
wanted to reach out to other moms.
That left the internet. It felt
weird telling strangers my
problems, so I used Daisy as a fake
name for Henry. It was a split
second decision. Henry was an
infant, no one could tell if he was
a boy or a girl in photos. I just
wanted to protect him.

DET. LAURENCE
And why is that?

MARIE
When he grows up, the photos and
stories would still be there.

(MORE)

MARIE (CONT'D)

And do you know how often people steal children's identities from social media? Stalk them? The shit I've seen happen.

DET. LAURENCE

But you make money from this?

MARIE

It didn't start out that way, but people liked me, so yes, it grew. And as a single mom with no job and lots of bills, I went with it. But then I couldn't just say "Oops Daisy is Henry" and I still wanted to protect his future... It was always going to be temporary.

DET. LAURENCE

Who is the girl in the photos?

MARIE

There is no girl in the photos... I started by tweaking Henry's photos. But the technology has gotten pretty impressive recently.

DET. LAURENCE

You seem very casual about defrauding your fans.

MARIE

They're not my FANS. They are my community and the shit I talked about was real. Everything else was set dressing.

The two women face off silently for a moment.

DET. LAURENCE

This is highly unusual.

MARIE

No, it's pretty damn simple. Everyone curates their online life. I bet you only post crap that makes you look honorable or whatever it is you're going for, *detective*.

DET. LAURENCE

Anything else you want to tell me?

MARIE

They should update that phrase:
"People in glass houses..."
Something like, "people surrounded
by screens shouldn't throw stones."
Don't you think?

LATER

Det. Laurence exits the room to see a tired Autumn.

DET. LAURENCE

How about we get a drink?

AUTUMN

Is that legal?

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Autumn and Det. Laurence generously drink their bourbons.

DET. LAURENCE

My eldest got called "Pizza Face"
in his frat because of some teen
photo I had posted. Resented me
something fierce. For a moment, she
made it sound like deep faking your
child is reasonable.

AUTUMN

A lot of people are refusing to
post photos of their kids nowadays.

DET. LAURENCE

I get keeping some things private,
but what did she get out of sharing
this funhouse mirror of her life?

AUTUMN

Validation from people that she's
not like our mother.

Det. Laurence gestures for her to go on.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)

We grew up in an environment with a
lot of distrust. And it seeps into
you until you can't trust yourself.
Am I normal? Do I know what I'm
doing? Am I a good mother or just
like mine? I think she wanted to
see herself from the outside.

DET. LAURENCE
She went to some great lengths.

AUTUMN
I could never shake how uncanny
Daisy looked.

DET. LAURENCE
She looks pretty real to me.

AUTUMN
You don't like that. Not being able
to tell.

Det. Laurence signals the bartender to fill up their drinks.

DET. LAURENCE
People say to listen to your gut.
And it's a fine barometer, but it's
not infallible. You need evidence
to back it up. Then I see this. I
see a future where nothing can be
proven real and we all only have
our guts to go on. I don't think
I'd like that world much.

AUTUMN
That's a world that requires a lot
of trust. And I don't have a lot of
faith in people. But I trust you to
find my nephew.

DET. LAURENCE
This job is the most sacred duty to
me, after raising my boys of
course. You can trust me.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - OFFICE - NIGHT

Det. Laurence checks in on the internet reaction:

We catch a series of posts, tweets, and video essays where
the story of Marie and Henry's disappearance is trending...

TWEET: Marie: My daughter is fake! Also Marie: Help me find
my sweet perfect other TOTALLY REAL child!

A YOUNG WOMAN speaks to the camera, breaking down the
interview between the local Newscaster and Marie.

YOUNG WOMAN
First off, look at her face.

IMAGE: Marie looking sour during the heat of the interview.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)
Doesn't exactly look like distress
for her missing child to me.

More mean-spirited MEMES flash across the screen. Screenshots of Marie yelling at Delia, Marie unable to tell Daisy/Henry apart, and many, many comments.

MARIE RESPONDS WITH A NEW VIDEO:

MARIE (ON VIDEO)
I owe you all an apology and an
explanation -

BACK TO LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - OFFICE

Det. Laurence closes the window on her laptop.

On her desk is a picture of a MAN IN UNIFORM with a PROUD LITTLE GIRL next to him. A young Det. Laurence and her decorated father.

DET. LAURENCE
(to the photo)
What do you make of this?

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - CONFERENCE ROOM - MORNING

Det. Laurence returns to the chaos at the small station. People crowd the front desk and phones RING everywhere.

CHYRON: "3 Days Since the Disappearance"

She pokes her head into a conference room, with officers manning the Henry tip lines.

OFFICER 1
That's one more for Marie is a
Chinese sleeper agent.

Officer 1 takes a dry erase marker and makes a tick mark under "Foreign Government Spy" on a white board. The rest of the white board catalogs other theories with various tick marks underneath, like "Hillary Clinton Pedophile Ring," "Murdered Daisy/Cover-up," and "Marie is AI bot."

DET. LAURENCE
Anything I should know?

OFFICER 2

The guy she said delivered Henry,
Dr. Morrison, died a year ago, so
we can't talk to him.

OFFICER 1

Convenient.

Other Officers seem to nod in agreement.

Det. Laurence looks up to see that the theory on the white
board with by far the most tick marks is:

"Henry isn't real."

This intrigues her.

DET. LAURENCE

Keep me updated.

Just as Det. Laurence ducks out of the room, she locks eyes
with her SERGEANT, who beckons her into his office.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - SERGEANT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

The Sergeant closes the door behind them, a sign of the
severity of the coming conversation.

SERGEANT

Where are we at with the boy's
location? Suspects?

DET. LAURENCE

No clear leads, Sir. But...

SERGEANT

Spit it out.

DET. LAURENCE

I think we need to explore the
possibility that the mother is
lying to us again.

SERGEANT

What, like she killed her kid?

DET. LAURENCE

That she also fabricated a son, in
addition to the fake daughter.

The Sergeant sighs impatiently. Fucking rookies.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
I'm far from the only one
theorizing this. The tips we're
getting, the reports online -

SERGEANT
We solve cases with polls on the
internet now?

DET. LAURENCE
Of course not.

SERGEANT
Then you have evidence that the boy
isn't real?

DET. LAURENCE
She lied to me about her daughter.
And frankly, she doesn't act like
any mother I know.

The Sergeant is quickly getting over this conversation.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
We could bring her in for
obstructing an investigation and
push her -

SERGEANT
What a fucking can of worms that
would open. It's already a fucking
circus out there.

DET. LAURENCE
It's a lead.

SERGEANT
It's a guess.

DET. LAURENCE
There's something unusual going on
in this case -

SERGEANT
This is a rookie mistake. I see it
all the time. You want it to be
some deep conspiracy. Something
juicy to make you feel like a hero.

Det. Laurence deflates as he lectures.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
But it's not. It's usually boring
and sad.

(MORE)

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

If he's out there and we say he's not, we are the cops who didn't care about an innocent kid.

DET. LAURENCE

And if she's leading us by the nose, then we look like the idiots running the Barnum and Bailey's.

It was a bold move. And it didn't go over well.

SERGEANT

It might be good to have someone more senior on this.

DET. LAURENCE

Sir, you can trust me. I have inroads with the family already and the optics, I'm a mother too -

SERGEANT

Find me evidence. Or I put someone else on it.

DET. LAURENCE

Yes, Sir.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Det. Laurence arrives with TWO OFFICERS.

Marie and Autumn welcome them in. The Detective takes in the unusual setup of Marie's house.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - HENRY'S BEDROOM - DAY

The Detective enters Henry's room. It's neat, not unlike the more presentational rooms in the rest of the house. Anime figurines, stuffed animals, and picture books arranged beautifully on shelves.

She opens a drawer with clothes folded. It's a bit light.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - PLAYROOM - DAY

Officers catalogue the various toys. Some are very "little girl" centric, props for Daisy's life on the blog.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Most of the products are for a 20-something woman.

But Det. Laurence stops in front of the sink and notices... only one adult toothbrush. She makes a note.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

The Detective waves away the officer talking to Marie.

MARIE
Anything helpful? Leads?

DET. LAURENCE
Can I see Henry's birth
certificate?

Marie sighs, but goes to the closet near the computer and crouches to take out a lock box.

She rifles through the paperwork inside. Then does it again.

Marie abandons the box and rushes into her bedroom.

She checks under her bed, in dresser drawers - pushing aside officers doing their work in her way.

But she comes up empty-handed.

MARIE
I see the way you're looking at me,
but I have it. I just... someone
must have moved it.

Autumn steps in to help, dependable as always.

AUTUMN
I'm sure it's just misplaced.

MARIE
Why do I even need it?

DET. LAURENCE
It's standard procedure.

MARIE
Is it really? Or just for people
like me?

AUTUMN
Marie.

Marie looks sourly at Autumn for the chastisement.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)
The other officer asked for more
photos of Henry. Can you get them?

Marie knows she's being sent away, but doesn't mind leaving
the conversation. Autumn leans in to Det. Laurence.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)
Marie...reaches for anger first
when she's scared. We haven't
always had the best interaction
with the police from our childhood.
But we do really appreciate your
help and if there's anything...

A young OFFICER flags Det. Laurence down.

DET. LAURENCE
(to Autumn)
Excuse me.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

CHYRON: "5 Days Since the Disappearance"

Det. Laurence pores over more documents, when her Officer
bounds up with a smile.

OFFICER
We got back the IP address of the
profile Marie flagged for
harassment.

DET. LAURENCE
And?

OFFICER
Well, it's...

INT. THE INTERNET VOID

Another Instagram account pops up: @ThisisKiki

The cursor scrolls down through photos of a meticulously
clean senior living apartment, and especially the nice things
in it. Beautiful teapot. A nicely cooked dinner. A shelf of
family photos showing a WOMAN and TWO PRE-TEEN DAUGHTERS
(Marie and Autumn, younger).

An awkward selfie or two show KIKI OKADA (Japanese-American, late 60s), who clearly cares about her appearance and giving an affluent air for the camera.

INT. KIKI'S APARTMENT - DEN - DAY

TITLE CARD: "KIKI"

The actual Kiki stares enviously out the window.

Behind her, Autumn comes in and puts down Costco-sized groceries before joining her mother at the window.

Looking down at the street, they see the POWER-WALKING LADIES (60s-80s). The elite of the retirement community led by BARBARA MELNITZ (80s). Their circuit around the neighborhood more a display of dominance than fitness.

KIKI

I could take the dog crap people
don't clean up around this place
and put it right in their path. Or
I could put laxatives in the
brownies at the community luncheon
and watch them shit themselves -

AUTUMN

Or you could just ask to join?

KIKI

Begging makes you a beggar.

Autumn sighs and heads for the door. Kiki follows.

KIKI (CONT'D)

Where are you going?

EXT. KIKI'S SENIOR COMMUNITY BUILDING - DAY

Autumn exits the front door with Kiki in tow, just in time for the POWER-WALKING LADIES to turn the corner.

AUTUMN

Good afternoon, ladies.

Barbara signals the group to stop and assesses Autumn with a cold eye. Her SECOND-IN-COMMAND leans in.

SECOND-IN-COMMAND

That's the professor-daughter.

POWER LADY 2
Adjunct professor.

Kiki hangs back. Autumn is going to be eaten alive.

AUTUMN
My mother has been living here for many years. She'd really love to join your walking group.

BARBARA MELNITZ
I've heard your mother certainly has the *hustle*. But we have a very strict regiment. There are other places she may exercise her skills. *Racket* ball, perhaps?

Her puns leave her minions giggling.

SECOND-IN-COMMAND
Perhaps you could get fit by playing with your granddaughter. Or was it grandson?

That gets her. Kiki leans closer with a stern look.

KIKI
Have you heard of John Wayne Gacy?

Barbara and her Minions look aghast.

INT. KIKI'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Kiki is in a huff. Autumn follows her in.

KIKI
They are going to dine on that for weeks.

AUTUMN
Why would you even want to join those awful women?

KIKI
You wouldn't understand.

AUTUMN
I gotta run back to Marie.

Kiki sighs in the silent apartment. She walks over to a bookshelf in the living area and pulls out a photo album.

She opens it to a old picture. Kiki holds a smiling Autumn, while a young Marie glowers at the camera.

Kiki turns to her computer. She scrolls through MARIE'S SOCIAL MEDIA, a bad habit. She goes back in time, way before the kidnapping, to an INSTA LIVE VIDEO: Marie sits under the covers in the dark.

MARIE (ON VIDEO)
It's easy for me to think like, of course Kiki didn't love me. She barely took care of us - my sister and I - and she'd disappear to gamble, we had to fend for ourselves or at times, help her scams just to know we'd have money for our next meal.

Comments scroll by like - "We are here for you, Marie!"

MARIE (ON VIDEO) (CONT'D)
What's probably more true and even harder to accept is she did love us, but still did what she did. I don't know what to do with that.

Kiki's reaction seems a mix of anger and regret. She plays the video again as if to prove to herself she should be more affronted than regretful.

KNOCK KNOCK. Kiki answers her door to find DETECTIVE LAURENCE standing there.

DET. LAURENCE
Ms. Okada?

LATER

Det. Laurence sits across the kitchen table from Kiki.

KIKI
(heavy sarcasm)
Wow, Marie's son is missing and I'm implicated. How surprising.

DET. LAURENCE
What makes you say that?

KIKI
Have you heard of John Wayne Gacy?

The Detective settles in for what might be a weird interview.

KIKI (CONT'D)

John Wayne Gacy killed all those people, but what do they say on TV? They blame his mother. Oh, she babied him, stunted him. She didn't kill anyone! But it's always like that. You loved them too little. You loved them too much. They always blame the mother.

DET. LAURENCE

I'm not here about John Wayne Gacy.

KIKI

Of course not. How can I help?

DET. LAURENCE

You've been writing distressing comments on your daughter's posts for years.

KIKI

Did you ever see what I wrote?

DET. LAURENCE

It constitutes harassment.

KIKI

So you didn't see.

Det. Laurence doesn't have a rebuke for that.

KIKI (CONT'D)

This "harassment" as you call it was me asking my daughter to stop lying about how I raised her.

DET. LAURENCE

Ms. Okada, I have access to your arrest record.

KIKI

So, one arrest and everything she says is true? I'm some prolific con artist? Scams are a sign of a healthy economy, they say.

DET. LAURENCE

Is that so?

KIKI

Prosperity for some depends on desperation for others. I wasn't on the right side of that equation.

DET. LAURENCE

You and your daughters share a talent for the philosophical.

KIKI

It's not philosophy when it's your life. If it's the difference between your children eating or not, you cash that bad check. Once. My husband had just left us... it was a bad time. The way she makes me a villain -

Kiki pauses to look at the Detective, searches her face.

KIKI (CONT'D)

Do you have children?

DET. LAURENCE

Two boys.

KIKI

And which one makes you want to tear out all your hair?

DET. LAURENCE

The eldest.

Kiki laughs. The two women share a moment of understanding.

KIKI

I bet your youngest is an angel.

DET. LAURENCE

He's pretty close.

KIKI

Sounds like my Autumn.

DET. LAURENCE

What can you tell me about Henry?

KIKI

Nothing at all. Marie has kept us out of his life.

DET. LAURENCE

Us?

KIKI

Me and Autumn. I know why Marie keeps me away, but poor Autumn keeps asking to meet her nephew, but it's this excuse or that -

DET. LAURENCE
Autumn has never met Henry?

KIKI
You're not here about Henry. You
want to ask me about Marie.

Kiki rises from the table and brings back a PHOTO ALBUM.

KIKI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
When Marie was around 10 or so, she
disappeared one day after school.

Kiki flips through photos, showing Marie as an excitable kid
(ages 8 - 13) - hanging off trees, mean-mugging for the
camera, bothering Autumn...

KIKI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She was gone for three days. Then
they finally found her hiding out
in the woods. She had made a little
camp. Packed food and water.

Then more - moody affect. Withdrawn. Putting her hand in
front of the camera.

KIKI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She had clearly run away, but she
insisted that she was not Marie
Okada. Oh no, she was Daisy Smith
and they must take her back to her
real family. I was just her fake
mother.

Marie even younger in age... Her first day of 1st grade (age
6), blowing out the candles on her 5th birthday...

KIKI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It got sorted out quickly. The
police chalked it up to a little
girl acting out. The next day, she
bit another girl so hard, the
school officer arrested her.

Finally, an image of Marie (4) looking eerily like Daisy.

We return to Det. Laurence mesmerized by the photo.

KIKI (CONT'D)
That's my Marie.

DET. LAURENCE
Was that the only incident?

Kiki puts the kettle on for tea.

KIKI

Oh lordy no. Shoplifting, fights.
My Marie was a handful and then ran
away for good at 16. I've been her
whipping boy ever since. Jasmine,
okay?

The image of 4-year-old Marie/Daisy takes over the screen.
Then it is swiped away to reveal -

INT. THE INTERNET VOID

Instagram: A cursor selects a new account: @AutumnWriter

Blank profile picture. No posts. Following LOTS of other
accounts. A classic lurker.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Autumn sits at the computer command center, trying to sort
comments and managing Marie's phone. Marie is nearby.

TITLE CARD: "AUTUMN"

CHYRON: "14 Days Since the (Alleged) Disappearance"

AUTUMN

Someone just sent us something.

Autumn brings up a VIDEO. ON SCREEN:

Det. Laurence exits the police station and local news
correspondent DELIA KOBRIN rushes up to interview her.

DELIA KOBRIN

Detective, are there any updates on
the Henry Okada-Green case?

DET. LAURENCE

I can't comment on an active
investigation.

DELIA KOBRIN

What about the mother's allegations
that you're mishandling the case?

DET. LAURENCE

It's difficult to investigate an
alleged disappearance of a boy who
no one can produce any trace of.

A shudder of excitement passes through Delia's body.

DELIA KOBRIN

Are you suggesting that Marie Okada-Green has filed a false report?

DET. LAURENCE

I cannot comment on an open case.

PAUSE ON DET. LAURENCE'S SMALL SMILE.

BACK IN ROOM:

Autumn looks tentatively at Marie, who is in shock.

MARIE

Who's gonna help look for him now?

AUTUMN

Maybe if you stopped antagonizing the Detective...

MARIE

Your new best friend?

AUTUMN

Good will can go a long way.

MARIE

What good will is left? They've done jack shit! She just called me a liar to a reporter!

AUTUMN

Yeah, that was bad.

MARIE

Fucking right it was bad.

AUTUMN

Have you gotten a hold of your nanny yet?

MARIE

She said she'd be out of service for a long time. I tried her a hundred times. I doubt even she could sway them at this point.

AUTUMN

Try her again. I'll call about expediting the replacement birth certificate.

MARIE
This is so fucked up.

Marie goes into another room as she dials.

Autumn sighs alone and takes a moment to let this next crisis pass and get into "fix-it" mode.

But that's when she hears... BUZZ BUZZ.

It sounds like it's coming from the closet. BUZZ BUZZ.

Autumn clears the floor, but doesn't see anything. Then she puts her hand down and feels the vibrations.

It's coming from under the floor. She picks at the rug and sees that it's not glued down. Underneath - a loose floorboard that reveals:

A PHONE. The screen says: "MARIE CALLING." Then it ends.

She opens the phone and sees TENS of MISSED CALLS from Marie.

She hits the VOICEMAIL button and listens:

MARIE (ON MESSAGE) (CONT'D)
Hey Kat! I hope the trip is
starting out well. I know it might
be a while until you're back -

Autumn's face is quite torn. This doesn't look great.

Marie comes back.

MARIE (CONT'D)
No answer. Again.

AUTUMN
Do you have an old address for her
paychecks? Any other number?

MARIE
I paid her cash, better for her
taxes. This is her only number.
What else am I supposed to do?

AUTUMN
Try her again.

Marie does. Autumn pulls out THE OTHER PHONE. It BUZZES.

MARIE
What the fuck? Kat left her phone?

AUTUMN

It was... hidden under the floorboard in your closet. The only contact is you.

Marie's defenses go up.

MARIE

You're accusing me of making her up? Am I a fucking god?! Look how many people I've manifested from thin air, right?

AUTUMN

I didn't say that.

MARIE

Of course not. You never say anything. Just dance around it. Marie's imaginative, Marie's always in trouble... give a polite sigh and look away. Let them fill in the rest. You learned from the best.

AUTUMN

I am not Mom!

MARIE

I let you into my house and asked for your help!

AUTUMN

And I showed up! Even though you have kept me in this tug of war between you and Mom for years. He's my nephew! You kept saying it's because of Mom that you kept me away, but I think that's bullshit. Why are you punishing me? Tell me the truth! Or am I the only one in this family who knows how?

Marie turns icy.

MARIE

Saintly Autumn. What a myth you've created for yourself. You might be the most delusional in the family.

Without a word, Autumn gets up to leave and Marie does nothing to stop her.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

Autumn dogs Det. Laurence around the station.

AUTUMN
Kat Leonard. Or Katherine?

DET. LAURENCE
Dead end.

AUTUMN
Okay, what else can we do?

Det. Laurence throws a file down hard onto a desk.

DET. LAURENCE
Not a lot.

AUTUMN
I'm sorry?

DET. LAURENCE
Why isn't there a child's
toothbrush in the bathroom? Where's
Henry's birth certificate?

Autumn sees what Det. Laurence is getting at and boils.

AUTUMN
What about our trust?

DET. LAURENCE
When did you first see Henry?

AUTUMN
The day he was born.

DET. LAURENCE
With COVID protocols in 2020, you
got to go into the hospital the day
of the birth?

AUTUMN
No, I wasn't there, there.

DET. LAURENCE
When have you seen Henry in person?

There's a tense silence. A stand-off.

AUTUMN
I haven't.

DET. LAURENCE

So you maintain unequivocally that Marie has a son named Henry?

Autumn fumes.

AUTUMN

You think Marie can fake a Face-time? I've seen him.

DET. LAURENCE

I don't know what she's capable of at this point. Hiring an actor -

AUTUMN

You just don't like her. You're reaching for any reason -

DET. LAURENCE

Autumn. We need to consider the possibility that she's playing us.

AUTUMN

You're missing a fundamental piece of the puzzle, *Detective*. Why?

DET. LAURENCE

I don't think people are as explicable creatures as we want them to be. I see a woman who was steeped in grief at the loss of her husband, who got attention on the internet and enjoyed it, and acts erratically -

AUTUMN

And for years, just kept up this charade?

DET. LAURENCE

Does that house look like a mother lives there? The toys are all over the place in age. His room is like a museum and his nanny is suddenly off the grid?

AUTUMN

So, that's it?

DET. LAURENCE

The case will remain open, if anything comes up -

EXT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - DAY

Autumn walks briskly away when she receives a text. She groans in frustration.

INT. KIKI'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - DAY

Autumn enters to find Kiki slamming a cabinet closed.

AUTUMN
What's wrong?

KIKI
They don't close right!

AUTUMN
Let me take a look.

Autumn takes a screwdriver and tries to tighten the screws on the cabinet's hinges. As she works -

KIKI
Everything here is always on the fritz. Though it reminds me, I'm going to need an extra eight hundred this month for the HOA.

AUTUMN
I paid your monthly dues.

KIKI
For the construction or what have you. Fixing the windows? It's always something with them.

AUTUMN
It's not right for them to make plans without community input. I'll call Janey to work something out.

KIKI
That woman thinks I'm a demon.

AUTUMN
She likes me. I'll take care of it.

KIKI
It is humiliating enough to have to beg you for money each month. What do I have to do? First the detective, now you're questioning me like I'm a criminal.

AUTUMN
Please stop.

KIKI
Autumn-chan. You picked this place
for me to live in. I buy everything
triple discount. I do my best.

Kiki takes Autumn's hands in hers.

KIKI (CONT'D)
I know I am a burden to you, but I
have no one else to rely on.

Kiki is incredibly sincere or a terrifyingly effective liar.

INT. AUTUMN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Autumn types into an Excel document tracking payments:

\$800 - HOA "fees"

The balance at the bottom shows Autumn has put tens of
thousands of dollars toward supporting Kiki.

A CALENDAR NOTIFICATION POPS UP: "Drinks with Agent."

Autumn sighs. Yet another thing to take care of.

INT. SWANKY BAR - NIGHT

Autumn, cleaned up and dressed primly, sits with her agent
TRISH MARIANO (40s) at the bar.

TRISH
I'd ask how your week's been, but I
have Twitter.

AUTUMN
My sister is going through a lot.

TRISH
But what about you? I'll cut to the
chase, the book proposal you sent
me... it's fine. You're a talented
writer. But it's missing you.

AUTUMN
Well, I'd be writing it.

TRISH

I sound like a broken record, but we're not selling just a book. We're selling you. But you cut me off at the knees, saying I can't give any of your background.

AUTUMN

Why aren't my professional achievements enough?

TRISH

You have a unique opportunity here. Not just because I think you have a killer perspective because of all you've been through, but you also have a *moment* right now. Only you have the best access to this story with your sister and you are the right person to tell it.

AUTUMN

No exploitative memoir bullshit. I'm a fiction writer.

TRISH

Whose life is more interesting than fiction! If you don't tell this story, I guarantee you someone is pre-buying the film rights to a Vox article right now. And they won't be as gentle with your family's portrayal... or yours.

AUTUMN

And what's my portrayal?

Trish takes a strategic sip of her drink. Autumn waits.

TRISH

The gullible, milquetoast sister swept up in a crazy woman's delusion. If I'm being generous.

AUTUMN

You're the second person today to assume I'm not in on it with Marie.

TRISH

Of course I don't think that -

AUTUMN

Because you think I'm the good sister.

(MORE)

AUTUMN (CONT'D)

I helped my mother with scams and check fraud just as much as Marie. I was even better at it. But one day, we got caught with counterfeit bills at a gas station. Our mother hid and watched as the police came to question us. I was 18. Marie was 15. She took all the blame. Because she knew if it was me, I'd go to jail. But she'd just go to juvie. Which she did. For a year. When she got out, she ran off and lived with friends. She took the fall, so that I could spend the rest of my life looking like the good kid. But what if our roles were reversed, huh?

TRISH

But this is exactly why you need to take ownership of the story. I've just learned more about you in one minute than in eight years of representing you.

AUTUMN

I want to be known for my work. Not my life.

Trish sighs and realizes she's not winning this fight.

TRISH

Bathroom break. I'll be right back.

Autumn stands to let her better shimmy off the barstool and they bump into one another.

After Trish is gone, Autumn reveals she's holding Trish's wallet in her hands. She spins it around, considering.

Then she takes out her purse. Puts \$20 of her own money into this wallet and places it on her chair.

INT. AUTUMN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Autumn curls on the couch with a drink in one hand. Watching HOME VIDEOS drowned out by peppy music.

After a moment, she raises her other hand holding a small NERF GUN and proceeds to shoot at their faces anytime Marie or Kiki pop up on the screen.

After a while, she rummages through a drawer in her kitchen and pulls out HENRY'S BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENT, worn and forgotten.

She turns it over to the handwritten scrawl from Marie -

MARIE (V.O.)

You're the only person I have the energy to send this to. It was going to be Paul's job, he's the one with friends anyway. Little Henry is here. He's perfect, but was born into a shitty situation with a shitty mom. Anyway, thanks for the things you sent so I can hunker down until the lockdown is lifted. At least my new roommate is a cutie. I'll send you pics soon. Marie.

Autumn turns it back over and stares into baby Henry's eyes. She heads to her computer with renewed fervor.

HOURS (AND SEVERAL DRINKS) LATER

Autumn scrolls through her folder of photos of Henry.

She stops suddenly when she sees a photo partially showing a YOUNG WHITE WOMAN holding HENRY (3) in her lap.

Autumn's wheels start turning.

She pulls up her Facebook and uploads the picture, cropping only the WOMAN'S FACE to show.

She types: "MISSED CONNECTION! This woman was on campus today and left her phone. Anyone know how to reach her?"

THE NEXT MORNING

A groggy and slightly hungover Autumn makes coffee and checks her phone. LOTS OF NOTIFICATIONS.

She opens them up eagerly and scrolls down the many comments on her post. Until she hits:

"I knew that girl in high school - Katrina Kokko..."

Wow, it worked. The internet provides.

EXT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - DAY

A huge house in the middle of the WOODS. Private. Fancy.

Autumn knocks on the door and KAT KOKKO (mid-20s, White, affluent, athleisure) answers.

KAT
Can I help you?

Autumn goes to open her mouth when -

Emerging into the entryway, a SMALL BOY (4) comes into focus.
It is Henry from the photos, no doubt about it.

AUTUMN
Henry!

KAT
I'm sorry, who are you?

AUTUMN
What are you doing with him?

KAT
I'm Henry's mother.

Autumn is flabbergasted.

AUTUMN
Umm... what?

TITLE CARD: "#HenryIsFound"

EXT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - DAY

Henry plays outside on the patio, seen through the sliding glass doors, but out of earshot.

Kat sits awkwardly. Autumn has just gotten off the phone.

AUTUMN
They're sending over a local patrol car, just until Detective Laurence can get here.

The air between them is thick with tension.

KAT
We've been away, so I hadn't seen all this news coverage saying Henry was missing.

More silence.

KAT (CONT'D)
Can I get you anything? Coffee?
Sparkling water?

AUTUMN

No, thank you.

Autumn looks Kat up and down as Kat gazes out the window warmly at Henry playing.

Kat sighs and gets up, disappearing into an office and returning with an organized file folder.

KAT

Home visits and such. You tend to get organized if you adopt.

She pulls out a bunch of paperwork... including Henry's birth certificate, an adoption contract...

Autumn strains to seem casual as she spies on their details.

LATER

The doorbell rings and Kat welcomes the Detective inside.

DET. LAURENCE

Thank you for your cooperation, Ms. Kokko. Have a seat.

Kat nods and returns to her paperwork. She watches Autumn confer with Det. Laurence in the entryway. Det. Laurence is clearly trying to send Autumn home, but she is resisting.

SCREECH. A car comes to a sudden halt outside.

All three women go to the door to see what's going on.

The car is Marie's. She leaps out.

MARIE

Autumn! What's going on?!

Nearby, two LOCAL OFFICERS wait by their patrol car.

There's a shuffling of movement behind Kat. She sees Henry has waddled in during the commotion. He appears in the doorway just long enough for Marie to catch a glimpse.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Oh my god, you found him!

Kat picks Henry up, shielding him from seeing Marie.

Marie races toward the door. The Local Officers put themselves between Marie and the door.

LOCAL OFFICER
Ma'am, step back.

MARIE
That's my son! Henry!

Marie tries to fight through the Officers, but they physically restrain her. Marie struggles against them.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Autumn!! Kat!! What is going on??

Marie shoves an Officer off of her and sprints toward the door, but the second Officer grabs her around the waist, wrenches her to the ground, and pins her.

Marie lies her head onto the ground and groans as the Officer screams at her.

Kat keeps Henry away from the commotion, but he's confused and upset. She calms him in the living room.

Det. Laurence sends Autumn away and closes the front door, before heading to the living room. She leans down to Henry's level and smiles. He shyly smiles back. She points to Kat.

DET. LAURENCE
Can you tell me who this is?

HENRY
Ma-ma.

DET. LAURENCE
Good, good.

Det. Laurence show a photo of MARIE to Henry.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
Who is this?

HENRY
Ha-ha.

DET. LAURENCE
Ha ha?

KAT
It's Japanese for mom. I taught him that back when I allowed Marie some contact. It was an open adoption. We were friendly. But then...

She trails off. Det. Laurence waits for her to continue. But -

HENRY
Where's *Ha-ha*?

KAT
This is confusing him.

DET. LAURENCE
Why did you cut off contact?

KAT
What is all this? He's my son.

She gestures to the paperwork - birth certificate. Adoption Contract. Medical records.

DET. LAURENCE
I'm trying to understand why Marie claimed he was kidnapped.

Kat pulls out her phone and shows a HEATED SERIES OF EMAILS from Marie. The final ones:

Marie: GIVE HIM BACK TO ME. NOW.

Marie: YOU WILL REGRET THIS.

Det. Laurence peers at the damning emails with a stoic face.

INT. INTERNET VOID

A photo of Kat out with Henry appears. #HenryisFound.

A comment pops up: "He was never missing!!"

Comments flood onto the screen.

"Angel!! Sweet boy!" // "Adorable mom and son <3 <3"

They then take a decided turn.

"Fuck Marie Okada." // "Disgusting!!" // "PSYCHOPATH."

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Kat sets up her camera in an intimate shot, wearing white and giving off "ethereal mom" vibes. She begins her recording.

KAT
It's not everyday you get thrust into the public eye. So, hi! Nice to meet you all. I'm Kat.
(MORE)

KAT (CONT'D)

I know a lot of you have questions about this whole situation with Henry and his birth mother and there are a lot of rumors running around, so I wanted to come on here and introduce me and just like, lay it all out on the table.

AN OLDER VIDEO pops up - a YOUNG KAT (7-8) puts her head to a PREGNANT WOMAN's belly at a BABY SHOWER.

KAT (V.O.)

That's me at my aunt's baby shower.

YOUNG KAT (ON VIDEO)

He kicked!

Her face glows with excitement.

KAT (V.O.)

I've always wanted to be a mom.

A MONTAGE OF PHOTOS appears:

- Young Kat combing a doll's hair carefully.
- Embracing HER MOTHER, who gives her an Easy Bake Oven.
- Young Kat reading a book like - THE BERENSTEIN BEARS: WE LOVE OUR MOTHER.

KAT (V.O.)

Because my mom and I had the best relationship. Like a movie.

INTERSPERSED with MEDIA about MOTHERS. The ways we subtly - and not so subtly - imply this is what all young women must want to grow up and do:

- Mrs. Potts tucking in Chip in *Beauty and the Beast*.
- *The Parent Trap*:

HALLIE PARKER (MOVIE QUOTE)

My mom is too cool.

- *Gilmore Girls* - Rory and Lorelai reuniting.

RORY GILMORE (MOVIE QUOTE)

I need you, I need you here, I need you now. I cannot do this alone. I need my Mommy, and dammit, I don't care who knows it.

KAT (V.O.)
My fave show was Gilmore Girls. I
know, very telling.

THEN: A portrait of KAT'S MOTHER - at a funeral.

KAT (V.O.)
But my mom got sick, so I dropped
out of culinary school. And then...
she died.

More images of KAT and her MOTHER.

KAT (V.O.)
It put everything into perspective.
I was alone in this big house and I
wanted to fill it with love.

Back to KAT ON VIDEO (PRESENT DAY):

KAT
Why adopt, you ask? I can have
kids, but Mr. Right wasn't around,
we've got 8 billion people on this
Earth, and there are so many
children in need of a home.

A few PICTURES OF HENRY (3-4) up on screen.

KAT (V.O.)
When I saw Henry, it was just like
Forrest Gump's mom said in the
movie, "I didn't know it, but I was
destined to be your mama."

Back to Kat:

KAT
There've been a lot of questions
about my relationship with Marie. I
didn't know anything about Daisy or
what was going on with her and I
don't want to focus on that
anymore. Instead, I want to
appreciate this positive community.
Thank you for all the support
you've already given me, you all
are such a blessing.

She waves off camera and Henry appears, sitting in her lap.

KAT (CONT'D)
Can you say "Thank you"?

HENRY
(shyly)
Thank you.

They wave at the camera as the recording STOPS.

INT. THE INTERNET VOID

We see a flurry of Kat's new posts, a mix of candids, cooking TikToks, and lifestyle posts of her life with Henry.

At the top, Kat's FOLLOWERS number ticks higher and higher, jumping from the low tens of thousands to the low millions...

The comments are complimentary bordering on sycophantic:

"Your recipes are SO GOOD. I used to HATE asian food, but now I love it!!"

"Some people are just BORN TO BE MOTHERS. You're SO AMAZING!!
<3<3<3<3<3 :) ;) :) #MomsAreInvincible"

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Autumn is at reception. The news blares from a nearby TV.

NEWSCASTER (ON SCREEN)
Update in a bizarre, unfolding story. A biological mother who falsified a missing child report allegedly attempted to kidnap the boy from his adopted mother -

Autumn rolls on her heels, then spots Det. Laurence.

AUTUMN
Detective Laurence!

DET. LAURENCE
It's nothing short of a miracle that Ms. Kokko isn't going to press charges. But if Marie violates the terms of the restraining order -

AUTUMN
Restraining order?

DET. LAURENCE
- or mandatory counseling, we'll be forced to arrest her again.

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

Marie is dead-faced and silent. Autumn keeps looking at her, but unsure of where or how to begin.

Outside is a media frenzy of local news crews and a pocket of protesters with nasty signs.

AUTUMN
Don't look.

But Marie can't help herself, staring right at the protesters and reporters yelling questions.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - DAY

Marie wrenches away from Autumn as soon as they are inside.

She pours herself some water.

Both stare off into space. Finally -

AUTUMN
Marie -

MARIE
Please leave.

AUTUMN
I'm not leaving you like -

Marie slams her glass into the sink and it shatters.

MARIE
Leave. Me. Alone!

Autumn, ever the one to avoid a fight, quietly heads for the door. As she opens it, the shouts of the reporters fly into the house and then dampen as she slams it shut.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - NIGHT

It's the end of a long day for Det. Laurence, but it's not quite over. Her Sergeant waits sternly by his office.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - SERGEANT'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

DET. LAURENCE
Quite the page-turner.

The Sergeant isn't amused.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
I asked to speak to the boy alone
and she threatened to lawyer up.

SERGEANT
Wouldn't you?

DET. LAURENCE
Don't we need... more to go on?

SERGEANT
More than a birth certificate,
adoption contract, threatening
emails...

DET. LAURENCE
Exactly, isn't it a bit too neat?

SERGEANT
Jesus, one didn't have enough proof
and now the other has too much?

DET. LAURENCE
It's like the story of King Solomon
and the two mothers -

SERGEANT
What do you think your job is here?
Your "hunches" have cost us a lot
of fucking embarrassment already.

The Sergeant turns around his monitor, plays a news segment.

DELIA KOBRIN (ON SCREEN)
Polls suggest trust in the Skipton
Sheriff's Department is at an all-
time low after the lead detective
on a missing child case erroneously
suggested the boy didn't exist,
when he was just a few towns away -

The Sergeant pauses the video.

DET. LAURENCE
I didn't say he didn't exist -

SERGEANT
This isn't up for debate.

DET. LAURENCE
Am I fired?

SERGEANT

For now, you're going on a long
unpaid vacation until further
notice. You'll be lucky if you come
back from that vacation.

Det. Laurence completely deflates in shame.

INT. KIKI'S APARTMENT - DEN - DAY

Kiki sits glued in front of her television showing news
coverage of Marie's scandal and arrest.

The schadenfreude is clear on her face, but she's interrupted
by a KNOCK at the door.

Kiki looks up in surprise then goes to answer.

It's Barbara Melnitz, the HOA powerhouse.

Kiki straightens herself up, ready for battle. But she is
undone when Barbara holds up a tray of COOKIES.

BARBARA MELNITZ

We heard about Marie.

Suddenly, more BOUFFANT NEIGHBORS appear on either side of
Barbara with piteous looks and eyes hungry for gossip.

LATER

The women all crowd around Kiki.

BARBARA MELNITZ (CONT'D)

What it must have been like to
raise someone with her troubled
mind...

KIKI

This isn't even her first arrest.

The women gasp and lean in. Kiki relishes the attention.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marie opens her take-out dinner to reveal: Katsudon.

She pulls up Kat's latest video on her phone and places it
across the table, like they are eating together.

KAT (ON VIDEO)
 I want to honor Henry's Japanese
 heritage today by making a
 delicious and popular Japanese
 dish: katsudon pork cutlet rice
 bowl. Henry's going to be my
 assistant today!

ON SCREEN: Already covered in flour, Henry laughs beside her.

HENRY AND KAT (ON VIDEO)
Itadakimasu!

MARIE
 (lifelessly)
Itadakimasu.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Det. Laurence downs the rest of a glass of wine, looking
 worse for the wear.

As she goes to refill her glass, she notices a mess of crumbs
 and dishes on the counters. The FRIDGE left partially open.

Fuming, she closes the fridge, refills, and goes back to -

THE LIVING ROOM

The TV swaps from "THE CROWN" to BASKETBALL by COLE (the
 younger jock son, we've seen before) who flops on the couch.

DET. LAURENCE
 What am I, chopped liver? I was
 watching that!

COLE
 I thought you went to bed. But I
 can watch with you.

He tosses the remote over to her, sheepishly. Ever trying to
 be the good son.

DET. LAURENCE
 What are you even doing home?

He gestures to a BAG OF LAUNDRY by the door.

COLE
 The machines at the dorm were full.

DET. LAURENCE
You could have a little compassion
for the timing.

COLE
You said to come home whenever...

DET. LAURENCE
I'm not your maid!

COLE
I wasn't asking you to do it for
me! I know you're dealing with a
lot. I'll just go -

Cole takes his laundry and storms out. Det. Laurence feels a pang of guilt that she battles with more alcohol.

INT. SKIPTON POLICE STATION - BULLPEN - DAY

A bored OFFICER stares off into the distance as Autumn rattles through the paperwork and evidence she has collected.

AUTUMN
And this adoption agency listed.
She says it's closed, but I can't
find any evidence of it ever
existing - hey, wake up -

She waves in the Officer's face.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)
Where is Detective Laurence? I'd
rather speak to her.

OFFICER
My job is to listen until you
leave.

Autumn is displeased, but not deterred.

INT. DIVE BAR - NIGHT

Det. Laurence enters to see Autumn at the bar, already with an extra bourbon ready. She sighs and sits down.

DET. LAURENCE
A few days ago, you didn't even
truly know if you had a nephew.

AUTUMN

Please, this woman just appears
with the perfect story and -

DET. LAURENCE

Ah yes, the "Gone Girl" accusation.

AUTUMN

Funny how the movie showed the cops
being totally oblivious to the very
obvious signs that the white woman
was full of shit. Except... for
that one detective.

DET. LAURENCE

You say she's lying, she says
you're lying.

AUTUMN

We're not lying -

DET. LAURENCE

Do you know the story of King
Solomon and the two mothers?

Autumn's silence says no.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)

Two mothers come to King Solomon
with one living child, both
claiming to be the child's mother.
No one knew who the true mother
was, so King Solomon says he'll cut
the baby in half and give one half
to each. The false mother says
nothing. But the true mother
screams that the other mother can
have the child, just let him live.
King Solomon reveals the threat was
just a test to discover the child's
real mother, who would do anything
to keep her child from harm.

AUTUMN

Yes, clearly any false mother is
cool with half a baby. What kind of
fucked up logic is that?

Det. Laurence finishes her drink and gets up.

DET. LAURENCE

You're not a mother -

AUTUMN

Don't tell me I wouldn't understand. You can't be bothered to really investigate, you'd rather give up and leave it to the whims -

DET. LAURENCE

The case is closed, Autumn. There's nothing more I can do.

AUTUMN

You're right. If you can't think of any better way to help than to cut a baby in half, then I don't want you near Henry or my sister at all.

INT. FANCY STEAKHOUSE - NIGHT

Kiki is out on the town with the Power-Walking Ladies, treating themselves to white wine spritzes and a nice meal.

KIKI

- and she cut holes in the dress I worked so hard to get her. Well, I made her wear it anyway. Let's just say, she wasn't Prom Queen.

SECOND-IN-COMMAND

Speaking of troubled girls, I just heard Minnie Baker's daughter is stepping down from her PR job for -
(whispers)
- *mental health* reasons.

POWER-WALKING LADY 3

Yet another young thing who cannot handle the realities of life. I wonder if she'll start a blog, right, Kiki?

Kiki chuckles politely. Barbara turns serious.

BARBARA MELNITZ

There's a wide gap between quitting and endangering a child.

SECOND-IN-COMMAND

Oh, Marie clearly took it too far -

BARBARA MELNITZ

She surely would've killed him or
that poor mother if the police
didn't step in. They need to lock
her up now.

Barbara looks furtively at Kiki as the others chime in to
parrot Barbara's point.

Kiki balks, it feels a step too far, but doesn't speak
against the consensus. Guilt eats at her.

The BILL arrives and Barbara confidently hands it to Kiki.

BARBARA MELNITZ (CONT'D)

We take turns paying and this would
be your turn. Unless it's too much?

Barbara puts on a pitying face that nags at Kiki's pride.

INT. KIKI'S APARTMENT - DEN - SAME TIME

Kiki takes out her emotions on ONLINE POKER. But it's not
working. Her TOTAL is in the RED.

Kiki loses another hand. Fuck! Stares at a photo of young
Marie, looking angry. Marie's eyes burrow into hers.

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

Autumn meets with a small-time LAWYER, laying out all her
evidence against Kat's account.

LAWYER

I'm sorry, but no.

AUTUMN

Oh, come on. There's holes
everywhere in her story -

LAWYER

Your sister isn't exactly a
straight-shooter.

AUTUMN

That's nothing to kidnapping -

LAWYER

She's Bergen Kokko's daughter.

Clearly, that means nothing to Autumn.

LAWYER (CONT'D)

The high-end lawyer whose clients are fishier than a seaside market? He's ironclad. Rich. And from what I hear, has kept his sweet daughter from trouble before.

AUTUMN

Some faith you have in the system.

LAWYER

She's untouchable.

INT. COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Marie sits across her court-appointed THERAPIST (50s) in his pastel and inoffensive office. His appearance equally pastel and inoffensive.

THERAPIST

Let's talk about Paul, your late husband. What was he like?

MARIE

Very dependable. Until he up and died, I guess.

THERAPIST

How did he pass?

MARIE

He was a big hiker. There was a rockslide and he got shoved off the edge of a trail.

THERAPIST

You were eight months pregnant.

Marie stares ahead.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

Tell me about that time for you.

MARIE

I was pregnant and the love of my life was dead.

THERAPIST

It's important to talk through difficult things. To process.

MARIE

I know. I, too, watch Depression
TikTok.

THERAPIST

You felt very comfortable sharing
intimate feelings with strangers on
the internet. Why not me?

MARIE

It wasn't court-ordered?

THERAPIST

Online community can be great. But
it doesn't replace that you need
supportive people around you.

(pause)

I find it curious you never spoke
about Paul in your content.

MARIE

It wasn't their business.

THERAPIST

What do you think would have
happened if you talked about him?

Marie, tired, lets some honesty trickle through.

MARIE

They'd keep comparing me to him.
Would he have done it better? And
the answer is, yes. Obviously.

THERAPIST

You think Paul would have been a
better parent?

MARIE

There's no question. He was steady,
caring, confident, patient...

She tears up talking about him. The Therapist looks like he's
made an insight.

THERAPIST

The pain of his loss compounded
with anxiety about being inadequate
must've been horrible. Is Paul's
death the reason you decided to put
Henry up for adoption?

Marie fumes.

MARIE

He was never adopted. He was with me the whole time in that house.

THERAPIST

You mean Daisy though, right?

MARIE

Daisy was Henry.

THERAPIST

So Daisy was the fantasy of what it would've been like to raise Henry?

MARIE

No, I literally raised Henry.

THERAPIST

I can't help if you don't choose to be in this reality with me.

MARIE

Oh, so I can choose a reality?

THERAPIST

Reality is an agreement. It's not fair what has happened to you, but if you want to participate in society -

MARIE

What if everyone is wrong? Where are they pulling this reality from?

THERAPIST

You're right. Information and impressions can be manipulated, the way you manipulated your audience with Daisy.

Marie stares daggers at him.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

But in this reality, you lost your husband while eight months pregnant, gave up your infant son for adoption, and created a fake daughter named Daisy to deal with your grief. I'm not judging you.

Marie puts her heads into her hands, she can't hear this.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)
But you cannot move forward unless
you accept this.

Marie tries to hold it together. He gives her a moment. Then -

THERAPIST (CONT'D)
Let's talk about your mother.

Dear Lord, no.

EXT. MARIE'S HOUSE - DAY

Kiki approaches Marie's door, unimpeded. Marie answers, worse for the wear. Too tired to keep Kiki out.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kiki tuts while examining the disarray in Marie's house. Marie gives up on stopping her and collapses onto the couch.

KIKI
You were very good at keeping all
this mess out of frame.

MARIE
Come to commend my cinematography?

Kiki sits down on the coffee table opposite Marie.

KIKI
You wondered in one of your videos
if I ever really loved you. You
know how I know that? I watched
every one.

Marie's defenses seem to lower.

KIKI (CONT'D)
You're a mother. You know you never
stop worrying about your child. I
haven't been responsible for your
since you were sixteen, but I never
stopped thinking about you. You've
grown so much. Can't you imagine
that in all these years, I've also
changed?

Marie still doesn't speak, takes it in.

KIKI (CONT'D)
I'm not here to re-litigate the
past. But you're in trouble. Let me
help you in any way I can.

Marie leans in closer to Kiki with steel in her gaze.

MARIE
This olive branch you think you're
offering is meaningless to me.
You're a stranger. I don't need
anything from you.

Kiki snarls in anger.

KIKI
Except as an excuse for everything
you don't like about yourself. Your
life is not my fault. Where's your
son? Am I to blame for that too?

MARIE
Watch it.

KIKI
You know what makes a good mother?
Money. Money to have time. Money
for opportunities. You think you're
so much better than me, but you ran
a game too. Because being a good
mother is expensive.

Kiki goes to twist the knife in her fury.

KIKI (CONT'D)
Maybe he's better off with that
woman. She has resources. She has
respect in the world. He can have a
bright future rather than fester in
the past with you.

Marie cannot believe it. But she gathers herself.

MARIE
Fine. My life isn't your fault. I
worked crappy job after crappy job
just to keep myself fed without
stealing from anyone. I built a life
with Paul that I could be proud of
and when he was ripped away from
me, I *still* found a way to take
care of my son and get my feet back
under me, and *she* is who you would
trust with your grandson?

Marie takes a breath.

MARIE (CONT'D)
I'm not your daughter. Henry isn't
your grandson. And if your name is
ever spoken in this house again,
Henry will only know you as the
pathetic, petty criminal you are.
Now get the fuck out of my house.

Kiki is deeply wounded. But puts her head high as she leaves.

Once she's gone, Marie collapses into anger and tears.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - HENRY'S BEDROOM - LATER

Marie hovers at the doorway for a long time, looking over
Henry's things. She takes the OWL STUFFED ANIMAL and
considers it warmly.

We focus in on COLONEL DUMPLING THE OWL.

EXT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - DAY

The stuffed owl dangles limply in Marie's hands.

Kat opens the door. She nearly slams it shut, but Marie holds
up both the OWL and Kat's SWEATSHIRT (that she left behind).

KAT
I can have you arrested.

MARIE
I know.

KAT
Peace offering, huh? Either way, he
hasn't stopped asking for Colonel
Dumpling, so I appreciate it.

MARIE
I just want what's best for him.

KAT
You going to back off now?

MARIE
Yes. You win.

Kat seems shocked by her answer.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I'm not going to fight you. I just... if you could find it in your heart to let me see him. I could nanny or clean for you. Or just... anything.

Kat looks at her smugly.

KAT

For all the times you just talked about you, you, you and how being a mom was so hard on you... I guess getting time away really did clarify some things for ya?

Kat reaches for something inside and hands it to Marie. It's a BOOK: "SIMPLY BE A GOOD MOTHER" - a self-help guide.

And closes the door.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marie throws the book into the trash, but her rage cannot hold back her tears.

Then, she gathers herself and picks up her phone.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marie and Autumn are together on the couch.

MARIE

You're right that I didn't want you to meet Henry.

Autumn doesn't look surprised. Lets Marie talk.

MARIE (CONT'D)

I thought it was because I wanted to keep anyone connected with Kiki away from him. But the truth is, I think I just resented that you had the chance to really break free from her. No arrest record. Blank slate. And you didn't. I thought, there must be something wrong with you. Or maybe that you were more like Kiki than I wanted to admit.

AUTUMN

I think I am more like her than I want to admit.

MARIE

Paul always wanted me to patch things up with you. Said I was blaming you for Kiki's sins. Guess his death made me dig in my heels.

AUTUMN

I wish I could've met him.

MARIE

You would've liked each other. You're both smug as shit when you win at games.

Autumn laughs.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Yay for mending years-long resentments! It only took having the most precious thing taken from me by a nanny I put my trust into.

The mood gets somber.

AUTUMN

Everyone has a weakness. Everyone has a price. We'll get him back.

MARIE

Any means?

AUTUMN

Any fucking means.

MARIE

Good, because I already bugged her house.

AUTUMN

What?

Marie goes to her laptop, booting up software. She struggles with an error message, then VOILA. THEY SEE:

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

The STUFFED OWL'S LEFT EYE gives a subtle BLINK. A camera inside it. It sits on a shelf in the living room, looking at:

Kat on the couch pounding wine with bleary drunk eyes. She whimpers and then drinks more to force herself to calm.

BACK ON MARIE/AUTUMN:

They both look perturbed to see Kat so upset.

AUTUMN

At least her guard is down.

MARIE

All we need is one slip-up, one opening and then we bring him home.

EXT. LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Det. Laurence lounges in near-complete darkness, as she drinks yet another wine. Then the outdoor lights turn on.

DUSTIN (26, her eldest son, charming trouble-maker, a "Jeremy Allen White" type) slinks into the seat beside her.

DUSTIN

Hey, Mom, whatcha doing? Depression drinking?

DET. LAURENCE

Taking the night air. What have I done to deign a visit?

DUSTIN

Cole said he came home to do his laundry and you freaked out on him. Yelling at your favorite son. Knew you must be in some shit.

DET. LAURENCE

You're both my favorite.

DUSTIN

Liar.

Dustin lights a cigarette. Det. Laurence scoffs, steals the cigarette, and ashes it on her chair. Dustin sighs loudly, this is not a unique occurrence.

DUSTIN (CONT'D)

He only came home because his girlfriend broke up with him. Didn't tell you, because Golden Boy didn't want to burden you.

Det. Laurence gets suddenly upset, the wine making it worse.

DET. LAURENCE

Tell Cole I'm sorry. I was mad at myself, not him.

DUSTIN

He knows. Don't beat yourself up.

DET. LAURENCE

And I'm sorry I never did your laundry when you were in school.

DUSTIN

Life isn't fair. I'm over it. And laundry's not why you're fucking pounding wine alone in the dark.

DET. LAURENCE

I really screwed up at work, Dusty.

DUSTIN

You know what you used to say when I really screwed the pooch? "Dustin Michael Laurence, if you don't stop pitying yourself and do better, I'm gonna be arresting you one day!"

It lightens the mood. She gently pats his hand. They have a quiet moment. Then Det. Laurence's eyes grow determined.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - OFFICE - NIGHT

Det. Laurence pours over her papers from the case and is deep into an INTERNET SPIRAL.

Searches like "How to fake documents" and "adoption scams" and "deep fakes" and "motherhood psychosis."

On print-outs of Marie's threatening emails to Kat, she has written "REAL?!" on them.

And a video essay titled "Post-partum psychosis? A case for why Marie Okada-Green created 'Daisy'"

Det. Laurence's eyes are bleary as she writes down increasingly more incomprehensible notes.

She nods to herself like she's got something going, but when she reaches for her glass, it's EMPTY.

KITCHEN

Det. Laurence reaches for another glass of wine, reconsiders, then instead goes for an alka-seltzer.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kat slams the door behind her. Henry tensely watches her.

KAT
Go play or something.

Henry hesitates, looking at the upset Kat.

KAT (CONT'D)
I won't tolerate another tantrum.
GO. PLAY.

Henry's lip quivers and he rushes away. Along his journey, he sees Colonel Dumpling the Owl and grabs him.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

No one is home, but we see Marie's laptop with the Owl's camera feed. The camera JERKS as Henry grabs him.

The camera shows the patio floor, then grass. Henry has taken the Owl and secret camera outside. He plops down on the ground and looks directly into the camera, blubbering in kid speak. It's heart-breaking.

Suddenly, Henry looks upward, off-screen. He hugs the Owl and the camera goes dark, pressing against his body.

Muffled, a WOMAN'S VOICE speaks to Henry, but her words are too unclear to make out.

Then the camera feed shows the ground. Henry is dragging the Owl while following someone.

The owl is dropped suddenly and the FEED GOES DARK.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY

Kat walks out of the backdoor and looks around for Henry.

KAT
Buddy, I'm sorry. Come here. Henry?

She sees the OWL on the ground and picks it up.

For a moment, the only sound is the wind. It blows on her face. Tranquil for a moment.

She stands still, hypnotized by the gentle breeze.

Finally, her stone-still demeanor is broken when her phone DINGS with a TEXT:

UNKNOWN NUMBER: "I have your son. Do not call the police. Untraceable cash and he'll be returned to you unharmed."

Kat seems unable to process this information. She looks away from the phone and seems to GO INTO A REVERIE -

TITLE CARD: "KAT"

KAT (V.O.)
I've always wanted to be a mom.

We revisit the VIDEO of YOUNG KAT (7-8) at the baby shower:

Young Kat sees her PREGNANT AUNT sneak a sip of champagne and PUNCHES HER IN THE LEG to the shock of the party.

INT. KOKKO HOME - YOUNG KAT'S BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Young Kat (7-8) forces her Mother to brush a dolly's hair.

Young Kat SCREAMS at her Mother for doing it wrong. Mother looks patient as Young Kat corrects her.

INT. KOKKO HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

TEEN KAT (15-16) watches TEEN MOM on MTV religiously, then her mother flips the channel away. Teen Kat protests.

INT. KOKKO HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Close on: a NEGATIVE pregnancy test.

TEEN KAT sits on the toilet crying her eyes out. Mother stands nearby with absolute relief. Then lays into Teen Kat.

LATER

Mother makes Teen Kat watch a BIRTHING VIDEO ala "The Miracle of Life." She watches in horror and retches into the trash.

Teen Kat, sweat on her brow, wipes her mouth.

TEEN KAT
I could always adopt. It's more
ethical with our population growth -

Mother sighs and stoops down, fixing Kat's hair.

KAT'S MOTHER

Don't rush, honey. Get some life experience. Motherhood is not as glamorous or easy as it can seem.

TEEN KAT

It can be if you do it right.

KAT'S MOTHER

I'm about to clean up your puke, you want to say that to me again?

TEEN KAT

But -

KAT'S MOTHER

Kitty-Kat, you're not ready. But I promise you, one day you'll see a sign and then you'll know it's the right time. And I'll be there to help you. I promise.

Teen Kat seems temporarily appeased.

INT. CHURCH - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A funeral service for KAT'S MOTHER is in session. KAT (early 20s) stares ahead blankly.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Kat wanders in the big empty house.

MASTER BEDROOM

She takes a big swig from a red wine bottle, then pours the red wine all over her late mother's bed.

Artwork on the walls is replaced with framed quotes like "Motherhood: All love begins and ends there."

INT. ADOPTION AGENCY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Kat sits in the office of an adoption agency rep.

AGENCY REP 1

The wait times for an infant or toddler are quite extensive. Aren't you a bit young? And single?

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Kat sits on the couch, deep in a depression cocoon, mindlessly watching Youtube on her TV.

On the table, her mother's OBITUARY, where we see her mother's name for the first time:

DAISY KOKKO, BELOVED WIFE AND MOTHER.

And that's when new video pops up on Kat's TV - it's Marie and a 2-year-old Daisy.

MARIE (ON SCREEN)

Daisy here is going to try mac 'n cheese for the first time.

The name - DAISY - perks Kat's ears up. She claws out of her blankets and puts her face close to the screen.

It grabs her attention, but in a critical way.

KAT

Boxed mac 'n cheese? Just make a roux! So lazy...

But she can't stop staring at Daisy's face.

LATER

Over what seems like countless days and nights, Kat watches Marie religiously, growing obsessed with Daisy and ever more critical of Marie:

KAT (CONT'D)

You don't deserve her.

EXT. MARIE'S HOUSE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Kat nervously KNOCKS on the door.

MARIE answers. Kat goes to speak, but stops short when she sees a THREE-YEAR-OLD HENRY run up behind Marie.

MARIE

Can I help you?

Kat recovers and smiles widely.

KAT

I- I live nearby and I'm offering up my childcare services. I'm an experienced nanny and -

Marie, exhausted, lights up.

MARIE
You're a fucking godsend.

KAT
Sorry - don't I know you from, oh
you're on Instagram. Don't you also
have a daughter?

Marie looks temporarily uncomfortable.

MARIE
How good are you at keeping
secrets?

Kat's smile says: VERY.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - HENRY'S ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Alone together, Kat plays with Henry on the floor.

Kat is thrown for a loop and looks mildly displeased at this unexpected turn, having wanted Daisy instead of Henry.

KAT
Which toy do you want?

HENRY
I want my kitty-cat!

Kat stops. Hearing her nickname - despite all logic - triggers something in her. Henry grabs his KITTY ANIMAL and snuggles up to Kat warmly. She melts instantly.

The SIGNS are there.

Inside Kat's BRAIN, she hears the line from *Forrest Gump*:

MRS. GUMP (V.O.)
I didn't know it, but I was meant
to be your mama.

KAT
Let's play a game. When Ha-ha isn't
around, call me 'Mama.' Wouldn't
that be funny?

Henry looks wary.

KAT (CONT'D)
It's just pretend, like how *Ha-ha*
plays pretend with Daisy?

Now he gets it. He giggles.

HENRY
Okay, Ma-ma.

MONTAGE - The months before the kidnapping - Kat prepares her plan to take Henry:

- MARIE'S HOUSE - Kat digs into the closet and takes Henry's BIRTH CERTIFICATE and other paperwork.

- KAT'S HOUSE - Kat googles "adoption contracts."

- MARIE'S HOUSE - Kat emails herself from MARIE'S laptop, creating the fake threatening emails.

- PRESCHOOL - Kat confidently walks up outside the school and sees Henry heading in with other kids to the door. She calls to him. And aide looks on, until -

HENRY (CONT'D)
Hi, Mama!

Kat walks Henry away from the school without a hitch.

- KAT'S HOUSE - Kat posts pictures of DAISY on Reddit under big caption: "FAKED PHOTOS." Hits enter with satisfaction.

- KAT'S HOUSE - Kat watches the news disparaging Marie with a smug grin on her face.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - HENRY'S ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Kat watches Henry sleep angelically. She beams with happiness. It's her perfect, designed life, and yet...

It's far from what she really wanted. Because now she'll have the realization that being a mom can be exhausting, frustrating, and nothing like she expected - Which we'll see by getting flashes of her new reality:

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Setup for filming, Kat leads Henry to a stepstool to join her in making a dish. Henry pouts and plays with a spatula.

KAT
Can you smile for Mama?

HENRY
I'm too busy.

KAT
You don't even know what that
means. Come on. Happy face!

Henry slaps the spatula around, messing up the ingredients on the table. Kat gasps.

HENRY
I don't wanna!

Henry goes into a full meltdown. Kat is overwhelmed.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

In the small hours, Kat yawns while treating wet stains on Henry's pajamas. She looks exhausted.

INT. GROCERY STORE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Kat pushes Henry in the cart. She walks two steps away to closely inspect the vegetables, when -

RUDE BYSTANDER
Excuse me! Whose kid is this? You
shouldn't leave him alone!

Kat turns. Henry is behaved and within easy distance.

The Rude Bystander tuts loudly. Kat tries to breathe.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Kat looks haggard on the phone.

KAT
(on phone)
It's been tough, but the work is
the reward!

CLUBBING FRIEND (O.S.)
Why don't you just get a sitter?

KAT
(on phone)
I can't leave him with a stranger
with all that's going on with his
bio mom! You should come meet him.
I'm dying for some company and
you'd be a great auntie!

CLUBBING FRIEND (O.S.)
 Girl, it's so loud. I'm about to go
 into the club, but congrats on the
 kid and kisses!

LATER

Kat sits on the couch pounding wine, already drunk. She
 whimpers and then drinks more to force herself to calm.

It's clear in her eyes: she thinks she's made a HUGE mistake.

We catch back up with PRESENT DAY KAT:

Sitting on her couch, considering the RANSOM TEXT after
 Henry's disappearance. The OWL sits on the coffee table
 nearby, with Kat in its sights.

Her mind races with all that's happened up to now -

Then, almost reflexively, Kat responds to the ransom text:

"No thanks."

INT. CAFE - NIGHT

CLOSE-UP ON PHONE receiving a text: "No thanks." Henry sits
 in the background in a booth, holding playing cards.

We turn around to reveal he's with: KIKI. Who sighs in
 frustration at Kat's response, then returns to the game.

KIKI
 Now, it's your turn to guess. Red
 or black?

She holds up a card he cannot see.

HENRY
 Red.

KIKI
 So it is!

She gives him the card, his stack larger than hers.

HENRY
 I'm winning!

KIKI
 Isn't Baba fun?

Henry crawls from his side of the table into the booth next to her in a sweet gesture of his comfort with Kiki.

HENRY
I'm tired of playing new house with
Nanny Kat.

KIKI
Sounds like a real bitch.

HENRY
Bitch!

Kiki giggles. Henry laughs too. But then Kiki looks off, a bit worried about what to do next.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Marie paces, apprehensive. She looks at the feed. Kat is just... sitting there. Like a dead doll.

MARIE
What the fuck is she doing?

Marie rewinds back the footage and gets to the part where Henry is led away by an unseen stranger. No!

Marie is resolved. She grabs her coat and heads out.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kat looks at her phone. Her last text is still: "No thanks." She starts a new response. Deletes it. Tries again. Deletes.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

INT. AUTUMN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Autumn stands in shock to see Kiki at her doorstep, with a shy Henry hanging onto her leg behind her.

KIKI
We have a bit of a situation.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSEHOLD - OFFICE - NIGHT

Det. Laurence is printing documents and organizing them into an accordion file. Then the printer JAMS. Her eyes are red and her energy is frantic.

DET. LAURENCE
What is up with the printer?

Dustin - the older jaded son - comes in and fiddles with the printer settings. He gets it working again.

The Golden Boy younger son, Cole, brings her coffee.

COLE
Some coffee so you're nice and
perky when you cuff this bitch.

DET. LAURENCE
Language! I don't know. There's
still lingering questions. If this
isn't rock solid...

DUSTIN
You certainly have enough on paper -

DET. LAURENCE
What I really need is a confession.

COLE
Go put the heat on her.

Det. Laurence downs the coffee.

DET. LAURENCE
(to Cole)
You watch too much true crime.

DUSTIN AND COLE
Good luck!

INT. AUTUMN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

We return to Autumn and Kiki, mid-conversation, as Henry eats dumplings in front of the TV in the background.

AUTUMN
Why would you do this? We were
working on a plan!

KIKI
Hope she just gives you blackmail?
No, she needs to leave with him.
The ransom can get them new
identities, I have a guy -

AUTUMN

What, Marty?! No way. Even if he can get real new identities - which I highly doubt - How would they live? What if one day someone recognized Marie?

KIKI

I was trying to do a nice thing!
Fine! I'm always wrong.

Autumn rolls her eyes heavily.

AUTUMN

You better hope Kat hasn't called the police or we're all screwed.

KIKI

Why would she call the police after she basically said, "no, kill my child please" to a kidnapper?

Autumn turns her attention toward HER LAPTOP where she also has the OWL CAM FEED LIVE. Her eyes go wide at what she sees.

AUTUMN

Shit.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - ENTRYWAY - NIGHT

Kat opens the door to reveal Marie. Marie shoves past her.

KAT

You can't be here.

MARIE

Arrest me after you tell me where Henry is.

KAT

He's upstairs. Now leave.

Marie holds up her phone showing the FEED of the OWL CAM.

MARIE

He was taken hours ago.

KAT

Have you been spying on me?

MARIE

You do not want to bring up the ethics of the situation here.

KAT
The ethics of what?

MARIE
Cut the bullshit!

KAT
What, you suddenly care? You loved
that fake little girl more than him
and you know it.

THUMP. Marie's fist connects with Kat's eye.

Kat's head snaps back and she stumbles into the couch,
catching herself.

MARIE
Where is he?!

KAT
Owww!! I don't know!!

MARIE
Someone took him. Who was it?

KAT
I don't know!

MARIE
You let him get kidnapped!

KAT
I thought it was you! And I just
thought I could get a little break
and you'd either bring him back or
I'd figure out a way to get him
back with the cops, so they don't
find out I...

MARIE
It clearly wasn't me!

KAT
Well, I know that NOW, but...

MARIE
But... but WHAT?

Kat struggles, looking guilty, she glances at her phone.

MARIE (CONT'D)
What did you do?

KAT
I'm not a bad person!

THUD. Marie cracks the base of her palm into Kat's nose, breaking it. Blood spills from Kat's nostrils.

Kat breaks into heavy, ugly sobs.

Marie grabs her phone, but it's passcode protected.

MARIE
What's the code?

Kat wails as blood gushes from her nose. Marie can see further violence won't get her far. She tries another tactic.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Please just tell me the code. We
need to fix this and get him back.

Kat tries to choke out a word, but goes right back to crying.

Marie starts looking around the room, as if there might be a clue to the passcode nearby.

Marie takes in Kat's house with the "motherhood is the only job" paraphernalia.

She sees one in particular and gets an idea. She takes a gentler approach, trying to work Kat.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Kat, I know this is hard. But
you're just being tested. "Being a
mother is learning about strengths
you didn't know you had." Right?

At the mention of the platitude, Kat begins to calm. Marie hands her a rag for her nose.

MARIE (CONT'D)
You have to be strong for Henry.

KAT
B-but I'm not s-strong...

MARIE
What do you mean? You fooled me
completely. And you just got hit in
the face - sorry about that - and
you're taking it like a champ.

Kat looks a little encouraged by this.

KAT
Is my nose broken?

MARIE
It looks... fine to me.

KAT
And fooling you was easy, you're so self-centered.

Marie swallows the instinct to fight back at the insult.

MARIE
And you are so good with Henry.

KAT
He hates me...

MARIE
What? That's not true.

KAT
(through sniffles)
He fights me all the time. He used to be so sweet and I can't get him to love me like he did before.

Don't gloat, don't gloat, don't gloat...

MARIE
That must be so tough.

KAT
And all these other moms are so mean to me. My friends never call anymore... I'm all alone -

MARIE
You're handling so much.

KAT
(snapping)
So? Being a mother is about sacrificing everything for your child. It's why I hated your fucking whiny content.

Marie takes it back, she's hit a nerve. But she waits and Kat cools a bit.

KAT (CONT'D)

But I'll be honest that I may have under-estimated how these unique circumstances with Henry might... strain the mother/son bond.

MARIE

Everyone needs some help. You were so good to me and to Henry.

KAT

I really do love him.

MARIE

I know. Let me help you get him back. Please, what's the passcode?

Kat takes her phone and types in her passcode. She hands the phone back to Marie.

KAT

I have thirty thousand on hand. I can get more, but I'd need a day.

MARIE

Thank you.

Marie turns away. She sees Kat's response of "No thanks" and has to strain to hold in her rage. She texts back the kidnappers as quickly as she can.

"I can get you 30k tonight if you bring him home."

As they wait for the response, Marie follows Kat into the kitchen as she cleans herself up.

MARIE (CONT'D)

You said that...you needed a break.

Kat looks up, but doesn't respond. Marie treads carefully. She clocks another MOTIVATIONAL MOM POSTER.

MARIE (CONT'D)

"The natural state of motherhood is UNSELFISHNESS."

Kat throws down the rag harshly into the sink.

KAT

You're saying that I was being selfish -

MARIE

No, the opposite. The most unselfish thing you can do as a parent sometimes is recognize your own limit. Take that break.

KAT

And you're offering that break?

MARIE

I am.

Marie gets closer to Kat with a vulnerable look.

MARIE (CONT'D)

Let me take him back.

KAT

I'm not a failure.

MARIE

And you wouldn't be. You said yourself that it's the unique circumstances. You'd be making a sacrifice. To part with him.

Marie waits patiently, praying this has somehow worked.

KAT

Maybe... I'm just like... not meant to be *his* mom? Maybe there's some other child... that's meant for me.

MARIE

That's... so valid.

INT./EXT. - AUTUMN'S CAR - NIGHT

Autumn drives as Kiki balances Autumn's laptop on her lap to watch the owl feed. Henry has on headphones and plays a game on Kiki's phone in the backseat.

KIKI

It keeps freezing. This hotspot is really crummy.

AUTUMN

I'm going to call her -

KIKI

No! Phone records can mark your position, I read it. We can't give the cops proof she was there.

AUTUMN

I think we're way past that.

DING DING.

Kiki pulls out her BURNER PHONE - the kidnapper's.

KIKI

She responded. A thirty thousand ransom! Where should we have them drop it? Somewhere private, but with good sight lines -

AUTUMN

You can't be serious!

KIKI

This is Marie's chance! Take the money and run!

AUTUMN

Who knows what Marie just had to do to get Kat to pay up.

Kiki grumbles at this.

AUTUMN (CONT'D)

We had a plan. We can start tonight, blackmail Kat with the fact that she did nothing to help him -

KIKI

Blackmail is tricky! It's unpredictable. Better for Kat not to know it was us -

AUTUMN

We need to get Marie out of there and talk to her before this spins out of control.

INT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - OFFICE - NIGHT

Marie continues trying to ingratiate herself to Kat as Kat opens the large safe hidden in her office and pulls out STACKS of bills.

Marie watches in awe at the amount of money.

KAT

What would I do about my presence?

MARIE

You do the, "I'm taking some time away" thing. I'll hide away too, people will forget. After a while, you can resurface and rebrand.

Kat does seem like she's mulling it over.

MARIE (CONT'D)

You'd have to help me with the custody quietly -

KAT

My daddy's a shark. That's no problem.

Marie looks at Kat's safe. Considering the money in there, she's not shocked to hear this.

KAT (CONT'D)

What if people find out and really hate on me though?

Marie's patience is being strained at humoring Kat.

MARIE

They're just bitter. Not worth it.

KAT

Right? Like... you're not a mom. Stop judging us. Jeez.

MARIE

Seriously!

The two burst into laughter at the absurdity. And then Kat fiercely hugs Marie.

KAT

I think we're both going to be better moms because of this.

Marie has to seriously hold it in.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Kat pulls back from the hug suddenly, looking unsure.

Marie hides behind the office door, looking through the crack to the front as Kat answers the door -

KAT (CONT'D)

Detective! How can I help you?

DET. LAURENCE
How's Henry?

KAT
Really, really good.

DET. LAURENCE
Is he here?

KAT
He's visiting my father tonight.

Det. Laurence is no fool. She sees the dried blood on Kat's face, the bruises forming, and Kat's nervous energy.

She steps into the house and Kat instinctively steps back.

DET. LAURENCE
Is there anyone else here?

Marie - in the office - folds back against the wall. In pain at how badly Kat is handling this. What should she do?

KAT
Nope.

DET. LAURENCE
What happened to your face?

KAT
Just an accident.

DET. LAURENCE
Don't play games with me.

KAT
I'm not.

DET. LAURENCE
Ms. Kokko, I'm here to place you under arrest.

KAT
What?!

Marie's eyes go wide. No, no, no...

KAT (CONT'D)
You can't do this -

DET. LAURENCE
I assure you, I can.

KAT
I want my lawyer -

DET. LAURENCE
You can call them once we're down
at the station.

Marie bursts out from the behind the office door to the
genuine surprise of Det. Laurence.

Det. Laurence pulls out her gun and aims it at her.

MARIE
Please wait.

DET. LAURENCE
What are you doing here?

MARIE
Someone took Henry and is trying to
ransom her. You're right about
everything she did and you should
absolutely arrest her. But not
before she pays the ransom and gets
Henry back.

KAT
What the fuck, Marie!

Det. Laurence sees the MONEY in the office. Her head is
spinning.

KAT (CONT'D)
She was surveilling me! She's been
setting me up. SHE took Henry!

Det. Laurence has had enough as they keep arguing. She SLAMS
THE FRONT DOOR SHUT. Marie JUMPS.

DET. LAURENCE
SHUT UP!

Det. Laurence turns to Kat.

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
I knew something was wrong with you
and your stinking story the first
moment I saw you.

Now, to Marie -

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
But her guilt doesn't mean your
innocence.

(MORE)

DET. LAURENCE (CONT'D)
You have lied to me since day one.
Why should I trust you now? He's
been kidnapped? Again?! All this
money. Are you two in on something
together?

Marie is cracking.

MARIE
Jesus, I'm his mother and she's the
psycho who kidnapped him. Why is
this even a question? WAKE UP!
Every second you waste here with
your shitty guesses is a second
he's in more danger!

Det. Laurence turns sharply and GRABS Marie. She wrenches
Marie's HANDS BEHIND HER BACK and CUFFS HER.

DET. LAURENCE
We will all figure this out AT the
station, where the POLICE will
locate Henry -

MARIE
Because they're so good at that!

DET. LAURENCE
Watch your mouth!

MARIE
You're fucking joking!! What is
wrong with you?!

Marie struggles against Det. Laurence who tries to gain
control and push her to the ground.

Meanwhile, Kat is hyperventilating and backing slowly toward
the kitchen, mumbling incoherently to herself.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Let me go!!

Kat reels, looking ill.

Finally, Det. Laurence kicks the back of Marie's knee and
sends her to the ground.

Det. Laurence stands up tall to deal with Kat when -

WHAM.

Too late. A frazzled Kat has KNOCKED DET. LAURENCE IN THE
HEAD WITH A MEAT POUNDER.

Det. Laurence lets go of Marie and stumbles down.

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM! Kat follows her down and hits her until her head is unrecognizable.

Marie slides herself backwards on the floor away from the sight, but already has specks of blood on her.

Kat stands up... very bloody.

Kat looks at Marie. Then pouts her lip.

KAT
God, no, no, no -

Kat has suddenly realized what she's done and is freaking out. Marie waits a moment until Kat seems to get a grip.

KAT (CONT'D)
It's okay. It's okay. Daddy will know what to do. He's so smart. And important. But he always makes time for my calls. He loves me a lot.

Kat walks past Marie into the OFFICE. She enters for privacy, but paces... still able to see out of the door to Marie.

KAT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
It's Kitty Kat. Well, tell him it's an emergency!!

Marie's eyes drift to the Detective... the KEYS on her belt. The GUN near her body.

Then to Kat as she goes BACK and FORTH across the doorway.

Each time Kat is out of sight, Marie inches toward the KEYS.

But then - Kat strides back into the room and Marie quickly sits back, trying to look casual.

KAT (CONT'D)
Daddy wasn't available, because it's late, but I mean, his clients could raze a whole town and walk.

Kat picks up the Detective's gun with disdain. And then she aims it at Marie.

KAT (CONT'D)
I'll make sure Henry is adopted by a really, really nice family.

Kat turns off the safety and -

Marie KICKS HER IN THE KNEE.

Kat goes down. It's enough time for Marie to -

RUN AND BARRICADE HERSELF IN THE OFFICE.

She locks the door.

Uses her body to SHOVE a CHAIR between the door and the desk.

BLAM. Kat has shot out the lock, but the door is still STUCK as the CHAIR PRESSES AGAINST THE HEAVY DESK.

There's only enough room for Kat to put through an arm.

She BLINDLY SHOTS.

Marie takes cover under the DESK. SCOURING AWKWARDLY through drawers to find something to undo the CUFFS.

Marie finds a PAPERCLIP. It'll have to do.

BLAM. Kat alternates BLIND SHOTS and SHOVING AT THE DOOR.

Marie focuses on the cuffs - using the paperclip as a SHIM.

She shoves the PAPERCLIP into the TEETH of one cuff. And then CLOSES IT TIGHTER.

She HISSES as it presses on her wrists, but the PAPERCLIP gets caught between the TEETH, causing them to SPLIT.

ONE CUFF is now OFF and her hands are FREE.

She rushes to the window. A BLIND SHOT WHIPS PAST HER FACE.

She ducks then tries the window. IT'S STICKY. Before she can get it open -

KAT JUMPS into the door and the chair SHOVES out of place, swinging the door OPEN.

Kat enters huffing, but Marie isn't visible.

Marie JUMPS from behind the chair going for the GUN, MISSES, but DESTABILIZES KAT, who falls backward.

Marie slams her ELBOW into KAT'S BROKEN NOSE.

KAT SCREAMS and DROPS THE GUN.

Marie GRABS THE GUN and races back into the -

LIVING ROOM

She aims it at Kat, who stands up.

MARIE
Please stop.

Kat comes forward a step, pleading pathetically.

MARIE (CONT'D)
Don't move!

KAT
Marie... we can talk about this.

Marie steps back into Det. Laurence's BLOOD and SLIPS.

Kat changes tune instantly and searches options and takes the nearby FIREPLACE POKER.

She CHARGES Marie.

Marie tries to SHOOT Kat from the floor. The gun is EMPTY.

Kat SWINGS the POKER and Marie DODGES.

It LANDS in Marie's SHOULDER. Marie YELLS.

Kat uses the poker to DRAG Marie back.

As she slides, Marie grabs the MEAT POUNDER from the floor.

Kat DISLODGES the POKER, lifts it far above her head for a KILLING STRIKE -

BAM. Marie SHATTERS her foot with the POUNDER.

Kat SCREECHES. Marie PUSHES her off-balance.

Kat FALLS FACE FIRST and -

THUD.

It's suddenly very quiet.

Marie stares at Kat's unmoving body. Tentatively, she rolls Kat's body over to see -

Kat had landed her HEAD directly onto the HOOK of the POKER.

Marie covers her mouth. Kat is dead.

Marie looks like she'll be sick and SPITS bile on the floor.

She goes to stand and hisses at the sudden pain of her SHOULDER WOUND. She gets a TOWEL from the kitchen to put pressure on it.

She's in shock as she looks around at the carnage.

Then, the sound of a CAR PULLING UP OUTSIDE.

This puts Marie back on alert. She grabs the MEAT POUNDER and is ready to face whoever is about to come through that door.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Marie throws open the door with POUNDER raised to see:

Autumn looking frightened.

Marie drops the pounder in relief.

AUTUMN
What the fuck happened?

MARIE
We can't wait. Henry's been
kidnapped.

Marie rushes back into the office and takes Kat's phone. She calls the "kidnapper."

MARIE (CONT'D)
(to Autumn)
I have the money, I just have to
make them meet me somewhere -

RING RING. Marie hears a phone ringing in the distance. She looks outside behind Autumn and sees:

KIKI holding her ringing burner phone. And HENRY in the backseat of the car, playing a game on a phone.

AUTUMN
He's fine.

The realization washes over Marie. Kiki sees her rage and rushes over.

MARIE
You -

AUTUMN
Marie, your shoulder. Don't move.

Autumn holds Marie back as Kiki comes up, ready with excuses, but then -

Marie deflates. She wails. Kiki sees her injuries and the bodies inside the house, a horrible understanding.

Autumn sits by Marie and holds her. Kiki tries to approach and Marie shoves her back.

She continues her desperate cry. Kiki's eyes tear up as well.

The three women take a moment to feel just how incredibly fucked this has all become.

But then - Marie exhales.

MARIE

Take him.

AUTUMN

Marie -

MARIE

You and him need to be far away and have nothing to do with this.

AUTUMN

You can't do this.

MARIE

They'll think it was my fault anyway. I need him with someone I trust to love him. Get out of here. Get an alibi. Keep him safe.

AUTUMN

No, it's not fair.

Marie looks like she'll throw up. Panic rising.

Autumn looks pleadingly to Kiki. Kiki stands with a calm air. She looks inside and takes it in cautiously.

KIKI

Autumn, tie up Marie's arm and get her cleaned up.

MARIE

Kiki -

KIKI

Don't argue.

AUTUMN

Ha-ha, we can't just leave. Her blood is inside -

KIKI
We'll handle this.

Marie looks to Autumn. They are out of other good options.

LATER

Autumn bandages Marie as Kiki shows her the owl cam footage on her laptop.

KIKI (CONT'D)
Can you do that?

Marie nods.

KIKI (CONT'D)
Autumn, you're with me. Work fast.

EXT. KAT KOKKO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Marie - now cleaned up - exits Kat's house through the office window and heads for Autumn's car.

Henry looks out the window and sees her.

He nearly jumps out of his seat. He opens the door and Marie picks him up.

MARIE
Hi, my sweet boy.

HENRY
Wanna see my game?

Behind her, Autumn skids out of the side door and sprints.

AUTUMN
It's time!!

Marie takes Henry around the other side of the car and crouches with him. She covers his ears.

Autumn crouches with her and is soon followed by Kiki, breathing heavily and carrying a BULKY BAG.

A few seconds pass.

BOOM.

The kitchen EXPLODES and the house catches fire. The flames expand higher and wider exponentially.

Marie holds Henry close as he gasps at the sound. Then they all look to him.

HENRY
Whoa! Big noise!

MARIE
Yep, what a big noise.

Their faces say: What the fuck did we just do?

KIKI
Keep the story clear and emotional,
but most of all -

AUTUMN
We were never here. I know.
(to Kiki's bag)
What's that?

KIKI
Call it a retirement investment.

The house CRACKS as part of it collapses. Then it freezes into a STILL IMAGE, which shrinks into a news info-graphic -

INT. NATIONAL NEWS STATION - EVENING

A News Anchor talks over the info-graphic of the fire.

NEWS ANCHOR
After weeks of conflicting accounts
and a night full of violence, it
seems the "Mommy who cried wolf"
was singing the truth all along -

Comments bubble on the side of the screen, providing a running commentary that only we can see.

"This story is NUTS. Finally the TRUTH comes out!" //
"Justice for Marie!!"

FLASH OF OTHER NEWS FOOTAGE ON SCREEN:

Firefighters comb through the burnt rubble of Kat's house. One opens the SAFE, which mostly survived the explosion.

He digs out some papers and the CHARRED STUFFED OWL.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)
The house's security cameras and
footage were destroyed in the fire.
(MORE)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)

Only a few frames of footage from the perpetrator's nanny cam was recovered. But it reveals some of the gruesome story.

GRAINY SLOW-MO OWL CAM FOOTAGE: Kat swings the MEAT POUNDER into Det. Laurence's head. Marie, conveniently, out of frame on the floor.

More comments: "plot is like an 80s slasher, so believable #not" // "y is that ONLY footage they recovered? convenient"

INT. NATIONAL NEWS STATION - NIGHT

Autumn sits as the guest for a NATIONAL NEWS SEGMENT.

NEWS ANCHOR

What happened that night?

AUTUMN

We'll never really know. Detective Laurence kept on the case. The police assume she found critical evidence, confronted Kat, and the fight broke out. But I just want to say how grateful I am for Detective Laurence. During the altercation, she found the wherewithal to get Henry out before the house exploded. She saved his life.

NEWS ANCHOR

He was found by a neighbor shortly after the explosion caused by -

More comments - "#RIP Det. Laurence. So Brave." // "Isn't anyone wondering who BURNED DOWN THE HOUSE?!"

INT. SNL SKIT - NIGHT

A DETECTIVE CHARACTER lines up to fight a FAKE KAT.

KAT

Wait, let me just put something in the oven before you arrest me?

Big wink. Audience laughter.

INT. MORNING SHOW - DAY

Autumn sits with two FEMALE ANCHORS, who are rapt.

AUTUMN

Even though Henry's kidnapping was horrible, it also gave a chance for my family to heal.

The Female Anchors put hands to chest.

INT. KIKI'S APARTMENT - DEN - NIGHT

Kiki opens the BULKY BAG from Kat's and puts it on the table. She reveals the stacks of cash from the safe.

INT. VEGAS CASINO - NIGHT

Kiki is the life of the table as she drinks with her new friends on the casino floor, looking and feeling fabulous.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A big box from "BABA" arrives for Henry. Marie unpacks a FANCY ZOO TOY SET to Henry's excitement. Marie helps him set it up and play with it, while Autumn makes them lunch nearby, happy to see her sister and nephew having a normal moment.

INT. ONLINE NEWS SHOW - DAY

Marie is interviewed (think: Red Table Talk).

MARIE

I thought it was important to publicly acknowledge that Daisy was a mistake. It started as one small lie just to protect my son's name on the internet. But I kept going. I take responsibility.

JADA-TYPE

But it does raise the question. What do we do about the internet and our kids?

"WAKE UP SHEEPLE!!" // "Want to make \$500? Click here!"

BACK TO NATIONAL NEWS SEGMENT.

AUTUMN

Kat was able to capitalize on the lack of critical thinking on social media to create this smoke screen.

(MORE)

AUTUMN (CONT'D)

It took an explosion for the police
to question the popular narrative.

NEWS ANCHOR

Speaking of narratives - Villains.
A kidnapping. Bravery. Bloodshed.
And a happy reunion between mother
and son. There's a book there.

AUTUMN

It comes out next spring.

NEWS

We look forward to seeing more
details when the book arrives.
Thanks for joining our show -

The comment bubbles expand and grow, like a mold taking over
the whole screen, a thundering chorus of HOT TAKES. UNTIL -

BZZT. The screen goes black like it's POWERING DOWN.

INT. MARIE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Marie takes a big breathe.

MARIE

Henry! Are you ready to go, hun?

EXT. PUBLIC PRESCHOOL - DAY

Marie and Autumn walk Henry up to the entrance of a small,
colorful PRESCHOOL.

He waves enthusiastically and starts chatting with another
boy as the door closes.

Marie sees other PARENTS dropping off their kids. Their eyes.
Their whispers. She shrinks with self-consciousness.

MARIE

I can't tell if they're all waiting
for me to take their kid or think
I'm an idiot who let a murderer be
my nanny.

Marie tries to stare proudly back.

MARIE (CONT'D)

What will happen when Henry grows
up and can Google this insanity?

AUTUMN

I think his college essay is already written.

MARIE

I'm like this stench that's going to stick to him for his whole life.

AUTUMN

Normally, I'd give you some platitude of like... all you need to do is love him. And you do. But that's not all he'll need. Bad things will happen you just have to try to deal with. So...I don't know.

MARIE

Yeah, well, what's the moral of your *gripping* book going to be?

Autumn considers this for a moment.

AUTUMN

You know that bible story? It's about two women who both claimed to be a child's mother. King Solomon ordered the child cut in half as a fake test to smoke out the real mother. He was then praised as a wise leader. I'll probably end with that. Let the reader decide how they feel.

MARIE

That's a stupid story.

CUT TO BLACK.