

UNITITLED PODCAST-KILLER PROJECT

Written by

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**THIS IS A ROUGH DRAFT, OFFERED FOR
EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES!**

**(It's a MESS! The point is to
Show you the MESSY progress of creative work.)**

Address
Phone Number

INT. GEORGE'S STUDIO - DAY

Darkness. **GEORGE ROIZMAN**, 49 years old, sits at a podcasting workstation. He's going gray, overweight and ought to shave more often. He's got large professional headphones on, thick-lensed glasses.

(Possibly: George smokes)

George is illuminated by the glow of a monitor and the colored LEDs of digital recording equipment.

GEORGE

His first victim was a florist in
Petukaville, Tennessee. Murray
Simpson, age 37.

THIS SHOULD NOT BE ABOUT THE FIRST VICTIM (dummy!) It should be about the LAST!!

(He may even have sety up a COUNTDOWN - three more episodes until I reveal the new evidence!)

George speaks quietly, intently, dramatically into his big old microphone - like an old FM Radio Late Night DJ:

GEORGE (CONT'D)

He did a full day's work on August 15th, 1978, and then went roller-skating at Al's Roll-O-Rama, down on Carbon Street. When he got home, he took a shower, and then made himself a sandwich and a can of soup.

George clicks through images on his monitor as he speaks - OLD PHOTOS and yellowed NEWS CLIPPINGS as he speaks - ABSORBED in the history, the images:

Xeroxed old snapshots of Murray - alive, and then crime-scene photos of his body.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

It was the sandwich that killed him. The pickled peppers, in fact. The jar of peppers in his refrigerator has been laced with a unique, never-before-seen...poison.

The toxicology analysis explains that this poison is mixture of nightshade and smadomog - The victim first feels a buzzing,

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

thickening numbness of the tongue and throat. It is like an anaphylactic allergic reaction. The breathing speeds up as the body frantically attempts to get oxygen. They feel dizzy, frightened, lightheaded. The room seems to spin. They can't focus their eyes or feel with their hands. They go numb. They lose the ability to walk, and fall to the ground, helpless - fully aware they are being killed by something sinister, insidious, invasive - creeping through their bloodstream into their nerve endings and their brain. They stop breathing. They die.

George is reading from a hand-written script.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Murray had been murdered. The killer had broken into his home days or maybe even weeks before, and poisoned the peppers. The poison was distinctive - close to several naturally-occurring plant toxins...and yet, chemically-created in a unique way. The killer had manufactured this poison, and would use it again on other victims - over the course of 5 years.

(beat)

The F.B.I. Serial Killer Task Force would later name him "The Chemistry Set Killer."

George lets that hang ominously for a second - then hits STOP on his recording.

He takes a deep, satisfied breath - and opens a bottle of water. He drinks a big swig, thinks - and then sets it down and starts RECORDING AGAIN:

GEORGE (CONT'D)

It's a cold case. Ice cold. No one cares, because this guy vanished in 1985. He killed 11 people. The victims were in different states, all ages, a wide variety of ages, races, economic and social

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

groups.

The poison was in their food/drink at home - which means he had the ability to break & enter without a trace.

The CSK was smart: he knew how the FBI Profilers worked - he understood the principles of evidence and so he didn't leave any. Profilers look for similarities in the victims - but he chose his targets totally at random.

(beat)

But he did sign his work. The poison itself was his "signature": he created it, designed it. He worked in a lab, he was a knowledgeable chemist. This killer wants to get away with it - but wants to make sure they KNOW he's getting away with it. He wants attention.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I was eleven years old when I first heard about The Chemistry Set Killer. My first serial killer.

There was a report in the local paper? A magazine article, with pictures? Or I heard people talking about it - because they were afraid of getting poisoned by things in their own homes.

It was the first time I became aware of human evil. Some person out there was killing other people...apparently for the fun of it. The sport. To get attention.

It changed everything. Knowing this could happen. Someone could do that.

And he could be anyone. He could strike anywhere.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Is that when I became obsessed?
No. It was buried for a long time, a dim memory.

No one is listening to this podcast. I know that. I have 14 subscribers. And according to my latest analytics, only 3 of them have downloaded any episodes.

But it is out there. I am speaking the truth. I am calling out. That's what citizen journalism is all about. Speaking out. Testifying. And then maybe something will happen. Maybe someone else knows something they haven't told anyone. And hearing my journey will provoke them to break their silence.

No one is listening...but I am on a mission. I am going to identify the Chemistry Set Killer. People like are all over. We're getting connected now, on websites and bulletin boards and chat rooms. The power and wisdom of the crowd is being summoned to hunt down these cold, calculating monsters.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Is there a difference between someone hiding and someone that no one listens to?

GEORGE (CONT'D)

But I have a secret weapon. And I'm going to use this podcast to broadcast it: I have found new, critical decisive evidence on the identity of the Chemistry Set Killer. Evidence that was out there, in plain sight. But no one was looking. The case was cold. New atrocities had caught the attention of the public. There were more popular killers. So no one noticed.

But I did. And I will reveal this evidence, on this podcast. Stay tuned.

True crime podcast.

I'm an outsider. Quirky, stubborn,
(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

obsessive. Maybe obsession is not
such a bad thing.
I don't like to let go of things.
I don't let go easily.

I worked in radio long after radio
died. And now I'm a podcaster.

George switches off the recorder. He takes a deep breath.

The studio is dim and silent around him. He gets up and
walks to one side of the room - and presses a switch on the
wall.

With a humming, grinding noise, the garage-door-opener in the
rafters pulls the shabby wooden garage door open. Light
floods in from outside -

- washing the "studio" in late-afternoon light and exposing
for what it is: George's shabby rickety two-car garage.

Unfinished wooden walls, rafters. Industrial shelving jammed
with cardboard file-boxes, papers, and ?? junk. While most
of this space is set up as a working podcast studio - there
are also pantry items (canned goods, bottled water, etc) and
other household supplies on some of the more dusty and
shadowed shelves.

George's black t-shirt is revealed to be an old Richard Hell
and the Voidoids shirt, worn backwards.

EXT. GEORGE'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

George walks across his shabby backyard toward his run-down
house.

Rural Ohio/Pennsylvania. Low mountains, run-down small town.

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

George lets himself in. The door from the yard to the
kitchen is swollen a bit and he has a hard time getting it to
close.

As he goes to (do something) - he gets a funny expression on
his face. He slows, sticking his tongue out a bit. It feels
fuzzy, thick.

His throat is closing up. He's getting dizzy;

George recognizes what is happening to him. He was just talking about it. He is feeling the toxins within.

GEORGE

Oh no.

He staggers a bit for the wall-mounted land-line telephone. But his already-somewhat-paralyzed fingertips cannot grip the sleek Princess Phone and it falls to the linoleum floor.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

No no no.

But it sounds more like "Nuh nuh nuh" because he's already paralyzed in the mouth and throat.

He's wheezing. He's gasping. He staggers and falls to his knees - pulling down a (something).

George dies, lying on the kitchen floor, staring up at us.

INT. MADELYN'S OFFICE - 5 O'CLOCK PM

A very clean, sparse workplace. Very corporate, very laminate-and-glass-and-metal. Bland safe light.

MADELYN MORRISON - almost 50. Supervising Data Analyst. Wearing a subtly-stylish business suit. A tiny bit 20th century: skirt, stockings.

She's in a room with FOUR OTHER DATA ANALYSTS all a bit younger, sloppier and nerdier than she is.

Madelyn shuts down her workspace calmly and efficiently. She's got it worked down to a few quick, simple gestures. A cover goes over her keyboard. It's rather marvelous to watch: an expert, a master at the game. The least expenditure of energy for the mosgt effect. Smart.

DATA ANALYST

Is it five?

DATA ANALYST 2

There she goes.

MADELYN

See you tomorrow, chickadees.
Tomorrow, kids.

She's already heading for the door.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATORS - SOON AFTER

The doors open to reveal **BRENDA** - Human Resources - already in.

BRENDA
We have a meeting tomorrow.

MADELYN
(startled)
Human Resources?

BRENDA
I like to think so.
(holds out her hand)
I'm Brenda McNeill -

MADELYN
(shaking her hand)
Madelyn. Morrison.
(beat)
You know that. Obviously.

They ride down in silence for a moment.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
Am I in trouble over something?

BRENDA
God, no.

Slight beat.

BRENDA (CONT'D)
Why? Is there something we should know about?

MADELYN
No! Of course not.
(beat)
I mean: I know, if there was - I would say that - but - seriously: no.

Before Brenda can reassure her - the elevator doors OPEN, revealing the LOBBY. Brenda - polite - waits; Madelyn slightly self-conscious, exits the elevator first.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn heads for the revolving doors -

- Brenda catches up with her to say, struggling with her desire to give good news against the rules:

BRENDA

I'm not supposed to say this until tomorrow.

Madelyn waits, not sure how to react - but Brenda's attitude is so friendly and repressing-a-smile that she is no longer scared.

BRENDA (CONT'D)

You're getting a promotion! So sorry - Spoiler alert!

Tomorrow. That's what the meeting is for.

(beat)

Director Of Analyst Services.

(beat)

A four-percent bump annually - and your own office. With a door. You can close.

MADELYN

Wow.

She is suddenly horrified at herself for breaking protocol this way.

BRENDA

I'm sorry - I couldn't help it. I just - like it when someone who deserves a promotion gets a promotion.

(beat)

Go team!

I mean: you've worked here for 14 years. Worked your way up. The first woman in your department. The first female supervisor. And you don't have a single complaint against you.

Madelyn takes this all in. She takes a deep breath.

MADELYN

Do I have to take it?

BRENDA

What do you mean?

MADELYN

Could I say no?

BRENDA
Why would you want to say no?

MADELYN
I like where I am. I like my job.

BRENDA
But -
(baffled)
Director...of...

MADELYN
I don't know. More meetings,
right? More pressure? Less
actually doing the thing.

BRENDA
But - Director...

They stand there in the lobby, as other WORKERS walk past them, on their way out. This has suddenly become awkward. But Madelyn is calm, even kind:

MADELYN
Nah.
(beat)
Thank you though.
(beat)
I'm good.

Brenda looks like she might cry, like she has been slapped in the face.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
Are you all right?

BRENDA
Yeah - I'm -
(beat)
You sure?!
(beat)
It's more money. It's more power.

MADELYN
Can I get the money without
changing what I do all day?

BRENDA
No.

MADELYN
I like what I do all day. I like
the work. I like analyzing stuff.
(MORE)

MADELYN (CONT'D)
I like my team. I like working
with them all day. I like my desk.

BRENDA
(processing)
Okay.

MADELYN
Is that okay?

BRENDA
Of course! No one is going to
force you to take a promotion.

MADELYN
Okay then. Thank you, though.
Really.

Madelyn nods and heads for the doors. But then she stops:

MADELYN (CONT'D)
Should I still come to the meeting
tomorrow?

Before Brenda can figure out the answer to that - Madelyn's
phone rings. (Distinctive ringtone?)

Brenda watches Madelyn check the Caller ID and FROWN.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
I'm sorry I have to take this -
it's the police -

BRENDA
Police?!

Madelyn nods, distracted - reading the Caller ID to Brenda as
she takes the call:

MADELYN
"Kirbysville Police" -
(into phone)
Hello -
(listens)
yes it is.

As she listens further, Madelyn is SHOCKED, STUNNED by what
she hears.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
Oh my God - when? um - how - ?

Brenda watches, CONCERNED. Madelyn turns away from Brenda
slightly, wrapped up the terrible news she is getting -

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 No - we - I didn't even know he -
 (listens)
 Yes - of course - I will -
 (
 I'm sorry, where is Kirbysville,
 exactly?

She's nodding.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 Yes. I'll be there tomorrow.

She disconnects and remembers Brenda is watching. Not sure exactly how to say this, she just plunges in honestly:

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 My husband is dead. He was
 murdered.

BRENDA
 You're not married.

Madelyn nods at Brenda - shaken, baffled:

MADELYN
 Its - thirty years ago.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - DAY

Madelyn's taxi pulls up outside and she gets out, with her carry-on luggage.

She is dressed as if for work, in a nice blue suit, with shoes that were not made for the muddy curb she's standing on. Her lovely silk print scarf feels particularly foolish, fluttering a bit in the chilly wind.

There is a POLICE CAR parked outside, and CRIME SCENE TAPE fluttering around the entrance to the house and the open garage door.

She stands for a moment, taking in George's home: it's crappy. It's in disrepair, and it's isolated and it's not at all what she would have wished for him.

She steels herself to go in.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

The big double-door is open, so Madelyn can see the entire shabby crime scene as she walks up, her wheeled suitcase bumping along the little weed-strewn driveway.

There is a CRIME SCENE TECH working on the scene.

DET. LEWIS ELMES watches Madelyn approach. Her suitcase hits a bump and twists, so she is dragging it instead of wheeling it. She is having a hard time walking in the rutted dirt.

ELMES

You all right there?

ELMES (CONT'D)

Mrs. Roizman?

Madelyn speaks absently --

MADELYN

Not even a little bit.

-- her eyes traveling the jammed-up hoarder-like shelves, the files and papers, the signs of George's life at the end.

ELMES

Beg your pardon?

MADELYN

I haven't seen George in thirty years. My name is Morrison.

ELMES

Well - his will says you're his next of kin.

MADELYN

Yeah, I know.

(sighs)

George.

She turns and looks at Elmes:

MADELYN (CONT'D)

No friends? No one here who...

ELMES

No, George was busy, and well-liked. He was a bartender at the Round Table Bar. Everybody liked George. He was between girlfriends, but it's not like he didn't have anyone to talk to.

(MORE)

ELMES (CONT'D)
 (Maybe George was even remarried)
 (beat)
 But you're the name on the
 paperwork.

(FIGURE OUT THE LEGAL ISSUES)

ELMES (CONT'D)
 You haven't talked to him in thirty
 years?

MADELYN
 The last time I saw him I was 19
 years old. New York. The East
 Village. We were outside of CBGB -
 had our last fight there. We had a
 gig. I was a singer. He was on
 keyboards. Our band was called the
 Utter Destruction Of Everything.
 We had a screaming fight on stage
 and I walked off and everything
 else was handled by lawyers through
 the mail.

ELMES
 So you don't know where he put the
 evidence.

MADELYN
 Evidence of what?

ELMES
 The Chemistry Set Killer.

Madelyn sighs, shaking her head, looking at the podcast
 studio.

MADELYN
 Oh, George.

Madelyn's phone rings. She's startled and embarrassed -
 checking the caller ID: **ZENA** She doesn't know that name so
 she declines the call, mutes the phone and puts it away.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 You ever deal with a serial killer
 before?

ELMES
 I'm not dealing with it now. If it
 is the Chemistry Killer - the FBI
 will want to take over the case.

MADELYN

"If" it is? I thought: he was poisoned. Like this guy always does. This Chemistry - Set..

ELMES

The Chemistry Set Killer has been cold for thirty years. It might be a copycat.
Your husband was kind of asking for it. Begging for it. Waving a red flag in front of it.

MADELYN

Ex. Husband

ELMES

He was putting out on the internet that he had special new evidence that was going to identify a serial killer.

ELMES (CONT'D)

He made a podcast, and he said he was going to out the killer.
(to himself)
Dumb shit.

MADELYN

George? George was the dumb shit?

ELMES

I'm sorry - forgive me. But instead of going to the police, he went on the internet and put himself in danger. He was obstructivng justice. If he wasn't dead, I would probably arrest him.

ELMES (CONT'D)

(with distaste)
A "web sleuth."

MADELYN

(winces)
Yeah...that just sounds bad.

ELMES

I just want to make a proper "pile of evidence" (police phrase) case file - to turn over when the FBI comes in.

MADELYN

What if they don't come in?

ELMES

Then I'm gonna try and prove you did it.

She looks pale.

ELMES (CONT'D)

Just kidding.

(beat)

I'm looking into everyone he knows, and I'm checking his bank records and phone records and all that stuff.

(grim)

Trying to find out if somebody was mad at him, if he cheated someone or slept with someone's wife - 'cause it could be, you know, that this had nothing to do with the podcast - and they just used this way of killing George to make it look like it was this geriatric serial killer.

MADELYN

Geriatric?

ELMES

Well, if he was grown up enough to be murdering people in the 1970s, the guy's likely to be around 70 80 years old now. If he's alive at all.

Madelyn's phone vibrates, and she glances down at the caller ID - frowning this time. **ZENA** again.

The voicemails are piling up.

MADELYN

Did I do something to make you mad?

ELMES

I was kind of hoping you'd be more helpful.

MADELYN

Oh. Sorry.

ELMES

Your husband went and got himself
killed.

MADELYN

You know, I'm kind of pissed at him
about that myself!

MADELYN (CONT'D)

I don't need to be here, you know.
I don't have to take on -- all this
-- I don't know this man - anymore -
- I didn't ask for this - I can't
help you --

(beat)

I am not good at crime scenes.
This is a lot for me. I'm trying
to deal with the fact that a man I
haven't seen in thirty years has
made me responsible for all of his
shit - including his murder.

(beat)

I'm not used to murder. I can't
believe I'm saying the word murder
and I'm in the house of a person
who was murdered - and that person
was - my --

She stops, upset. Elmes sighs.

ELMES

Yeah. All right.

(beat)

ELMES (CONT'D)

Will you be here for a few days?

MADELYN

(gleefully)

No, I need to get back home
tomorrow. I'm staying at the -
(hotel)

She looks around, upset.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

I have to deal with - all this.

(beat)

George is dead. George is
murdered.

(beat)

I don't know - this place. I don't
know what to do.

(MORE)

MADELYN (CONT'D)

(beat)

I don't know what's going on. I'm
pissed, I'm confused. I'm shaken
up.

Elmes starts for the door but then stops. Turns back to her.

ELMES

You were divorced in 1990.

She nods, absently -- looking around at all the stuff of
George's life since then. Photos of him as a radio DJ, etc.

ELMES (CONT'D)

But he didn't make you his next of
kin until 1992.

Madelyn looks at Elmes, now -- startled.

MADELYN

I just figured he...never got
around to changing it.

ELMES

No. He went out of his way to do
it. Went to a lawyer.

(beat)

Two years after the last time he
saw you.

MADELYN

(thinking back)

He called me. Maybe then. I don't
know. We caught up.

(beat)

He was kind of a mess. I think he
wanted to get back together. But I
was in college by then. No more
music. Working, too. Data entry.
Nights and weekends, at Fisher
Parnell.

ELMES

That's where you work now.

MADELYN

Thirty years.

ELMES

You had changed. So he let you go.
And made you his executor. Because
he knew you'd be - stable.
Reliable. Trustworthy.

Madelyn looks at him, shrugs. Elmes nods, kindly. It's a compliment. He starts out again.

MADELYN
 (to his back)
 You ought to be a detective or something.

Elmes goes out, and Madelyn is left alone in George's home.

Madelyn's phone vibrates again - she checks the caller ID - **Zena** again - and sighs, exasperated:

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 (to the phone)
 I don't know who the hell you are
 Zena - can't you take a hint?!

She declines the call again and takes a deep slow breath - trying to let out all of her pent-up feelings and calm down.

INT. ZENA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

We meet **ZENA MORANO** - 23 years old, on a sofa in the living room of her large, airy, luxurious house in Southern California. Well: not her house. The house she grew up in. The house she has not yet managed to move out of. Partly because...damn, it's nice! A big swimming pool beyond the giant sliding glass doors. This place looks like a reality show should take place here. And Zena would be the star: a wanna-be influencer.

She's staring at her phone as if it has insulted her.

ZENA
 No. No you did not. Bitch.

She thinks. Working the problem.

ZENA'S MOM comes through the living room - as made-over as her daughter.

ZENA'S MOM
 Zena - what do you think about fish
 for dinner?

ZENA
 (working her phone)
 I won't be here.

ZENA'S MOM
 Where're you gonna be?

ZENA
 Pennsylvania.

ZENA'S MOM
 Pennsylvania Pennsylvania?

ZENA
 A friend of mine just died.

ZENA'S MOM
 Oh my God! Who?!

Zena's not listening - because her phone is ringing and she's picking up, breathless, excited:

ZENA
 (into phone)
 Madelyn!!

INTERCUT:

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - THE SAME TIME

Madelyn is startled by Zena's gushing friendliness.

MADELYN
 Hi.

ZENA
 I am SO sorry. I can't imagine what you're feeling. He was such a beautiful soul. What are the police doing?

Small uncomfortable pause.

MADELYN
 Who are you?

ZENA
 Oh my god, I'm sorry - of course - my name is Zena Morano: I was a friend of George's.

MADELYN
 How do you know...my number?

ZENA
 I knew your name. Of course. Because of what George told me. So I searched for all the Madelyn Morrisons, and I broke that down by age -- so then there really weren't
 (MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)

that many -- and then I started to
look for images, because he has
that picture of you on his
bookshelf --

Madelyn looks around: there IS a faded old framed photo of
George and Madelyn, back in the East Village in New York
City, in their musician days together.

ZENA (CONT'D)

-- and there's a software you can
use that can age or de-age photos,
they use it for victim profilng and
missing persons -- so I ran some of
the photos of different people
named Madelyn Morrison -- there
were about seven possible -- and
then I found a shot of you on your
corporate website because you were
at a fundraising picnic...

(beat)

It is you, right? You're George's
wife?

Awkward beat. Kindly:

MADELYN

Ex-wife.

ZENA

I am...SO sorry. For your loss.
Are you okay?

MADELYN

I don't know.

(beat)

How did you know George?

ZENA

Corkboard, yarn and pins.

MADELYN

I'm sorry, what?

ZENA

Oh! I thought maybe - the police --
or something...

(catching her up)

"Corkboard, Yarn & Pins" is the
name of an online websleuthing
group that George and I were both
in. It's in the Forums of -- "Dr.
Sleuth"?

Madelyn is not a whole lot less lost than when Zena started explaining -- and Zena senses that.

ZENA (CONT'D)

That's an online community of home-based non-professional detectives.

MADELYN

I don't understand that.

ZENA

Web sleuths. We meet on line and try to solve cold cases or crimes that the authorities aren't getting done.

MADELYN

I think you might have known George better than I did, then.

ZENA

Oh, no - that's crazy. We just kind of worked together. On cases. But I loved George. He was a doll.

MADELYN

(hesitant)

So you were - online friends?

ZENA

I came to visit a couple of times. I'm in Cali. I'm in California. I'm on the West coast, I would have seen him more often.

MADELYN

You worked on cases. With George. And now - he's a case.

ZENA

I know. That would be - like: so cool. If it wasn't so awful.

MADELYN

You think this guy did it: the one George was talking about, in his podcast?

ZENA

I do. One hundred percent. I think he was afraid of George.

(MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)

George was on his case. George was gonna get him. That's why George is dead now. And we need to pick up where he left off.

ZENA (CONT'D)

Have the police - found anything? The evidence George said he had?

MADELYN

No. I don't know. I don't think so.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

I'm so completely in over my head.

ZENA

Did you have to identify the body?

MADELYN

I don't even know if I could.

ZENA

It was like, horrible? Was there - distension from gasses? Decomposition?

MADELYN

No. I mean: I haven't seen him.
(looking around)
I don't know this man. I was married to him. But not - him.

ZENA

You poor thing. Are you all alone there?

MADELYN

Yes.

ZENA

Who's doing crime scene cleanup?

ZENA (CONT'D)

Do you want help?
Is there anything I can do to help?

MADELYN

From California?

ZENA

I can be there tomorrow.

MADELYN
From - California?

ZENA
They have planes.
Let me help you. Let me help
George.

MADELYN
That would cost a fortune.

ZENA
I'm rich.

MADELYN
(distracted)
What do you - do?

ZENA
Influencer. Former. I can tell
you all about it when I see you.

MADELYN
No. No - thank you - that's very
kind - but - no.

ZENA
I want to.

MADELYN
I may not even be here. I have to
get home. I have a job. I'm sorry
- thank you -

ZENA
What if I just showed up? No
pressure, no obligations.

MADELYN
That would be creepy.

Zena grimaces. She punches the pillows on the sofa, and then
throws one - which hits a shelf full of ornate (and
expensive) bric-a-brac and knocks it off - SMASHING a lot of
it.

ZENA
Okay. But I'm here for you. I
feel you.

LINDA, a middle-aged housekeeper, rushes in, concerned --
-- but backs out hastily as Zena throws her water-bottle at
her to get some privacy.

ZENA (CONT'D)

I am speaking for a whole community who knew George and loved him and want to help.

ZENA (CONT'D)

I need to help you. I'm devastated. You can call or text me any time day or night, do you understand? I feel like we have a special connection.

It's gonna hit you, when you hang up. The loss. And when that happens: I'm here for you.

(beat)

Will you call me tomorrow?

Madelyn has absolutely no intention of calling Zena.

MADELYN

Yes. Sure.

ZENA

Love you.

Zena disconnects. She falls back on the sofa, staring up at the ceiling.

Madelyn hangs up and looks around. Zena was right. It hits her. The loss.

INT. TYPEWRITER REPAIR SHOP - AKRON, OH - LATE AFTERNOON

About what you'd expect: dusty, dim, cluttered with the hulking bodies of dying typewriters on steel shelves. The elderly REPAIR GUY behind a tall counter wears a gray smock and a pair of glasses with large flip-down magnifying lenses. His fingertips are yellow from cigarette-residue, and smeared with ink.

He is inspecting an IBM SELECTRIC typewriter.

NORMAN MURCH, 58 years old, watches apprehensively. He is a former journalist, and thus something of a mess. But he's still trying, the world hasn't left him behind just yet.

The Repair guy looks up from the machine, wipes his hands on a rag.

REPAIR GUY

Gonna take about ten days. And cost you more than just buying a laptop.

NORMAN

I have a laptop. I just like using this for my book. I'm writing a book about the death-spiral of civilization in the 21st Century. So it seems...appropriate.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

They don't make 'em like that any more, huh?

REPAIR GUY

(without looking up)
Sure they do.

NORMAN

What?

REPAIR GUY

They still make these. I can get you a new one.

NORMAN

Nah. I want this one. I've had it a long time. Since I worked in D.C. The Post.

(might ask some questions about the shop, etc.)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Yeah. I just like the noise it makes. The feel. Rat-a-tat-tat.

There's an ORNATE RINGTONE from within Norman's pocket - he pulls out his phone. As he checks it -

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Oh, crap --

As he gets it out and shuts off the alert, defensively:

NORMAN (CONT'D)

-- that's a reminder my zoom group's starting. I know how to use a phone. I just like the Selectric. Excuse me --

-- he opens Zoom on his phone as:

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Do you need a credit card now?

The Repair Guy nods, and Norman PROPS his phone on the counter, facing himself so he can watch --

-- as he takes a credit card from his wallet and hands it over --

-- we see the Zoom room open on his phone and the FACES OF THE GROUP in their many windows:

INT. FULL SCREEN: ZOOM MEETING - CONTINUOUS

Norman's window - wobbly and hand-held, in the shop - joins:

CARL DUNDOSKI, mid-30s, full-on-biker-style METH DEALER, speaking from a decrepit riverfront warehouse.

ARVIN MCLEAN, early-20s, a first-year trader on Wall Street, speaking from his desk, after hours. He is always at this desk, we never see him anywhere else.

NURSE SHRIMPTON, 40s, a NURSE, still in her scrubs but at home, with her feet up.

(DURING ALL ZOOM CALLS: we often cut to the LIVE LOCATION of the people in the "windows" - so we don't only see them as part of the Zoom, we also are WITH THEM in their LIVES.)

And Zena, at home - running the meeting:

ZENA

...and I tried to convince her to let come there, but she was NOT having it.

SHRIMPTON

Well, the woman is bereaved.

ZENA

She didn't care about George! She hadn't seen him in thirty years. I'm more bereaved than she is!

ARVIN

Why didn't you just tell her you wanted to look at the files?!

ZENA

If I tell her there's a secret room under the house full of George's secret files - and she doesn't want to help us - which she clearly does not - then she'll go and tell the

(MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)
 police about the files, and then
 game over!

Frustrated silence. Everyone's working on the puzzle.

NORMAN
What are we talking about?

DUNDOSKI
 George is dead?

NORMAN
George George?!

SHRIMPTON
 Poisoned.

NORMAN
 No way. Like - poisoned?

ZENA
 He clearly was getting too close.

SHRIMPTON
 He had the evidence. He told us he
 was gonna drop it.

ZENA
 The Chemistry Set Killer is alive.

DUNDOSKI
 And that evidence is sitting in a
 box under the living room rug.
 Waiting to explode.

NORMAN
 Wait - what?!

ZENA
 George told me he kept his
 important files in a special secret
 basement under his house. It has a
 trap door, hidden under a sofa and
 rug in the living room.

NORMAN
 And it's gonna explode?!

DUNDOSKI
 It's explosive.

ZENA
 Like: "blowing-up" on line.

NORMAN

Oh - okay.

ZENA

But the total bitch who's got control of everything now won't let me in.

DUNDOSKI

This is why we need to go over there and take care of business.

NORMAN

A...police bitch?

ZENA

No. George's ex-wife. Madelyn Morrison. This office manager type from New Jersey with a stick up her butt.

DUNDOSKI

Is this her?

Dundosky screen-shares: Google-image-search photos - including several OTHER "Madelyn Morrisons"- one is an etching of a 15th century Nun, another is a photo from the 1930s - but also one or two from corporate-communications of MADELYN.

EXT. TYPEWRITER REPAIR SHOP - CONTINUOUS

Norman is walking out of the shop, eyes fixed on the phone - swerving to avoid PASSING PEOPLE on the sidewalk -

- slowing as he takes in MADELYN's PHOTO. Listening to:

ZENA

Yes. I don't know - maybe I should just tell her about the files. Get her on board. I mean this is once-in-a-lifetime moment. Look at all the groups on Dr. Sleuth, trying to solve crimes. How many of them ever actually get to do anything?! Zero. George is the only one -- and we need to honor his mission -- we need to pick up the flag and carry it -- to the -- finish line --

(beat)

I bet she would want us to do that.

(beat)

We need to take over George's

(MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)

podcast. I want to finish this. I want to take down the Chemistry Set Killer, the way he wanted do -- the power of online crime-solving community. The power of everyone getting together. The power of - nobodies. The power of everyone.

SHRIMPTON

Or: just ask her to give them to the cops.

ZENA

Are you out of your mind?! This is ours. We did this work, with George.

ARVIN

And how do we know the cops won't bury it?

SHRIMPTON

Why would they bury it?!

ARVIN

Somebody let this guy get away thirty years ago. Why? Maybe they'll just want to cover up their mistakes - or maybe there's more to it.

SHRIMPTON

It's not a conspiracy, Arvin --

DUNDOSKI

I'll go get it.

ZENA

She's not going to give it to us.

DUNDOSKI

I didn't say she'd give it. I said I would get it.

INT. WALL STREET OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Terrible silence from everyone in the zoom meeting. Each other them conjuring up their own mental image of Dundoski "getting" anything from anyone.

ARVIN

Whoa.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman is driving, the phone with the Zoom meeting on a hands-free dashboard rig.

NORMAN

Wait a second, nobody is "getting anything" from this woman. You can't just -- get stuff --

INT. ZENA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Zena is leaning in, literally. She's seeing a new day dawn, a hope rise:

ZENA

Well, wait -- I don't know. Let's think about it. Let's not get trapped in old perceptions. Maybe we should.

(tentatively)

Carl...how do you want to get it?

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

CARL

I could -- I don't know -- convince her.

ZENA

I'm not comfortable with that.

CARL

No worries. I'll break in.

Carl is already starting to grab equipment and put them into a leather motorcycle saddle-bag -- getting ready to go:

ZENA

When she's not there.

CARL

Well -- duh. No witnesses.

ZENA

Please don't say it like that.

CARL

Text me her address.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

NORMAN
Do NOT text him that --

INT. ZOOM GROUP (FULL SCREEN ZOOM MEETING) - CONTINUOUS

Norman's audio cuts out, Zena has muted him. The others are also talking -

SHRIMPSON
Maybe I'm not supposed to say this
but -- isn't Carl a tweaker?

-- and one by one THEIR audio goes out --

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman grimaces, driving --

NORMAN
Oh for --

He pulls over, dangerously, horns blaring around him --

-- grabbing the phone and working Zoom, texting into the CHAT

INT. ZENA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ZENA
Hey guys, I don't think it's
productive to have everybody
talking at once - but I appreciate
all of you so much, I really do --

Zena sees that Norman has scribbled **I NEED TO TALK TO YOU!** On an old-fashioned flip-top reporter's notepad and held it up to his camera, filling the screen.

Zena takes a breath, keeps composed, and unmutes him.

ZENA (CONT'D)
Norman: do you have a question?

NORMAN
No I have a statement. You cannot
let him go to that woman's house!

ZENA
We need that evidence.

NORMAN
Fine. Let's talk to her.

CARL
I'll talk to her.

NORMAN
Nope! Nope!

ZENA
I think we can set up some
guidelines for Carl --

NORMAN
Carl is a METH DEALER.

CARL
That doesn't negate my humanity,
dude.

ARVIN
That's fair.

CARL
Just because somebody makes their
living outside the traditional
economy doesn't mean I can't have a
desire for justice.

ZENA
I believe in that. Carl has been a
really involved member of our
community.

SHRIMPSON
I gotta say: I'm with Norman on
this.

ZENA
I think we're facing a generational
issue here.

NORMAN
He's a METH DEALER.

ZENA
Okay: Carl - will you promise not
to harm George's ex-wife while
you're getting the evidence?

CARL
Except in self-defense.

SHRIMPTON

I'm sorry, no -- I like to pretend we're detectives and all, but I can't be involved in this. This is effed-up. I'm out --

Shirmpston disconnects. Norman is TALKING heatedly in his window - but Zena has MUTED him. Arvin is laughing, muted, in his window.

ZENA

You know what, I hear you all -- I really do. But I think we need to do this. Carl: you call in before you do anything, okay?

Carl is checking the magazine on a very large .45 pistol:

CARL

Roger that.

He snaps the magazine into the grip and puts the gun in his waistband.

Zena forces a big encouraging smile.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman sits back and sighs, frustrated, eyes on the phone.

A CAR HORN blares behind him: he's blocking a turning lane.

Reluctantly, he starts up the car.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Carl leans over close to his laptop, where Zena is watching from the Zoom window -- calm, mature, a hero:

CARL

Hey: I got this. I will not do anything to make you sorry you entrusted me with this mission.

He shuts the laptop and goes to the door -- and FLIPS OUT, reacting to what he sees outside --

-- turning, pulling the gun out and FIRING IT into a nearby wall three times:

CARL (CONT'D)
 Holy fucking shit Marcus, HOW MANY
 times do I have to tell you not to
 block my car in?!

INT. NORMAN'S APT. - LATER

A one-bedroom in a boring, boxy apartment building in Akron Ohio. His taste runs to MidCentury Modern - scandinavian-wood furniture, clean "modern" (i.e. 20th century and old) style.

Dense with well-organized books on shelves going up to the ceiling, several file cabinets along one wall. An sturdy wooden desk, with an empty space where the big Selectric Typewriter should be.

Norman lets himself in, tossing the keys into a dish on the little table in his kitchen alcove -

He sits on worn sofa and opens his laptop on the coffe table. But he doesn't look at it.

Staring into space above the screen. Grimacing.

He takes a deep, frustrated breath.

Types into the laptop: **MADELYN'S PHOTO** comes up on the screen, from the Corporate Website.

He scrolls down to **CONTACT US**.

Thinks. Opens another window instead - a DATABASE: (**RESEARCH THIS! What would a newspaper reporter USE to get contact info on a person?**)

Types in MADELYN MORRISON and scrolls through.

JUMP CUTS:

Norman on the phone, listening to the annoying TONES that signal a number is no longer in service.

Norman scrolling through Facebook profiles for "Madelyn Morrisons" - there are a lot, but none look like ours.

Norman on the phone:

NORMAN
 -- Madelyn Morrison who works for
 the Corporation (NAME) --

He listens to someone telling him no.

Norman on the phone: more TONES, no longer in service.

INT. NORMAN'S APT. - LATER

It's getting dark out. He has not found a way to reach her.

He's pouring himself a bourbon on the rocks.

He's drinking it.

He's realizing that he's going to do this.

NORMAN

Oh...hell.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Norman drives up a ramp onto a highway. Heading for Pennsylvania.

(CONT'D)

INT. ZOOM GROUP (FULL SCREEN ZOOM MEETING) - CONTINUOUS

(CONT'D)