

CRIME CRACKERS

(formerly the
UNITITLED PODCAST-KILLER PROJECT)

Written by

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

**(It's a MESS! To demonstrate the MESSY
progress of creative work.)**

INT. GEORGE'S STUDIO - DAY

Darkness. **GEORGE ROIZMAN**, 49, lit only by his high-end desktop podcasting setup.

GEORGE

Murray Simpson was florist in Perkins, Tennessee. Age 37.

George is going gray, sloppy. He speaks quietly, intently - like an old FM radio midnight-shift 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.

(beat)

It was the sandwich that killed him. The pickled peppers, in fact.

The victim first feels a buzzing, thickening numbness of the tongue and throat. They feel dizzy, frightened, lightheaded. The room seems to spin. They can't focus their eyes or feel with their hands. 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 brain. The body frantically attempts to get oxygen. They gasp for air. And they die.

George is reading from a hand-written script.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

The killer had broken into his home days or maybe even weeks before, and laced the peppers with a unique mixture of plant toxins. The killer 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.

OLD PHOTOS and yellowed NEWS CLIPPINGS:

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

He takes a deep, satisfied breath -

GEORGE (CONT'D)

It's a cold case. No one cares.
This guy killed 11 people and then just -- vanished in 1985.

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 understood the principles of evidence.

FBI Profilers look for similarities among the victims - but his were in different states. Different ages, races, economic and social groups.

(beat)

But he did sign his work. The poison itself was his "signature": he created it, designed it.

He wanted to make sure they KNEW he was getting away with it. He wanted attention.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I was eleven years old. My first serial killer. It was in the news. People were panicked. Everyone was suddenly afraid of their own pantries and refrigerators.

It was the first time I became aware of human evil. This man was killing other people...for fun. For the sport. To get attention.

It changed everything. Knowing someone could do that.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

No one is listening to this podcast. I know that. I have 14 subscribers.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

But I have a secret weapon. And I'm going to use this podcast to broadcast it: I have found new evidence regarding the identity of the Chemistry Set Killer. Evidence that was out there in plain sight. But no one was looking.

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

True crime podcast.

I'm an outsider.
Stubborn, obsessive.
I don't let go easily.

George switches off the recorder.

The studio is dark and silent.

He gets up and goes to press a switch on the wall.

With a GRINDING noise, a garage-door-opener pulls up most of one wall. Light floods in from outside -- exposing:

The unfinished walls and rafters of George's shabby two-car garage. Metal shelving jammed with cardboard file-boxes and junk. Canned goods, bottled water, and other household supplies.

EXT. GEORGE'S STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

George walks across his weed-strewn backyard to his run-down house.

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

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

George lets himself in. He gets (a snack and a drink).

(GOES BACK TO WORK)

He gets an odd expression. Sticking his tongue. It feels fuzzy, thick. He's getting dizzy.

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

GEORGE

Oh no.

He staggers for the wall-mounted land-line telephone. But his paralyzed fingertips cannot grip and it falls to the linoleum floor.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

No no no.

But it sounds like "nuh nuh nuh" because his throat is closing up.

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

George DIES, lying on the garage floor, staring up at us.

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

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

MADELYN MORRISON - Supervising Data Analyst, 50ish. *Subtly-stylish suit. A tiny bit 20th century: skirt, stockings.*

Her tiny office looks out at FOUR OTHER DATA ANALYSTS: all younger, sloppier and nerdier.

Madelyn shuts down her workspace. It's rather marvelous to watch: she's got it down to a few quick, simple gestures. The least expenditure of energy for the most effect. Smart.

DATA ANALYST

Is it five?

DATA ANALYST 2

There she goes.

She's already heading for the door.

MADELYN

See you tomorrow, kids.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - ELEVATORS - SOON AFTER

BRENDA - Human Resources - is already

. Madelyn steps inside, watches the doors close.

BRENDA

We have a meeting tomorrow.

MADELYN
 (startled)
 Human Resources?

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

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

They ride down in silence for a moment.

The elevator doors OPEN, revealing the LOBBY. Brenda, polite, waits; Madelyn self-conscious, exits the elevator first.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn heads for the revolving doors -

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

BRENDA
 I'm not supposed to say this until tomorrow.

Madelyn waits, uneasy -- 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!
 (beat)
 So sorry - Spoiler alert. That's the meeting tomorrow.
 (beat)
 Director Of Analyst Services. A four-percent bump annually - and your own office. With a door. You can close.

MADELYN
 Wow.

BRENDA
 I'm sorry, I couldn't help it. I just love it when a promotion is -- righteous.
 (beat)
 (MORE)

BRENDA (CONT'D)
 24 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 tries to process all this. 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.

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 in the lobby as other WORKERS walk past. 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.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 Are you all right?

BRENDA
 Yeah - I'm -
 (beat)
 (MORE)

BRENDA (CONT'D)

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. I like my team. I like working with them all day. I like my desk.

(beat)

Is that okay?

BRENDA

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

Madelyn's phone rings. Brenda watches Madelyn frown, checking it:

MADELYN

I'm sorry I have to take this - it's the -- police?

BRENDA

Police?!

Madelyn nods, distracted - as she takes the call:

MADELYN

Hello? Yes it is.

She listens: SHOCKED, STUNNED.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

Oh my God - when? um - how - ?

Brenda watches, concerned. Madelyn turns away slightly, wrapped up in terrible news.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

No - we - I didn't even know he -

(listens)

Yes - of course - I will -

(beat)

I'm sorry, where is Kirbysville, exactly?

She's nodding.

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

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

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

BRENDA
I'm so sorry.
(beat)
You're not married.

Madelyn nods at Brenda - shaken, baffled:

MADELYN
I was. Thirty years ago.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

DET. LEWIS ELMES

(Listening to a podcast?!)

The door is rolled-up, so

There is a CRIME SCENE TECH working on the scene.

Madelyn dressed for work.

Madelyn can see the shabby crime scene as she walks up, her wheeled suitcase bumping along the weed-strewn driveway.

Behind her, we can see a POLICE CAR, a CRIME SCENE van and a LOCAL NEWS van. CRIME SCENE TAPE fluttering around the entrance to the house and the open garage door.

watches Madelyn approach. Her suitcase hits a bump and twists, so she is dragging it instead of wheeling it.

ELMES
You all right there?

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

Mrs. Roizman?

MADELYN

Morrison. I haven't seen George in thirty years.

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.

MADELYN

The last time I saw George I was 19 years old. Outside CBGB's. 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 guy.

ELMES

The CSK has been cold for thirty years. Your husband was kind of stirring the pot: he might have stirred-up a copycat.

MADELYN

Ex. Husband

ELMES

He was putting out on the internet that he had new evidence to identify a serial killer.
(to himself)
Dumb shit.

MADELYN

George was the dumb shit?

ELMES

Sorry. But instead of going to the police, he went on the internet and put himself in danger. If he wasn't dead, I would probably arrest him for obstructing justice.

ELMES (CONT'D)

(with distaste)
A "web sleuth."

MADELYN

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

ELMES

I just want to make a proper 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)

Kidding.

(beat)

I'm talking to everyone he knew, checking his bank records and phone records.

(grim)

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

MADELYN

Geriatric?

ELMES

Well, he was murdering people in the 1970s. Guy's likely to be around 70-80 years old now. If he's alive at all.

Madelyn's phone vibrates, she glances down: **ZENA** again.

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 know this man -- I didn't ask for this -- I can't help you. I don't know this place. I don't know what to do.

(beat)

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

(beat)

I'm 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 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)

Will you be here a few days?

MADELYN

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

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

Madelyn looks at Elmes, now -- startled.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

Yeah - apparently he just never got around to changing his will.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

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: **Zena** again.

MADELYN (CONT'D)
 (to the phone)
 I don't know who the hell you are.

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** - a wanna-be influencer, 23 years old, in the living room of her luxurious house in Southern California. Well: not hers. The house she grew up in. That she has not yet managed to move out of. Partly because... damn, it's nice!

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 - 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. A friend of mine just died. In Pennsylvania.

ZENA'S MOM
 Oh my God! Who?!

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

ZENA
 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. From George. So I searched for all the Madelyn Morrissions, and I broke that down by age -- so then there really weren't 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, in the East Village in New York City, back 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 profiling 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

Yes. How are you? 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 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 what you're saying.

ZENA

We meet online and try to solve cold cases or crimes that the authorities aren't taking seriously.

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

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 killer did it: the one George was talking about in his podcast?

ZENA

I do. One hundred percent. I think he was afraid of George. George was gonna get him. And we need to pick up where he left off.

ZENA (CONT'D)

Have the police - found anything? Like George's evidence?

MADELYN

I don't know. I don't think so.

ZENA

Did you have to identify the body?

MADELYN

I don't even know if I could.

ZENA

Because it was like, horrible? 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? Is there anything I can do to help? I can be there tomorrow. Let me help you. Let me help George.

MADELYN

(distracted)

Don't you have, like: work? Or school?

ZENA

No, I'm an Influencer. I mean, I used to be. 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'm sorry - thank you -

ZENA

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

MADELYN

That would be creepy.

Zena grimaces. She punches a sofa pillow, then throws it - at a shelf of expensive bric-a-brac, SMASHING a lot of it.

ZENA

Okay. But I'm here for you.

LINDA, a middle-aged housekeeper, rushes in, concerned --

-- but backs out hastily when Zena GLARES.

ZENA (CONT'D)

I am speaking for a whole community who knew George and loved him and want to help. Call or text any time, okay? I feel like we have a special connection.

(beat)

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.

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

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

(Funky hipster type place!)

He is inspecting an IBM SELECTRIC typewriter.

NORMAN MURCH, 58 years old, watches apprehensively. He is a newspaper journalist, and something of a mess. But 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)

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

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I like the noise it makes. The feel.

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

NORMAN (CONT'D)

Oh, crap -- Excuse me --

As he gets it out and shuts off the alert,

-- 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 hands over the credit card --

-- we see the Zoom room on his phone and the FACES OF THE GROUP in their 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.

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

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 me go 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!

MCLEAN

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

ZENA

If I tell her there's a () of George's secret files - and she

(MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)

doesn't want to help us - which she clearly does not - then she'll go tell the police about the files, and then game over!

NORMAN

What are we talking about?

DUNDOSKI

George is dead?

NORMAN

George?!

SHRIMPTON

Poisoned.

NORMAN

No way. Like - poisoned?

ZENA

He was clearly 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
().

NORMAN

Wait - what?!

ZENA

George told me he kept his important files in.

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?

Dundoski screen-shares - Google-image-search photos: several "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:

ZENA

Yes. I don't know, maybe I should just tell her. 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.

(beat)

I bet she would want us to do that.

(beat)

We need to take over George's 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 nobodies.

SHRIMPSON

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

ZENA

Are you out of your mind?! This is ours.

CONSPIRACIST

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

SHRIMPSON
Why would they bury it?!

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

SHRIMPSON
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. Each conjuring up their own mental image of Dundoski "getting" anything from anyone.

MCLEAN
Whoa.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman is driving, the phone 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. Seeing a new hope rise:

ZENA
Well, wait -- I don't know. Let's think about it. Let's not get trapped in old perceptions.
(tentatively)
Carl...how do you want to get it?

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

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

ZENA
I'm not comfortable with that.

DUNDOSKI
No worries, then. 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.

DUNDOSKI
Well -- duh. No witnesses.

ZENA
Please don't say it like that.

DUNDOSKI
Text me her address.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

NORMAN
Do NOT text him that --

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

Zena mutes Norman. But:

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

Zena mutes everyone.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman grimaces, pulling the car over, dangerously, horns blaring around him --

NORMAN
Oh for --

-- grabbing the phone and 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

You cannot let him go to that woman's house!

ZENA

We need that evidence.

NORMAN

Fine. Let's talk to her.

DUNDOSKI

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!

DUNDOSKI

That doesn't negate my humanity, dude.

MCLEAN

That's fair.

DUNDOSKI

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

ZENA

I believe 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?

DUNDOSKI

Except in self-defense.

SHRIMPSON

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 --

Shrimpton disconnects. Norman is TALKING heatedly in his window - MUTED. MCLEAN 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: call in before you do anything, okay?

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

DUNDOSKI

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.

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:

DUNDOSKI

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 something outside --

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

DUNDOSKI (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. His taste runs to MidCentury Modern (i.e. 20th century and old).

Well-organized books on shelves going up to the ceiling, file cabinets along one wall. An sturdy wooden desk, where the Selectric Typewriter should be.

Norman lets himself in

He sits on worn sofa and opens his laptop. Types into search.

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

Maybe sad. Hard to say. Taking in George's home: in disrepair and isolated and not at all what she would have wished for him.

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

INT. NORMAN'S APT. - CONTINUOUS

NORMAN
 (into phone, voicemail)
 Um, hi -- you don't know me, I'm --
 my name is Norman Murch, and --
 it's about George -- and his stuff.
 (winces)
 Please call me.

Norman disconnects. He sighs. That was lame.

(He has her contact info and George's address from ZENA!)

INT. NORMAN'S APT. - LATER

It's getting dark out. He has not found a way to reach her.
 He pours a bourbon on the rocks. Drinks it.

NORMAN
 Oh...hell.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - DUSK

Norman drives up a ramp onto a highway.
 Passing a sign indicating he is heading to 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

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

(sound system - LARGE speakers, reel-to-reel etc!)

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 hard. He's not going to be wearing them any more. She suddenly YELLS at his clothes:

MADELYN

Screw you, George! I have a life!
A life that makes sense! I'm not
staying here to clean up your mess.
What were you thinking -- calling
out a serial killer?!

(beat)

Your whole damn life was gestures,
George! Didn't you get tired?!

(beat)

Oh no. Was THAT what this was?

(beat)

A way to end it all?

(beat)

Please tell me you didn't want
this, George.

The DOORBELL rings.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - SOON AFTER

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

MADELYN

I'm sorry, it's not a great time.

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

I don't know. I'll be back tomorrow. I'm leaving soon. I can't let this thing take over my life. This is going to take weeks. It's a whole house. A whole life.

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.
(re: work stuff)
Have you submitted the (work stuff)

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

SCREAMING HYSTERIA BAND

The doorbell rings.

MADELYN

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

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - FOYER - SOON AFTER

She opens the door, 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 Sandwiches.

MADELYN

Yes -- thank you! Cash all right?

KYLE

Cash works. Nineteen oh five.

As Madelyn collects her wallet, Kyle checks the place out. Madelyn returns with the cash and notes his gaze. He shrugs, busted:

KYLE (CONT'D)

This is where that guy got serial-killed.

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

MADELYN

Yeah.

KYLE

Poisoned, right?

Madelyn nods, taking the bag and handing over the cash. She can't blame the kid.

MADELYN

Thus: take-out.

Now it's a bit awkward, because: he could leave. But instead:

KYLE

Are you his...mom?

MADELYN

Ex-wife.

KYLE

Oh -- wow. You must be...

MADELYN

I'm not.

KYLE

...pissed.

MADELYN

Oh. Maybe. No. I'm not.

(beat)

I don't know what I am.

KYLE

Sucks.

MADELYN
 It's what he was like. Chaos.
 (beat)
 Chaos in cheap sneakers.

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

KYLE
 Drugs?

MADELYN
 (sighs)
 Yeah. I mean: I don't know. When
 we were together, yes.

Slight beat.

KYLE
 I meant do you want some.

MADELYN
 Oh!

KYLE
 I sell some stuff that's not on the
 menu. If you know what I mean.

MADELYN
 I do. Understand.

KYLE
 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. She realizes it. Sighs.

KYLE
 Edibles? Xanax? X?

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

MUSIC BLASTING on George's excellent sound system: a reel-to-reel tape recorded back in the mid-90s, MADELYN & GEORGE with their punk/grunge band. Hand-scrawled on the tape's box:

THE DEATH OF MUSIC AS WE KNOW IT

Madelyn, stoned, SINGS as loud as she can with her 20-year-old self.

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Getting dark. Dundoski, parked across the street, watches the windows. He frowns, rolls down his window:

The blasting music drifts out to him.

DUNDOSKI
...the hell?

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

He doesn't notice HEADLIGHTS slowly approaching far down the street. They stop a block away, and go out.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman studies the lit-up house, the truck parked nearby, and Dundoski's big lurking figure.

It moves into the shadows, heading to the back of the house.

NORMAN
...uh-oh.

He takes his phone from the magnetic dashboard grip, 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, hand on the doorknob. Listening. Steps back.

INT. NORMAN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Norman listens to a recorded voice on 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 on the house. An agonizingly-long series of clicks, and then another recorded voice:

911 OPERATOR (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
 Thank you for calling Oakdale
 County Police Services. Please
 listen carefully, because our menu
 has changed --

NORMAN

AAARGH!

He grabs the phone and gets out of the car.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn finishes threading a new tape into the machine and turns a clunky old lever:

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

She 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 it, 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 an imaginary dark, crowded nightclub full of sweaty GRUNGE-PUNK NEW YORKERS. Actually: the bookshelves. Lit mostly by a yellow-and-orange LAVA LAMP.

Behind her, Dundoski appears in the KITCHEN DOORWAY.

Watches Madelyn, staying still.

He pulls out a crumpled NOTE he scribbled earlier:

(Zena's instructions for where to find the EVIDENCE)

Grimaces...watching Madelyn thrashing and wailing, between him and his mission objective down the hall.

Dundoski turns away.

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

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

-- as, behind him, NORMAN PUSHES OPEN the KITCHEN DOOR. Didn't see Dundoski until it was too late.

MUSIC BLASTING.

Norman FREEZES. Paralyzed with fear. Trying to think.

Dundoski CLOSES the CABINET...and SEES NORMAN reflected in its glass.

Norman TURNS to FLEE --

-- Dundoski LUNGES, pushing the door SHUT as Norman tries to open it -- SLAMMING Norman into the door.

Norman GRUNTS, stunned --

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

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

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

Madelyn, lost in her performance, WANDERS the room -- TURNING AWAY just as --

-- behind her: Dundoski staggers backward, the coffee can clattering off his forehead -- choking on a cloud of ground COFFEE --

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

-- SCARING the hell out of Madelyn -- as he lunges for the shelves, FRANTICALLY looking for a weapon or a phone or --

--Dudoski stomps in clumsily, COMING AFTER HIM --

-- Norman GRABS the LAVA LAMP, HOT orange blobs in a glowing-yellow liquid -- 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 -
- its 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!

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 STEPS 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 to his HANDS and KNEES.

Madelyn anxiously HOLDS the knife READY --

-- as Norman hastily DIALS 9-1-1 on George's LAND-LINE. As
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 dials his phone.

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 dark, trashed living room. He's bent slightly in pain and holding one hand to his eye; the brow is bleeding.

OPERATOR (ON PHONE)

Do you need assistance?

Norman disconnects. Looking at Madelyn, holding the 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.

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 backing into the kitchen, hands raised.

Madelyn follows, knife still ready.

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.

She goes to the sink, unsteadily.

NORMAN

You okay?

MADELYN

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

He shuts up while she squirts dish soap on a washcloth then she goes to clumsily apply it to his cut.

NORMAN

Ow! Stings.

Sudsy water runs down his face and all over his clothes. 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 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. 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
 A journalist. I'm writing a book
 about online culture. That's why
 I'm in the group.

MADELYN
 So you're like: spying on them?

She sits down at the little kitchen table, the drugs and
 stress overtaking her. Closes her eyes, breathes deeply.

NORMAN

No. I'm embedded. In the culture. I'm in a lot of groups. 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)

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.

Madelyn SNORES.

Norman sighs. Sets the vegetables aside and goes to gently shake her.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

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

Putting an arm around her waist, he helps her to her feet --

MADELYN

Are you driving?

NORMAN

"Driving"?

MADELYN

My bed is in New Jersey.

Holding her up as he walks her out of the kitchen:

NORMAN

No, I'm not driving.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - SOON AFTER

Norman struggles to get them both through the doorway.

MADELYN

I'm not usually like this.

Distracted, trying to figure out how to turn her so she doesn't just flop down face-first on to the 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
Whhhooooo -- dangerous maneuver.

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

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

-- they sit with an ungraceful abruptness. He's still got one arm around her waist, the other hand 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 breath and tries to figure out the next maneuver. Still holding her --

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

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

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Please don't.

And then they're falling backward onto the pillows, Norman's arm still around her. A bit breathless:

NORMAN (CONT'D)
Okay, good. Nice.

He starts to try to extricate himself -- and she SNORES again. 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. 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 is leaving for the airport in a hurry - talking to Cameron

Zena was going to Attend her parent anniversary brunch, and is asking Cameron to go in her place. And sing a song, because she's a shy singer. It'll be good for her. (Zena can't appear clueless - not even ruthless - instead it's almost like she's TEAMING UP, becoming HELPING BUDDIES.)

EXT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - NEAR DAWN

The night begins to retreat as sunrise warms the sky in the East and paints the front of George's shabby house.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Pale light edges into the room through George's window shades.

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

She stirs. Opens one eye. 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 to see how dressed she is, 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 looks up, reaching over and putting one finger to his lips.

MADELYN
Nope. Shhh.

Norman stops talking. Eyes on hers. Her eyes on him.

She slowly withdraws the finger...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
Oh: my breath?

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 smiles, taking her in. Leans in to kiss her, trying
to rise up on one elbow --

-- but flops down clumsily, face-first on to her --

MADELYN (CONT'D)
What the fuck?!

She's pushing him off --

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

He shows her, lifting the limp arm with his other hand and
waving it like it's Weekend At Bernie's --

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

She tries to massage it --

NORMAN
No -- thank you, ow! Agonizing
pins and needles.

Madelyn stops, apologetic. They just look at each other,
uncertain. And then they slowly, gently kiss.

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.

Dundoski, one foot raised, hands floating in front of him...doesn't move 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:

INT. HIGH-END GYM - NEW YORK - MORNING

A sleek, elite place near Wall Street. McLean is working out, lost in thought, listening to a podcast -- until:

BILLY, late 20's and gorgeous, comes to use the next machine. It's no meaningless move: his eyes check McLean as he begins to work.

McLean does the same, glancing over. Billy's clothes, his body. His gym bag. Little glances.

Now and then they catch each other -- 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.

McLean realizes he's thrown Billy off. Apologetic:

MCLEAN (CONT'D)

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

BILLY

Are you a -- doctor?

MCLEAN

No, 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 looking at McLean like he's a freak, or a stalker, or both.

MCLEAN (CONT'D)

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

Getting off his machine, Billy forces a smile as he grabs up his bag and walks away.

Watching 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

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 THE CRIME-CATCHER podcast. Joining the SWARM of people passing through the revolving doors.

INT. HOSPITAL - MORNING

A Chemotherapy Treatment Room. NURSE SHRIMPTON, kind and efficient, attends to a handful of PATIENTS in recliner chairs, plugged into IV drips.

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

SHRIMPTON

How are we today, Mrs. Weitzman?

WEITZMAN

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

SHRIMPTON

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!

Shrimpton winces a bit.

SHRIMPTON

Some people get too involved.

WEITZMAN

Ohhh. Drama?

SHRIMPTON

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?

(beat)

You should get a nice hobby.

Shrimpton is taken aback. Puts on a smile.

INT. HOSPITAL - NURSE'S STATION - MORNING

Shrimpton sits at 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 picks up her phone and
opens the **DR. SLEUTH** website.

Hesitates. Wrestling with it.

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

Turns and goes to a BOX of MAGAZINES and ACTIVITES for patients: takes out a CROSSWORD PUZZLE book.

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

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - MIDDAY

Norman wakes, alone, in a dead stranger's bedroom. Daylight coming around the window blinds.

Checks under the sheets: he is naked. Searching the room, from the bed -- looking around on the floor, the chair.

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

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. Looks up at:

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

MADELYN
Oh, hey! Hi.

NORMAN
Hi.

MADELYN
You probably want your clothes.

NORMAN
I kinda do.

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

Norman nods and BACKS OUT. Madelyn watches him go...amused.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

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

He follows the SOUND of DISHES clinking and CABINETS opening -

INT. GEORGE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

-- to find Madelyn cooking, exploring the unfamiliar kitchen.

NORMAN

Thank you!

MADELYN

Can I make you some breakfast?

NORMAN

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

Madelyn sighs slightly:

MADELYN

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

Norman smiles, too. Watching her work.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

You like eggs?

NORMAN

I shouldn't, but I do.

MADELYN

Good. Because I'm making eggs.
(searching)
He's got to have a frying pan, right?

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

MADELYN (CONT'D)

Mystery solved.

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. They are not sure how to talk about this.

NORMAN

I do. "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: it wasn't like --

(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.

Awkward 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
I meant: when it does happen --
which, full disclosure, is not that
much any more. They tend to start
fast and then...blow up.

MADELYN
Maybe slow down, next time. Look
for: 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 stopped worrying about it.
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 sets a plate of eggs on the table.

MADELYN
So: what am I?

Beat. As he sits:

NORMAN
Different.

She smiles slightly. Then as he lifts a forkful of eggs to his lips -- she SCREAMS --

MADELYN
NAAAAHHH!

- grabbing the fork, throwing it across the kitchen.

Norman stares at her.

NORMAN
Okay: maybe not.

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 about his horrible relationship history...end of a funny story?)

MADELYN
This was nice. Thank you. I kind of forgot about the serial killer. And everything.

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

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

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.

NORMAN

I know that. Obviously.

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, dismissing that:

MADELYN

I mean, yeah -- but: everybody did drugs. George was a drug. He was like a fireworks display, 24-7. Inspirational, awesome...kind of a mistake to have in the house.

(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.

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.

She walks away -- upset. Stands watching the traffic on the town's "miracle mile." Suddenly turns and confronts Norman:

MADELYN

I don't want to hunt serial killers!

He's a bit taken aback.

NORMAN

You don't have to.

Despite the noise and traffic, it's an intimate moment.

MADELYN

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

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

(MORE)

MADELYN (CONT'D)

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 ATTIC - LATER

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
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?

SHRIMPTON

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

(MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)
 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:

Madelyn steps out, pissed-off:

MADELYN
 Really?! You're doing this right
 here? We can hear you.

Zena freezes, busted. Phone still held up.

SHRIMPSON
 What is going on?

In that awkward silent moment:

The landline phone, inside, BEGINS TO RING.

EVERYONE looks at the open doorway

Zena looks at Madelyn.

Madelyn looks at Norman.

The phone keeps ringing.

NORMAN
 You want me to get that?

Madelyn goes inside.

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

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

MADELYN
 Hello?

EXT. SMALL TOWN FISHING PIER - THE SAME TIME

A picturesque, even cliché, small New England coastal town. Little fishing boats tied up to the dock, a row of local shops and restaurants facing the water.

An old buoy out past the end of the pier, *bobbing in the water* -- CLANGS 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 doesn't speak yet. Uncertain.

INTERCUT:

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn frowns, listening. Norman and Zena, in the doorway, watch her.

MADELYN

I can hear...birds. Seagulls.

(beat)

So this isn't a spam call.

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

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

MADELYN (CONT'D)

Are you trying to call George Roizman?

Deakins grimaces slightly, then plunges in:

DEAKINS

No -- are you...
Who am I speaking with?
Who is this?

MADELYN

This is George's...widow.
(beat)
Ex...widow.

DEAKINS

I'm sorry. For your loss.

MADELYN

Thank you. Who is this?

Uneasy pause.

DEAKINS

I just wanted to say...I didn't do
it.

Madelyn's eyes widen, looking at Norman and Zena, as:

MADELYN

You didn't do...what?

That gets their attention. They move closer, eyes on her.

DEAKINS

I didn't kill him.

Madelyn -- in shock -- trying to keep her voice steady:

MADELYN

Are you saying -- this is
the...Chemistry Set Killer?

Their jaws drop, Norman hurries closer --

DEAKINS

I never liked that name.

-- Zena hangs back to whisper frantically to her Zoom call:

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

They're all talking over each other:

ZENA

It's CSK! On the phone!

CAMERON

No freakin' way!

SHRIMPTON

What is he saying?!

MCLEAN

I have questions.

DUNDOSKI

Trace it! Trace the call!

Hastily MUTING them so she can EDGE IN beside Norman to
LISTEN --

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn turns away from them -- trying to focus on Deakins:

MADELYN

Okay. But you are the one that George was podcasting about.

DEAKINS

Yes.

Madelyn turns, amazed, to Norman and Zena -- and nods: *he just said yes!*

MADELYN

(into the phone)

And you're calling...to tell me that you didn't do it?

DEAKINS

Look: I just heard about this, on the news. And I want you to know: I had nothing to do with it.

I stopped. A long time ago. I haven't -- done anything -- in many years.

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. Using it. I just wanted to tell you. I don't know why. Because -- it just felt -- unfair.

ZENA

(to Madelyn, whispered)

Can I talk to him?

Madelyn paces away from Zena -- who follows with her phone raised to let the others on Zoom watch -- Madelyn, trying to connect with Deakins: he seems authentic.

MADELYN

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

DEAKINS

I can't talk to the police.

Zena, frustrated -- goes to the landline-base and hits the button to put the call on Speaker. *From now on, Norman, Zena and the Zoom callers can also hear Deakins:*

MADELYN

You can if you're innocent.

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

DEAKINS

You must have a very...simple life.

MADELYN

You said didn't do it.

DEAKINS

I didn't do this.

(beat)

That may not be the end of it, for the police.

Silence. Madelyn is uncertain, uncomfortable talking to him further with the whole Zoom Group listening. Abruptly:

NORMAN

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

Deakins freezes. Suddenly very careful.

DEAKINS

Is that the police?

Madelyn glares at Norman, who shrugs: the journalist in him couldn't keep quiet.

MADELYN

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

Zena grabs the opportunity, in her best influencer voice:

ZENA

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

Slight pause.

DEAKINS

"...web detectives"?

ZENA

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

Deakins listens, wary. Close to disconnecting.

ZENA (CONT'D)

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

(beat)

We also want to hear your side of
it. Of course.

DEAKINS

"From home. An office." So you're
not -- professional detectives.

ZENA

Not actual professionals.
(defensively)

There's a long tradition of --
armchair detectives.

DEAKINS

In books. And movies.

ZENA

We're citizen sleuths. Harnessing
the power of technology. We're
crowdsourcing. When the
authorities give up, we don't. We
solve cold cases.

DEAKINS

So: this is just...like a club.

a form of entertainment. It's a
game?

You're a bunch of people with
nothing better to do.

ZENA

We're a community. All over the
country. And if anything happens
to one of us -- like it did to
George: then everyone will know.
And we all come after you.

ZENA (CONT'D)

It's a bad time to be a bad cop or
a serial killer. All that stuff
you used to be able to get away
with because no one was looking...

(MORE)

ZENA (CONT'D)
 now we're all looking. And talking
 to each other.

Long, uneasy silence.

DEAKINS
 Why?

ZENA
 What?

DEAKINS
 Why would you do this?

DUNDOSKI
 Because it's -- wrong.
 Because we speak for the victims,
 and we speak for justice.

MCLEAN
 And our lives are not very
 interesting.

Deakins thinks about this.

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

ZENA
 Not so far. No.

DEAKINS
 Have you thought about what might
 happen if you did?

There is a chilling pause as the quiet threat sinks in.

DEAKINS (CONT'D)
 Who made YOU the sword of justice?
 What is wrong with you people?

NORMAN
 You never answered the question.
 (beat)
 Why should we believe you are who
 you say you are?

DEAKINS

Why on earth would I call a dead man's house and pretend to be a serial killer?

NORMAN

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.

MCLEAN

Tell us something that only the killer would know.

ZENA

Yes -- like: something from a crime scene.

DUNDOSKI

Something the police didn't make public.

DEAKINS

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

Uncomfortable pause.

CONSPIRACY

Show us your trophies!

DEAKINS

I didn't keep trophies.

CONSPIRACY

Serial killers always keep trophies.

MCLEAN

No, that's not true.
Well -- that's actually not true.
Ummm -- no.

DEAKINS

Look: I stopped. I put all that behind me, a long time ago. I've tried to be a better person.

NORMAN

All right: but can you think of a way to prove to us that you are who you say you are? Because if you can't...then why should believe you didn't do it?

He frowns, struggling -- then speaks warily...but truthfully:

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.

ZENA

Wait a second: are telling us that you didn't stalk your victims?

DEAKINS

God no.
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

The FBI Profile says you took weeks and months to learn everything about them.

DEAKINS

How did you see the FBI Profile?

ZENA

Well -- there's like, books where
people -- like, experts -- figured
out what it must have said.

Deakins sighs.

MCLEAN

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

ZENA

That's why they never caught him.

Everyone is kind of stunned.

NORMAN

Why did you stop?

DEAKINS

I fell in love.

(beat)

And then the universe was no longer
meaningless.

Norman and Madelyn look at each other.

MADELYN

I think he's telling us the truth.

Norman nods.

SHRIMPTON

We should tell the police.

DEAKINS

Tell them what?

SHRIMPTON

That you didn't do it.

DEAKINS

Um - no: please don't do that.

SHRIMPTON

Why on earth not?!

MADELYN

Because they'll want to know how we
know he didn't do it.

DEAKINS

Yes. Exactly.

NORMAN

If we don't tell the police that you didn't do it, then they're going to waste their time trying to find you.

(beat)

Which I also assume you don't want.

DEAKINS

No.

There's something else we haven't been talking about.

(beat)

If you didn't kill George... who did?

ZENA

Whoa. Right.

DEAKINS

I was wondering that myself.

MCLEAN

Somebody pointed the cops right at you. They wanted you to go down for this. So it's someone who doesn't like you very much.

DUNDOSKI

Well: that's got to be a long list.

DEAKINS

I'm sorry to ask this. I know it's not your problem right now, but: what is evidence that George was going reveal?

MADELYN

Oh, lord - of course. I'm sorry: that must be very frightening for you. To hear that.

(beat)

He didn't have any.

DEAKINS

What do you mean?

MADELYN

He made it up. He was trying to draw you out. Get you to make a mistake.

Deakins is silent.

MADELYN (CONT'D)

Maybe we can just push the police to look other places. Without telling them we talked to you.

DEAKINS

I would appreciate that.

MADELYN

MCLEAN

It looked like you killed George because he was going to reveal new evidence that identified you. But that was a scam. He was just trying to bait you, provoke you -- lure you out in the open. He didn't have anything.

DEAKINS

I didn't even know he said he did.

MADELYN

Poor George. He couldn't even do that right.

NORMAN

It doesn't help you, anyway. Because the FBI would say you could have been lured out by fake evidence just as much as by real.

NORMAN (CONT'D)

I don't suppose you have an alibi for Thursday night?

DEAKINS

Yes, actually. I do.

NORMAN

Can you tell us what it is?

DEAKINS

It would tell you who I am..

ZENA

You know: you should team up with us.

DEAKINS

To catch me?

ZENA

No! To clear your name. If we find the real killer -- everyone will know you didn't do this. So you should help us.

ZENA (CONT'D)

I have so many questions.

NORMAN

I have one. But it's a bi--

ZENA

Well, hang on: let me ask some of mine. I'm going to record this part of the --

DEAKINS

No, I don't think I want to --

ZENA

How about this: shoot me your contact info, so I can keep you in the loop as we work on it.

Awkward silence.

DEAKINS

I...don't think so.

ZENA

This is so freaking weird. Is this as weird for you as it is for us?

DEAKINS

I have never spoken about it to anyone.

ZENA

We're like: the only ones who really understand you.

NORMAN

I don't think that's true.

ZENA

We want to.

DEAKINS

I appreciate your hearing me out.
I'm sorry if I made this all worse
for you.
I just wanted you to know.

MADELYN

Thank you.
(beat)
Take care.

Deakins disconnects.

DUNDOSKI

"Take care"? This man is a serial
killer.

EXT. SMALL TOWN FISHING PIER - CONTINUOUS

Deakins closes the cheap pre-paid flip phone and takes a
deep, frightened breath.

He looks around, uneasy. Feeling vulnerable.

A few TOURISTS walk past him.

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

Zena hands the house phone back to Madelyn. Zena still
holding the zoom-connected iphone in her other hand.

No one speaks for a moment, in shock.

EXT. SMALL TOWN FISHING PIER - CONTINUOUS

Deakins removes the phone battery and drops the dead device
into the water.

Seagulls cry. Waves wash gently past the pier's barnacle-and-
salt-crusted pillars. It is a beautiful day.

He looks down at his hands. They are trembling slightly.

Putting them in his pockets, Deakins starts walking back into
the quaint seaside New England town.

INT. FULL SCREEN: ZOOM MEETING - CONTINUOUS

DUNDOSKI
Did that really just happen?

ZENA
Yes. Yes it did. And it changes
everything.

SHRIMPTON
We have to tell the police.

ZENA
Nope. Nope. No. We can't. We
swore we wouldn't.

DUNDOSKI
No we didn't.

ZENA
We kind of did. I mean: it was
implied.
(turns to Madelyn)
Right?

INT. GEORGE'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Madelyn stares, holding the phone.

MADELYN
I don't know.
(looks at Norman)
He said he didn't do it. And I
believe him.

NORMAN
He didn't do this. He did the
other stuff.

MADELYN
What are we going to do?

EXT. SOAP SHOP - THE SAME TIME

Deakins walks along a street of cute tourist-y old clapboard
and brick-fronted shops, well-kept and sweet.

A denim-clad, white-moustached retiree...

...who unlocks the front door to The Soap Shoppe - "*artisanal
soaps, handcrafted scents and other delights*" - which jingles
with authentic bells as he goes inside.

INT. SOAP SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The shop is marvelously home-y and full of richly-colored soaps in baskets and other old-timey displays. They're so pretty you can almost smell the floral delicacy through the screen.

Deakins opens up his shop: turns off the alarm system, turns on the lights and the cash register and the acoustic folk Americana music.

But he is distracted.

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

NORMAN

We have evidence that might help the police catch a serial killer.

MADELYN

Retired serial killer.

NORMAN

Is there such a thing?

DUNDOSKI

And even if there is: doesn't he have to pay for what he did?

ZENA

What do even you mean, "evidence"? Did he really give anything away in the call?

NORMAN

The call is evidence.

And he confessed.

ZENA

Oh wow. Yes he did. This is pure gold.

DUNDOSKI

But we don't know who he is. Or where he is.

MCLEAN

We can figure that out.

ZENA

Hellz yeah we can! That's what we do. That's who we are. Websleuths.

MADELYN

Just because we can doesn't mean we should.

DUNDOSKI

We should.

ZENA

And we can.

MCLEAN

And he knows that.

Small silence.

ZENA

Wait: what?

INT. SOAP SHOP - THE SAME TIME

Deakins, writing the *Specials Of The Day* on a chalkboard in impeccable calligraphy --

-- stops halfway through the word "lavender" --

-- realizing:

They are going to come after him.

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

Madelyn looks at Norman, REALIZING they have somehow -- reluctantly, unintentionally -- got themselves into the hunt for a serial killer.

MADELYN

No, I'm not -- I don't think I want to be -- a part of that.

NORMAN

It doesn't matter what we want.

(re: McLean)

He's right. The killer's going to realize he gave us a new reason to hunt him.

MCLEAN

And new clues to hunt him with.

SHRIMPSON

Oh...holy hell.

MADELYN

No, wait. Maybe it's really just what he said. Maybe he was just reaching out, as a human being.

DUNDOSKI

If he was: big frickin' mistake.

MADELYN

What if we just -- walk away?

ZENA

We can't. No way.
(frantic, groping)
George's -- spirit -- cries out to us -- from beyond the grave.

MADELYN

George is DEAD! He GOT that way by messing around with serial killers and cold cases! Did you NOT get the lesson here?! You have to STOP. You are NOT detectives!

Long awkward silence. Norman looks at Madelyn.

MCLEAN

Fair enough. Except for one thing.
(beat)
If we don't get him...he's gonna get us.

ZENA

(eagerly)
That's right.

DUNDOSKI

He knows we know. He can't let us walk away.

MADELYN

What if we tell him -- that we won't -- come after him?!

ZENA

Would you believe that? If you were him?

They look at each other, realizing that they are now a team.

NORMAN

There's one other thing we have to figure out.

(beat)

Who did kill George.

(beat)

And why.

Zena goes to Madelyn, takes her hands -- reassuring, and yet condescending. Madelyn has to make a big effort not to pull her hands away.

ZENA

I know you didn't want to be in this. I know you don't respect us. I know you think we're all losers and fools. And maybe we are.

(beat)

But if we don't work together, he can pick us off one by one. And no one will know, and know one will care.

We're a team.

(beat)

We're all Crime Crackers now.

Zena HUGS Madelyn.

Madelyn, looking over Zena's shoulder, meets Norman's eyes.

He shrugs.

END OF EPISODE 1