

UNITITLED PODCAST-KILLER PROJECT

Written by

Glenn Gers

**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.)**

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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 posioned 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 tries a (reporter-friendly "yellow pages" finder site) - find a number for Madelyn.

Dials it.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - THE SAME TIME

Madelyn sits alone in George's house. She's just sitting there, expressionless. Maybe sad. Hard to say.

Daylight fading out the windows, but she hasn't turned on the lights.

Her phone rings. She glances at the number, doesn't know it. Lets it go to voicemail.

INT. NORMAN'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

NORMAN
 Um - hi - you don't know -- I'm --
 listen my name is Norman Murch, and
 (MORE)

NORMAN (CONT'D)

- it's about George - and his stuff
- please call me.

Norman grimaces. That was lame. He sighs, frustrated.

Turns back to his computer. Back to her the corporate website. 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 (CONT'D)

-- 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 - DUSK

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

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - THE SAME TIME

Madelyn is walking through the house, turning on lights.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

Madelyn stands by the floor-to-ceiling BOOKSHELVES, which are also crammed with FRAMED PHOTOS and TRINKETS.

She picks one up: a TIN BIRD.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

Madelyn slides open the closet door and takes in George's CLOTHING.

That hits her harder than the desk did. He's not going to be wearing this any more.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - SOON AFTER

She's looking at his photo.

MADELYN

Screw you, George! I'm not staying here and cleaning up your mess. What were you thinking? Calling out a serial killer?! We're you just sticking it to the man? Making a statement?

(beat)

I have a life! I have a life that makes sense! Not a gesture. Your whole damn life was all gestures, George! Didn't you get tired?!

(beat)

Oh no. Was THAT wahat this was?

(beat)

Was this a way to end it all?

(beat)

Did you want this, George? Please tell me you didn't. All that life.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - SOON AFTER

The DOORBELL rings. Madelyn answers it, revealing:

CARL DUNDOSKI, biker meth dealer. Big, intimidating, hairy...and polite.

Trying to get a sense of Madelyn and the situation as he distractedly makes up random bullshit:

DUNDOSKI

Hey. I -- uh, grew up in this house.

MADELYN

Oh - I'm I'm sorry - it's not a great time -

DUNDOSKI

I was wondering if I could just - come in and walk around a little.

MADELYN

Dundoski nods.

DUNDOSKI

No worries. You have a blessed day.

Madelyn shuts the door and shakes off the weirdness.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - OTHER ROOM - SOON AFTER

She's got her earbuds in, and is SORTING THROUGH George's personal papers as she talks to her office:

MADELYN

No - I'm still there. I know, I thought I could -- no - tomorrow, I think. Yeah. Tomorrow, definitely. I'll be back tomorrow. I'm leaving soon.

I just had - a lot of - paperwork to fill out and people to talk to.

I can't let this thing take over my whole life.

Are you kidding? This is going to take weeks. It's a whole house. A whole life. Not MY life.

I don't know what to do with it. No, I'm not staying her to do that.

(MORE)

MADELYN (CONT'D)

I'm going to have people come and box it all up and take it away. Probate? I don't know.

I have to sell a house in a town I've never been to before.

(listens)

I don't know. Maybe I will. Maybe I'll hire someone.

(re: work stuff)

Have you submitted the (work stuff)

SHOULD leave BUT is finding excuses NOT TO...

(listens)

-- yeah, it's weird. I lived with this man for two years. I married him. I have no idea what this stuff meant to him. It must have meant something...but...that's like - a mystery now.

She finds an old program for a rock concert - with a grainy photo of George and Madelyn on stage, grungey, punky:

SCREAMING HYSTERIA BAND

(AWKWARD QUESTION asked of her so the doorbell is a relief!)

The doorbell rings.

MADELYN

Oh, hey - my food is here, I've gotta go -

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - FOYER - SOON AFTER

She hurries to the door, opens it revealing **KYLE**, late teens, wearing a local sandwich shop's LOGO-printed APRON, carrying a plastic bag with a TAKE OUT DINNER.

KYLE

Ziggy's Sanwiches.

MADELYN

Yes - thank you! Cash all right?

KYLE

Cash works. Nineteen oh five.

As Madelyn collects the cash from her wallet - Kyle is failing to conceal his desire to LOOK PAST her and snoop.

Madelyn watches his gaze probing the house, past her. He realizes she's noticed - busted.

KYLE (CONT'D)

This is the place where that guy
got serial-killed.

Madelyn controls the urge to correct him. Or hit him.

MADELYN

Yeah.

Permitted to speak, he lets his eagerness show:

KYLE

Poisoned, right?

Madelyn nods, taking the bag and handing over the cash. She can't blame the kid; she'd want to know, too.

MADELYN

Thus: take-out.

Awkward beat. He could leave.

KYLE

Are you his...mom?

MADELYN

Ex-wife.

KYLE

Oh - wow. You must be -

MADELYN

- I'm not. I haven't seen him in
thirty years.

KYLE

...pissed.

MADELYN

Oh. Maybe. No. I'm not. This is
just -- not my life.

KYLE

And he left you with all this? (to
deal with)

MADELYN

That's what he was like.

(beat)

Chaos.

(beat)

(MORE)

MADELYN (CONT'D)
Chaos in cheap sneakers.
(she sighs)
Album title.

KYLE
what?

MADELYN
It was what he used to say all the
time. When somebody said some
phrase they didn't realize was
cool. "That's an album title."

KYLE
Like a photo album?

Madlyn sighs.

MADELYN
Kind of.

KYLE
I'm sorry.

MADELYN
Not your fault.

Kyle doesn't quite manage to leave yet. She waits.

KYLE
What about drugs?

Madelyn sighs.

MADELYN
Yes. I mean: I don't know. When
were together, yes - drugs. Maybe
too many drugs. Maybe that's just
an easy way to not deal with the
fact that I chose to marry a man
who was like a fireworks display,
24-7. Inspirational,
awesome...kind of a mistake to have
in the house.

Slight beat.

KYLE
I mean, do you want some, now?

MADELYN
Oh.

KYLE

I sell some stuff that's not on the menu. Edibles? Xanax? Oxy?

Madelyn smiles slightly.

(I was thinking edibles but they take too long to work...maybe the other pills)

MADELYN

Okay - good. I'm glad it wasn't just out of pity.

KYLE

Nah. I just thought: you know - take the edge off.

MADELYN

What makes you think there's an edge?

Kyle doesn't even bother to answer. Her stiff, defensive manner says it all. She realizes it. Sighs.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

MUSIC BLASTING on George's excellent sound system: the music that MADELYN & GEORGE RECORDED back in the 90s with their band, late PUNK or early GRUNGE - a reel-to-reel tape that was recorded for an unfinished album back in the mid 1990s.

We see the box the tape was in, with the title:

THE DEATH OF MUSIC AS WE KNOW IT

Madelyn - seriously stoned - is SINGING ALONG as loud as she can - but still no competition for her 20-year-old self on the tape:

(DESCRIBE the sound system - LARGE speakers - earlier!)

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

It's getting dark out. Dundoski, parked down the block, watches George's house. The windows are lit-up. He frowns, and rolls down his truck window:

The blasting music drifts out to him.

DUNDOSKI

...the hell?

He gets out of his truck, wary. Walking closer to the house, trying to see in and understand the party in this house of grief.

As he does, he cannot see the HEADLIGHTS slowly approaching far down the long, quiet semi-rural street. The mystery car stops a block away, and its lights go out.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman studies the lit-up house, the truck parked nearby, and Dundoski's HULKING FIGURE lurking outside.

Dundosky moves into the shadows, heading toward the KITCHEN DOOR in the back of the house.

NORMAN

...uh-oh.

He takes his phone from the magnetic holder on his dashboard and opens the phone. Dials 9-1-1.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The SCREAMING-LOUD song ends. In the sudden silence, Madelyn takes a sweaty, happy bow to an imaginary audience.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Dundoski freezes, his hand almost on the doorknob. Listening. Stepping back, wary.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman peers intently at the house down the block, as he listens to a recorded voice on his phone's speaker:

911 OPERATOR (ON PHONE)

...please choose from the following options: for fire, press 2. For medical emergency, press 3. For police, press 4 -

Norman hastily presses 4, eyes straining to see where Dundoski has gone.

An agonizingly long series of clicks on the phone, and then another recorded voice speaks:

911 OPERATOR (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Thank you for calling Oakdale
County Police Services.

NORMAN

AAARGH!

He grabs the phone and gets out of the car.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn is changing tapes. She finishes threading another into the machine and turns a clunky old lever:

ENGINEER (ON TAPE)
Band name, song title, take number.

Madelyn listens, sad and tender and back in time.

Behind her, through the dark window: Dundoski peers in.

Tape hiss, murmurs of the band counting down - then MUSIC BANGS OUT of the speakers, rattling the windows -

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN DOOR - CONTINUOUS

Dundoski -- hearing the MUSIC begin to POUND again -- draws a MASSIVE HUNTING KNIFE from a sheath in his BOOT --

-- and easily POPS the kitchen door LOCK OPEN.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn THRASHES and DANCES as she SINGS into an unplugged MICROPHONE -- facing a dark, crowded nightclub full of sweaty GRUNGE-PUNK NEW YORKERS. But since they haven't existed for thirty years...she sings to the bookshelves. Lit mostly by a yellow-and-orange LAVA LAMP.

Behind her, Dundoski appears in the KITCHEN DOORWAY. The knife is back in his boot.

Watches Madelyn, staying still.

He pulls out a crumpled NOTE he scribbled earlier:

FILE BOXES - CELLAR - TRAP DOOR - UNDER BLUE RUG

Grimaces...looking down at Madelyn's bare feet, planted on the threadbare BLUE RUG as she WAILS out her song.

Dundoski backs out of the doorway.

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

He opens various drawers -- briefly considers a ball of KITCHEN TWINE, then keeps looking -- now trying the GLASS-FRONT CABINETS --

-- as, behind him, NORMAN uneasily PUSHES OPEN the KITCHEN DOOR.

MUSIC BLASTING.

Norman FREEZES in the doorway. Paralyzed. Trying to think.

Dundoski CLOSES a CABINET...and SEES NORMAN, REFLECTED in the glass.

Norman TURNS to FLEE --

-- Dundoski LUNGES, pushing the door SHUT as Norman tries to escape -- SLAMMING the door on Norman's back, the biker SQUASHING the tweedy older man between the door and the frame.

Norman GRUNTS and FLINCHES, stunned --

-- as Dundoski GRABS him by the collar and DRAGS him back into the kitchen.

As he is YANKED BACKWARDS, Norman GRABS a CAN OF COFFEE from the counter --

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - THE SAME TIME

Madelyn TURNS, lost in her performance, WANDERING around the room in a Joplin-Morrison-esque paroxysm of bliss, TURNING AWAY --

-- just as Dundoski staggers backward, the coffee can clattering off his forehead -- choking on a cloud of FLYING COFFEE GROUNDS --

-- Norman PUSHING PAST him into the living room --

-- SCARING the hell out of Madelyn as he lunges for the shelves in front of her -- Dundoski staggering AFTER --

-- Norman FRANTICALLY looking for a weapon -- or a phone or --

-- the LAVA LAMP -- HOT orange blobs in a glowing-yellow liquid -- Norman GRABS it up and WHIRLS, swinging it as hard as he can --

- hitting Dundoski's head with a LOUD, HOLLOW CLONK.

Madelyn SHRIEKS, Dundoski GRUNTS -- as the lava lamp GOES OUT, the GLASS CONE-CORE flying out of its metal shell and bouncing off a wall.

Dundoski DOUBLES OVER, turning away, clutching his head.

Norman watches him, wary -- no sound in the DARKENED ROOM except everyone's HEAVY BREATHING -- and the LAVA LAMP, ROLLING UNSTEADILY across the wooden floor.

Then Dundoski and draws the HUGE GLEAMING COMBAT KNIFE from his boot-sheath --

NORMAN

Oh, crap.

MADELYN

NO!

Eyes big and lost in rage, Dundoski STARTS toward Norman --

DUNDOSKI

Mother fucker!

-- who BACKS UP against the shelves, DEER IN HEADLIGHTS --

-- until Dundoski STEPS ON THE LAVA LAMP and FLIPS like a rag doll, LEGS FLYING UP, ARMS FLAILING -- HEAD hitting the wood floor with a frightening THUD.

Norman stares.

Madelyn STAMPS on Dundoski's wrist and takes his knife away. Then she backs off, holding it, STARING over the moaning meth dealer at Norman.

MADELYN

Who ARE you?!

What is HAPPENING?!

What the fuck?!

Norman doesn't have time to answer. Dundoski GROANS and rolls over, GETTING on to his HANDS and KNEES.

Madelyn anxiously HOLDS the knife READY --

-- and Norman hastily PICKS UP George's land-line PHONE. He's already dialling 911 by the time Dundoski GETS TO HIS FEET.

OPERATOR (ON PHONE)
9-1-1 Operator, what is your
emergency?

Dundoski considers them. There is no question he could disarm and dismember them both in moments.

He sighs. Shakes his head, and walks out the front door.

Closing it gently behind him.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Dundoski walks toward his truck, rubbing the back of his head. With his other hand, he takes his phone from his pocket and dials.

We don't hear Zena pick up at the other end, just:

DUNDOSKI
Yeah. We got a problem.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn and Norman face each other across the darkened, trashed living room. He's bent-over slightly, because his back hurts and he's holding one hand to his eye; the brow is bleeding from being smashed by the door.

OPERATOR (ON PHONE)
Do you need assistance?

Norman hastily disconnects. Then looks at Madelyn.

She's holding a big combat knife. Wary, confused -- and unsteady on her feet but trying to conceal that.

NORMAN
I'm sorry -- do you want me to --
call them back?

MADELYN
I don't know.

Trying to reassure her:

NORMAN
You've got the knife.

MADELYN
You afraid of me?

NORMAN
Kinda.

MADELYN
Good.

Trying to de-escalate -- he points at the kitchen and holds out his bloody palm, to indicate he needs first aid:

NORMAN
Sorry - you mind if I just...?

He starts for the kitchen, hands raised.

Madelyn follows, knife still ready -- weaving in her path and hoping he doesn't notice.

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Norman goes for the freezer, taking out a bag of frozen vegetables and applying it to his eye.

MADELYN
Here, wait a second.

He frowns, with his available eye -- watching her head unsteadily to the sink and try to put the knife back in a wooden "knife block." She misses the slot repeatedly.

NORMAN
You okay?

MADELYN
Shut up, I'm helping you. You need to disinfect that.

He shuts up while she squirts some dish soap on to a washcloth and soaks it under the tap. Then she goes to him, clumsily moving the frozen food and applying the wet cloth.

NORMAN
Ow! That stings.

Sudsy water runs down his face and all over his jacket and shirt. He is trying to be polite, letting her "help."

MADELYN
That means it's working.

They are intimately close now, face to face. Uncomfortable beat.

NORMAN

Wow. Your pupils are HUGE.

MADELYN

I'm stoned out of my mind.

NORMAN

Good to know.

She just stands there, pressing a dripping soapy cloth to his face. They are staring at each other.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

My name is Norman Murch. I'm sorry I'm here -- like this. I just didn't want Mr. Dundoski to hurt you.

MADELYN

And...who is Mr. Dundoski, exactly?

NORMAN

He's a meth dealer.

MADELYN

Right. And you know him -- how?

Norman winces, reluctantly admitting:

NORMAN

I'm in a...group with him. Online. Crime-solving.

MADELYN

The meth dealer is crime-solving?

Norman shrugs, uncomfortably.

NORMAN

He has a very deep sense of justice.

Silence. Standing so close, face to face.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

My hand is getting really cold. Do you mind if I -- ?

Madelyn steps back, embarrassed. Norman raises the bag of frozen vegetables back to his eye. As she goes to squeeze out the cloth in the sink:

MADELYN

And what are you? A hit man?

NORMAN

I'm a journalist. I'm actually writing a book about online culture. That's why I'm in the group. I not actually trying to...

MADELYN

Solve crimes?

She sits down at the little table in the kitchen, the drugs and stress overtaking her. She puts her elbows on the formica top of the table and holds her head in her hands.

NORMAN

No. I'm in a lot of groups. I have a lot of identities. I'm embedded. In the culture. Because I think something monstrous has happened to our world and we don't even see it because we're enjoying the rewards. Digital culture has changed everything.

(more of a rant-y SPEECH here)

Madelyn SNORES.

Norman sighs, sets the vegetables on the counter and goes to gently shake her. Helping her stand up --

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Hey. Hey -- let's get you into bed.

-- holding one of her arms and putting his other arm around her waist, he helps her to her feet --

MADELYN

Are you driving?

NORMAN

"Driving"?

MADELYN

My bed is in New Jersey.

He's holding her up as he walks her out of the kitchen:

NORMAN

I think this is more of a crash landing.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

They bump into the doorway, both trying to get through it at once.

MADELYN

I'm not usually like this.

Distracted, trying to figure out how to turn her around so he doesn't just flop her down face-first on to the lumpy queen-sized bed:

NORMAN

What are you usually like?

MADELYN

I'm dishwasher safe.

NORMAN

Uh-huh.

(turning with her)

All right -- just let's get you turned --

MADELYN

Whhhoooooo -- dangerous maneuver.

He's nodding, now backing her up to the bed --

NORMAN

And yet: you can say the word
"maneuver."

The backs of their knees bump the edge of the bed and they sit with an ungraceful abruptness. He's still holding one arm around her waist and the other hand is gripping her wrist, which is around his shoulders.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I'm going to let go of you now.

MADELYN

Are you out of your freaking mind?!

NORMAN

You're safe.

(beat)

Dishwashe--

MADELYN

No, no -- NO. If you let go, I will instantly go whirling off into outer space.

NORMAN

I swear that you won't.

MADELYN

Really?! Has ANY part of today
been what you thought would
happen?!

Bested, logically, Norman takes a deep breath and tries to figure out the next maneuver. Still holding her, he pulls her back toward the headboard --

NORMAN

Okay, *skootch*. Back, like this --

She wriggles back, holding his arm tight...making the truck "backing up" signal.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Please don't.

And then they're there: falling backward on to the pillows, Norman's arm still around her, her arm around his waist. A bit breathless:

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Okay, good. Nice.

He starts to try to extricate himself from her arms -- and she SNORES. Eyes shut. Relaxed. Dead weight on his arm.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Oh, no. No. Seriously.

He tries to move and she SNORTS and clutches his wrist tightly. Norman stares at her. Appalled. Amused. Kind of okay.

He sighs, and gives up. Staring at the dark ceiling.

Madelyn breathes deeply. Safe.

INT. ZENA'S HOUSE - THE SAME TIME

Zena's Mom and Dad follow her down the stairs and across the living room, confused. They shout, because she's moving fast and the wheels of her authentic Louis Vuitton suitcase are very loud on the imported terrazzo floors.

ZENA'S DAD

What the hell is in Pennsylvania?!

ZENA

A case -- that could change my
entire life!

ZENA'S MOM

Do you want us to drive you?

ZENA

You are! You're driving me insane!

She's out. They stand, nest empty for a minute.

ZENA'S DAD

What was wrong with the case she
had? It looked nice.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - NEAR DAWN

Dark and quiet, but the night is beginning to retreat as a colorful sunrise warms the sky in the East and paints the front of George's shabby house.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

That pale pink light edges into the room, through George's rice-paper window shades.

Norman and Madelyn sleep. She still nestles up to his chest, his arm is still beneath her, around her shoulders.

Madelyn stirs. She opens one eye -- groggy, hung-over. Her mouth feels like carpeting, everything hurts...and what exactly is she lying on? She rises up slightly to look at:

Norman -- who is startled awake by the move.

They stare at each other in the dim, pastel-colored sunrise light.

Madelyn's eyes widen a bit, as it all -- well, some -- comes flooding back.

Norman watches her: caring, concerned, slightly afraid.

Madelyn looks down, trying to calculate her proportions of amusement, shame, gratitude and uncertainty.

Norman doesn't move. Eyes on her.

She shakes her head. Sighs. But kind of smiles, too.

But she won't look at him.

NORMAN
 (hesitantly)
 Nothing hap--

She instantly looks at him, reaching up with one finger and putting it over his lips to stop him.

MADELYN
 Nope. Shhh.

Norman stops talking. Feeling her finger on his lips.

Eyes on hers. Her eyes on him.

She slowly withdraws the fingertip...and moves to replace it with her mouth.

Norman is frozen, wide-eyed, ecstatic.

They kiss.

Norman pulls back hastily:

NORMAN
 No -- wait -- hold on --

MADELYN
 Did we already do this?

NORMAN
 What? No! I just --

MADELYN
 You don't want to.

NORMAN
 Oh no. I do.
 (beat)
 I just need...consent.

Madelyn stares at him.

MADELYN
 Do you want me to have my lawyers draw something up?

NORMAN
 No -- no: I just -- are you -- still high?

MADELYN
 I am not. I am doing this because I want to. Although, if we keep discussing it, that will end.

Norman laughs, taking her in. He leans in to kiss her, trying to rise up on one elbow --

-- which is when he realizes his arm is still totally numb. He flops over on to her, clumsy and unexpected --

MADELYN (CONT'D)
What the fuck?!

Trying to pull back, she's pushing him off --

NORMAN
My arm! Fell asleep -- it's completely dead.

He's shimmying his shoulders to test it: one arm hangs limp and useless. As he shows her, by lifting it with the other hand and waving it around like it's Weekend At Bernie's --

-- Madelyn laughing, and waving it also --

MADELYN
Oh, you poor thing! It was under me all night, wasn't it?

She's pushing him back, poking his arm and shoulder --

NORMAN
It's fine. It'll come back.

-- and now she's looking down at him, intently. He meets her gaze, equally intent.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
(distracted)
With agonizing pins and needles, actually.

Madelyn moves to kiss him again. This time he goes along, fully. They kiss, passionately.

And as she climbs on top of him, we...

FADE OUT.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MORNING

A Meth Lab before it opens: beautifully quiet.

Dundoski's truck pulls up and he gets out, stretching - looking at the early morning sun and doing some improvisations on yoga poses.

MARCUS bangs out of the office, hyped up.

MARCUS
Carl! Where the hell have you
been?!

DUNDOSKI
If I wanted you to know, you would
know.

MARCUS
Big Leon put some guys on the
corner of 4th and River.

Dundosky, one foot raised, eyes on the sky, hands floating in front of him...doesn't move or react for a long time. Breathing in deeply through his nose and exhaling slowly through his mouth.

Then he straightens up and squints at the sun:

DUNDOSKI
It's Wednesday, right?

MARCUS
Yup.

DUNDOSKI
Time?

MARCUS
(checks his phone)
7:14.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

Small light, airy. Rows of white columns, lovely polished pews. Only a few PARISHONERS, singing. Among them: **BIG LEON**, late 20s, very large, burly. Shaved head with many tattoos.

(Possibly BEFORE they go in? Waiting outside?)

(Maybe Big Leon is Little!)

MARCUS
Let's get us some justice.

DUNDOSKI
This isn't justice.

MARCUS

What are you talking about?! He moved into our territory!

DUNDOSKI

Justice is impartial and usually carried out by a third party, by the law, the government, an authority - not taking sides.

This is personal and emotional, and it's not going to bring us any closure. This is just revenge.

This is just a power struggle. It's business.

Then Dundoski is HORRIFICALLY VIOLENT against Big Leon.

INT. HIGH-END GYM - NEW YORK - MORNING

A sleek, elite place near Wall Street: the fanciest machinery, the snazziest decor.

McLean is working out, lost in thought, listening to a podcast -- until:

BILLY, also late 20's, comes to use the next machine. It's no meaningless move: his eyes are on McLean as he arrives -- admiring, interested.

Billy begins to work out, as well.

McLean studies Billy's clothes, his body. His gym bag. Little glances.

Billy does the same, glancing over at McLean. Now and then they catch each other doing it -- and it's all good.

McLean takes off his headphones, smiling. Billy smiles too, waiting to hear McLean's opening line, his move.

MCLEAN

Was the accident before or after you left Chicago?

Billy's smile falters, and he stops working out -- the machine's momentum slowing, his eyes wide and on McLean.

McLean realizes he's thrown Billy off. Apologetic:

MCLEAN (CONT'D)

Your knee! You have a scar -- orthoscopic surgery. Looks like it's about ten years ago. That would put you in high school, right?

BILLY

Are you a -- doctor?

MCLEAN

No, I'm a research assistant -- at Murgison. Investments? Upstairs.

Billy is looking more and more baffled.

MCLEAN (CONT'D)

I just -- notice things. And put them together. I saw you had a U of C sweatshirt --

Billy looks down. His sweatshirt is bundled-up in his open gym bag, with only a tiny section of the school logo visible.

Billy is now looking at McLean warily. Like he's a freak, or a stalker, or both.

MCLEAN (CONT'D)

It's like a -- habit. Detecting, kind of.

Billy is getting off his machine now. Forcing a smile as he grabs up his bag and walks away.

McLean watches him go -- regretful:

MCLEAN (CONT'D)

You ride a bicycle to work. And you don't like to wear a helmet, because you're vain about your hair. Which is...really nice.

(beat)

But you should wear your helmet.

EXT. WALL STREET - MORNING

Crowded sidewalks, FINANCIAL INDUSTRY WORKERS on the way in to work. The classic buzzing hive of lower Manhattan.

LOST IN THIS CROWD, McLean. Earbuds in, listening to a podcast. Joining the SWARM of people passing through the revolving doors.

INT. WALL STREET OFFICE - THE SAME TIME

McLean sits at his cramped workspace - one desk in long packed row of desks, walled-in by their multiple MONITORS. The factory of finance.

He's working diligently, but has his earbuds in.

And we see, on his phone, next to his mouse: he is listening to THE CRIME-CATCHER podcast.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

A Chemotherapy Treatment Room. NURSE SHRIMPSON, kind and efficient, is attending to a handful of PATIENTS in recliner chairs, plugged into complicated IV drips. Some in better shape than others.

As she checks the drips for MRS. WEITZMAN, an elderly woman in a wig:

SHRIMPSON

How are we today, Mrs. Weitzman?

WEITZMAN

We feel crappy. Take my mind off: how's your detective thing going? Catch anybody yet?

SHRIMPSON

Oh -- um: no, I'm taking a break from all that right now.

WEITZMAN

Oh, why?! You liked it, so much! That was all I knew about you: Shirley Holmes, Nurse Detective!

Shirmpson winces a bit.

SHRIMPSON

Some people get too involved.

WEITZMAN

Ohhh. Drama?

SHRIMPSON

Kind of.

WEITZMAN

Well: you're better off.

SHRIMPTON

I think so.

WEITZMAN

All that looking up serial killers.
That's not nice. What kind of
people do that. You should get a
nice hobby.

Shrimpton is taken aback. She makes sure Mrs. Weitzman can't see. Puts on a smile.

INT. HOSPITAL - NURSE'S STATION - MORNING

Nurse Shrimpton comes back to sit behind her desk, slightly put-out. Tries to shake off the conversation.

She takes a deep breath, ready to start her new sleuth-less life...but then as she exhales, she thinks again. Feeling the pull.

Opens the **DR. SLEUTH** website on her phone. Is about to SIGN IN. Hesitates. Wrestling with it.

Shrimpton shuts the window and puts the phone in her purse. Puts the purse in a drawer, and shuts the drawer. Locks it.

Edgy. Feeling the pull of the locked drawer.

She turns and goes to a BOX of MAGAZINES and ACTIVITIES for patients: sorts through it and takes out a CROSSWORD PUZZLE book.

She opens it, sits back at her desk, gets a pen, and tries to focus on...the clues.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MIDDAY

Norman wakes, alone. Takes in the daylight coming around the window blinds, the fact that he is in a dead stranger's bedroom.

Sits up -- and begins to get uneasy. Checks under the sheets: he is naked. Searching the room, from the bed -- looking around on the floor, the chair.

Scrambling out of the bed and hastily checking under it (discreetly blocked from our view, of course.)

His clothes are gone.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - SOON AFTER

Madelyn, dressed and presentable, sips coffee while she sorts through the papers in George's desk. She looks up at:

Norman, edging in from the hallway, uncomfortably holding a PILLOW in front of his nakedness.

MADELYN
Oh, hey! Hi.

Slight beat.

NORMAN
Hi.

MADELYN
You probably want your clothes.

NORMAN
I kinda do.

MADELYN
They were a mess. I threw 'em in
the washer. Should be done now --
(indicates)
Down the hall.

Norman nods and starts to BACK OUT of the room. Madelyn watches him go...slightly amused.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Norman steps out of the laundry room, dressed -- buttoning his shirt.

He follows the SOUND of DISHES clinking and CABINETS opening -
-

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

-- to find Madelyn hunting around, brisk and busy.

NORMAN
Thank you!

MADELYN
Can I make you some breakfast?

NORMAN
Oh, no -- I don't want to -- put
you out.

Madelyn sighs slightly, honest:

MADELYN
I'm out. I'm way out, here. Might
as well eat.

Norman smiles, too. Nods. Watching her start to figure out
where basic kitchen stuff is.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
You like eggs?

NORMAN
I do. I shouldn't, but I do.

MADELYN
Good. Because I know how to cook
those.
(searching)
He's got to have a frying pan,
right? Everybody has a frying pan.

Norman pulls down the oven door: the frying pan is in there.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
Good eye.

NORMAN
Is this weird for you?

MADELYN
In every possible way.

NORMAN
I thought maybe it was just me.

MADELYN
Look -- I don't -- do this kind of
thing.

NORMAN
Breakfast?

MADELYN
Making love -- on the -- first...

Awkward sudden awareness of how (wild) it was.

NORMAN
Yeah...that was not a date.

MADELYN
Nope.

They are not sure how to talk about this.

NORMAN

I do.

(beat)

"Make love" -- right away.

(beat)

If -- it...works out. That way.

MADELYN

Really.

NORMAN

Yeah.

(shrugs)

I mean: I don't have to.

MADELYN

Wow. Now I feel...

(beat)

Icky.

NORMAN

Oh -- God -- no: I didn't mean to --
it wasn't like I --

(frustrated)

I was just trying to -- tell you --
it wasn't so...

MADELYN

Please don't finish that sentence.

NORMAN

No! No -- it was great.

(beat)

It wasn't so terrible. That you
did it. It happens.

MADELYN

In my dead ex-husband's crime scene
house.

Akward silence.

NORMAN

We both needed to...connect.

Madelyn sighs. Nods.

MADELYN

Well, we did.

They kind of smile. She begins to cook again.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
So you do this a lot?

NORMAN
No. That's not what I meant.
(beat)
I meant: when it does happen --
which, full disclosure, is not
really a lot any more -- it tends
to starts fast and then blow up
horribly, pretty quick.

MADELYN
Maybe you should start a little
slower. Look for warning signs.
You know: lit fuses, ticking.

NORMAN
Now you tell me.

She keeps cooking. Not looking at him. So he opens up.

NORMAN (CONT'D)
I think I just gave up a long time
ago on the idea that a relationship
could not blow up. Because they
all have.

MADELYN
All of them?

NORMAN
Kinda...yeah. I don't know, every
woman I meet turns out to be --
possessive. Or promiscuous.
Dishonest. Kleptomaniac.
Hypochondriac. Neo-fascist.
(beat)
I just got used to it, so I stopped
worrying about it. I just figured:
plunge in, hang on, and try to
enjoy the parts that feel like a
romantic comedy before you get to
the inevitable horror movie.

Madelyn serves the eggs up on to a plate and sets it on the
little table near him.

MADELYN
So: what am I?

Beat.

NORMAN

Different.

He sits at the table. She smiles slightly, but tries not to let him see it.

As Norman lifts a forkful of the breakfast toward his lips -- Madelyn whirls and SCREAMS:

MADELYN

NAAAAHHH!

- rushing toward him and grabbing the fork, throwing it across the kitchen.

Norman stares at her.

NORMAN

Okay: maybe crazy.

MADELYN

He put the poison in George's food.
The serial killer.

(beat)

That's was George's food.

They both take a deep breath.

NORMAN

Wanna maybe go out for brunch?

INT. DINER - LATER

They're in a booth, finishing their hearty brunches. It's kind of like a date.

(Maybe a bit more talk about his horrible relationship history...end of a funny story?)

MADELYN

This was nice. Thank you.

(beat)

I kind of forgot. About the serial killer. And everything.

NORMAN

God. I'm sorry. You're -- in mourning, and I was --

MADELYN

No. I'm not. In shock, maybe. In denial.

(MORE)

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 (sighs, looks around)
 In Pennsylvania.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 I don't even know who this was:
this George.
 (beat)
 He was already...gone. For me.
 (beat)
 This guy who did a - podcast?
 About - serial killers?
 (beat)
 I was married to a drummer. In a
 band. In New York. In the
 twentieth century.

He watches her wrestle with it.

NORMAN
 You still might have - feelings.

She startled -- and defensive:

MADELYN
 I do have feelings. What do you
 mean? I have feelings. I'm not
 just some corporate drone.

NORMAN
 I know that.
 (beat)
 I obviously know that.

She takes a moment, trying to let him in:

MADELYN
 It was hard. Leaving him. We had
 a wild life. It was intense. It
 was everything I ever wanted.

NORMAN
 So why did you leave?

MADELYN
 Because I was nineteen years old.
 So everything I wanted was crazy.
 And foolish. And dangerous. And
 if I stayed with him I was going to
 die.

NORMAN
 Drugs?

She shakes her head, shrugs, dismissing that:

MADELYN

All of us did drugs.

(struggling to capture it)

He was...just fearless. Musically. Emotionally. All in. All or nothing. He would jump off the stage, he would jump off the roof, he would jump into a passion pit without a condom. It's like he was missing a part of his brain.

(beat)

Which was incredibly appealing.

(beat)

Until you had to take him to the emergency room.

She falls silent, lost in thought.

NORMAN

Or make his funeral arrangements.

Madelyn looks at Norman, startled by the empathy. Grateful. He's rather proud of it, himself -- so he gets carried away:

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Maybe we can find the guy who did it.

MADELYN

"We"?

NORMAN

The -- group I'm in. Online detectives. You never know: maybe they really can -- crowd-source it -
- and --

MADELYN

George did it.

NORMAN

What?

MADELYN

George killed George. George called out a serial killer. He made himself a target.

Suddenly, decisively, she opens her purse, sets some cash on top of the check and gets up.

EXT. DINER - SOON AFTER

Madelyn hurries out, looking at her phone. Norman follows.

NORMAN

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you.

MADELYN

I'm not upset.

NORMAN

You seem upset.

MADELYN

My husband was murdered!

(beat)

Ex. Husband.

She walks away - upset. He follows, but doesn't say anything, because he has no idea what to say. Or what is going on inside her. Which makes two of them.

She stands outside the Diner, watching the traffic on the town's fairly-crappy "miracle mile."

She suddenly turns and confronts Norman.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

I don't want to hunt serial killers!

NORMAN

Either do I!

That throws her off. She frowns.

MADELYN

Then what are you doing in your little on-line club -- trying to meet chicks?!

NORMAN

"Chicks"?

MADELYN

I was trying to make you feel bad.

NORMAN

Do you have any idea what kind of "chicks" you meet in a serial-killer-hunting community?

MADELYN

I am so entirely regretting this whole thing right now.

NORMAN

I'm writing a book!

(beat)

About online culture. If you want to call it that. About the destruction of our culture by the internet. Crowd-sourcing. The abdication of responsibility.

(beat)

So I "embedded" myself in this group, and some others -- to understand the way these so-called "communities" operate. **(POSSIBLY RUN ON A BIT MORE ranting a little with his over-thought out pitch?)**

He watches her try to process all this.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I only got -- involved, here -- because...

(beat)

I don't know.

(beat)

I didn't want to see you get hurt.

Despite the noise of the traffic on the busy road behind her, it's a suprisingly intimate moment. She smiles, gently.

MADELYN

Thank you. That's -- sweet.

(beat)

I'm sorry that I...thought the worst of you.

(beat)

I feel like I've been: pushed out of my own life. Like my life is an airplane -- and I was doing fine, I was safe -- they didn't even have the "fasten seatbelts" sign on -- and all of a sudden, a door popped open and I'm...

NORMAN

Maybe you should get back to it. Your life. It's waiting for you, right?

MADELYN

I can't.

(beat)

It just seems -- like -- I won't believe in it, any more.

(beat)

When you get on a plane, when you strap yourself into a chair inside a metal tube and then it goes up in the air -- you only can do that because you believe in it.

(beat)

If I went back to work now, I think I might start screaming hysterically.

NORMAN

What are you gonna do?

MADELYN

I don't know.

(beat)

You want to hang out some more?

INT. GEORGE'S SECRET BASEMENT - LATER

A damp concrete "bunker" underneath George's living room: low ceiling, harsh lighting, wall-to-wall metal shelving stuffed with boxes of research materials.

There's a WOODEN staircase leading up a TRAP DOOR in the floor of the living room.

Zena is searching through George's RESEARCH. As she does, she's LISTENING to AUDIO FILES:

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER)

(Podcast Title) - diary entry - March 9th, 2021. Episode 6 went live yesterdays. Still just four subscribers.

(beat)

I've interviewed everyone I can find. I've pulled every bit of research material that exists.

(beat)

I know I am on to something. I know that this case can be cracked. It's just a matter of going all-out. Going where no one has been willing to go.

Zena is pulling open the boxes and sorting through the papers: *(IS it paper? Wouldn't it be on his computer?)*

We see HEADLINES and PHOTOGRAPHS and DETAILS of the crimes, the victims, the investigation.

Build a sense of ominous evil, of the threat buried in this long-forgotten mystery.

Zena is frustrated, sifting through them.

Zena stops every once in a while to selfie-herself "digging".

She has a mini-studio in her bag: a collapsible tripod for her phone, a couple of small LED lights, a mic.

She's professional and quick at the work of creating online content: she knows how to pose, and she works with the available lighting -- unfolding a small reflector and velcro-ing to the STAIRWAY leading up to the living room, to bounce some incoming light on her face.

She records a "moment":

ZENA

This is it: the inner sanctum.
George's secret files. This is
where he's got the identity of the
Killer. Doing a deep dive. So
excited. Unearthing this LIVE.
(re: the voice)
It's like he's talking to us from
the grave. Crying out for justice.

She stops recording and checks her look before taking a few stills.

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER)

*When I started this project, I
didn't really know where it was
going. It was just a little snag
in my memory, an unfinished song.*

Zena hits STOP

ZENA

Cut to the chase, George.

-- she sets the speed on "2x" so George is speaking way too fast and high:

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER)

*It's going nowhere. I can't break
through. So there's only one thing
(MORE)*

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER) (CONT'D)

I can think of. I'm going to use myself as bait. I'm going to announce that I have new evidence and try to use that as a red flag to wave at the bull. Come on after me, Killer. I'm going to really hype this whole "new evidence" thing for a couple of weeks or maybe a month --

Zena hits STOP, staring at the machine. She runs it back, and plays it again at normal speed:

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER) (CONT'D)

-- myself as bait. I'm going to announce that I have new evidence and try to use that as a red flag to wave at the bull.

ZENA

No. No. NO NO NO NO NO!

She plays it again:

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER)

I'm going to use myself as bait. I'm going to announce that I have new evid--

Zena SCREAMS -- loud and long --

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - FOYER - THE SAME TIME

-- Madelyn, letting Norman in the front door -- FREEZES.

INT. GEORGE'S SECRET BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER)

-- if I can make him angry or fearful enough, maybe he will come out of hiding.

Zena kicks a box -- papers go flying -- she WHIRLS on the (whatever) playing George's voice:

ZENA

YOU -- DIPSHIT!

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn and Norman -- TERRIFIED -- are HURRYING OUT the front door when they hear her.

They freeze AGAIN -- listening:

ZENA (O.S.)
YOU STUPID FAT OLD PIECE OF SHIT!

They EDGE into the doorway to the living room, and see the RUG pulled aside, the OPEN TRAP DOOR.

INT. GEORGE'S SECRET BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

GEORGE (ON SPEAKER)
Of course...what if he's dead?

Zena sits, holding her head in her hands.

ZENA
I'm fucked. I'm so fucked.

All of a sudden the TRAP DOOR SLAMS shut, DARKENING the room and SCARING THE HELL out of Zena.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn watches Norman SHOVE the SOFA over the trap door, to keep it closed. They stare at each other, breathless.

INT. GEORGE'S SECRET BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Zena stares at the closed trap door, terrified.

And then, grabbing up her phone, she YELLS UP:

ZENA
I'm calling 9-1-1!

As she begins to do exactly that --

NORMAN (O.S.)
Zena?!

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn has picked up the FIREPLACE POKER and is ready to bash. But then muffled through the floorboards:

ZENA (O.S.)
 ...Norman?!

Norman signals Madelyn to hold off bashing and kneels to pull up the trap door.

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - SOON AFTER

Madelyn, Norman and Zena sit around the formica-topped table. A bottle of bourbon and three glasses are set out...empty.

MADELYN
 We should tell the police.

ZENA
 No! Why?!
 (beat)
 I mean: why would we tell them?

NORMAN
 It's -- evidence.

ZENA
 It's evidence that doesn't exist!

MADELYN
 That seems like something they should know.

ZENA
 How does it help? They don't have something that they already didn't have. But now they think George was just a crackpot. Yeah: they're really gonna work on that case.

Beat.

MADELYN
 It feels wrong.

ZENA
 If you care about George: you want this plan to work.

NORMAN
 Do we? It got him killed.

ZENA
 Right! He proved the killer is still out there. Alive. So now we have to get him.

MADELYN

Can't the police do that? Isn't that like: their entire job?

ZENA

You think the police are going to let us keep provoking the killer, drawing him out, getting him to make a mistake?! They can't -- they have play by the rules. They don't have the manpower, they don't have the balls.

MADELYN

You are really scary.

ZENA

Yes I am.

Madelyn takes a deep breath, uncertain. She and Norman exchange looks -- trying to decide whether to go along with this.

Zena's watching that eye-contact, and her own eyes widen.

ZENA (CONT'D)

Oh my gahd. No freakin' way. Get OUT!

MADELYN

What?

Zena is grinning, and Madelyn and Norman suddenly get uncomfortable - busted:

ZENA

You two?! Seriously?! Did you hook up?!

NORMAN

No!

MADELYN

That's -- none of your --

ZENA

You did. Ohmigod -- I love it.

NORMAN

We did not -- hook --

ZENA

(to Madelyn)

You did, didn't you? And it was good!

Madelyn kind of rolls her eyes and blushes and tries not to grin -- and Zena holds out her fist for a bump. Madelyn can't help but bump it, and truly grin.

ZENA (CONT'D)

This is so great. This explains everything. I am SO happy for you two. Wait!

She's getting out her phone and pulling them closer for a group selfie:

ZENA (CONT'D)

We have to celebrate this.

Madelyn hastily stands up to stay out of the image.

MADELYN

Nope!

ZENA

Okay -- all right: but you know that everybody's gonna find out, right?

NORMAN

Not if you don't tell them.

ZENA

Are you kidding?! You're both glowing. I hear angels singing! "Ahhhh!"

Madelyn sits, amused.

MADELYN

Well, let's let the angels tell them, then. Yes?

Zena grimaces: it may be impossible for her to keep this secret. Norman decides to snap them back to priorities:

NORMAN

Could we get back to the serial killer thing?

Madelyn considers Zena, kindly.

MADELYN

We can't let you do that. It's too dangerous.

ZENA

How are you going to stop me?

NORMAN
Tell the police?

ZENA
Really? Like, the Internet Police?
Because last I looked, I can say
whatever I want in my podcast.

MADELYN
She can. It's really horrible.

NORMAN
You don't have a podcast.

ZENA
I'm taking over George's. I'm not
going to let his death be for
nothing.

MADELYN
It was for nothing.

ZENA
You can't copyright an idea. You
can't stop me from doing a podcast!

MADELYN
No. But I can stop you from being
in this house.

ZENA
What?

MADELYN
Get out.

ZENA
But --

MADELYN
No, seriously: get out. You want
to be the next victim -- great.
But not here.

ZENA
I need his materi--

MADELYN
I don't care. Out. Scram. I am
not enabling another murder.

Zena, aghast, turns to Norman, who shrugs.

NORMAN
Her house, her rules.

MADELYN
Oh my God, you sound so old.

NORMAN
I know.

Madelyn points to the front door. Norman shrugs: yep.
Zena grabs up her stuff and hurries out, fighting tears.

INT. ZOOM GROUP (FULL SCREEN ZOOM MEETING) - SOON AFTER

Zena has gathered the Web Sleuths into an emergency call: in their windows we see DUNDOSKY, MCLEAN and SHRIMPTON.

(We INTERCUT FREELY between the Sleuths at the homes and Zena in the front yard and the Zoom Screen itself...)

Zena is pacing in George's front yard, furious.

ZENA
I can't just walk away. George got us close. This can work.

DUNDOSKI
What can we do to help?

ZENA
I just need to know if you're still in. What do you think: Am I insane? Should I do this?

MCLEAN
Well: those are really two separate questions. But the answer to both is yes.

DUNDOSKI
Hell yes!

Zena tears up a bit. And then:

ZENA
Carol?

SHRIMPTON
I'm in -- with one condition.
(beat)
I'm in on the money, too.

ZENA

What money?

SHRIMPSON

You catch this fella: your
podcast's gonna hit the big time.
You got a book deal, the HBO
series, you're famous. And making
money.

ZENA

Because...I risked my life?

(beat)

Okay: sure. You know what? If
there's money, and we're not dead,
you can have some. Okay?

SHRIMPSON

You all heard that.

DUNDOSKI

Now I feel dirty.

SHRIMPSON

You can afford your feelings, I
guess, Carl.

ZENA

Okay, now the question is --

Behind Zena: George's front door opens and Madelyn comes out,
her carry-on bag's wheels making a ton of noise, Norman
following --

They stop, startled to see Zena is still here.

She stops talking, her phone still held up, the others still
on her screen -- kind of busted by Madelyn & Norman.

In that awkward silent moment:

The land line phone in George's house BEGINS TO RING.

Everyone looks at the open doorway.

SHRIMPSON

What is going on?

Zena looks at Madelyn.

Madelyn looks at Norman.

Norman looks at the doorway -- then back at Madelyn...and
shrugs: *your call. Get it if you want.*

The phone keeps ringing.

Madelyn goes inside.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She finds the cordless handset, on an end table near the TV.
Picks it up -- hesitant:

MADELYN

Hello?

EXT. SMALL TOWN FISHING PIER - THE SAME TIME

A picturesque, even cliché, small-town harbor. Little fishing boats are tied up to the dock. There is a row of local shops and restaurants facing the water.

There's an old buoy out past the end of the pier, bobbing in the water -- CLANGING now and then. SEAGULLS cry.

ELMORE DEAKINS is on a pre-paid ('burner') cell phone. He is in his 70s, wrinkled, weathered, white-haired. Wears simple workmanlike but artsy clothes - denim, cotton.

He listens to the silence on the line, even more hesitant than Madelyn to make this connection.

MADELYN (ON PHONE)

Hello?

Deakins grimaces. But he doesn't speak.

MADELYN (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

I can hear -- like -- birds.
Gulls.

(beat)

So this isn't a spam call.

Deakins almost speaks. But he can't. Yet.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn is about to hang up. But she can't. Yet.

Something...human...travels through the airwaves and keeps them both on the lines. Not speaking.

Norman appears in the front doorway -- curious.

Zena edges up behind him, also curious.

But Madelyn looks away from them. Focused on the silence and sounds of the faraway coastal town.

MADELYN
 (into phone)
 This is George Roizman's number.
 (beat)
 Is that who you wanted to call?

INTERCUT:

EXT. SMALL TOWN FISHING PIER - THE SAME TIME

DEAKINS
 Yes.

MADELYN
 Okay. Well then: who's calling?

DEAKINS
 I'm -- the one -- they think
 poisoned Mr. Roizman.
 (beat)
 But I didn't.

MADELYN
 I'm sorry: what?

DEAKINS
 I didn't do it.

Madelyn stares at Norman and Zena, in shock.

MADELYN
 This is the...Chemistry Set Killer?

Their jaws drop, their eyes widen -- as they hurry inside to be closer -- she PUTS IT ON SPEAKER, so Norman can hear:

DEAKINS
 I never liked that name.

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

Zena, in her window, is still outside the front door -- whispering frantically:

ZENA
 It's CSK! On the phone!

MCLEAN
 No way -- plot twist!

DUNDOSKI
 Trace it!

ZENA
Shh! Shut up!

She is hastily MUTING them so she can EDGE INTO the house and LISTEN beside Norman --

EXT. SMALL TOWN FISHING PIER - CONTINUOUS

DEAKINS
(into phone)
May I ask who I'm speaking with?

INTERCUT:

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn is trying to focus, but Norman and Zena are both in her face, mouthing questions and advice. Turning away from them -- talking to Deakins:

MADELYN
This is --

Norman hastily gestures: *DON'T SAY IT!* And she rethinks:

MADELYN (CONT'D)
George's ex-wife. Widow. Ex-widow.

DEAKINS
I'm sorry for your loss.

MADELYN
Are you?

DEAKINS
Yes, I am.
(beat)
I just heard about this. On the news. And I want you to know: I had nothing to do with it.

MADELYN
And I'm just supposed to...believe you?

Zena is frantically stepping away and whispering into her phone, repeating everything that Madelyn is saying.

DEAKINS
(frowns)
Is that the police?

MADELYN

No -- it's some -- people --

ZENA

Wait -- is he asking about me?!

Madelyn paces away from Zena -- who follows with her phone raised to let the others on Zoom watch --

DEAKINS

Tell them I didn't do it.

MADELYN

Well I can tell them you said you didn't do it --

ZENA

Let me talk to him --

(We begin to intercut the Zoom group as well:)

DUNDOSKI

What is he saying?!

MCLEAN

Put him on speaker!

DEAKINS

I stopped. I haven't -- done that -
- in years. Decades!

ZENA

Can we talk to him?!

MADELYN

(to Deakins)

You're talking to the wrong person.
Tell the police.

Madelyn keeps walking away from Zena, who gives up -- and then gets an idea. She walks to the landline base and hits the button to put the call on Speaker.

DEAKINS (ON SPEAKER)

I can't talk to the police. I
can't risk that.

Madelyn WHIRLS, startled to suddenly hear the voice there -- the handset in her hand now useless. Deakins keeps talking, urgent, confessional -- having no idea he's now broadcasting:

DEAKINS (ON SPEAKER) (CONT'D)

I shouldn't even be talking to you.
But this whole thing just came at
me out of nowhere -- and it...hurt.
Someone is taking my private life.

(MORE)

DEAKINS (ON SPEAKER) (CONT'D)
Using it. I just wanted to tell
 you. I feel -- violated.

ZENA
 How do we even know you're the real
 Chemistry Set Killer?

Deakins freezes. Suddenly very careful.

DEAKINS
 Who is that?

ZENA
 My name is Zena. I'm leading a
 group of online web detectives to
 solve the murder of Goerge Roizman.

DEAKINS
 "Web detectives"?

MCLEAN
 We hunt serial killers. From home.
 And...office.

Deakins listens. Thinking. No fool.

ZENA
 I mean: "hunt" is kind of just a --
 way of putting it.

DUNDOSKI
 No. We hunt them down. And bring
 them to justice.

ZENA
Or: we try to get their side of it.

Long, uneasy silence.

DEAKINS
 Why?

DUNDOSKI
 Why?! Because it's -- wrong.
 Because the victims cry out from
 beyond on the grave!

MCLEAN
 And our lives are not interesting.

DEAKINS
 So: this is just...a form of
 entertainment. For you. Like a
 club. Or a game.

ZENA

No: we are citizen sleuths. We're harnessing the power of community. When the authorities give up, we don't. We solve cold cases.

DEAKINS

Have you...ever caught one? A serial killer?

ZENA

Not so far. No.

NORMAN

Here's a question:

Everyone is a bit startled that Norman is suddenly getting involved.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Why should we believe you?

DEAKINS

What do you want? An alibi? I have one. But it would tell you too much about me.

NORMAN

No: why should we believe that you're the Chemistry Set Killer? Maybe you just want attention.

DEAKINS

From a bunch of internet...sleuths?

NORMAN

You didn't know who would pick up the phone. That's who you got. You say you didn't kill George. He was killed with your poison. He was threatening to expose your identity, so you had a very strong motive. Why should we believe you didn't do it?

DEAKINS

Because --

He frowns. He can't think of a way to prove this.

NORMAN

You want us to believe you? Prove you are who you say you are.

ZENA

Yes! Tell us something that only the killer would know.

MCLEAN

Like: how you chose your victims.

DUNDOSKI

Or something from the crime scene. Something the police didn't tell the press.

DEAKINS

If I tell you something that only the killer would know...how will you know if it's true?

NORMAN

(to the others)

Hang up. He's not real.

DEAKINS

It was random. I had no reason for choosing any of them. No pattern. No secret clue. I would just say: I'm going to watch that bus and whoever gets off it, I'll choose them. I didn't think about it. I was strict with myself: no reasoning. Just chance. And then I would try not to find out anything about them. I would follow them home and break in as quickly as possible. Put the poison in their food and get out. I didn't want to know about them. I didn't want to care. Or feel bad. I just wanted to -- have some kind of power, in a meaningless universe. That was the point. We are all staring in the face of an abyss. Our lives are run by random events. We have no control. So I took control. I made things happen. Because I couldn't stand to live in this world without some kind of -- power.

ZENA

Everybody thinks you stalked them. That you learned all about them.

DEAKINS

God no. I would never be able to
do it if I knew them.

MCLEAN

So everything that everyone thinks
about you...is completely wrong?

ZENA

That's why they never caught him.

Norman and Madelyn look at each other.

NORMAN

Why did you stop?

DEAKINS

I fell in love.

(beat)

And then the universe was no longer
meaningless.