**ERASE ME**

written by

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based on his novel

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

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FADE IN:

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - TESS'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Black. A phone screen wakes and lights a face from below.

TESS QUINN (15) is eating Takis in the dark and watching her parents' marriage end.

ON HER PHONE: a video, shot sideways. She was twelve.

The top of a staircase. At the bottom the front door stands open on a yellow square of porch light. A MAN's back in a Carhartt jacket, a black Nike duffel over one shoulder. The edge of a woman at the foot of the stairs, a hand on the newel post, hair coming down out of a pencil.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
(low, done)
Then go.

Black. Eight seconds, and it always ends there. She drags the scrubber back to the start.

Cheap white wired earbuds, and the cord runs down her hoodie and ends in nothing. Adults see earbuds and stop talking to you. That's the point.

A text slides down over her mother's face. DAD: u up? sorry about the concert. soon.

She thumbs up the thread. March: a screenshot of two tickets, PHOEBE BRIDGERS, THE GREEK THEATRE, SECTION C, and a row of Dad's exclamation points. Her report card off the parent portal, and under it, proud of you kid.

Two years back, the same eight seconds, sent at 10:47 on a school night, and under it, from thirteen-year-old Tess: u should see what she said. He never answered it.

She types ok, looks at it a while, deletes it, and lays the phone face down on her chest to stare at the ceiling.

Through her window: Larkspur Court, Porter Ranch. Nine houses on a horseshoe of black asphalt, three colors of stucco. Hers is the gray one. Over every garage, a camera's red dot, awake.

A COYOTE trots across the circle and doesn't look back.

MAIN TITLE: ERASE ME

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR - MORNING**

The ninth floor of a glass tower in Warner Center. At the far end, a screen the size of a garage door counts every flag this floor has confirmed this quarter. 7:38. Nobody's here yet.

MARA QUINN (41) runs a strip of tape out of a Brother P-touch and wraps it around the cable from her monitor to the dock: MONITOR. The power cord beside it already says POWER. She smooths the tape flat with her thumbnail.

MARA
Good.

Brown hair up in a twist, held with an unsharpened yellow Ticonderoga. A navy blazer from the Loft outlet in Camarillo, flats she could run in. People at Meridian call her "very good" and "a lot," in that order.

SENTRY, forty files deep. A nail salon in Reseda: four cash deposits in four days, every one just under ten thousand.

The green button says CONFIRM, big, right under her mouse. The gray one says CLEAR, small, off to one side. In one corner a clock runs: REVIEW TIME. In the other, a driver's license the size of a postage stamp. The customer's face.

She doesn't click the face. She never does.

CONFIRM. The clock stops at REVIEW TIME 00:00:24. A banner wipes across the file: ACCOUNTS FROZEN. SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY REPORT FILED. RELATIONSHIP CLOSED.

Next, a retired teacher who wired $26,000 to a man she met on Facebook. CLEAR takes three screens and a box that wants forty typed characters. Mara types them.

By the window the coffee machine jams with a grinding noise, and OWEN PAK (24), the youngest analyst on the floor, steps back from it.

OWEN
Sorry.

He's talking to the machine.

10:41. Mara texts: Dr. Okimoto moved you to Thursday 4pm. Please confirm. In under a minute, TESS: ok

Tess has said ok to the dentist twice this year and gone once. Mara calls.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - MEDIA LAB - DAY**

An old chemistry room, eyewash station and all. On the one good Mac, Tess cuts the Spanish Club's Día de los Muertos table on the kick drum. Cut between the kicks and people feel sick and don't know why.

MARISOL REYES (15), who's supposed to be in study hall, eats a Lunchable beside her and talks enough for both of them.

MARISOL
You've used the abuelo three times.

TESS
He's the best thing on the table.

MARISOL
He's dead.

TESS
That's the theme.

MARISOL
Fair.

Her phone lights: MOM. She puts it on speaker. If she has to do this, she wants a witness.

INTERCUT - REVIEW FLOOR / MEDIA LAB

MARA
Hi, it's me. Did you get my text about Thursday?

TESS
I said ok.

MARA
You did. Thank you. I just want to make sure it's in the family calendar, because last time...

TESS
You don't need a period after "ok."

Mara looks at her phone.

MARA
It's punctuation, Tess.

TESS
It's a threat, Mom.

Marisol squeaks into her hand, and it comes down the line.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
It's a sentence. Sentences end with periods. That's how you know they're over.

TESS
Okay, so that's literally what I'm saying.

MARA
Thursday at four. Dr. Okimoto. I'll pick you up at three-fifteen so we're not late, and if you have a thing, move the thing.

TESS
I didn't say I had a thing.

MARA
You were about to.

She was. Mara takes a breath for the nice part, the part about teeth, and Tess hangs up.

MARISOL
Your mom texts like a hostage negotiator.

TESS
She is one. I'm the hostage.

On the Review Floor, Mara sets the phone down. She won. She feels terrible. In the lab, Tess opens the DAD thread, types ok, and sends it. No period.

END INTERCUT

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR / PRIYA'S OFFICE - DAY**

Three flags: three young men, three new accounts. Eight or nine thousand in by Zelle every Friday, out every Monday to one tow company on Laurel Canyon. SENTRY calls it three problems. Mara sees one. REVIEW TIME 00:04:03.

She walks the printout into the corner office. PRIYA SHAH (40s), the floor's director, prints every email she's ever been cc'd on.

MARA
It's one guy. He's using his nephews.

Priya reads two pages over a Ziploc of almonds.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

PRIYA
How long did that take you?

MARA
Four minutes, three seconds.

PRIYA
The floor averages twenty-eight seconds. You're my best.

Walking back, Mara passes under the big screen: 4,112 CONFIRMED THIS QUARTER, in white numbers a foot high. It ticks to 4,113 over her head. She doesn't look up.

12:02. A photo from CAL: the Bristol Farms meat counter, chicken thighs or salmon. CAL: vote. She types salmon, adds the period, and smiles at her desk when she sends it.

2:00. The weekly fraud bulletin, and an FBI notice: AI VOICE CLONING TARGETS FAMILIES. AGREE ON A SECRET WORD. She prints it for home. Tess will hate it.

5:40. On her way out she passes Owen, still on a file he opened before lunch, with the customer's license photo blown up big.

OWEN
Sorry. I just want to look.

MARA
A face tells you nothing the money doesn't.

Owen nods and keeps looking. Down on level three: the Outback, and Agatha Christie at one and three-quarter speed. Poirot sounds late for something.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT HALL / KITCHEN - EVENING**

Shoes inside the front door, lined up by somebody else. Tess's Vans, both pairs, black and checkerboard, toes to the baseboard. Mara's slippers. Brown leather work boots, size twelve, laces tucked inside.

Tess pads past them in her socks. Steely Dan, low, from the speaker over the sink. A man's back at the counter, patting a side of salmon dry, gently, all over.

CAL
(not turning around)
Shoes.

TESS
They're off.

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CAL
I know. I lined them up. I mopped.

We get a look at him now. CAL HARMON (40s). Tall, and he ducks under the pendant lights though he doesn't need to. A short beard so neat it looks drawn on. Gray Patagonia quarter-zip, white socks. He wipes the counter before the food is even on the plates.

TESS
Is it always going to be Steely Dan?

CAL
Your mom likes it.

TESS
Nobody likes Steely Dan. People put up with it.

CAL
After dinner, the speaker's yours.

TESS
Phoebe.

CAL
"Kyoto." I know.

Miso salmon at the island. Mara lays a printout by Tess's plate, where she'll have to look at it, and reads it in her work voice, the one she uses on Comcast.

MARA
"Criminals are using artificial intelligence to clone the voices of family members from short clips on social media."
(skips down)
"Families should agree on a secret word or phrase to confirm who's calling." We should have one.

TESS
Our code word is "code word." Lowercase."

MARA
The FBI's serious.

TESS
So am I. Nobody would ever guess it. It's too obvious. It loops back around.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Pick a word, Tess. Something nobody outside this house would know.

TESS
Gerald.

Mara closes her eyes.

CAL
Who's Gerald?

TESS
My goldfish. When I was six.

MARA
Nine days. I kept the receipt.

TESS
We buried him under the jacaranda in a Folgers can. Dad played "Taps" on a kazoo.

MARA
You want our emergency identity verification phrase to be the name of a dead goldfish.

TESS
He's not doing anything else.

Cal laughs. It comes half a beat late, as his laugh always does, and he covers his mouth with his napkin. Tess likes anybody who thinks she's funny before her mother does.

MARA
Fine. Gerald.

CAL
Gerald.

He raises his water glass to it. Tess raises hers. After a second, so does Mara.

After dinner Mara clears, which means she labels things. She prints SMOKED PAPRIKA and presses it onto the jar that already says Smoked Paprika, in red cursive.

TESS
It already says what it is.

MARA
Cursive doesn't count.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Cal's tablet chimes by the stove, three notes, rising. At the same moment Mara's phone buzzes. She holds it out to him across the salmon.

MARA
It wants an admin approval. I confirm things all day. You do this one. I don't want to know how it works.

He taps twice and hands it back.

CAL
Doorbell update. I'll change all your passwords tonight, too. They're overdue.

MARA
It meets the requirements.

CAL
It's your birthday.

MARA
Backwards.

TESS
That's still your birthday.

Cal laughs and holds out his hand for her phone. He changes them right there while she rinses plates. For a second the screen reads RECOVERY CONTACT: CAL HARMON. She doesn't look. He sets his tablet face down by the stove.

MARA
(trying for casual)
When did your dad last text you?

Everybody gets very interested in their hands.

TESS
He texted.

MARA
Good. Is he still employed?

TESS
It's a rig, Mom. He's on a rig. In North Dakota.

MARA
I know where it is, Tess.

Steely Dan plays into the gap. Mara turns her mug a quarter turn, and back.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
There's mango sorbet. Or the good chocolate, the Valrhona, that I'm hiding from your mother.

MARA
Behind the flour. I labeled the shelf.

CAL
I know.

Mara laughs before she can stop it. Half a beat later, so does he.

**EXT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - NIGHT**

We watch from the circle. Every window in the gray house is lit. Every eave on Larkspur Court has its red dot, and this house has the most. Its doorbell wears a blue ring that never goes out.

Upstairs, Tess lets a square of Valrhona melt and counts the red dots. From downstairs, faint, the two of them are still laughing. Tess listens until the chocolate is gone.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - CONFERENCE ROOM 9B - DAY**

On Mara's phone, a voicemail transcript. DR. OKIMOTO DENTAL: "...family emergency, we need to move Tess to next Thursday, same time..." She drags the pickup a week. She won that argument for nothing.

2:00. The good conference room, and a box of Krispy Kreme already raided. Eleven people come in after Mara.

PRIYA
Phones face down.

Mara turns hers over and squares it to the edge of the table with two fingers. The VICE PRESIDENT FROM RETAIL leaves his face up, and Priya lets it go.

Owen dates a spiral notebook and winds his lanyard once around his fist. He takes the minutes. Nobody asked him to.

GORDON FISK (50s), Legal, in a suit the color of the carpet, eats a glazed with a plastic fork, one small square at a time. That explains a lot about Legal.

Mara writes 2nd deposit (was 4th) on her pad and underlines it. This is her room. Item four: FLOOR CORRESPONDENCE.

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PRIYA
The auditors want to know who reads it.

OWEN
Sorry. I do. Sometimes. At lunch.

He slides a printed email down the table, hand to hand past the donuts.

INSERT - THE EMAIL

You "made a business decision." What decision? I have two kids. Please just tell me what I did.

BACK TO SCENE

OWEN
Can we tell her why?

FISK
(pleasantly, around a square of donut)
Federal law. We can't tell her anything.

OWEN
Sorry. Is that the law, or is that us?

FISK
It's the policy that keeps us inside the law.

MARA
Right call. Tell a structurer why I closed him, and Monday he's at Chase, depositing ninety-four hundred.
(then)
So let's stop collecting mail we're not allowed to answer. I move we sunset the inbox.

Owen writes it in small square printing: MQ moves to sunset FLOOR CORR. He looks up at her over the notebook. We catch the look. Mara doesn't.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - VICE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY**

Nobody's in. A desk phone rings. Its display reads 2:14 PM. Voicemail picks up, a red light blinks, and on the line, first, a breath.

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MARA'S VOICE
(on the line)
Mr. Ruiz, this is Mara Quinn, Tess Quinn's mother...

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - CONFERENCE ROOM 9B - CONTINUOUS**

Mara's phone lies face down, squared to the edge. Beside the donuts, the Retail VP's phone lights up: 2:14. Eleven people would swear to that. Nobody seconds. Priya tables it, and the inbox survives. Owen folds the woman's letter into the back of his notebook.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - FRONT OFFICE - DAY**

Burnt coffee and the laminating machine. Tess on a varnished bench with a pink slip from the middle of the Krebs cycle: Mr. Ruiz. Now please.

Through the vice principal's glass wall, her mother. Navy blazer, pencil through her hair, both hands on her bag. Across the desk HECTOR RUIZ (50s), a face built for disappointment, long and kind, pokes his phone.

We're out here with Tess, on her side of the glass.

A CLICK. The speaker. A breath, in and out.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the speaker)
Mr. Ruiz, this is Mara Quinn, Tess Quinn's mother. I'm calling about Tess's math teacher. Mr. Delgado.

Tess's head comes up.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the speaker)
He's been touching my daughter. More than once. If the school doesn't do something today...

Behind the voice, a long soft hiss of water. A dishwasher on its rinse cycle, somewhere in the room the call came from.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the speaker)
I'll handle him myself.

Through the glass, her mother sits perfectly still.

So who's talking? Her mother's mouth is shut.

Tess knows this from the media lab. When the sound doesn't belong to the face, people feel sick and can't say why. She

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feels sick. She pushes her earbuds in deeper. Her mother turns and looks at her through the glass, and Tess looks at the floor.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - RUIZ'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

MARA
That's not me.

RUIZ
It's your number, Ms. Quinn. It came in yesterday afternoon. I had to pull Mr. Delgado out of his last class.

Mara leans in without asking and reads the little screen upside down.

INSERT - THE DESK PHONE DISPLAY

INCOMING. Her cell number. THU 2:14 PM. DURATION 0:51.

BACK TO SCENE

MARA
I was in a meeting with eleven people. Conference Room 9B at Meridian Bank, two o'clock to two-forty. My phone was face down on the table the whole time. Call Priya Shah.

She hears herself, crisp and a little too slow. It's the woman on the speaker, exactly.

MARA
Somebody spoofed my number. You can make a call show any number you want. I see it at work every day.
(then)
And there's a dishwasher running behind that. On the rinse. It sounds like mine.

RUIZ
Everybody's dishwasher sounds like that.
(the long sad face)
Ms. Quinn, I'm a mandated reporter. A parent calls and says a teacher is abusing her child, I don't get to decide whether it's true. And honestly, thank God. I reported it to the county last night.

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In his chair she'd have done the same thing in under a minute, and been right to.

MARA
He didn't do anything.

RUIZ
Then the county will find that.

MARA
And my file?

Ruiz doesn't answer. He looks past her through the glass, at the bench.

RUIZ
I'm sorry.

He is.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - FRONT OFFICE / MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS**

Tess stands up when her mother comes out, and then doesn't know what to do with having stood up.

TESS
What was that?

MARA
Somebody spoofed my number. Yesterday, two-fourteen. It wasn't me.

Tess gives her the look. Mara invented that look. It's the one you give a report that doesn't add up.

TESS
Okay.

MARA
It wasn't me, Tess.

TESS
I said okay.

The empty main hall, WELCOME BACK KNIGHTS in gold foil over the gym doors. Mara takes her daughter's hand. She doesn't decide to. Her hand squeezes three times, short, short, short, the way it has since Tess was four.

MARA
Three. Still means I love you.

Tess pulls her hand away.

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TESS
I'm not six.

She says it flat, and it isn't mean. Both hands go into her hoodie pocket, and she heads back to class, earbuds in, before Mara can tell her not to.

**INT. MARA'S OUTBACK - NORTHGATE LOT - DAY**

Engine off, and her hands aren't steady. The last text from GREG is from August, a sunset he says is North Dakota. She types Did you do this? and sends it before she can make it any nicer.

Greg has never answered anything quickly in his life, including his own wedding vows. The reply lands before the dots can appear. GREG: not everything is about you mar

MONTAGE - GLITCHES

3:04 on the bedside clock. Mara wakes drenched, the furnace roaring. The thermostat app: 81°, SCHEDULE: COMFORT. She never made a schedule called Comfort. Beside her Cal sleeps through it.

Morning. Cal frowns at his tablet against the sugar bowl, and taps.

CAL
Firmware. They pushed an update and it reset a bunch of people's schedules. There. I'm sorry. It's my system. I take it personally.

Eggs scrambled soft for Mara and hard for Tess, who eats hers standing up with her backpack on.

TESS
These are acceptable.

10:40, the Review Floor. An email from MRS. OCHOA, DCFS, the county social worker on Tess's case: she called at their scheduled time and got no answer. Mara's calendar says 11:00. She set it for 10:00. Last edited by Mara Quinn, Monday, 11:38 PM. She was asleep by ten.

MARA
(into the phone, crisp)
Mrs. Ochoa, I'm so sorry. I'd never miss a call from DCFS. There was a problem with my calendar.

A padded mailer on the kitchen counter, addressed to her. An orange pharmacy bottle. MARA QUINN. OXYCODONE HCL 10 MG. QTY 30. VIA TELEHEALTHNOW. CAREDIRECT PHARMACY, TEMPE, AZ.

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PHARMACIST (V.O.)
(on speaker)
The patient was seen on a video visit last week. She looked fine to him.

MARA
Then somebody sat in front of him wearing my face.

She prints NOT MINE on the P-touch and presses it across the label, right over her own name. The bottle goes in the back of the junk drawer, with the takeout menus, the rubber bands and an envelope she labeled CASH.

You might want to remember that drawer.

Mara's legal pad: what happened down the left side, who could have done it down the right. The right side has one name all the way down. GREG. Cal sets a cup of tea by her elbow and reads over her shoulder.

CAL
Why Greg?

MARA
He gambled. Four years ago a Capital One card in my name came across my own desk at work. Maxed out in nine days at the casino in Commerce.

CAL
You're sure it was him?

MARA
A man who'd forge my name on a credit card would forge my voice on a phone.

CAL
I changed every password in the house. If he's getting in, he's not getting in through me.

9:15. RUTH. Ruth always calls at 9:15, after Wheel of Fortune and before the news.

RUTH (ON PHONE)
(no hello)
My son says you won't let him talk to her.

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MARA
He hasn't called her in two years, Ruth. He hasn't called anybody. He texts.

RUTH (ON PHONE)
(gone soft)
I'm just worried. You don't sound like yourself.

MARA
I sound exactly like myself. That's the problem.

END MONTAGE

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Late. Overhead the shower runs: Cal. The dishwasher starts its long soft rinse hiss. Her phone buzzes. GREG: she deserves better than this. Under it, a photo.

INSERT - THE PHOTO

Mara at this sink, tonight, sleeves pushed up, rinsing a mug under the pendant light. Taken from the dark of the backyard, through the window.

BACK TO SCENE

The window over the sink is black. From out there, she's the only thing anybody can see.

She slaps off the pendant. The dishwasher keeps hissing.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR - DAY**

3:05. A soft chime from her phone. She reads the reminder without thinking.

INSERT - THE REMINDER

Pick up T @ Northgate, 3:45. Dr. Okimoto 4:30.

BACK TO SCENE

We remember 3:15. She doesn't. It's her own phone.

**EXT. NORTHGATE HIGH - PICKUP LANE - DAY**

3:38 on the Outback's dash. A long red curb under ficus trees, empty. The buses are gone. No Tess.

Mara texts: Here. Out front. Two minutes go by with nothing.

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TESS (V.O.)
(voicemail greeting)
It's Tess. Don't leave a voicemail, I won't listen to it.

Find My. Where Tess's blue dot should be: No location found.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - FRONT OFFICE - DAY**

MARA
Quinn, Tess. Tenth grade. Pickup.

MRS. PHAM (60s) signs kids out in green ink, because red is for tardies. Her face does a small polite surprise.

MRS. PHAM
You called, Ms. Quinn. You said you were running late and she should get a ride. Two-forty. I signed her out myself at the bell.

MARA
I didn't call. I was at my desk at two-forty.

MRS. PHAM
It was you. I know your voice. You sounded tired. You kind of took a second before you answered things.

**INT. MARA'S OUTBACK - MOVING - DAY**

Tess: voicemail. CALL ME NOW, in capitals, which she never does. Cal: voicemail, on a big install in Calabasas. Ruth rings out to a man's voice. Ruth never changed the greeting on her phone.

GREG (V.O.)
(recorded, years ago)
You've reached Ruth. She's probably at church.

Mara hangs up on her ex-husband.

Round and round the Northridge Fashion Center parking structure, every girl in a hoodie getting a look. She's terrified. Her hands are cold on the wheel and she can't feel her feet.

4:16. RUTH: Tess is here with me. Are you alright?

Mara puts her forehead on the steering wheel and breathes until she can see.

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**EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE, JIMENO AVENUE, GRANADA HILLS - DAY**

A split-level, manila-folder beige. A plaster Virgin Mary by the porch, and seven lawn gnomes, which Ruth moves every few weeks so the neighbors know she's still alive.

Tess on the porch steps, earbuds in. Mara's out of the car before it has properly stopped.

MARA
Where were you? Why is your location off? Why didn't you answer your phone? I called you eight times, Tess. Eight.

Tess stands up. White, then red.

TESS
You told me to come here.

MARA
I didn't tell you anything. Show me.

TESS
You texted me. You texted me at like two-forty. "Running late take an Uber to Grandma's I'll meet you there." Right there. From you.

ON TESS'S PHONE, in a gray bubble under MOM: running late take an uber to grandmas ill meet you there

MARA
I didn't send that. Look at it. There isn't one period in it.

TESS
I thought you finally listened!

MARA
I didn't send it! And why would you turn your location off?

TESS
I didn't turn it off!

MARA
Then who did?

TESS
I don't know! You're the one who's...

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MARA
Don't you dare. Don't you dare tell me what I am. I thought...
(her voice cracks down the middle)
Do you have any idea what I thought? Do you have any idea?

Across the street a NEIGHBOR stops watering his roses to watch. Mara sees him see her. She's doing exactly what the woman on the voicemail would do.

The screen door BANGS. RUTH QUINN (68) comes down the driveway in gardening clogs, a rosary wound around the fingers of one hand. Small and solid, white hair set every Saturday. She steps between them without hurrying.

RUTH
Mara. Honey. She's here. She's fine. Look at her.

MARA
She turned her location off, Ruth.

TESS
I didn't!

Mara looks up. Ruth's doorbell: a little blue ring around the button, a camera eye on top. Three feet from where Mara stands. It saw all of it.

RUTH
The doorbell? Cal put that in for me. In the spring. Wasn't that sweet of him?

A white Tacoma pulls up, ladder rack, a magnetic security-company sign on the door. Cal crosses the lawn without hurrying and puts a hand lightly on Tess's shoulder. He says something we don't hear, and Tess's face crumples.

CAL
(over his shoulder)
Ruth called me. I was on a ladder in Calabasas. Are you okay?

MARA
Somebody texted her from my phone. Somebody called the school.

CAL
Okay. Let me get her home and get some food in her, and you take a minute. I've got her.

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He walks Tess to the truck and pulls away at the speed limit, signaling at the corner. Ruth presses the rosary to her chest.

RUTH
Thank God for that man.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - GARAGE - DUSK**

The Outback noses in. Behind it, the garage door rumbles down on its own, as it always does. She sits in the dark until the engine stops ticking.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Cal asleep beside her. The neighborhood app, top of the Granada Hills feed. JimenoNeighbor, Joined today: Heated incident on Jimeno Ave this afternoon, anyone know what happened?? Hope the girl is ok.

A doorbell clip, forty-one seconds long. A woman in a navy blazer with a pencil through her hair, on a front lawn, shouting at a teenage girl.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Do you have any idea what I thought?

83 comments. She watches it twice. The second time she makes herself watch her own face.

It's real, every frame of it. Nobody faked a thing.

That's the worst part.

**INT. DANA WEXLER'S OFFICE, VENTURA BLVD - DAY**

Upstairs from a Persian bakery in Encino. It smells so strongly of rosewater that clients cry before they've said a word, which Dana considers a time saver.

DANA WEXLER (60s), small and sharp. Reading glasses, a gray bob she cuts herself, badly, on principle. Sesame cookies she never offers a client. A legal pad with a red line down the middle: FACT on the left, FEELING on the right.

DANA
(without looking up)
Sit. This is going to be a lot of FEELING, so let's get through it. Ruth filed Friday. Emergency guardianship. Greg's backing her, by email. He's "deeply concerned about Mara's state of mind."

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
He's never been deeply concerned about a bill in his life.

DANA
FEELING. Keep going.

Exhibit E, added to Ruth's petition this morning. From Mara's own account, to Ruth, cc Greg. Saturday, 3:12 AM.

INSERT - EXHIBIT E

Per my last email, you will never see her again. Neither of you. I will take her somewhere none of you can find her and I'll make sure she understands what you are. Don't test me.

BACK TO SCENE

DANA
(a flight attendant pointing out the exits)
"Per my last email, you will never see her again."

MARA
I would never write that.

DANA
The threat?

MARA
"Per my last email." I would never in my life write "per my last email."
(hears herself)
And the threat. Obviously. I didn't write any of it.

Dana writes it down under FEELING, word for word.

MARA
That's not a feeling. That's a fact about me.

DANA
It's a fact about you that a judge can't check. FACT is what the court can see. An email from your account. You on a lawn. A voicemail from your number accusing a teacher of molesting your daughter. Everything you've told me goes under FEELING. That doesn't mean it isn't true. It means it isn't evidence.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
I reported the photo through my kitchen window. Devonshire gave me a report number and said it sounded like a family matter.

DANA
It is a family matter. That's the trouble with it.

The cookie plate sits between them, untouched.

DANA
I'm going to tell you once, and I'm going to bill you for it, so listen.

She counts it off on her fingers.

DANA
The hearing's in three weeks, in front of a commissioner who has forty of these a week. The standard is low. A recording comes in if somebody says it sounds like you. That's the whole bar. The court doesn't need it to be true. It needs it to be sufficient.

Mara's scared, and she hates it. She reaches across and takes a sesame cookie without asking. Dana watches her do it and doesn't say a word.

MARA
What about Tess? Tess knows me.

DANA
At a full hearing the judge would ask her. This one's an emergency. That email is what made it one. Nobody asks her anything.
(then)
Consent. You agree to it, for now.

MARA
No.

DANA
Tess stays with Ruth during the week, home on weekends. In the spring we go back in and fight it properly.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
I read files all day. A mother who agrees is a mother who knows what's in the file. I'm going to find out who's doing this.

DANA
Mara.

MARA
I'll prove it.

Dana looks at her over the glasses for a long moment, then writes something in the FACT column. Mara tries to read it upside down, and can't. That's a first.

DANA
That was six minutes. Plus the last forty-two. I'll send you a bill. You'll hate it.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - GREG'S OLD ROOM - DAY**

Greg's boyhood room, unchanged: a 1988 Dodgers pennant gone pink, a plaid bedspread. Through the wall, Murder, She Wrote at volume 38. She checked.

Saturdays are Grandma's. Tess on the bedspread, earbuds in, plugged into nothing. The DAD thread ends on her ok, unanswered. She types can u facetime, almost deletes it, and sends it.

The dots appear. They go away. They come back. DAD: no signal out here kid. sorry. sending u something

A video, seven seconds long. Her father, GREG QUINN (40s), in the cab of a truck in a Carhartt beanie, smiling, the window behind him blown out white.

GREG (ON SCREEN)
(a little hoarse)
Miss you, kid.

Her throat closes. She watches it again. A third time, for his voice.

At four seconds he blinks, left eye a hair before the right, as always. A second later he blinks again. She drags it back frame by frame, the media-lab way. The lids come down at the same speed. The light moves on his cheek the same way.

TESS
(under her breath)
Same blink. It's on a loop.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Her dad is the least technical man in America. He once asked her how to make a GIF stop.

Ruth knocks on the doorframe with her elbow, with warm tube sugar cookies and a glass of milk.

RUTH
Is that my Gregory?

TESS
It's a video.

RUTH
Tell him to call his mother.

TESS
He doesn't have signal.

RUTH
He has signal to send you a video.

She smooths the bedspread at the corner and looks up at Greg's pennant.

RUTH
Tell him his mother would like to hear his voice. Just once.

She goes. Tess drags the video back to four seconds and holds it there with her thumb: her father's face, with his eyes closed.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - GREG'S OLD ROOM - MORNING**

7:02 on the lock screen. MOM: Stop texting your father. He doesn't want you. Neither did I.

Capital letters and periods. It looks exactly like her mother, and her mother has never in her life said anything like neither did I.

She breaks a three-year rule. DAD: dad what did she say that night. after then go. i stopped recording. i need to know

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - DAY**

The door's locked and the fan's roaring. 2:20. DAD: ur old phone was on my icloud kid. the whole file backed up before u trimmed it. im sorry. u should know

Her clip. The stairs, her father's back, her mother at the bottom with her hair coming down, a stripe of porch light across her cheek.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Then go.

Her screen always goes black here. Today it keeps going.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Take her with you. I never wanted her.

Her father's shoulders move. He doesn't turn. Black.

Tess looks at her own thumb. She doesn't remember trimming it. A loop is Dad hiding something. This is her own clip, off her own stairs. She plays the stairs again.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Garlic and tomatoes. Cal at the stove in his white socks, making Sunday sauce from his grandmother's recipe. Unfortunately, it's incredible. Steely Dan. At the island, Mara looks up from a white binder and smiles, a real one.

Tess holds out her phone.

TESS
"He doesn't want you. Neither did I." Did you send this?

Mara's face does its work thing, smooth and blank. Tess hates that face most of all.

MARA
No.

TESS
It's from you.

MARA
It's from my number. Tess, I didn't write that. I was asleep at seven-oh-two. Somebody's sending things from my phone. The school, the Uber text, this.

TESS
And this? Dad had the whole file.

She cranks the volume all the way up and holds the video out between them.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Then go. Take her with you. I never wanted her.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

The wooden spoon stops in the pot. Steely Dan keeps going, a cheerful horn section, and Mara's face goes white.

MARA
I never said that.

TESS
I was there.

MARA
Then you know what I said.

TESS
I know what I recorded.

Mara comes around the island, palms up. Tess steps back. Mara stops.

MARA
Somebody took your video and made my voice say that. They can do that now. That's what the FBI bulletin was about, the code word...

TESS
That's what you'd say anyway.

MARA
I would never have said that about you. Not that night. Not any night.

TESS
Then what did you say?

Mara opens her mouth. Tess has waited three years for this.

Mara looks at Cal. Half a second, over Tess's shoulder, at Cal by the stove with the spoon. Then back to Tess. She takes a breath.

MARA
After "then go," I told him...

TESS
Don't. I don't want to hear it in front of him.

Cal looks down into the pot. Mara closes her mouth and keeps it closed.

Tess's face burns all the way to her ears. Her mother looked at him first.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TESS
I'm going to Grandma's. Until the hearing.

She's already texting. ON TESS'S PHONE: can u come back and get me pls

In under a minute: RUTH: Yes. Capital Y.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT HALL - NIGHT**

Tess on the stairs with a duffel, every hoodie she owns. Cal at the bottom, hand out.

TESS
I've got it.

CAL
I know. Let me anyway.

She puts on the black Vans from the line by the door and leaves the checkerboards where they are. She lets him take the duffel. He carries it down the walk to Ruth's Buick at the curb and sets it on the back seat with both hands.

MARA
(from the doorway)
Tess.

Cal walks back up the path and puts a hand on Mara's arm.

CAL
(low)
Give her the room, Mara. She'll come back. Give her the room.

**INT. RUTH'S BUICK - CONTINUOUS**

Ruth puts it in drive without a word. Through the open window: a soft electronic chirp, and the heavy CLUNK of the front door of 14 Larkspur Court locking itself.

Mara's still on the step. Nobody touched the keypad. Tess faces front. It's a smart lock. Smart locks do that.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT HALL - NIGHT**

Mara punches her own code into her own front door. The line of shoes, and beside Tess's checkerboards a gap exactly one pair of Vans wide.

She locks the door again herself, by hand, on the deadbolt, and stands there with her hand on it. Cal turns off the speaker and kisses the side of her head.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
Hall light's on. Take your time.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - THE OFFICE OFF THE GARAGE - NIGHT**

A desk, a door, a printer, and nobody else ever comes in. The P-touch whirs out EVIDENCE, and she presses it onto the binder's spine. She uncaps a Pilot G2 she isn't supposed to bring home from nine. Feelings don't go in this notebook.

INSERT - THE NOTEBOOK

NOV 5. Fake voicemail to Northgate HS from my cell, 2:14 pm (I was in 9B, 11 witnesses).

NOV 8. Thermostat set to 81 at 3:04 am. Cal says firmware.

NOV 22. Video of the stairs, sent to Tess. My voice. "Take her with you. I never wanted her." NOT SAID.

BACK TO SCENE

She presses NOT SAID hard enough to dent the next page. Midnight. Her old HP LaserJet clears its throat before every page, and she loves it. Exhibit E with its headers. The calendar's edit history. The pill label.

When the HP goes quiet, the binder is an inch thick. She lays her hand flat on it. She's going to prove it. She's afraid of what that takes.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Cal reads a paperback history of the Panama Canal by a clip-on light. He holds up the covers on her side. Light off. In the dark she tells him all of it, the feelings too. He listens and doesn't try to fix it. At the stairs video, her voice goes.

MARA
She asked me what I said. After "then go." Three years, and she's never asked. I started to tell her, and she wouldn't let me. Not in front of you.

His thumb moves on her shoulder.

CAL
What did you say? That night. After.

She takes a breath.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
I said...

TIME CUT TO:

Later. They make love, slow and a little sad, her shirt over the side of the bed, his mouth at her collarbone. After, she lies with her hand flat on his chest, over his heart, and sleeps the whole night through for the first time in a week.

On the ceiling over the bed, the smoke detector's small red light glows, steady, as it always does. We stay on it.

MARA'S VOICE (PRELAP)
You've reached Mara Quinn. I'm sorry I missed you...

**INT. TEDDY OKAFOR'S OFFICE, RESEDA BLVD - DAY**

A phone on speaker in a big hand.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the phone)
...Please leave your name, your number and a good time to reach you, and I'll call you right back.

BEEP. The hand ends the call.

TEDDY OKAFOR (50s) has heard the whole greeting with his eyes shut. Heavy shoulders, gray beard cut close, studio headphones around his neck with gaffer tape on one hinge.

TEDDY
Ten seconds. Nine and a half, actually. You talk fast when you're being nice.

Mara sits very straight on a beat-up leather couch, notebook open, a good pen ready. Over her head, framed, a gold record: TABERNACLE OF PRAISE MASS CHOIR, LIVE AT WEST ANGELES, 1997. MIXED BY THEODORE OKAFOR.

He plugs his phone into a laptop. On the middle monitor, a waveform and a button that says GENERATE in a friendly rounded font. It could make birthday cards.

TEDDY
This is free. Somebody's graduate thesis. I'm not going to show you the paid ones.

MARA
Why not?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TEDDY
I don't want to put ideas in your head about what's possible.

He types a sentence where she can't see it and presses GENERATE. It's faster than she can lean forward.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the monitor)
I'm not well. I can't be trusted with my daughter.

It's her. The bright voicemail register, and the tiny catch on "daughter" she's hated on every meeting recording.

Mara's sick to her stomach. She looks up at the drop ceiling, lips moving. She's counting the tiles.

MARA
I thought you needed hours. Of somebody talking.

TEDDY
Five years ago, hours. Now that one needs ten seconds. Five dollars a month gets you the good one. You tick a box that says you have the person's permission. It's a very small box.

He folds his hands on his stomach. The desk chair complains.

TEDDY
Now the part Dana's paying me for. I'll run everything you've got through every detector I own and sign a report you can put in front of a judge. And the report will say inconclusive.

MARA
You haven't heard them yet.

TEDDY
I've written thirty of these this year. Add a little background noise, run it through a phone line, and the software can't tell any more than you can.

MARA
Then I'm reviewing the wrong file.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TEDDY
Stop listening to the voice. The voice is the easy part. Every forger I've ever seen caught, and I've seen seven, got caught on records.

MARA
Account logs. Device IDs. Recovery numbers.

TEDDY
You've done this.

MARA
Eleven years. Fraud, at a bank.

TEDDY
Then you know the phone company won't talk unless a judge makes them. And a judge won't make them without a reason.
(a smile, not much in it)
And the reason is in the records.

INSERT - THE NOTEBOOK
Records. Recovery numbers. Subpoena, underlined.

**INT. STAIRWELL OVER CLOUD DISTRICT VAPE SHOP - CONTINUOUS**

Narrow stairs. At the bottom, the vape shop's chalkboard: BLUE RAZZ. MANGO ICE. UNICORN MILK. The stairwell smells of all three.

At the street door Teddy takes off the headphones and turns them over in his hands.

TEDDY
One more thing, free. These programs are stupid in one way. A model only knows what it's been fed. It knows what it's seen. It doesn't know what it hasn't. And the good ones learn slow. Months to get all of you right. Days to learn anything new.

She writes it down against the wall.

TEDDY
Last question. It matters for everything after. Who's had ten seconds of you?

Mara laughs, short and loud. It bounces down the stairwell.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

FLASH CUT: THE OUTBACK, OUTSIDE TESS'S MIDDLE SCHOOL

Mara records her greeting into the phone, chin up, bright.

FLASH CUT: THE MERIDIAN INTRANET

A bank training video. MARA QUINN, SENIOR ANALYST.

FLASH CUT: YOUTUBE

A compliance panel in Anaheim. Four hundred views.

BACK TO SCENE

MARA
Everyone.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

The turkey's been in since six. Two boxes of Stove Top sit beside the homemade stuffing, because Ruth likes people to have a choice. Ruth ticks off a shopping list on the back of a church bulletin. Tess wipes the good Lenox, a wedding present from 1979, plate by plate.

TESS
You don't invite people you're suing to Thanksgiving.

RUTH
I'm not suing anybody. I filed a petition. It's different. Father Tomás explained it.

She pins the bulletin under the harvest-gold wall phone by the stove. Its cord reaches the burners.

RUTH
And she's your mother, and he's a very nice man, and I'm not sitting at that table with an empty chair where your mother should be. I did that three years with your father.

Out the window, the white Tacoma pulls up.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS**

Mara, in the gray sweater she wears to things she's nervous about, a bowl under foil. Cal behind her with two white Porto's boxes. His boots come off first, unasked, and go against the wall, side by side.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
Guava and cheese strudels. And a pumpkin pie, because you can't not have a pumpkin pie.

MARA
Brussels sprouts. With bacon. I know nobody's going to eat them.

RUTH
I'll eat them. Offer it up.

She won't.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - LATER**

Ruth at the head. Cal at the foot, because he's carving. Tess and Mara across from each other with the turkey between them. A negotiating table.

Ruth folds her hands. Her grace is famous in this family, and not in a good way.

RUTH
...and Father Tomás's knee, and the families from the fire in Altadena, and the Holy Father, and the troops, and Lord, we ask that you look after the bullpen, which needs it, especially in the late innings. You know what I mean, Lord.

Tess's eyes come open. Across the table, Mara's eyes are already open. Her wrist is turned up by her fork. She's timing it.

Their eyes meet. For one second they're both going to lose it. Tess bites her cheek until she tastes salt.

RUTH
(a different voice)
And we ask you to bring Greg home. Wherever he is today. Amen.

EVERYONE
Amen.

Cal carves. The white meat goes out on the platter fanned, every slice one thickness.

RUTH
Where did you learn to do that?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
My grandmother. She'd smack my hand with the spoon if the slices weren't even. She's the reason I make Sunday sauce.

RUTH
Good for her.

Tess eats a lot, hungry for the first time in two weeks. Mara passes her the cranberry, the ridged kind from the can, without being asked. Tess takes it and doesn't say thank you. That's almost a conversation.

Ruth's phone BUZZES by her plate. Her whole face lights up. She holds it at arm's length. She won't wear her readers at the table.

RUTH
Oh. It's from your father. "Happy Thanksgiving, Mom. Miss you all. Love to Tess."

She pats the phone. From her seat Tess can read it: happy thanksgiving mom. miss u all. love to tess.

RUTH
He remembered.

Tess looks at her plate. Her father said hi through Grandma.

Mara gives Ruth's phone the look she gives a screen she doesn't trust.

Cal gets up from the foot of the table and refills Ruth's white zinfandel. Nobody asked him to.

CAL
That's nice, Ruth. Say when.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER**

Mara at the sink, sleeves pushed up. Tess loads the Kenmore.

MARA
(to the sink)
I know you don't believe me.

TESS
I don't know which one's you.

Mara's hands stop under the water.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
That's fair. Send me the video from the stairs. It's the one gap in my binder.

TESS
No.

MARA
Okay.

TESS
Not today.

MARA
Okay.

Tess starts the Kenmore. It ROARS.

Ruth backs through the swinging door with the gravy boat.

RUTH
Who wants gravy? Mara? There's a lot of gravy.

MARA
I'm good, Ruth.

TESS
I'm good.

Ruth looks from one to the other. She sets the gravy boat on the counter between them and goes back out to the pie.

MONTAGE - THE DESKS

The Larkspur dining table. ON MARA'S LAPTOP, a cartoon owl in a red scarf: MERRY, YOUR MERIDIAN ASSISTANT.

MERRY: Hi Mara! We've placed a temporary hold on your checking account ending in 4471 due to unusual crypto activity. We apologise for the inconvience.

Her statement: three weekend transfers to a trading app whose logo is a cartoon rocket ship.

MARA
(to the screen)
A crypto hold? Really, Greg?

She types: "Apologize" is spelled with a z. "Inconvenience" has four n's.

MERRY: I'm sorry, I didn't understand that. Your estimated wait time is 47 minutes.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Somewhere on the ninth floor, her own account sits in a queue, waiting for somebody she trained.

Night. The JimenoNeighbor account, emptied, a gray silhouette. Joined November 12. The P-touch comes out of the junk drawer, where it lives now beside the orange bottle labeled NOT MINE. GHOST, on a tab.

END MONTAGE

**EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - BACK STEP - DAY**

Mara comes around the side of the house past the lemon tree. Out front, the doorbell's blue ring watches the lawn. It can't see back here.

Ruth comes to the screen door in her gardening clogs.

MARA
I'll be in Sacramento next Tuesday. The eighth. Overnight. In case Tess needs anything.

RUTH
What's in Sacramento?

MARA
Records.

Ruth looks at her a long moment, then goes and comes back with a banana.

RUTH
You should eat something.

Mara stands there holding a banana from a suspect.

**INT. DANA WEXLER'S OFFICE - DAY**

The plate of sesame cookies. The FACT and FEELING columns.

MARA
I'll be in Sacramento on the ninth. Wednesday. All day.

DANA
Nothing comes up on a Wednesday.

She writes it under FACT.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - MORNING**

Steely Dan over the sink. Cal at the stove in white socks, working the eggs.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

ON MARA'S PHONE, a text to GREG: I'll be in Sacramento Thursday the 10th, all day. Records office. If you want to talk, call me before then.

Send.

INSERT - THE NOTEBOOK
RUTH: TUE 8. DANA: WED 9. GREG: THU 10.

BACK TO SCENE

Under the three names she writes CAL. She looks up. He's sliding an egg onto her plate, soft, singing along with Donald Fagen under his breath.

She draws one neat line through his name.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - DINING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON**

ON THE LAPTOP, the attendance office is happy to help. Under its reply, an email from her own account, sent this morning at 10:52:

Hi, Tess will need to leave early next Thursday (12/10) as I'll be out of town that day. Please release her at 11. Thank you, Mara Quinn

She circles GREG: THU 10.

MARA
(to the screen)
Thursday. I only told Greg.

For about ten seconds, Mara's won. Then she writes under the circle: SAME HANDS. Whoever reads Greg's phone writes to Tess's school as her.

TIME CUT TO:

Dark. Bristol Farms bags rustle at the front door. Cal steps out of his boots and leans in.

CAL
Why are you sitting in the dark?

MARA
Thinking.

She gets up and turns on the lamp.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR - MORNING**

The elevator opens on nine. ON MARA'S PHONE, a calendar invite: Check-in. 9:00. Priya's office. No description.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Forty analysts, and nobody looks up. At her desk, a text from a number she doesn't have saved: It's Kim from Wire Fraud. I'm so sorry. I don't believe it. I thought you should see.

And a video. A concrete stairwell, a metal handrail, a red EXIT sign at the edge of the frame. Mara at the lens, red in the face, her hair coming down from the pencil.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
You're useless. You're a waste of a desk. I'll make sure you never work in a bank again.

OWEN'S VOICE
(from the phone, crying)
I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

She trained that voice.

Two rows over, Owen Pak has gone white, his lanyard wound so tight around his fist the fingertips are dark. He comes over and talks low.

OWEN
I told them it never happened. I told Priya, I told HR. I've never even been in that stairwell with you. They said I was in shock.

MARA
It's not your fault. Write that down.

OWEN
I know. But I'm sorry anyway.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - PRIYA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS**

The almonds in their Ziploc, untouched. Priya's kind about it. Mara would rather she yelled.

PRIYA
I don't believe it. Not the Mara I know.

MARA
But?

PRIYA
But what I believe isn't the point. It went to the whole floor, then HR, then Legal. Paid leave, pending a review. Your badge goes off at
(MORE)

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

PRIYA (CONT'D)
the end of this meeting. You're my best. That's why this is so hard to explain.

MARA
Then don't.

On Priya's monitor, the video's paused on the stairwell.

PRIYA
Which stairwell is that?

MARA
I don't know. I take the elevator. I've taken the elevator for eleven years.

Priya writes something small on the corner of her blotter, beside a coffee ring, and doesn't show her.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR - CONTINUOUS**

Mara opens the supply cabinet and takes the whole box of Pilot G2s. The good pens, 0.7, black.

PRIYA
(from her door)
The G2s are on backorder.

The walk out is the length of the floor, toward the wall screen: 7,482 CONFIRMED THIS QUARTER. She passes Owen's desk, and we let her go.

In his queue: QUINN, MARA. Personal checking, on hold for crypto, the rocket-ship app. The queue gives it to the newest analyst.

He looks at everything. She told him once it's the good part and the slow part.

This time he doesn't look long. Every box says CONFIRM, and the green button sits right under his mouse.

He clicks it. In the corner of the file the little gray clock stops.

REVIEW TIME 00:00:26.

The wall screen turns over: 7,483. Owen looks up toward the elevators. The aisle's empty.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - GREG'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT**

The 1988 Dodgers pennant gone pink. The plaid bedspread. Through the wall, Murder, She Wrote at volume 38.

Her phone lights: MOM, calling. Tess almost lets it ring, and picks up.

MARA (ON PHONE)
Hi. It's me. I need you to do something for me and not ask why. Say the word.

TESS
Mom.

MARA (ON PHONE)
Please. Just say it.

TESS
Gerald.

MARA (ON PHONE)
Okay. Thank you. Okay. I'll text you.

Click. A minute later the phone buzzes. MOM: It's me. Sorry. Long day.

Periods, every one. She types: say ok

The dots come and go.

MOM: ok.

There it is. The period, small and black and completely unnecessary. Tess laughs out loud in her father's room.

She types: still a threat. it's you.

Later. 10:40. A text from DAD: ur mom at work today. im worried kid. someone sent me this

The stairwell video. She plays it with the phone at her ear, so Grandma won't hear it through the wall. Then she does what she knows how to do. In CapCut, frame by frame, she hunts for a seam, a loop, an ear going soft.

FRAME 1 OF 720. She drags it all the way to the end.

Nothing. Every frame is her mother, red in the face, screaming, perfect. If Tess can't tell, nobody can.

She puts the phone under the pillow and lies on it.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TIME CUT TO:

11:30. Still awake, with the rig video held on the blink. Her father with his eyes closed, the Carhartt beanie, the window light blown out on the left.

Where do you get a video of a man saying "Miss you, kid"? From a man saying it.

She scrolls up her camera roll. Years go by under her thumb. Four years back, in March, it's her birthday.

ON TESS'S PHONE, the kitchen on Topeka Drive. A Dodgers cake from Gelson's, TESS in blue frosting. Her mother laughing at a lighter that won't light. Her father in the Carhartt beanie, leaning toward a phone on the napkin holder, where Mara's father, Lou, is on FaceTime from Tucson.

She sets the rig and the birthday side by side and drags them both to the same word.

GREG (ON SCREEN)
(both videos, at once)
Miss you, kid.

Same beanie, same light, same angle. Somebody took her father out of her own birthday, sat him in the cab of a truck and sent him back to her.

She sends both videos to her mother without a word.

TIME CUT TO:

Dark. 2:04 on the lock screen. VIDEO CALL: MOM.

Tess picks up before she's awake. Her mother's face, lit from below. Behind her in the dark, a porch post. A planter. The blue ring of a doorbell.

Grandma Ruth's porch.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
(whispering)
Tess. Baby. I'm outside. Come down. Don't wake Grandma. I need to talk to you. Just you.

We go with Tess to the window. The gnomes, the plaster Mary, the porch.

Nobody's on the porch. The blue ring glows over BLESS THIS MESS on the mat.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Tess? Come down.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TESS
(very quietly)
Turn your head. All the way.

On the screen her mother's face turns, slowly, left, toward the porch post. At profile it goes wrong. The edge of the cheek slides. The ear smears back into the hair. Wet paint, dragged by a thumb. For half a second the side of her mother's face is a blur with an eye in it.

The call drops.

There's a screenshot in her photos. She doesn't remember taking it. She sends it to her mother and types under it, no period: look at the ear

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

2:09. Mara's phone lights up on the nightstand, face up, where she left it in case. Her own face on Ruth's porch, where she isn't, the ear going to nothing. look at the ear

Beside her, Cal sleeps on his back with one arm over his eyes. He can sleep through just about anything.

She doesn't wake him. ON MARA'S PHONE, a text to Ruth: Has anyone actually seen Greg?

Send.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY**

Wood paneling from when the elevators were new. Mara hugs the white EVIDENCE binder, an inch and a half thick now. Dana has a Ziploc of sesame cookies in her coat pocket, which can't be allowed in this building.

DANA
Probate. Not family court. Same floor where they divide up dead people's furniture. Don't read anything into it. Slowest elevators in Los Angeles County. It's a competitive field. I've got ten minutes with the commissioner if we're lucky. You're going to want to say everything. Don't say everything.

MARA
I have the binder.

DANA
I see the binder.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
I have the screenshot. The smear. It's proof they're faking me live, Dana, in real time...

DANA
It's a video call from your own account to a fifteen-year-old girl at two in the morning, asking her to come outside. That's what it is on paper.

MARA
Then we explain the ear.

DANA
Then we explain how she got it. Tess on the stand, against her grandmother.

MARA
No.

DANA
Then it's a picture of a bad connection.

She eats a cookie in two bites.

DANA
The bottle.

MARA
What bottle?

DANA
Don't. The pills. From Tempe. Where is it?

MARA
In my junk drawer. Labeled NOT MINE.

DANA
Leave it there. Leave it exactly there.

On a bench by the courtroom door, Tess, with her phone. Minors wait in the hall. Mara passes. Tess doesn't look up.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - PROBATE COURTROOM - DAY**

Smaller than Mara pictured. Over the clerk's desk, one fluorescent tube buzzes and won't quit.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

COMMISSIONER ADELAIDE MARSH (60s). Half-moon glasses, a patient face. She reads the last page of every file first.

BARRY PINSKY (60s), Ruth's lawyer, in a tie the exact color of a Band-Aid, holds out Ruth's chair.

PINSKY
Right here, Mrs. Q.

Ruth sits with the rosary wound on her hand and doesn't look at Mara. Behind Mara's table, Cal, in a gray sport coat over the quarter-zip. His idea of dressing up.

On a monitor on a cart: the doorbell clip from Ruth's lawn, forty inches of it.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Do you have any idea what I thought?

PINSKY
And a voice note, Commissioner. Sent from the respondent's phone to the petitioner, Mrs. Ruth Quinn, at 3:12 in the morning on December second.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the monitor; slow, tired)
I stand in her empty room and I think about the pills.

The courtroom goes quiet. Dana's on her feet.

DANA
Objection. Authentication. Foundation. We have a forensic report from Mr. Theodore Okafor.

MARSH
Mr. Okafor's report says he can't determine whether the recordings are authentic. Then I'm going to let them in and give them the weight they deserve. Overruled.

DANA
The respondent calls Cal Harmon.

Cal in the witness chair, hands on his knees, eyes on the commissioner. The man she lives with.

DANA
How would you describe her?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
She's the most honest person I've ever met. She labels the spice jars. She can't tell a white lie to save her life. She's a good mother.

DANA
Has she seemed unwell to you, these last weeks?

Cal looks at Mara. His face is so sorry and so gentle that she almost reaches for him across the rail.

CAL
She's been under so much strain. Things happening on her phone, and the house, and nobody believes her. She doesn't sleep. Some nights she doesn't know where she is.

Dana's pen stops on the legal pad.

Pinsky stands for cross, smooths the Band-Aid tie, and asks one question, mildly.

PINSKY
Mr. Harmon. You said some nights she doesn't know where she is. What did you mean by that?

CAL
I meant she's exhausted. She's being attacked. I didn't mean...
(stricken, to Mara)
She wakes up and she doesn't know what's real. Who wouldn't?

PINSKY
Thank you, Mr. Harmon.

DANA
Five minutes. Six, you lose her.

Mara's good at first. Explaining things to people who don't want to hear them is her job.

MARA
At 2:14 on November fifth my number called my daughter's school. At 2:14 on November fifth I was in Conference Room 9B with eleven people. A pharmacy in Tempe mailed me thirty oxycodone. A man on Reseda Boulevard made my voice out
(MORE)

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA (CONT'D)
of my voicemail greeting while I watched. Ten seconds.

MARSH
Go on.

MARA
I told three people I'd be out of town, and I gave each of them a different day. The day I gave my ex-husband's phone came back to my daughter's school the same morning, in an email from me.

She hears herself. It's the school voicemail, exactly. She keeps going. There isn't anything else to sound like.

MARA
Commissioner, everything in that file was made out of me. My voice. My face. My number. Someone is building a version of me, and that version is very convincing, and it isn't me. I can't prove that with a recording, because a recording is the thing they can fake.
(her voice cracks)
But my daughter knows me.

She hears it go.

MARA
She's on the bench right outside that door. You don't have to take my word, ask her, she knows the difference, she's the only one who's ever...

She's crying, and loud, the binder against her chest, and she's become the clip. It lands on the commissioner's face, small and patient: there she is.

Dana stands up. Mara stops.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS**

Tess on the bench. Her thumb slides from the smear to the stairs video, her mother frozen on "go." If her mother can be faked live, so can anything on this phone.

Through the door, muffled, her mother's voice goes up and cracks on the word.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA (O.S.)
Ask her!

Tess turns the phone face down on her knee. She stays where she is.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - PROBATE COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS**

The commissioner takes off her glasses and folds them.

MARSH
Ms. Quinn, I'm not going to call your daughter today. Today is about what's safe for her for the next sixty days, while everybody gets the help they need, and while Ms. Wexler finds the evidence she's told me she'll find. Temporary guardianship of the minor to the petitioner. Supervised visitation for the respondent, supervised by the petitioner or an adult the petitioner approves. We'll review in sixty days.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER**

Mara comes out first, alone, the binder against her chest and her face wet. As she passes the bench, her hand comes out from under the binder, low, toward Tess's hand on her knee. The old way. Three short squeezes.

It stops an inch short and stays there a second, open, in the air.

Then it goes back to the binder. Mara presses the elevator button and stands with her back to the hall, waiting for the slowest elevator in Los Angeles County.

Tess looks at her own hand.

Ruth comes out with Pinsky, Cal behind them. She looks about a hundred years old. Cal puts a hand on her shoulder. Ruth reaches up without looking and pats it.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

An envelope against the napkin holder: LAW OFFICES OF BARRY PINSKY. Ruth sits in front of it, the rosary wound tight in both hands.

INSERT - A DECLARATION OF DILIGENT SEARCH
A retired deputy in Williston, North Dakota, hired to serve

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

GREGORY PAUL QUINN. Bakken Basin Services. A man camp. A bar called the Doublewide. At the bottom: "the father could not be located."

BACK TO SCENE

RUTH
Your mother texted me. Two in the morning. "Has anyone actually seen Greg?" I was going to tell her she was being crazy. And then this came.

Tess puts her phone on the table between them and plays the two videos side by side. Two Gregs in the same beanie say it at once: "Miss you, kid."

Ruth touches her son's face on the birthday side.

RUTH
That's Lou. On the phone. Greg always called him kid. Lou hated it. That's the cake from Gelson's. I was there. I was at that party.

TESS
Somebody cut him out of my birthday. And made him say it to me.

RUTH
After Mass I'm going to Devonshire. I'm filing a report on my son.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Jeopardy! on the TV. A KNOCK. Tess gets it.

DETECTIVE ALCARAZ (50s) on the BLESS THIS MESS mat, gray suit, a Dodgers cap in his hands that he turns and turns by the brim. A kind, tired face, already sorry.

ALCARAZ
Is Ruth Quinn home? I'm Detective Alcaraz. From Missing Persons.

Why's a detective holding his cap like that? Tess backs up a step in her socks.

TIME CUT TO:

Alcaraz on the edge of Grandpa Walt's plaid armchair. Ruth on the couch, a dish towel in her lap. Tess won't sit.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

ALCARAZ
In May, a man was found in a dry wash below Interstate 40, west of Gallup, New Mexico. No phone. No wallet. The county buried him as an unidentified man. But they took his prints first. California keeps the prints of everybody it ever licensed to sell a house.

He stops turning the cap.

ALCARAZ
It's your son, Mrs. Quinn. DNA will confirm it. But I'm very sure. I'm so sorry.

Ruth stops moving.

Tess waits to be sad. What comes is anger, hot and pointed at nothing. Her fists ball up in her hoodie pocket.

TESS
He texted me. He texts me. He sent me a video Friday. He's on a rig.

ALCARAZ
I know. Your grandmother told the officer. That's going to be part of what somebody looks into now.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER**

Ruth at the harvest-gold wall phone, the cord in loops.

RUTH
They found him, Mara.

**EXT. COUNTY CEMETERY, GALLUP, NM - DAY**

Chain-link on a slope of dirt. By the back fence, the section where the county buries the people nobody claimed: rows of small metal plates on stakes, a number on each.

INVESTIGATOR LORRAINE BEGAY (40s), McKinley County Sheriff's Office, tan uniform, a long braid, shakes Ruth's hand with both of hers. We go down the rows behind her folder.

Her father is 117, fourth row from the fence. The plate's a little crooked. Somebody's put a smooth gray rock on it.

Ruth's rosary goes faster than Tess has ever seen it go.

Mara reads the county form aloud in her quiet work voice.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Recovered in May. Mile marker six, westbound. Case number O-M-I, dash, zero, four, one, dash...

TESS
Stop.

Mara stops, her mouth open on the next digit. She closes the folder and looks at the plate with the rest of them.

Tess didn't know she could do that.

TESS
(to the plate)
He texted me Tuesday.
(to the wind, louder)
He texted me Tuesday.

**EXT. COUNTY CEMETERY - GATE - LATER**

Begay walks them up to the white Nissan rental, talking low to Ruth and Mara. Tess, a few steps behind, hears it all.

BEGAY
No vehicle. He was walking, or somebody let him out. Nobody up in North Dakota ever had him. Wherever he was, it wasn't Williston.

Ruth's beads stop.

BEGAY
Somebody's been using his phone since May. That's a crime, and it started in my county, and I'm opening a case.
(to Mara)
I'm going to need everything you've got.

Mara looks at the white binder on the back seat.

MARA
An inch and a half. Indexed.

In the back seat, Tess opens the DAD thread. The last thing in it:

Tuesday, 8:14 PM: proud of you kid

Two days ago. Her father was already under a plate in the fourth row.

She types, very slowly, with one thumb: who is this

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

She leaves it there, unsent, and puts the phone in her hoodie pocket.

**EXT. I-40 SHOULDER, MILE 6 WESTBOUND, WEST OF GALLUP - DAY**

A small green sign on a post: 6. The Nissan sits on the shoulder with its hazards on. Trucks go by at seventy, close enough to rock it on its springs.

RUTH
(from the car, window down)
I can see you from here. That's what the paper says. And my knees won't do that hill.

Mara and Tess step over the guardrail. Fifteen feet of loose gravel down to a dry wash. Mara's flats slide, and she goes the rest of the way sideways with her arms out. At the bottom she holds up a hand for Tess. Tess comes down on her own in her Vans, faster and steadier than her mother.

Nothing here. Sand, rocks, a Gatorade bottle bleached white. No marker. We get our first real look at the sky in this movie. It's enormous, and very blue.

Tess finds one of his North Dakota skies in the DAD thread and holds the phone up against the real one. Same blue. Every week he was down here, somebody sent his daughter a picture of the sky.

Mara looks up the slope at the shoulder, where somebody could pull over, take a phone and a wallet off a man and drive back onto the highway.

Tess turns a slow circle, eyes on the sand, looking for anything of his. A button. A guitar pick. There's nothing.

Mara stands a foot away and opens her mouth. The end of the sentence from the stairs is right there.

Tess shakes her head without looking up.

Mara closes her mouth. They listen to the trucks. Then they climb back up.

**INT. WHITE NISSAN - A RED LIGHT, EDGE OF GALLUP - SUNSET**

Ruth asleep against the window. Tess in back, earbuds in. Mara's lock screen: THU DEC 10, the day she told Greg's phone she'd be out of town.

A text from Dana: Filing to reopen in the morning. Dead father, a phone in use for seven months, a sheriff's case in

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

NM. Commissioner will have to hear us. Eat something. Under it: Your monthly statement is ready.

INSERT - THE CARRIER STATEMENT
The family plan. Line three: GREG IPHONE. ACTIVE. NOVEMBER: 14 GB DATA, 412 TEXTS. AUTOPAY: VISA, PAID IN FULL.

BACK TO SCENE

She never took him off. In the divorce she never thought of it, and he never asked.

On paper, the dead man's phone is hers. She's paid for every picture of the sky.

The light goes green. Somebody behind her honks, politely. New Mexico.

**INT. EL RANCHO HOTEL, ROUTE 66, GALLUP - LOBBY - NIGHT**

Brick and timber from the 1930s, built for the movie people. Signed stars on every wall, Kirk Douglas in a cowboy hat, grinning about the hat.

RUTH
If I'm going to cry in a hotel, I want one Kirk Douglas slept in.

Ruth takes both keys from the clerk, keeps one and points Mara down the hall with the other.

RUTH
The paper says you can be with her when I'm there. I'm down the hall. That's there. Keep your door shut.

**INT. EL RANCHO HOTEL - MARA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

A chenille spread. Over the bed, a rearing palomino somebody painted from a lot of calendars. The phone buzzes at 11:51 PM: an email from her own address to her own address, no subject, one video.

ON MARA'S PHONE: her Larkspur kitchen at night. The pendant light. The spice jars, every one labeled. Mara at the island, looking into the lens, long hair twisted up with a yellow pencil through it. Tired, and sure of herself.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
I did it. I took her. You'll never find her.

Five seconds, and in the corner a small white date stamp: FRI DEC 18 11:40 PM. That's next Friday, in her own kitchen, on a night that hasn't happened yet.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

She calls Dana, who picks up on the second ring.

DANA (ON PHONE)
Wexler.

MARA
An email, from my address to my address. A video of me in my kitchen, saying I took her. There's a date in the corner. Friday, December eighteenth. 11:40 p.m.

DANA (ON PHONE)
Dated next week. You don't show that to anybody.

MARA
It's evidence. Somebody made it.

DANA (ON PHONE)
On paper, you made it. A week early. To rehearse. Send it to me. Only me. And don't delete it. Deleting it is worse.

MARA
Teddy could look at it.

DANA (ON PHONE)
Teddy does voices. This goes to Phil Ruggiero. Twenty-two years a video examiner for LAPD. Works out of his garage in Burbank now, next to a boat he's never going to finish.

MARA
It's not me.

DANA (ON PHONE)
I know. Put it under FEELING.

Click. Mara sends the video, puts the phone face down on the chenille and sits under the horse.

It rings, and she turns it over. The screen says CAL.

CUT TO:

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - GARAGE - NIGHT**

It's the cleanest garage in Porter Ranch, and on Larkspur Court that's saying something. Gray epoxy floor, sealed and swept. No cars tonight.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

A pegboard, every tool inside its own outline in black marker. Under it, a workbench. A computer tower with the side panel off, two graphics cards glowing faint green. A good microphone on a boom arm. Two dark monitors.

On a normal night the Outback's nose stops a foot from this bench, and all of it sits switched off under a canvas drop cloth. Tonight the cloth's folded square on a sawhorse.

And the tablet, face down. Cal, in white socks and the gray quarter-zip, turns it over. 10:51 PM. In Gallup it's 11:51.

A render list, white on black. The last line's highlighted.

MQ_conf_v14 ..... COMPLETE

He touches it. A still frame: a woman at a kitchen island, long hair, a pencil through it. FRI DEC 18 11:40 PM. He doesn't play it.

In a second window, a replay runs with the sound off. What's he watching? A high school basketball game, a hawk painted on the scoreboard.

A boy in white brings the ball up. Tall and thin, hair cut short, not used to his own height yet. Number 11. He gets fouled on a putback. At the line he bounces the ball twice and looks at the rim a long time. He makes the first. He misses the second.

At the next stoppage a kid comes in off the bench and points at him. Number 11 sits at the end of the bench with a towel over his shoulders. The stream's camera stays on the game and leaves him there.

Cal watches the end of the bench a while longer. Then he sets the tablet face down.

He presses a name on his phone and leans back against the workbench while it rings, six hundred miles away.

CAL
Mara. It's me. Ruth called. She said you went out to the road. Are you okay? Is Tess okay?

He listens a long time. His face doesn't change. He looks at the pegboard, at the black outline around the hammer.

CAL
I know. I know. I'm so sorry. You don't have to figure anything out tonight. You've done enough. You found him.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

He waits.

CAL
Did you eat? Eat something. Get on the plane tomorrow. I'll be right here when you get home.

And then, low and kind:

CAL
Come home. I've got you.

PRELAP: CLANG.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - DAY**

A cast-iron pan comes down on the front burner. Hard. The stove clock says 8:10. Cal, in white socks, drops butter in it. Breakfast for three.

Steely Dan low from the speaker over the sink, "Aja," with a sax solo longer than anybody needs.

Mara at the island in the gray sweater she wears when she's nervous. She smiles from her stool and doesn't get up. Good.

Two plates. Soft eggs for Mara, hard for Tess.

TESS
These are acceptable.

CAL
(accepting an award)
Thank you.

Nobody says Gallup. Nobody says the hearing.

LATER

Tess cuts Marisol's birthday video on her phone. Forty seconds of CHUNK, a corgi crossed with something taller, one ear up and one that's given up. The song is Phoebe Bridgers.

Cal stops a polite distance behind her.

CAL
Show me. Everything you make is better than it should be.

Tess hooks the next stool out with her foot.

TESS
You cut on the kick drum. Change the picture between kicks and
(MORE)

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TESS (CONT'D)
people feel sick and don't know why.

He cuts on every single kick through the chorus. Chunk's good ear goes up and down in perfect time.

TESS
You cut like a dad.

CAL
I'll take that.

We get a look at his hands. Good hands. Everybody says so.

Mara watches the two of them over her tea. For a minute her life has worked out. The sax starts another solo. Of course it does.

LATER

Cal at the front door with a stepladder.

CAL
That camera over the garage has been two inches off since October.

He goes out. Tess takes the basement stairs.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BASEMENT - DAY**

Steep wooden stairs with open backs. The bottom step is wet. It's always wet. Tess puts her sock in it.

TESS
Shit.

In the far corner, the water heater drips into its puddle. It's the one thing in this house Cal never fixed.

Between the tank and the wall there's a gap about two feet wide. Tess turns sideways and squeezes in.

A small window at side-yard dirt level. She pushes. It opens four inches and stops on a bolted metal bar.

Four inches is plenty for a vape: Watermelon Ice, twenty bucks from a junior in the Northgate lot.

A red earthquake wrench hangs on the gas pipe by a wire.

She takes out her phone for music. NO SERVICE. She steps out from behind the tank. One bar. Back in. NO SERVICE.

Her shoulders come down. Relief. Down here, nobody has her.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

She leaves the vape on the ledge behind the tank.

Up the stairs: through the open front door, Cal's boots on the ladder.

TESS
(low)
Mom. Come here. No signal.

Mara looks at the boots. Then she comes, and puts her sock in the bottom step too. Behind the tank, Tess holds up the screen. Mara gets it faster than Tess did.

MARA
Tess. At the wash, I...

TESS
Here. No bars. Say it here.

No speaker down here. No red light. Tess picked it.

TESS
I'm going first. I've had "Then go" for three years. Eight seconds. I watched it before I went to sleep. Most nights.

The heater drips.

TESS
I texted him every Sunday. Him or whoever. I sent him my clip and wrote "u should see what she said," and he never answered, and I decided that was him being a grown-up for once. He bought the Phoebe tickets in March. Section C. And then in June the rig needed him, except in June he was already...

MARA
Tess.

TESS
So somebody else was sorry. And then the whole thing. Your voice. "I never wanted her." I know about the ear. I still hear it every time you say okay. So say it. Nobody's listening down here. What did you say?

Mara doesn't look at the stairs. There's nobody on them.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
(low, tired, done)
Then go. Take the car, take the money, take whatever's left of it, but you don't get her.

The heater drips. Tess just looks at her.

TESS
He was taking me.

MARA
He was going to try. Your bag was in his trunk. He packed it that afternoon, while you were at Marisol's.

TESS
Why didn't you tell me?

MARA
Because then you'd know he tried.

Tess is crying, which she didn't plan, mad at three years and at her own twelve-year-old thumb. She finds her mother's hand and squeezes it. Once.

Mara doesn't squeeze back.

MARA
That's one.

TESS
That's all you get.

Mara holds on until Tess takes the hand back. Outside, a mockingbird does every car alarm it has ever heard.

TESS
Go up first. There's cameras. My face.

Mara goes. Her sock finds the bottom step.

MARA
(very quietly)
Shit.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER**

Cal at the island with his tablet. Ruth is on speaker.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

RUTH (ON PHONE)
(small)
I need one night. She can stay over. I'll come for her after Mass.

CAL
Thank you, Ruth. Get some sleep.

Tess comes up and hears it. Her own bed, a whole night.

Cal looks at the tablet, at something we can't see. Then at the basement door, open a crack. Then at Tess.

He smiles.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - GARAGE - NIGHT**

Dark, except for the green inside a computer. Cal, in white socks, eases the kitchen door shut so the latch won't click.

The tablet on the bench. 1:58 AM. A strip of light under Tess's door. The bedroom from a high corner: Mara asleep, her back to his empty half of the bed.

Two flat waveforms on a monitor, labeled MQ. A calling service. NUMBER TO SHOW: Mara's cell, and 14 LARKSPUR CT, PORTER RANCH CA.

Headphones on. Boom mic to his mouth. He types 911.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(from the bench speaker)
911, what is the address of your emergency?

His mouth moves. Half a second later, the speaker answers.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the bench speaker)
Fourteen Larkspur Court. Porter Ranch.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
What's going on there, ma'am?

CAL
(low, his own voice)
I have a gun and my daughter. I'll do us both before I let them take her.

The lower waveform rises and follows the upper one.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA'S VOICE
I have a gun and my daughter. I'll do us both before I let them take her.

Her calm voice, a little too slow.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Ma'am, is anyone hurt right now?

MARA'S VOICE
Not yet.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
I've got officers on the way to you. Where's your daughter?

MARA'S VOICE
Upstairs. I'm putting the phone down.

Headphones down on the bench, cups up, the dispatcher still talking out of them. Mic to mute. The waveforms go flat.

He doesn't end the call.

He shakes the canvas drop cloth out over the bench, the tower, the mic. Squares the hem a foot off the floor, so anybody can see nobody's under it.

He goes in and leaves us in the dark with the canvas.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(small, under the cloth)
Ma'am? Ma'am, stay on the line.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - TESS'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Tess on her own bed, earbuds in, plugged into nothing. Listening to the house. Her phone says 2:04.

Every window goes WHITE. Bars of light through the blinds.

LOUDSPEAKER (O.S.)
MARA QUINN, THIS IS THE LOS ANGELES POLICE DEPARTMENT. FOURTEEN LARKSPUR COURT. MARA QUINN.

Tess is off the bed with her phone in her hand.

ONE SHOT, over Tess's shoulder. We don't let go of her.

Down the hall through a long white stripe of light. The top of the stairs. One step down. Two.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

INSERT - THE FRONT DOOR

CRACK. The deadbolt tears out of the jamb. The door SLAMS.

BACK TO THE SHOT

The shoes by the door go everywhere. Her Vans, her checkerboards, Mara's slippers, Cal's boots, KICKED across the tile by men coming in a line. Helmets. Rifle lights.

The lights find Tess. They go past her.

Red dots slide across the spice jars. The fridge. The calendar where Mara writes everything twice.

METRO OFFICERS
POLICE! POLICE! SHOW ME YOUR HANDS!

Under the shouting, the speaker over the sink still plays Steely Dan. Low. Nobody's thought to turn it off.

METRO OFFICER
KILL THAT!

An officer RIPS the speaker off its bracket. The music's gone. In the gap, SCREAMING. It's Tess.

A door opens behind her. Here comes Mara, with empty hands.

Northgate Knights T-shirt. Plaid pajama pants. Barefoot. Her hair loose down her back, which Tess almost never sees. Hands high, fingers spread.

MARA
(her work voice, the one for Comcast)
My name is Mara Quinn, I'm unarmed, there's no gun in this house, my daughter is on the stairs, I'm coming down.

METRO OFFICER
COME DOWN THE STAIRS, SLOW, KEEP THEM UP!

Passing Tess, Mara doesn't turn her head.

MARA
Tess, stay there, don't move, keep your hands where they can see them.

Tess stays. Three years ago on Topeka Drive she stood at the top of other stairs with a phone held sideways. Her thumb is on the glass. The phone stays down.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Cal out of the bedroom, gray T-shirt, white socks, hands up.

CAL
I'm getting the girl, I'm unarmed,
I'm just getting the girl.

He steps down below Tess, between her and the guns, and spreads his arms. Two red dots settle on his chest and stay.

CAL
Stay behind me, Tess. Stay right
behind me.

She grabs a fistful of the back of his shirt.

At the bottom Mara gets down in the shoes. Knees. Stomach. She's not all the way flat when a KNEE drives into her back.

INSERT - THE TILE

Her cheek hits. A small sound.

BACK TO THE SHOT

Tess hears it over everything. Blood comes out from under her mother's cheek, very red on the white tile, and runs along the grout toward Cal's boots.

METRO OFFICER
WHERE IS IT, MARA, WHERE'S THE GUN?

MARA
(into the floor)
There's no gun, there's never been
a gun, please, my daughter.

None of the work voice left.

TESS
She doesn't have anything, look at
her hands!

Nobody looks. Her legs shake so hard the step seems to move.

Two officers open the garage. A car door is tried. Let go.

METRO OFFICER (O.S.)
Garage clear.

The garage door swings shut on its own weight.

METRO OFFICER
(into his shoulder radio)
No weapon. No weapon in the house.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

They stand Mara up, her cheek split along the bone, and walk her barefoot through the shoes. At the door she turns her head toward Tess. A hand turns it back.

**EXT. LARKSPUR COURT - CUL-DE-SAC - CONTINUOUS**

The cul-de-sac is white end to end. The Nguyens on their porch in bathrobes. MR. ABERNATHY (70s), in pajamas, stands guard beside his boat, on a trailer that hasn't moved in a year. On every eave, a little red camera dot, awake.

On the grass, a WOMAN in a gray windbreaker, badge on her belt, phone at her ear, watches Mara go past cuffed with empty hands. She keeps watching.

She puts it on speaker and holds it out to the officer.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(small, from the phone)
Ma'am, the caller's still on the line.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY**

A bolted table. A camera in the ceiling corner with a small red light. On the table, a phone on a loop.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the phone)
I have a gun and my daughter. I'll do us both before I let them take her.

DETECTIVE LENA MOSS (40s) eats mango with Tajín from a Vallarta clamshell, one spear at a time. Compact. Hair pulled back so hard it's a decision. Reading glasses she doesn't use. The woman from the lawn.

Four black stitches in Mara's cheek. Her hands on the table.

MOSS
Is that you?

MARA
That's my voice.

MOSS
Is there a difference?

MARA
Yes. Nine and a half seconds of my voicemail and a free program. I watched a man do it.

Moss stops the loop.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MOSS
You came down the hall with empty hands. Dispatch still had you. Who was I talking to?

It's the first question in a month with the right answer folded up inside it. Mara has to look at the table.

MARA
I don't know. But it wasn't me. And you know it wasn't.

TIME CUT TO:

A full page of Moss's yellow pad. GALLUP. PLATE 117. Mara gives her everything but the five-second video from her own kitchen. On paper, that one hangs her.

MOSS
And he's texted you since?

MARA
Every week, for seven months. From his own phone. It's line three on my family plan. GREG IPHONE.

MOSS
Whose name is on line three?

MARA
Mine.

Moss puts down the plastic fork.

MOSS
Or you've been texting as him.

On the ninth floor that file's a CONFIRM in under a minute.

MARA
I know. I'd have flagged it too.

MOSS
Who's Begay?

MARA
McKinley County Sheriff. She's opened a case.

Moss writes BEGAY and underlines it.

MOSS
Who else was in the house? Where were they?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
My daughter. Cal Harmon, my partner. Asleep next to me. He sleeps through anything.

MOSS
Does he own a gun?

MARA
He installs doorbells.

Moss closes the clamshell and presses until the lid clicks.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - FRONT DESK - DUSK**

5:45 on the clock. The DESK SERGEANT (50s) slides her phone across in a property envelope.

DESK SERGEANT
You're free to go. No charges.
(he's said it before)
Yet. And your phone didn't call anybody at one fifty-eight. Sign here. No contact with your daughter. Not her school, not her grandmother's house. Seven days.

She signs. Her hand doesn't shake on the line.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

The front door, rehung. A new strike plate, the screws still bright. The shoes lined up again.

CAL
I mopped.

A white Porto's bag on the island, going see-through with grease. He looked at her cheek at the curb and said nothing. Right call.

CAL
Potato balls. Eat something. Tess is with Ruth. Ruth came for her at four, in her church coat over her nightgown. She asked about your face.

Mara eats one. She cries through the second.

Milk in a saucepan. Honey off a wooden dipper, stirred slow.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
My grandmother's. Same as the Sunday sauce. School nights, when I couldn't sleep.

The big white mug, into her hands.

CAL
Drink it all.

She does, standing at the island in her socks. He rinses the mug and stands it upside down in the rack.

We linger on the mug.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

She sleeps with his arm over her and doesn't move. Over the bed, the smoke detector's red light. Steady.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - MORNING**

A note on the island in block capitals: AT RUTH'S. SHE SHOULDN'T BE ALONE TODAY. EAT SOMETHING. C.

Mara picks up her phone, and the thread with Tess is at the top of her messages, where it shouldn't be.

INSERT - MARA'S PHONE

Her own sent messages in blue, capitals and periods, 12:52 to 4:37 AM.

12:52 AM. Tess. Answer me.

3:58 AM. I'm coming to get you, baby.

4:37 AM. Don't make me come in there.

Read 6:48 AM.

BACK TO SCENE

She counts them, loses her place and starts over, because she wants the number right.

The house line rings. Nobody calls the house line but robots about her car's warranty, and Dana.

DANA (ON PHONE)
Don't touch your cell. Whatever's on it is an exhibit now.

MARA
I looked at it.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

DANA (ON PHONE)
How many?

MARA
Forty. To Tess. I counted twice.

DANA (ON PHONE)
Your detective called me. Moss. I liked her. They're writing a warrant for violating the order. Signed by noon. Come in with me. I talk, and nobody puts a knee on anybody.

MARA
Not yet. If I go in, I'm in. Whoever this is keeps going, and I hear about it from you, through glass.

DANA (ON PHONE)
Then you're a wanted woman with a cut face. I'm not billing you for this call.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Jeans. The flats she always said she could run in. A tote from a compliance conference: RISK IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS.

The junk drawer. The orange bottle with NOT MINE across her own name stays exactly where it is. The envelope labeled CASH in front of it goes in the tote.

The P-touch. The notebook. Two of the good pens. From the binder, only the pages that matter.

The Outback stays in the garage. There's a plate reader on every third pole on Tampa.

END OF SERIES

Last, her cell. She sets it on the counter by the stove, under the smoke detector's red light.

**EXT. SLOPE BEHIND LARKSPUR COURT - DAY**

The back gate clicks shut. We go down through the brush with her, sideways, holding on to the sage, in flats that were never asked to do this. A COYOTE watches from under a scrub oak with total contempt.

She'd find herself in an hour: plastic, plates, phones, doorbells. She goes the other way.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Ruth at the table, readers on, typing with one finger on a phone held at arm's length. Her avatar is the plaster Virgin from the flower bed. Cal beside her drinks her Mr. Coffee.

Tess on the stairs, five steps up, where the banister hides most of her and none of the table.

RUTH
Has anyone seen my daughter-in-law. Question mark.

CAL
I'd start with her name. And say she isn't herself. It's true, and it's kind. And ask them not to call the police.

RUTH
Why on earth not?

CAL
Ruth. You saw the floor.

She did. Her finger stops.

CAL
(so she can keep up)
New line. Please don't call the police. They'll hurt her.

RUTH
They'll hurt her.

CAL
Then "Message me." So it all comes to this phone first. They'll want a picture.

RUTH
I've got the one from Easter. She's holding a ham.

CAL
That's not how she looks now.

Ruth hands him the phone. She gives him everything lately.

He opens her doorbell app, back to the gray November afternoon on the lawn, and works the clip a frame at a time with his thumb. Back. Forward. Back.

He stops on the frame. Mara in the navy blazer, pencil in her hair, mouth open, shouting, an arm out. If you want

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

somebody to look scary, it's the best frame in the clip. On the stairs, Tess would have picked it too.

Ruth posts it and crosses herself. His hand on her shoulder.

CAL
It's live, Ruth. That's good.

**EXT. RESEDA BLVD - DAY**

Mara walks with her back to the traffic, reading a $39.99 CVS burner that doesn't know her name.

ON THE BURNER, Ruth's post. Mara on the lawn, shouting. She isn't herself. Please don't call the police, they'll hurt her. Message me.

It's the nicest thing anybody's said about her in a month, and every one of those people has her picture now.

A share, from a gray silhouette that joined today: WANTED MOM, ARMED. This is the hostage call in Porter Ranch. Had a gun on her own kid. Ring cams up people.

Mara knows that silhouette. She once labeled one GHOST.

Red pins drop on the map.

Where do they think she is? Lindley. A pin drops there, and three cars turn onto Lindley. Mara walks back to the block they all just drove past.

Amateurs.

**EXT. SHELL STATION / ROSCOE EXPRESS CAR WASH - DAY**

4:20 on the pump. A man filling a black Silverado looks at Mara. At his phone. At her. She's given that look plenty.

SILVERADO GUY
Hey. Hey! Ma'am!

Phone up, filming.

Mara runs. Turns out she can run in these flats. Mostly.

Next door, past the KID IN A RED POLO, into the car wash tunnel beside a white Prius as the conveyor takes it.

We go in with her. Loud. Wet. Blue. The big brushes SLAP the Prius. The blowers ROAR. She flattens against the wall and slides through, tote against her chest.

She comes out the far end soaked, soap in her ears, the pencil still in her hair. Across the vacuum bays and gone.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

The Silverado guy is still filming the tunnel's mouth.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Cal reads Ruth the replies, shoulder to shoulder.

RUTH
Lord. Is she all right?

CAL
"Lost her in the car wash on Roscoe. She's in there somewhere."

RUTH
In a car wash? With the brushes?

CAL
That's what it says.

Ruth covers her mouth. On the stairs, Tess covers hers for a different reason. She's ashamed of the laugh. It won't stop.

Cal reads the next one to himself and doesn't call anyone.

RUTH
I haven't slept since Saturday. That man on the loudspeaker, saying her name in the street.

CAL
Let her sleep in her own room Friday. You need a night.

RUTH
I'll pray on it.

**INT. THE PALMS MOTOR LODGE - OFFICE - NIGHT**

Sepulveda, between a tire shop and a pupuseria. Behind bulletproof glass, the PALMS CLERK, Clippers hoodie, eats pistachios into a coffee can.

PALMS CLERK
Cash?

MARA
Cash.

PALMS CLERK
Sixty-five a night. Twenty for the key.

Four twenties and a five through the slot. He doesn't ask her name. At the Palms, that's what the twenty is for.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

INSERT - THE FOB

A green plastic diamond as long as her hand. THE PALMS in faded gold. On the back, a big white 9, an 818 number, and DROP IN ANY MAILBOX, POSTAGE GUARANTEED.

**INT. THE PALMS - ROOM 9 - NIGHT**

A brown spread, a beige phone on the nightstand, and a sailboat painting screwed to the wall so nobody takes it.

She tapes the printouts over the sailboat's wall in date order: the voicemail, the Tempe pharmacy, the stairwell, line three, GREG IPHONE.

With the P-touch she labels the first page and smooths it flat with her thumbnail. NOT ME. Then the next one, NOT ME, all the way down the wall.

MARA
Who had access?

Her voice, her kitchen at night, her daughter's clip, her phone bill, her floor at Meridian. Somebody got in close.

In the notebook, her own writing from the station: 1:58. CAL ASLEEP NEXT TO ME. Her finger goes past it.

Seven months, and nobody's asked her for a dime.

MARA
(to Room 9)
Somebody I confirmed.

The files are in the archive. Her badge is dead.

One more label, from up on the bed, above all the others. ARCHIVE. It goes on crooked. She leaves it.

**INT. MERIDIAN PARKING STRUCTURE - LEVEL THREE - NIGHT**

Mara on the concrete behind a white Civic, tote in her lap.

Ding. 8:40 over the elevator. Owen, backpack on one shoulder, head down over his phone. He sees her, then the stitches. She watches him decide whether to run.

He puts his phone in his pocket.

OWEN
You're on everybody's app. My mom sent it to me. My mom lives in Fullerton. It says you had a gun.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
There wasn't a gun.

He looks at her a moment longer, then nods. A man who's checked the file himself.

OWEN
Okay.

MARA
I need the archive. My badge is dead. Yours isn't.

OWEN
The cleaners are out by ten. The dock door opens on my badge, because Priya made me fire warden. I have a vest.

MARA
You'll get fired.

OWEN
Probably. Legal pulls the badge log every Monday.

MARA
You can drive away. I mean it.

OWEN
You told me to park on three. My first week. Shortest walk to the elevator. I wrote it down. I'll come down for you at ten.

It's going to cost him his job. Mara nods anyway.

**EXT. MERIDIAN BANK - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT**

10:00 on the clock over the roll-up. The steel door beside it opens. Owen, his lanyard wound so tight around his fist that his fingertips have gone dark. He doesn't step aside.

OWEN
I confirmed you. Twenty-six seconds. I'm sorry.

The morning they took her badge, her name was in his queue.

OWEN
Your checking. The crypto hold. Every box said CONFIRM. You told me I look at everything. And I didn't look at yours.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Owen. I helped design that screen. I'm the one who put the button under the mouse.

OWEN
Come on.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - GREG'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT**

Murder, She Wrote through the wall at volume 38. Tess under a faded Dodgers pennant, earbuds in, plugged into nothing.

Her phone rings on her chest. 10:02, an 818 number.

Her mother is out there with no phone. Tess answers.

TESS
Hel...

MARA'S VOICE
(on the phone, low, fast)
Don't talk. Listen.

Traffic behind it.

MARA'S VOICE
Gerald. Baby, it's me. Don't tell Grandma. Not even Cal. Friday night I'm coming. The back door at home, eleven-forty. Bring nothing.

Click.

TESS
(to the pennant)
Mom doesn't have a burner.

Her mother has a label maker, a color-coded family calendar, and a number she's had since 2009.

TESS
She does now.

She renames the old number MOM (OLD). The 818 becomes MOM.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR - NIGHT**

The motion sensors light only the rows where somebody's moving. On the big screen, 8,604 CONFIRMED THIS QUARTER, over a room with two people in it. On her old monitor cable, black-on-white tape still says MONITOR.

At his desk Owen types his password with his body between her and the keyboard, then gives her the chair.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

INSERT - THE ARCHIVE

REVIEWER: QUINN, M. CONFIRM. SUBSEQUENT STATUS: CLEARED.

BACK TO SCENE

The screen thinks about it.

1,140.

OWEN
All of those?

MARA
Cleared. After.

Somebody wrote it down. Nobody told her.

She sorts by what came after. A paycheck that stopped. A family court subpoena. Fourth down, an identity theft.

INSERT - THE FILE

LUND, CALVIN R. West Hills. Network engineer, defense contractor. Five accounts opened in his name in one week.

FLAG: SUSPECTED PERPETRATOR. MONEY MULE. REVIEWER: QUINN, M. CONFIRM. REVIEW TIME 00:00:31.

LAPD: CALVIN LUND, A VICTIM. CLEARED.

BACK TO SCENE

OWEN
That's longer than I gave you.

She doesn't remember it. A Tuesday or a Thursday, between a car wash and a nail salon.

MARA
He got this exact page. Reviewer and clock. Nobody blacked them out.

OWEN
That's your name.

MARA
He's had it for two years.

She's sick. She holds the edge of the desk.

The gray square in the corner. She's never clicked one. She trained every analyst on this floor not to bother, the one behind her chair included.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

She clicks it.

The license photo fills the screen. Eight years younger. Clean-shaven, thinner, longer hair pushed back. No expression at all.

She went to sleep beside that face last night.

It's Cal.

LUND, CALVIN R. Calvin. Cal.

An attachment: CUSTOMER CORRESPONDENCE. ROUTED TO: REVIEW FLOOR. CLOSED. NO ACTION.

INSERT - THE LETTER

Your bank closed my accounts and reported me to the government for crimes that were committed against me. Because of your report I lost my job. Because I lost my job I lost my son. He was seven. This is the last school picture I have of him.

I would like to know the name of the person who reviewed my file. I would like that person to look at him.

Calvin Lund

BACK TO SCENE

OWEN
"I would like that person to look at him." Review Floor. That's the inbox.

The one nobody answers. She moved to kill it once, Owen taking minutes.

Page two. A school photo on a blue background. A BOY about seven, collar buttoned all the way up for him, one front tooth on its way, smiling as hard as he can.

MARA
He was seven. Eight years ago.

She doesn't say the rest. Fifteen. Tess's age.

Over the elevators, the floor display climbs. 6. 7.

OWEN
That's not the cleaners. The cleaners are done.

8.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

OWEN
Print it. Then Stairwell B.

The printer groans. The elevator CHIMES on nine. Owen grabs the pages warm and shoves them against her chest.

**EXT. MERIDIAN BANK - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT**

Out the fire door at a run. Dumpsters and eucalyptus. Owen bends over, hands on his knees. Mara under the dock light, the license photo on top of the stack, still warm.

Owen looks at her face. Then at the page.

OWEN
Who is it?

MARA
He makes my breakfast.

**EXT. SEPULVEDA BLVD - BUS STOP - PREDAWN**

5:50 on the arrival board. Mara on a borrowed phone. Its owner, a WOMAN IN KAISER SCRUBS, holds a thermos and pretends not to listen.

MARA
Detective Moss, please.

DESK SERGEANT (ON PHONE)
She's not in till eight. Who's calling?

MARA
Mara Quinn.

Typing. Then a different voice from the same man.

DESK SERGEANT (ON PHONE)
Ms. Quinn, where are you right now?

She hangs up and hands the phone back.

MARA
Thank you.

The man who wrote AT RUTH'S will be at Ruth's for breakfast at seven, across the table from Tess.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING**

MARA
...he was the victim, and I closed him anyway. His son was seven.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Ruth at the table in her quilted bathrobe, readers on. Tess at the far end by the back door, in front of eggs cooked hard. Cal at Ruth's stove in white socks, Ruth's spatula in his hand. Breakfast for three.

On the table between the plates: the license photo, REVIEW TIME 00:00:31, the letter, the boy.

MARA
His name is Calvin Lund.

Every word is true. From a woman with a warrant and four stitches, at seven-thirty in her ex-mother-in-law's kitchen, it sounds insane. She used to put calls like this on hold.

Cal turns off the burner and folds Ruth's dish towel, edges matched. He looks at Mara, sorry and gentle, the man on the witness stand.

He never looks at the papers. Only we notice he doesn't need to look.

MARA
Ruth. Look at his face.

Ruth holds it at arm's length. Looks at Cal. At the picture.

RUTH
That's a young man.

MARA
That's him. Eight years ago. That's Cal.

Ruth sets it down face up, in case it's somebody's son.

RUTH
Mara, honey. What did they do to your face?

MARA
Ruth, please. He's been in my house for a year. He's been in my phone. He's been...

CAL
(very low)
Mara. You're scaring her.

Tess sits very straight, out of Cal's sight line.

TESS
(mouthing it)
Friday?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Mara doesn't know what Friday means. She looks for it and can't find it. Tess sees her not find it.

Ruth goes to the wall phone, rosary wound in her fingers, and dials with her thumb. Three numbers.

Mara goes around the table toward her daughter.

CAL
Hey. Hey. Mara. Come here.

He takes her in his arms. From the table, it's a hug. A big gentle man rocking his frightened girlfriend.

Tight on the wrist. He's got her right one behind her back. He turns it up between her shoulder blades. Slow. Her elbow lights up WHITE. Her knees go.

Her face is crushed into his quarter-zip, stitches on the zipper. Nothing she makes reaches the table.

His mouth at her ear. His own voice, kind as it's ever been.

CAL
(for her alone)
You didn't look up.

Her eyes go wide over his shoulder.

Her left hand finds one of Ruth's jelly-jar juice glasses on the counter. She SWINGS it into the edge.

It BURSTS in her hand. Ruth SCREAMS into the phone. Mara's left palm opens, hot and wet.

Cal lets go at once. Steps back, both hands up and open where everybody can see them. Her blood on his chest. His face frightened and kind.

CAL
Okay. Okay. Nobody's going to hurt you.

She scoops the file to her chest with the cut hand. Blood on the corner of the school photo.

RUTH
Jimeno Avenue. J-I-M-E-N-O.

Mara's right hand comes out of her pocket with the green plastic diamond. She goes past her daughter close, her body between Tess and the room, and presses it into Tess's hand. Less than a second.

She doesn't look at Tess's face. If she looks, she'll stop.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

She's out the screen door. It BANGS, bounces, goes still.

Under the table, Tess's hand is closed on her knee. Something hard and flat in it. Warm. Wet.

RUTH
(the rosary clicking)
She's here. In my kitchen, with my granddaughter. No. Out the back, just now. Yes. Yes, I have the order.

A siren on Devonshire. A second one under it.

Cal at the screen door. He doesn't go out. He turns and finds Tess looking at him. His face does the sorry thing.

CAL
Are you okay? Don't move. There's glass.

He crouches and picks up the glass piece by piece.

Where only we can see, Tess's fist goes up her sleeve.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS**

Door locked. Fan on. A brass motel key on a green plastic diamond, her mother's blood across it. She wipes it on her jeans. In faded gold: THE PALMS.

She turns it over.

9.

TESS
(to the key)
The Palms. Nine.

**INT. THE PALMS - OFFICE - NIGHT**

The coffee can is fuller. Mara slides sixty-five through the slot, her left palm butterfly-taped. The clerk comes up from under the counter with the twin of the green diamond.

PALMS CLERK
Lose yours?

MARA
Yes. Do you have scissors?

A pair comes through the slot, no questions. Orange handles.

PALMS CLERK
Twenty. And bring 'em back.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
And a ride later. Cash.

PALMS CLERK
My cousin's got a Prius. Forty each way. He doesn't ask questions either.

**INT. THE PALMS - ROOM 9 BATHROOM - NIGHT**

Cold tap. The butterflies wash off and the cut opens again into the chipped sink. She wraps it in a thin motel towel and sits on the floor against the tub.

The file on the tile beside her, her blood dried brown on the school photo. The boy, smiling as hard as he can.

She makes herself keep looking at him. Then she does what she always does when she's scared. She counts.

MARA
(under her breath)
Forty a day. That's low. Five days. Fifty weeks. Eleven years.

INSERT - THE NOTEBOOK

110,000 files x 31 sec = 39 days

BACK TO SCENE

Every person she was ever handed, end to end, without a break for lunch or sleep. Under forty days. The time she spent on their faces: a zero. She goes over it until the pen tears the paper.

MARA
A face tells you nothing the money doesn't.

She taught that line to every analyst on the floor. 1,140 say otherwise.

LATER

On a fresh page, she works him up as a case.

NOT MONEY. HE WANTS ME TO KNOW.

Under the confession's timestamp, FRI DEC 18 11:40 PM:

HE NEEDS ME LOOSE ON FRIDAY

And one more. RECOVERY CONTACT, EVERY ACCOUNT: C.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**INT. 24-HOUR PRINT AND SHIP, VENTURA BLVD, ENCINO - NIGHT**

At the curb, the cousin's Prius waits with a pine tree on a string. Inside, a KID IN A GREEN POLO wakes up long enough to rent her the computer by the window for cash.

She types her address and her password slowly.

MARA
(under her breath)
He's my recovery contact. Every account. Every new sign-in goes to his phone.

ON THE SCREEN, 400-some unread. DANA six times, all caps.

Near the top, from Tess's account at 10:14 PM, no subject: mom cal is scaring me. come get me friday night. back door. 11:40. please.

11:40. The confession's minute.

MARA
From Tess. Five periods.

Tess would die first.

MARA
That video needs me loose at eleven-forty. Out here, wanted, at his back door, with nobody to say where I was. Let him see me here, reading what he wants me to read. He thinks I'll come to that door because Tess asked. I'll come. But he'll have to be somebody in person.

She logs out the ordinary way.

She's pulling on her coat when the phone on the counter rings. A beige desk phone, the kind nobody calls at two in the morning.

The kid answers it with his eyes shut.

KID IN GREEN POLO
Print and Ship.
(opens his eyes)
Is one of you Mara?

There's only one of anybody in here.

She takes it across the counter. The cord barely reaches.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Yes.

CAL (V.O.)
(on the phone)
Hi, Mara.

The same voice that asks about her eggs. Warm. Unhurried. A man who's been up a while and doesn't mind.

MARA
Calvin.

A pause on the line. He likes that.

CAL (V.O.)
Nobody's called me that in two years. You never asked what Cal was short for. You never asked me much.

MARA
You read my email.

CAL (V.O.)
I read everything. You didn't want to know how. Your birthday, backwards.

She turns her back to the kid. On the window, her own reflection, the pencil, the stitches.

MARA
Where's Tess?

CAL (V.O.)
Asleep at Ruth's. She ate. I made soup.

That's the worst thing he could have said, and he knows it.

MARA
If you go near her...

CAL (V.O.)
I've been near her every day for a year. I fixed her router. You thanked me.

MARA
I read your letter tonight.

Silence. The copier in the corner cycles and goes quiet.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL (V.O.)
One page. I stapled his picture to it so a person would have to look at him before they threw it out.

MARA
It was routed to my floor. Closed. No action.

CAL (V.O.)
Thirty-one seconds. You know what I've timed against it? Brushing my teeth. The light at Topanga and Vanowen. A kid walking from the bench to the free-throw line.

MARA
I'm sorry.

CAL (V.O.)
I know you are. That's the part I wanted.

He lets her hold that.

CAL (V.O.)
Get some sleep. You've got a long week. Eat something.

Click. The dial tone, loud in the empty shop.

She hangs up. Her hand stays on the receiver.

KID IN GREEN POLO
You want a receipt?

MARA
No.

Outside, the cousin starts the Prius and the pine tree swings. She doesn't look back at the screen. He's had a year of her face. He doesn't get another night.

**INT. THE PALMS - ROOM 9 BATHROOM - NIGHT**

The P-touch. PALMS OFFICE, on tape around one orange handle, smoothed with her thumbnail, so she won't forget.

The fluorescent light takes a few seconds to decide. Then it comes on, buzzing, over the chipped sink.

There she is.

Forty-one. Four stitches and a bruise gone purple and green. Brown hair past her shoulder blades, twisted up with a

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

yellow Ticonderoga through it. Unsharpened. Every working day for fifteen years.

On every camera at Larkspur. In the stairwell. On Ruth's porch with an ear made of paint. In her own kitchen saying I took her.

MARA
(to the mirror)
It knows what it's seen.

She pulls the pencil out. Her hair comes down. She sets the pencil on the edge of the sink.

She gathers the hair at the back of her neck and pulls it forward over her shoulder. Opens the scissors.

They aren't made for this, and her left hand doesn't want to hold anything. She saws at it, a handful and then another. Brown hair in the sink, on the floor, on her flats.

We don't cut away. It takes a long time.

She cuts the other side to match. It doesn't. The left side sticks out where she had to switch hands.

She stops before she's bald.

The woman in the mirror. Hair to the jaw, crooked on the left. Four stitches. The green bruise.

Who's got a picture of this woman? Nobody, and it's three days to Friday.

She leaves the pencil on the sink and turns off the light.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - GREG'S OLD ROOM - NIGHT**

Lamp off. 2:50 AM on Tess's phone. The key is inside her pillowcase, where she can feel it through the cotton.

CapCut. Her clip on top, Dad's "whole thing" under it, frame for frame.

She's watched the mouth for three years. Tonight she watches everything else. The mat. The duffel. A yellow stripe of porch light across her mother's cheek.

INSERT - CAPCUT

FRAME 239. The mouth closes on "go."

FRAME 240. The last frame of Tess's clip. Top track: black.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Bottom track: FRAME 241. The stripe of light on her mother's cheek JUMPS a sixteenth of an inch toward the eye. It stays there for the rest of the video, while her mother's mouth says Take her with you. I never wanted her.

BACK TO SCENE

TESS
(a whisper)
Light doesn't jump. That's a cut.

Everything before 240 is hers, her eight seconds, which lived in two places in the world: her phone, and her dad's thread, with u should see what she said. Everything after is somebody else's.

There never was a whole file. The rest was built onto hers.

The phone RINGS in her hands. MOM. 3:14 AM. The new MOM.

MARA'S VOICE
(on the phone)
Baby. It's me. I can't talk long. Gerald. I need to know you heard me. Friday. Eleven-forty. The back door.

Tess looks at the pillow, at the shape of the key.

TESS
What did you give me this morning?

The line is quiet for half a second. Then a little longer.

MARA'S VOICE
...Nothing, baby. He wouldn't let me near you.

It's exactly her mother's voice.

TESS
Okay. Friday.

Click.

Her mother would know about the key. So who knows Gerald?

TESS
Me. Mom. Cal.

FLASH CUT: THE ISLAND AT LARKSPUR

Salmon. Tess saying "Gerald" to be a pain. Cal laughing half a beat late, raising his water glass.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

BACK TO SCENE

Three people at a table. Grandma Ruth never heard the word. Dad never knew it was a password.

TESS
She doesn't call me baby.

The porch called her baby. Forty texts called her baby.

It's Cal.

The front door at Larkspur, locking itself behind her mother. Nobody touched the keypad.

Tess is scared of him. First time. She pulls her knees up.

Then she takes the key out of the pillowcase and gets up.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

The light over the stove, which Ruth leaves on all night for burglars, who presumably like to see what they're doing.

The harvest-gold phone on the wall under the crucifix. It's hung there since before her father was born, on a copper wire to wherever calls went in 1979. Cal never touched it. Nobody ever needed him to.

She reads the number off the back of the key. Calling is for grandmothers and emergencies. This is a grandmother's phone, at least.

PALMS CLERK (ON PHONE)
(crunching)
Palms.

TESS
Room nine.

An older ring, at the end of a hallway. Somebody picks up.

MARA (ON PHONE)
Hello?

Her mother's real voice, tired and a little hoarse, at the end of a wire Tess picked. No Gerald. They don't need one.

Tess slides down the wall, the receiver in both hands.

TESS
It's him.

MARA (ON PHONE)
I know.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TESS
What did you do?

MARA (ON PHONE)
I cut my hair tonight. He's never seen it.

TESS
Is it bad?

MARA (ON PHONE)
Motel scissors.

TESS
Did you label them?

A silence on the line, with somebody in it.

MARA (ON PHONE)
...Yes.

Tess laughs, loud and ugly, into her hand so she won't wake Grandma Ruth, tears running into her palm. On the other end her mother is laughing too, trying not to, failing, and giving up.

MARA (ON PHONE)
(wiping her nose)
PALMS OFFICE.

TESS
Oh my God.

Then she stops laughing.

TESS
He called me. As you. Monday night, and again just now. He said Gerald. He said Friday, the back door, eleven-forty.

MARA (ON PHONE)
He sent me one from you. Same door. Same minute.

TESS
I didn't send anything.

MARA (ON PHONE)
I know. It had periods.

TESS
He asked Grandma for me Friday night. My own room. He wants me at
(MORE)

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

TESS (CONT'D)
the back door. Let him think he's got me.

MARA (ON PHONE)
No.

TESS
You're a fugitive. You don't get a vote.

MARA'S VOICE (PRELAP)
I have a gun and my daughter...

**INT. THE PALMS - ROOM 9 - DAY**

MARA'S VOICE
(the 911 recording)
I'll do us both before I let them take her.

Mara on the end of the bed. Hair to the jaw, longer on the left. Four black stitches. Her left hand in a motel towel.

MARA'S VOICE
(the 911 recording)
I'm putting the phone down.

The loop runs out. On the wall, her pages, NOT ME on every one, and ARCHIVE above them, crooked. 9:00 on the clock radio. She dials Dana's office from memory.

**INT. DANA WEXLER'S OFFICE - DAY**

Above the Persian bakery. Sesame cookies cool on the filing cabinet, unoffered. Dana answers with her eyes on her legal pad, FACT down the left and FEELING down the right.

INTERCUT - ROOM 9 / DANA'S OFFICE

DANA
Wexler.

MARA
It's me. Left-hand column. Calvin Lund, a file I confirmed eight years ago. The license photo is Cal.

Dana's pen starts.

DANA
And under FEELING?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Leave it blank.

DANA
I've never left it blank.

MARA
Then it's a first.

Her pen skips the right-hand column.

DANA
Phil Ruggiero called back. Five seconds is too short to find a seam. He wants three weeks and the machine it was made on.

Mara looks at ARCHIVE on the wall.

MARA
I know where the machine is.

DANA
Then come in with me.

MARA
Yes. Friday. Eleven-thirty.

DANA
In the morning.

MARA
At night. Tell Moss I want to see her first. Somewhere that isn't a police station.

DANA
If anybody finds out, it's her badge.
(then)
Eat something.

Click.

END INTERCUT

**INT. VAN NUYS COFFEE SHOP, SEPULVEDA AND VICTORY - DAWN**

Orange vinyl, brown Formica, a lemon meringue older than the sign out front. THE WAITRESS (60s), a pot in each hand. Lifer. Mara in the back booth, facing the wall.

6:29. Moss comes in on the phone, gray windbreaker, hair pulled back hard. She gives Mara's hair a beat longer than anything else in the room.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MOSS
Did your people walk the wash in May, Begay? Ask the plate readers on the 40 for a white Tacoma, eastbound that week.

She hangs up. Somebody's doing it properly. Mara studies the place mat until her eyes quit stinging.

MARA
(to the Waitress)
Two eggs over medium. Wheat toast.

MOSS
Oatmeal.

Mara slides over the printout, her blood dried on one corner. Moss reads it and lays down a page of her own.

INSERT - THE NOTICE
ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME. PRESENT NAME: CALVIN R. LUND. PROPOSED NAME: CAL HARMON.

BACK TO SCENE

MOSS
Calvin Lund to Cal Harmon. A judge in Van Nuys, two years ago. It ran in the paper four weeks in a row.
(then)
Did Greg carry a wallet?

MARA
With a picture of Tess in it from the fourth grade. He showed it to waiters.

Moss writes it all down, waiters included.

MOSS
Why eleven-thirty?

MARA
Because I'm invited somewhere at eleven-forty.
(then)
He made a video of me confessing at my own island. The corner says Friday, eleven-forty. At eleven-forty I want to be in your interview room, on your camera.

MOSS
Why not today?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
If I'm in a cell at noon, Ruth's prayer chain knows by two, and he picks another night. He waited eight years. And everything says Friday. The email, the calls, the video, the room he asked Ruth for. To move the night, he has to take all of it back.

MOSS
Where's your daughter at eleven-forty?

MARA
At her grandmother's. She wanted to go. I told her no.

MOSS
Runaways say okay. Did she?

MARA
She heard me.

Moss doesn't like it, from the windbreaker all the way down. She writes a 323 number on the back of a badge card and slides it under the sugar dispenser.

MOSS
If this is you, I'll put you away myself.

MARA
If it's me, you should.

At the register Moss pays cash, asks for the receipt and writes on the back of it. We don't get to read it.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Mara comes in the screen door from the side yard. Cal's doorbell watches the front walk and the street. It was never pointed at the side.

Ruth, on her knees in yellow rubber gloves, scrubs the spot where a drop of Tuesday could still be. She gets up, goes straight to the harvest-gold wall phone and puts her hand on the receiver. She doesn't lift it.

RUTH
What did you do to your hair?

MARA
I cut it.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

RUTH
With what?

MARA
Scissors I have to give back.

RUTH
It's crooked.

MARA
I switched hands.
(then)
Your phone buzzed at Thanksgiving.
What did it say?

RUTH
(sing-song, to nobody)
"Happy Thanksgiving, Mom. Miss you all. Love to Tess."

She's said it to herself every night for three weeks. This time she hears it.

MARA
What date's on the county form, Ruth?

RUTH
May. The trucker found my boy in May.

MARA
And Thanksgiving's in November.

RUTH
I know when Thanksgiving is, Mara. I cooked it.

MARA
So who had the phone?

Then Mara shuts up. Ruth's hand comes off the receiver. At the head of the everyday table, on the plastic cloth with lemons on it, she sets Thanksgiving back out from memory.

RUTH
Tess on my right. You across. He was at the foot. Everybody looked at my phone. He didn't. He said, "That's nice, Ruth," and he poured my wine. He set up my phone. He told me what to write. "Please don't call the police, they'll hurt her." That was him.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Ruth.

RUTH
I put your face on the app. He wrote it. I pushed the button.

She sits down hard. Mara's knees go. She's been believed. She grabs the door frame with her good hand and stays up.

Ruth peels the gloves off a finger at a time and lays them palms down on the lemons, fingers even.

RUTH
Seven years old, in a collar buttoned to the top. Somebody put him in that shirt and told him to smile. I know exactly what that looks like. I did it to Greg in 1990.
(then)
I prayed on it, Mara. Two whole rosaries. Then I called a lawyer.

MARA
Dana?

RUTH
Barry Pinsky.

MARA
Barry Pinsky wears a tie the color of a Band-Aid.

RUTH
He does. I tell him at coffee hour.
(then)
What do you need?

MARA
He asked you for Tess Friday night. Say yes.

RUTH
You want me to send her to that man's house.

MARA
I want him to think you are. She called me at three yesterday morning, on that phone. The one thing in this family he never touched. She wants to go. I told her no.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

RUTH
Thank God.

MARA
Say no, and he smells it. Say yes, get sick at six tomorrow, and he's stuck with Friday.

RUTH
Sick how?

MARA
A cold. Nothing he'd come over for.

RUTH
I don't get colds.

MARA
Get one. Keep her home and lock the doors. And give him a reason for the yes.

RUTH
My sister's. Joan, in Simi. We haven't spoken since a christening and a tuna casserole.
(decided)
Nobody calls Joan.

Mara takes the church bulletin off its nail by the phone and prints PALMS MOTOR LODGE, ROOM 9 under Ruth's Stove Top (2).

MARA
Anything happens, you call me there. Not him.

**EXT. RUTH'S HOUSE - BACK STEP - DAY**

Ruth in her church coat by the lemon tree, her cell at her ear. Mara listens through the screen door.

RUTH
Cal, it's Ruth. Friday's fine. She can have her own room. I'll be at my sister's.
(listens)
Yes, that one. Don't start.

Her pharmacy voice. It doesn't shake. In her pocket, her other hand holds the rosary so hard the beads can't move.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - COUNSELOR'S OFFICE - DAY**

Tess holds a pink slip by one corner. COUNSELING. Earbuds in, face set to nothing.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MS. FIGUEROA (20s), a cardigan with cats on it, believes in lamps. In the second chair Moss eats chili-powdered mango spears out of a clamshell. The visitor sticker on her windbreaker says DET. L. MOSS, LAPD.

Moss follows the earbud cord down to the end plugged into nothing, and says nothing about it.

MOSS
Where does your mother feel safe?

TESS
The Container Store.

Ms. Figueroa adjusts a lamp that didn't need it. Moss writes it down, underlines it, and asks for the room.

Moss lays a receipt on the desk, facing her.

INSERT - THE RECEIPT
A coffee shop on Sepulveda, Van Nuys, 7:02 AM. 2 COFFEE. 1 OATMEAL. 2 EGGS OVER MED. WHEAT TOAST.

BACK TO SCENE

MOSS
Does your mother order her eggs over medium?

TESS
When nobody's cooking for her. Cal makes them soft.

Moss turns it over.

INSERT - THE BACK OF THE RECEIPT
A 323 number. A Zoom meeting number and a passcode. FRIDAY 6 PM: GRANDMA'S. IF "MOM" CALLS, CALL ME.

BACK TO SCENE

Periods. Her mother would like this woman.

MOSS
I want you in that meeting tomorrow night, at your grandmother's, from six. Camera on. If somebody who sounds like your mother calls at eleven-forty, I want to see it. Will you be at your grandmother's? Whatever your phone tells you?

Tess looks at the receipt and doesn't answer.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MOSS
Whose Wi-Fi is at your grandmother's?

TESS
His. He did her router when he did the doorbell.

MOSS
Stay off it.

TESS
If I was at the house. At home. Could you still see me?

MOSS
Why would you be at the house?

TESS
If.

MOSS
And if you were in that house, and the lights went out, where would you go?

She's trying to scare her. It works.

TESS
The basement. Behind the water heater. There's nothing of his down there. No speaker. No camera. Nothing with a light on it.

MOSS
Has he ever been down there?

We remember Saturday: the basement door open a crack, and Cal smiling at it.

TESS
I don't know. There's a window. Four inches. I can kick it.

MOSS
And when you're down there, who sees you?

Neither of them answers. In the hall a locker bangs.

TESS
Did you see her? This morning?

MOSS
Her hair's crooked on the left.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Tess's throat closes so fast it scares her. She grabs a green Jolly Rancher from Ms. Figueroa's bowl.

MOSS
Your mother thinks you'll say no to her. Will you say no to me?

TESS
I say no to her because she's my mom. You're not my mom.
(then)
Are you going to be watching? The whole time?

MOSS
Double shift. I bought two mangoes.

The receipt goes in her hoodie pocket, beside the motel key on its green plastic diamond.

TESS
Then yes. Don't cut away.

Yes to what? Moss doesn't ask.

Ms. Figueroa comes back in, hopeful.

MS. FIGUEROA
Did she help?

MOSS
Have you ever been to the Container Store?

**INT. RUTH'S BUICK - MOVING - DAY**

3:05 on the dash. Johnny Mathis skipping on "Sleigh Ride." Tess in back, because of the airbags and an article.

RUTH
I told him yes.
(to the windshield)
You're not going anywhere. Your mother said no, and I said no. That's two.

At the light at Rinaldi, Ruth practices. Hand on her chest. One dry bark that goes on too long and ends in a whistle.

Terrible.

TESS
That's not a cold. That's the Buick.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

RUTH
It'll get better by six. I'll gargle.

Tess looks out the window the rest of the way home.

**INT. RUTH'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Ruth snoring behind her door. Tess comes down along the wall where the steps don't creak and lifts the harvest-gold receiver. Dial tone. She doesn't dial.

TESS
(low, into the dial tone)
If I'm not there, he knows, and he's gone. Somebody else, with a girl upstairs. And you're the mom who took me. Forever.

She hangs up. On her own phone, in Cal's thread, she types can u get me? grandma's sick / i want my room

Her thumb waits over the arrow.

**INT. RUTH'S BUICK - NORTHGATE DROP-OFF LANE - MORNING**

Ruth's cough is better now. A cold you'd cancel plans for.

TESS
Marisol's mom's driving me home after school. Spanish Club. I'll be back at six.

RUTH
Six, young lady. Not one minute after.

Ruth turns all the way around in her seat, which her back hates, and takes Tess's face in both hands, cold from the wheel. She holds on longer than usual.

Tess holds both backpack straps all the way up the steps, sick about the lie.

**EXT. NORTHGATE HIGH - LOW WALL BY THE GYM - DAY**

Marisol peels a Lunchable. On the wall beside her, a Ziploc: her old iPhone, cracked, in a pink glitter case with a Chunk sticker, the cord coiled under it.

TESS
If my grandma calls you, I'm at your house.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARISOL
Is it a boy? It's a boy. Is he in college?

TESS
He's not in college.

MARISOL
Is he older than college?

Marisol eats a cracker instead of asking the next one.

In Settings, Tess's iPhone becomes HP OfficeJet 4F. Tonight her own phone is the Wi-Fi, so nothing touches his. Nobody looks twice at a printer.

She sends last night's text to Cal. The answer comes before she can put the phone down.

ON TESS'S PHONE, from Cal: out front at 3. I'll bring the good chocolate.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT HALL / TESS'S ROOM - DAY**

The doorbell's blue ring watches them in. Her black Vans go beside the checkerboards. Cal's boots. Her mother's slippers, where nobody's moved them. On the hook above, Cal's canvas coat.

CAL
Go on up. It's all how you left it.

Upstairs she charges her phone on Marisol's cord, since hers is shot. In Wi-Fi settings she finds his network. Forget This Network? She's sure.

Downstairs, a cast-iron pan comes down on a burner.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN / STAIRS - NIGHT**

Cal's phone lights on the island at 6:02. RUTH. He turns off the stove fan to hear.

Tess is on the top step before the second ring, in her socks, out of sight.

INTERCUT - LARKSPUR / RUTH'S KITCHEN / ROOM 9 / MOSS'S DESK

Ruth at her wall phone, rosary in her free hand.

CAL
Ruth.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

RUTH
(the cough; it's good now)
Cal. I'm sick as a dog. I'm not up to Joan's. I'm keeping Tess home with me tonight.

CAL
Ruth, she's here. She texted me at lunch and said you weren't feeling well. She didn't tell you? Teenagers.

Ruth's hand closes on the beads. On the stairs, Tess puts her hand over her mouth.

CAL
Get some rest, Ruth. I've got her.

Fan back on. He talks to the stairs without turning around.

CAL
Salmon. If that's okay.

Did he know she was on the stairs the whole time? Yup.

TESS
That's fine.

6:05, ROOM 9. Mara grabs the beige phone mid-ring.

RUTH
She's not here, honey. She's at that man's house. She used my cold before I did.

MARA
Ruth.

RUTH
Where are you going to be?

MARA
The police station. Eleven-thirty.

RUTH
Then that's where I'll be.

MARA
There's going to be two of me, Ruth.

RUTH
Then I'll look at the one in the room.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Mara's hand is on the doorknob before she's decided anything. His back door, his night. She takes the hand back.

Upstairs at Larkspur, Tess on the bed with both phones. Hers: Personal Hotspot, on. Marisol's: join HP OfficeJet 4F. Zoom. Name: T. A black square lets her in: L MOSS. On her own phone, Voice Memos, the red circle, 6:08. The battery says 90.

She types into the chat one gray bubble at a time. No capitals. No periods. Marisol's phone goes on the shelf against Catching Fire, looking down at her lap.

At MOSS'S DESK, in a tile marked T: a lap from above, and a lock screen with a dog asleep on his back in the grass. Five gray bubbles. Moss calls Room 9.

MOSS
Your daughter joined my meeting.
(reading, flat)
its me
im ok
hes making salmon
dont come
if u come he'll know

Mara sits down on the bed without meaning to.

MOSS
Her thumbs are steady. No periods. Supposed to be?

MARA
No. It's her.

MOSS
I've got a unit on Tampa. He can knock in ten.

MARA
Knock. Offer her a ride to her grandmother's. If she says she's fine, leave her. Drag her out past him and nobody knows what he does with the next minute. I want somebody with a badge to see her face tonight.

The clock radio goes from 6:13 to 6:21. Mara hasn't moved. Moss holds her cell to the laptop's speaker.

MOSS
Listen.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Three soft notes come up through the Larkspur house. The doorbell. Cal always gets to the door first.

Tess slides Marisol's phone into her hoodie pocket, screen in. Cal's feet on the stairs. One knuckle on her door.

CAL
Tess? There's a police officer at the door. He'd like to see you.

She goes down first, and we go with her. Halfway down, his hand comes to rest on her shoulder. It doesn't push and it doesn't hold. She feels every one of his steps through it.

On the porch, in the blue light of the ring: a YOUNG OFFICER (20s) in a vest that squares him off. His patrol car idles by the Kaplans' inflatable Grinch, lit and swaying and grinning at all of them.

YOUNG OFFICER
Teresa Quinn? We got a request to come check on you. You doing okay tonight?

TESS
I'm fine.

He looks at Tess. At the hand on her shoulder. Back at Tess.

CAL
Her grandmother's her guardian. She's got a cold, so Tess came home for the night. You're welcome to call her.

YOUNG OFFICER
(to Tess)
Want me to run you over to your grandmother's? It's no trouble.

In Room 9, Mara presses the receiver into her ear.

TESS
She's sick. I'm fine.

YOUNG OFFICER
Have a good night.

Cal shuts the door. The deadbolt goes over by itself. Whir, click. His hand comes off her shoulder.

CAL
Salmon's ready.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

He doesn't ask who sent the police. Tess holds the newel post until her knees stop.

Room 9. Her daughter just lied to a police officer. Well.

MOSS
He's parking on that circle with two instructions. He doesn't leave for any call that doesn't come from me. And if the lights go out in that house, he doesn't wait for me.
(then)
Be early.

In the Larkspur kitchen, Phoebe Bridgers plays from a new speaker on the bracket where the police tore the old one down. The Gerald dinner, salmon glazed dark at the edges. Tess's plate is made up and waiting by the stove. He serves his own out of the pan. Her mother's phone charges by the stove under the smoke detector's red light. The tablet lies face up by his plate, the porch on it.

CAL
Did Marisol like it? The birthday video?

TESS
She cried on the chorus. Your cuts.

CAL
She cried?

He laughs half a beat late, low and warm, behind his napkin.

CAL
(right at her)
Whatever happens, Tess, you're not alone in this.

Does he mean it? As far as Tess can tell. His eyes keep dropping to the tablet. Her hand stays in her pocket around the phones, and a piece of salmon goes under the rice.

CAL
Eat something.

TESS
I had a big lunch. Ms. Figueroa had pizza. For the kids with stuff going on.

He wraps her plate in foil, edges even. Into the fridge.

CAL
For later. If you get hungry.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

At Moss's desk, 6:52, the T tile is black: a phone in a hoodie pocket, and faint forks on plates. Moss calls Room 9.

MOSS
Your mother-in-law called after the knock. She's the guardian. She wants Tess out. With Harmon in the doorway saying she's fine, that takes my sergeant and a second car. I get both when you're booked. The car waits at the Chevron on Rinaldi, two minutes out.

On Moss's card, Mara prints CHEVRON. RINALDI. 11:30, boxed.

MARA
Ten minutes ahead of him. And until eleven-forty, he needs her fine.

9:15. Mara's phone buzzes by the stove: RUTH. Cal, drying the cast-iron, lets it ring out.

TESS
She calls Mom every night. Nine-fifteen.

Tess at the window, one blind slat down: the patrol car on the circle, lights off, by the drain stenciled NO DUMPING.

CAL (O.S.)
Doorbell says he hasn't moved since he knocked.

TESS
Because of Mom?

CAL (O.S.)
Because of your mom.

He sounds sorry about it.

10:50. Upstairs, Cal in white socks at her open door.

CAL
Night, Tess.

TESS
Night.

He looks at her phone. In the corner of the screen: 38%. He holds out his hand, palm up.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
Want me to put that on the charger downstairs? Your cord's shot. I saw it Saturday.

TESS
It's at ninety.

CAL
Okay. Sleep tight.

He goes down the hall. We hear every stair. He doesn't know which ones creak, or he doesn't care. Tess leaves the door not quite shut.

END INTERCUT

**INT. THE PALMS - OFFICE - NIGHT**

Orange-handled scissors slide under the bulletproof glass, handles first. PALMS OFFICE on label tape around one handle.

The clerk looks up from his phone game. The microwave behind him says 11:05. He looks at Mara for the first time in five nights: the hair, the stitches, a tote that says RISK IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS.

PALMS CLERK
Huh. First pair back since I've been here. Friday's on the house.

MARA
Your cousin with the Prius. Is he around?

PALMS CLERK
Ten minutes.

Back in Room 9 the wall is bare except one crooked label, ARCHIVE. The pencil lies on the sink, where she left it.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - GARAGE - NIGHT**

Cal comes in from the kitchen in white socks and the gray quarter-zip, the knob held turned so the latch won't click.

The Outback sits a foot from the workbench under a week of gray dust. Her keys are in the cupholder, the fob in label tape: OUTBACK. In case anybody wondered.

He folds the drop cloth off the rig, corner to corner. Glove box. Under the registration, an orange bottle.

INSERT - THE BOTTLE
MARA QUINN. OXYCODONE HCL 10 MG. QTY 120. Henderson, Nevada.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

BACK TO SCENE

He turns the label toward the seat. A can of Diet Coke from the fridge goes in the cupholder beside her keys, unopened.

**INT. COUSIN'S PRIUS (MOVING) - SEPULVEDA BLVD - NIGHT**

A pine tree on a string, Bad Bunny turned down. Dash: 11:17.

MARA
The police station on Etiwanda.

The cousin doesn't ask why. Good cousin. She counts two twenties into his hand.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Dark. The stove light, the smoke detector's red dot above it, and Mara's phone on the counter under that.

Cal opens the junk drawer. A clean rectangle in the dust where a label maker sat, and in the back, the bottle taped NOT MINE. He looks. He doesn't touch it.

The tablet. The porch feed: the Kaplans' inflatable Grinch, and under the streetlight a black-and-white, engine running, the driver's face blue from his phone.

He drags the feed back to 6:21. The young officer at the door looks down at one face and up at another. Cal drags it back. The officer looks again.

INSERT - THE TABLET
11:41 PM GARAGE DOOR ..... CLOSE ..... ONCE
11:52 PM MQ_conf_v14.mp4 ..... SCHEDULED
11:53 PM CH_statement_v3 ..... SCHEDULED

BACK TO SCENE

He reads every line and changes nothing. In the fridge, a foil-covered plate of salmon with one piece pushed under the rice. He folds the foil so the edges match.

**EXT. LAPD DEVONSHIRE STATION, ETIWANDA AVENUE - NIGHT**

Dana waits under the light in a camel coat down to her shins, with a Ziploc of sesame cookies she has brought to a surrender. Ruth stands beside her in her church coat, a hand on the rosary in her pocket.

Dana looks at the hair for a long second.

DANA
Good God.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
It's a choice.

DANA
It's a crime. Is it evidence?

MARA
It's the evidence.

Dana holds the door for her.

DANA
You're early.

RUTH
She was early to her own wedding.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - BOOKING COUNTER - NIGHT**

The clock over the counter says 11:31. A BOOKING OFFICER (30s) types it in. Moss watches from the end of the counter in her gray windbreaker.

BOOKING OFFICER
Violation of an emergency protective order. Forty counts. Look at the lens.

She doesn't fix her hair. FLASH. On the monitor: hair to the jaw, crooked on the left, four stitches, 11:31.

MOSS
(into the hall)
She's booked. Send the car.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

The upstairs-hall feed: Tess's door open a few inches, lamplight on the carpet. 11:32. 11:33. Nothing moves, and Cal hardly blinks.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT**

A wide window onto the squad room: a WOMAN eating noodles with chopsticks, a PATROLMAN with his feet up, the SERGEANT by the radio.

On the far wall, a briefing monitor cabled to Moss's laptop shows Tess's lap from over her shoulder. Takis dust on the comforter. Her own phone runs a recording: 5:25:46, 5:25:47.

Tess found a second phone. Of course she did.

MOSS
What am I looking at?

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
She's breathing.

Ruth's beads move in her fingers. Dana writes in the left-hand column: 11:31 BOOKED. Moss's phone lights up.

MOSS
The second car's rolling.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

11:34. A school stream: NO GAME TONIGHT. Cal closes it.

From the drawer under the island, a small black headset. Two flat waveforms open on the tablet under one word: ABERNATHY. He dials 911. Caller ID: an 818 line three doors down.

CAL
(low, into the mic)
There's a guy shooting at cars.

ABERNATHY'S VOICE
(from the tablet)
There's a guy shooting at cars.

An old man with a smoker's catch, half a beat behind Cal's lips. From here on we hear only the old man.

ABERNATHY'S VOICE
The gas station by the 118. He's got a rifle. There's a woman in a car, she's not moving. It's Dick Abernathy. Hurry up.

Cal coils the cord around two fingers.

**INT. ABERNATHY HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Three doors down, Mr. Abernathy sleeps on his back with his mouth open. His hearing aids sit in a dish.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM / SQUAD ROOM - NIGHT**

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(through the glass)
...shots fired... gas station... the 118... a woman down...

The noodles go down. Moss is on her phone before the sergeant gets a sentence out.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MOSS
You stay on that circle. I know what it said. Stay.
(dials)
Keep going. Get the girl first.

She RAPS the glass. The sergeant jabs a finger at his radio.

SERGEANT
(through the glass)
Woman down. Every unit.

His order over hers. Moss sits back down.

MOSS
The second car stopped at the 118.

INTERCUT - CAL'S TABLET / THE INTERVIEW ROOM

On the tablet, the light bar washes the Grinch red and blue. The car swings around the circle and goes. WHOOP.

Out of Moss's laptop, small and far away: the same WHOOP.

MOSS
There goes my circle.

Mara presses her taped hand flat on the table, hard.

END INTERCUT

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT HALL / GARAGE - NIGHT**

Cal touches the tablet, and the big garage door rolls up.

The front hall. His boots, Mara's slippers, Tess's Vans and her checkerboards. The left checkerboard sits half an inch forward. He evens the heels. His canvas coat hangs on the hook above. He doesn't touch it.

Into the Outback in his white socks, beside the Diet Coke. Foot on the brake. The button.

The engine turns over. The dash: 11:39.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT**

Out of Moss's laptop, faint, from under Tess's floor: an engine catches and settles into an idle. Mara's head comes up. That's her car.

MARA
He's starting my car. In the garage. With her.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

On the wall the recording goes away. A video call RINGS in over it, loud enough to make Ruth flinch.

MOM.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - TESS'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Tess on her bed, earbuds in, plugged into nothing. On the headboard shelf, Marisol's pink-glitter phone leans on Catching Fire with its camera on her.

Her mother has never made a video call in her life. Tess answers anyway, low, so the shelf can see.

INTERCUT - THE INTERVIEW ROOM / TESS'S ROOM

On the squad-room wall, over her daughter's shoulder: Mara.

A dark yard, a porch light putting a gold edge on one cheek. Long hair twisted up, a yellow pencil through it. Calm, tired, kind. No stitches. The face from her own kitchen, every morning for a year.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Come out to the garage, baby. The car's running.

Mara goes cold all over.

Ruth looks at the screen. Then at the woman beside her: short hair, stitches, the taped hand. Back to the screen.

The beads stop.

Through the glass the patrolman takes his feet down. One by one the night shift turns from the long hair to the short, and nobody turns back.

On Tess's phone the woman with the pencil smiles. It's better than Mara has ever managed at seven in the morning.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
Baby? Come on. It's cold.

Tess looks at the hair, the pencil, the cheek with nothing on it. She lifts the phone until it has her whole face. She wants him to have it.

TESS
Your hair's wrong, Cal.

One second of total silence in Devonshire station.

Then the noodle woman BARKS a laugh and claps a hand over her mouth. Mara makes a sound that's half a laugh. She's so

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

proud she has to hold the table.

The woman with the pencil keeps smiling. She doesn't blink.

On the wall, the phone drops out of the picture. An empty bed. Socks on the stairs, at school-morning speed.

END INTERCUT

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT HALL / KITCHEN - NIGHT**

We go with Tess, down the stairs. The front door's right there. She runs past it.

Cal sits at the island in the dark, headset on. On his tablet the long hair smiles. His own mouth is closed. He turns his head and looks at her.

She doesn't stop. Past the pantry. Through the basement door. Shut.

His stool SCRAPES the tile.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

No light. Open-backed stairs. Her sock goes in the bottom step. Wet. It's always wet.

Around the water heater, into the two feet between the tank and the wall. Her phone says NO SERVICE. The smile freezes. The call drops. The hotspot icon goes out.

**INT. DEVONSHIRE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM - NIGHT**

The wall freezes on the empty bed. Then NO SIGNAL.

Mara knows where. Six days ago she stood behind that tank.

MOSS
I need a car on Larkspur.

SERGEANT
All we've got is at the gas station.

Moss turns around.

MOSS
Car. Now.

Mara's already up with the tote on her shoulder.

MOSS
You're in my custody. You stay where I can see you.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
There's a window.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BASEMENT - NIGHT**

Behind the tank, Tess's phone says 11:41.

Through the wall the big garage door RATTLES down its chain. BUMP. Under it, an ENGINE.

Her mother's car. Running. Door shut.

She pulls her earbuds out for the first time all night and pockets them with the motel key and Moss's receipt. She wants to hear.

The gray line of stove light under the door goes out.

CLICK. WHIRR. CLICK. The front deadbolt. The back door. The garage. Who's locking up? Nobody. The house is.

Then the smoke detectors. Cal picked the kind that talk.

MARA'S VOICE
(from every smoke detector in the house)
Tess? Baby? It's Mom.

The heater DRIPS.

The basement door CLICKS open. No light. The stairs CREAK, and Tess knows every creak. The last one. A gap, too long. A sock, soft, on concrete.

He's stepped over the wet one.

Then she can't hear him at all.

INSERT - TESS'S PHONE, UNDER HER HOODIE
Voice Memos, stopped at 11:40. A flat line of breathing, two fat spots near the start. Her thumb drags to the second.

BACK TO SCENE

The second spot is dinner. Play. Face down. A two-finger push, and it skates off toward the bins.

CAL (RECORDED)
(from her phone, at dinner)
Did Marisol like it?

Forks, plates, Phoebe Bridgers. A sock on concrete, close, then going away toward the voice. Tess goes the other way, low, a hand on the wall.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

A hand CLAMPS on her ankle. Huge. Dry. Sure of itself.

It YANKS. She goes down HARD on her hip.

Her heel drives back into the dark. THOCK. Bone. She tears free, under the open stairs, knees to her chin.

He doesn't come after her.

The phone's light comes up off the floor in his hand, and we get his face from below. Nothing on it.

CAL (RECORDED)
(from the phone in his hand)
Whatever happens, Tess, you're not alone in this.

He thumbs it off and throws it. CRACK, by the bins. Dark.

Back up, right over her head. Each tread CREAKS. Dust sifts onto her face. At the top his own phone lights his ear.

CAL
This is Cal Harmon, Fourteen Larkspur Court, Porter Ranch. Mara Quinn is in my house. She has a gun and her daughter.

His own voice. The kind one, for Grandma Ruth.

**INT. MOSS'S EXPLORER (MOVING) - TAMPA AVENUE - NIGHT**

Mara rides in front, uncuffed. Moss put her there and will answer for it Monday. SIREN. Every red on Tampa at sixty.

MARA
He'll call them on me. He wants them to find me in there with her.

MOSS
Which window?

MARA
Behind the heater. Four inches.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Cal at the top of the stairs, the phone still at his ear.

CAL
Please hurry.

He lowers the phone. Quietly, down the stairs, to her:

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
She always comes.

Under the stairs Tess's fear turns to anger. Her hand finds the motel key and squeezes until the brass teeth go in.

White light slides along the joists through the four-inch window. Headlights. Somebody he didn't call.

At the top of the stairs, the tablet lights in his hands.

THE HOUSE GOES OFF.

A SIREN Tess feels in her teeth. Every light STROBES. The basement comes and goes in hard white pieces.

MARA'S VOICE
(roaring, from every speaker)
TESS. BABY. IT'S MOM.

Through the wall the garage door SLAMS up. Down. Up.

FLASH. Cal at the top of the stairs, calm, his reading-the-news face. FLASH. Her phone by the bins, its glass a spiderweb. FLASH. The red wrench on its wire.

Dark: she moves. FLASH: she freezes. She's been cutting video on the beat since she was thirteen. She moves between the kicks.

**EXT. LARKSPUR COURT - CUL-DE-SAC - CONTINUOUS**

Moss brakes in the middle of the circle. Every window in the house goes white, black, white. The garage door rolls up on the Outback, exhaust pouring out and nobody in it. BANG. It comes down. Mr. Abernathy stands in his doorway in pajamas, a hand up against the strobe.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

Tess makes the tank. Her fingers find the wrench on its wire. She touches it. She leaves it.

Everything STOPS. Black. Her ears RING. The DRIP. The ENGINE through the wall.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the smoke detectors, small and patient)
Tess? Baby? It's Mom.

At the top of the stairs a flat blue-white light comes on, the size of a tablet. It starts down.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**EXT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT WALK / SIDE YARD - CONTINUOUS**

Dark, except the doorbell's blue ring.

MOSS
Stay in the car. Head below the dash.

Mara's out before Moss has her own door open. Moss SLAMS her shoulder into the front door. THUD. Cal rehung it Sunday with long bright screws. Mara thanked him.

MOSS
(into radio)
Detective Lena Moss, 14 Larkspur Court. Mara Quinn is with me. Unarmed. Booked at eleven-thirty-one.

We go with Mara the other way, over the side gate, badly, onto her hip by the trash cans.

The window at dirt level stands open its four inches. Black, with a faint glow far inside.

MARA'S VOICE
(from inside, small and calm)
Tess, it's me. Come to me.

Her back to the Kaplans' fence, both flats on the frame. KICK. The stop holds. KICK. Old wood CRACKS.

MARA'S VOICE
(from inside)
Come to me.

It has all night.

KICK. The bar TEARS out, screws and all. Feet first, on her stomach, the bad hand held up. She hangs by one arm and drops into the dark.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS**

SPLAT. Wet concrete. She's on her knees between the wall and something big and warm. The water heater.

Watermelon, faint. On the ledge by her cheek, Tess's vape.

The glow is two steps from the bottom, at chest height. It lights nothing of the man.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA'S VOICE
(from the tablet)
Tess, it's me. Come to me.

Up through the floor:

MARA'S VOICE
(from the smoke detectors)
Tess? Baby? It's Mom.

Two of them. Both her.

Mara opens her mouth. She has her daughter's name ready, and everything she'd say in a kitchen.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the tablet)
Tess, it's me.

He's said it first.

FLASH CUT: THE KITCHEN ISLAND, NOVEMBER

The FBI bulletin by Tess's plate. Cal raises his water glass to it.

CAL
Gerald.

BACK TO SCENE

Mara closes her mouth.

She says nothing.

Her good hand goes out into the black. The warm tank. A cold pipe. Something on a wire that swings.

Lower. A cotton sleeve with an arm in it.

It jerks away hard.

She doesn't follow it. She holds her hand out where it was. Open. Palm up.

Nothing.

Then cold small fingers come back and touch hers, and stop. They're waiting to find out what she is.

Mara takes her daughter's hand.

Short.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

Short.

Short.

Only we see it.

Tess's eyes close on the first. She lets the other two come.

She holds on one second longer.

MARA'S VOICE
(from the tablet)
Tess, it's me. Come to me.

The glow is on the second step from the bottom.

Tess lets go.

Along the bins on hands and knees to the broken phone. She HURLS it at the far wall, away from her mother. CRACK.

The glow swings to the sound. One white sock on the step above the wet one.

Mara comes out of the dark. Low. Fast. She HITS him at the hips with all of her.

His sock finds the wet step.

It goes.

WHUMP. Concrete. The tablet SKIDS off, lighting the joists.

He's stronger. He's on top of her before they stop sliding, her taped hand in his, turning the wrist. His forearm SLAMS across her throat. He leans.

The tape RIPS. The cut opens. Blood runs to her elbow.

Tess goes for the wrench. The wire holds. She hauls with her whole body and it TEARS loose, wire and all.

Her mother's face is going dark. Her eyes are on Tess.

Two hands. DOWN on his wrist.

CRACK.

He SCREAMS, high, and rolls off curled around the arm. His foot kicks the tablet under the stairs. Every speaker in the house stops mid-word.

DRIP. The ENGINE. Cal WHISTLING breath through his teeth. Tess stands over him with the wrench up, shaking so hard the wire RATTLES. She wants to hit him again.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARA
Tess.

From the floor. One voice, from one place. Nothing in the ceiling says it with her.

Tess lowers the wrench. She doesn't let go of it.

BOOM. Overhead, the front door comes in.

METRO OFFICER (O.S.)
POLICE! POLICE!

Rifles down the stairs. The lights find Mara on the wet floor with blood to her elbow. Red dots walk up her chest.

METRO OFFICER
Hands! Show me hands!

Mara raises them. Tess drops the wrench, CLANG, and kneels beside her with her hands as high as they go.

Moss pushes down through them, hands open, and stops in front of Mara with her back to her. The dots move onto Moss.

MOSS
She was in my custody at eleven-forty. Who called you?

Nobody answers. One light slides off her to the man in white socks holding his arm. Then the rest of them.

On Moss's belt, at Tess's eye height, a phone lights: 11:52. Her mother at the island, long hair, yellow pencil, calm.

Through the wall, the engine runs. Tess gets up. By the far wall her own phone lies face down. She turns it over. Spiderweb glass, and it still lights.

MOSS
Somebody go with her.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - KITCHEN / GARAGE - CONTINUOUS**

Up the stairs. She puts her foot in the wet step on purpose.

Past her mother's phone under the red light. The garage deadbolt. Hot-engine air. An officer hits the wall button and the big door starts up.

The keys in the cupholder, beside a can of Diet Coke nobody opened. She leans across the seat and pushes the button.

The engine stops.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

**EXT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - FRONT PORCH / LAWN - NIGHT**

A few minutes past midnight. Cal sits on the top porch step, cuffed in front because of a blue foam splint. His white socks have gone gray. He looks at the welcome mat. It says hello, lowercase. He's never liked it.

Mara stands on the lawn where Moss put her, in a silver blanket that crackles when she breathes.

The whole street's awake. The Nguyens on their porch in matching bathrobes. Again. Red and blue over all of them, and over the little red camera lights on every eave. They all have their phones out.

MARA (ON SCREEN)
(from a dozen phones, out of step)
I did it. I took her. You'll never find her.

Over the hedge, MRS. KAPLAN (60s) holds hers up: Mara's island, Mara's unmarked face, the pencil. In the corner: FRI DEC 18 11:40 PM.

Where was Mara at 11:40? Nine minutes past her mug shot.

Mrs. Kaplan plays the next post. Cal at Mara's island in daylight, in the gray quarter-zip, his eyes wet.

CAL (ON SCREEN)
My name is Cal Harmon. I put in your doorbells. Eight years ago my name was Calvin Lund, and a woman at a bank took my job and my son in thirty-one seconds, without looking at my face. Her name was Mara Quinn. I came here to forgive her, and I did. I loved her. I'm so sorry I couldn't help her.

On the step, the real one doesn't look up from the mat.

Mrs. Kaplan looks at Mara's hair and stitches, then back at the pencil. She turns her phone over against her coat.

**EXT. LARKSPUR COURT - CUL-DE-SAC - LATER**

Dana's green Volvo wagon stops behind the ambulance. Ruth's out before it stops.

A hand on Mara's arm, one second. At the foot of the steps she looks up at Cal and says nothing to him at all.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

She goes to Tess on the curb and takes her face in both hands. This time she doesn't let go.

Dana stands beside Mara with the cookies and the pad.

DANA
I put him on the stand.

MARA
He did my eggs soft.

On the curb, Tess scrolls a thread up and up on the cracked glass, years of it, and sends three short words.

Through the front door, hanging on one hinge: Cal's canvas coat on its hook. We linger on it.

The pocket lights through the canvas. BZZZT. BZZZT.

Moss, in a blue glove, takes out an iPhone and holds it where Mara can read it.

INSERT - THE LOCK SCREEN
TESS: who is this

BACK TO SCENE

Tess walks to the bottom of the steps, where Ruth stood.

TESS
You knew where he was.

CAL
In a wash off the I-40 shoulder, outside Gallup. I didn't kill anybody. I just didn't report it. Nobody reported me either.

She looks at him until he looks away. Then she goes back to the curb, and Ruth sits down beside her in her church coat.

Mara goes up the walk. Moss lets her. A red mark is coming up on his cheekbone. That's Tess's heel.

For a year he stood at her island every morning, and she read her laptop.

MARA
Look at me, Calvin.

It takes him a while. Then he lifts his head.

We recognize the face: the license photo, eight years on, with a beard. And the eyes of the boy in the school photo, exactly. He takes his time with her short hair, learning it.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CAL
My son doesn't know my voice.

MARA
I'm looking.

She doesn't count. They walk him past her in his gray socks, through all the phones, to a car.

Beside the door, the doorbell's blue ring glows. In the garage an officer pulls the plug on a white box. High on the back corner of the eave, a red dot goes out: the camera that took Greg's picture of her at the sink.

The blue ring goes dark.

**INT. NORTHGATE HIGH - HALLWAY - DAY (JANUARY)**

MR. DELGADO (40s), sweater vest, holds a door. Tess goes by.

TESS
Hi.

MR. DELGADO
Hey, chief.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - PROBATE COURTROOM - DAY**

The same room as December: cough-drop-brown paneling, one fluorescent tube BUZZING. This time Tess is inside, first row, in a Kohl's sweater from Ruth.

Commissioner Marsh has a cold and her own box of Kleenex. Mara sits with Dana, hair evened at the jaw, a new scar across her left palm. Ruth sits with Pinsky. Begay has come from New Mexico in uniform.

DANA
You got the City Attorney's letter.

MARA
Four times. Forty counts, dropped in two lines. Cleared.

PINSKY
Commissioner, Mrs. Q withdraws her petition.

MARSH
Granted. Before I terminate anything, I'd like to know what December's two recordings weighed.

Moss takes the witness chair.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

INSERT - THE TWO STILLS, SIDE BY SIDE ON THE BENCH
Left: hair to the jaw, four stitches, 11:31.
Right: a dark yard, long hair, a pencil, 11:40.

BACK TO SCENE

MOSS
Ms. Quinn was booked at eleven-thirty-one and sat across from me. At eleven-forty her daughter got a video call that said MOM. I recorded it. Her daughter went to that house on her own. I'd asked her not to.

Tess goes hot to the ears.

MOSS
Then Mr. Lund called 911 in his own voice. He said Ms. Quinn was in his house with a gun and her daughter. She was in the front seat of my car.

DANA
And the confession?

MOSS
Uploaded eight days before the time on it.

MARSH
What was the back door for?

MOSS
He'd called Ms. Quinn there at eleven-forty, in her daughter's name. I heard her car running in his garage. A hundred and twenty oxycodone in her name in the glove box. The garage door was set to close once. On my recording, her daughter's told to come out to the garage. It would have looked like she did it herself, and tried to take her daughter with her.

DANA
Greg Quinn's phone.

MOSS
In May his line pinged towers west along the I-40 for two days, at about three miles an hour.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

MARSH
Three miles an hour.

MOSS
That's walking.

Mara closes her eyes.

MOSS
It stopped west of Gallup ten hours before the plate readers put Mr. Lund's truck in New Mexico. The wallet was in Mr. Lund's garage. Tess's fourth-grade picture. Behind it, two printed tickets to the Greek, a night in June. Section C.

Begay nods to Tess.

TESS
He was walking to Phoebe.

She cries without a sound into the Kohl's sleeve.

MOSS
A father walking home was the one thing Mr. Lund couldn't fake.

DANA
The forty texts.

MOSS
Scheduled from her phone the night before, while she slept. I traced the calls in her voice to the house internet line.

MARA
(to nobody)
Twelve fifty-two to four thirty-seven. I slept through it.

MARSH
And the tablet?

MOSS
The tablet is encrypted. It doesn't need to be opened.

Moss sits back. For Moss, that's a filibuster.

DANA
And Ms. Quinn's badge records. Priya Shah at Meridian printed them
(MORE)

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

DANA (CONT'D)
the day of the stairwell video and kept them past the purge. That badge never opened a stairwell door.

MARSH
Thank you, Detective. Ms. Quinn, in December you asked me to ask your daughter. I'd like to ask her now. Tess?

Tess goes through the little gate. It squeaks.

MARSH
Is that your mother?

FLASH CUT: THE BASEMENT

A hand held out, palm up, behind a water heater.

BACK TO SCENE

TESS
She's my mom. I checked.

RUTH
Amen.

About volume thirty-eight.

MARSH
The guardianship is terminated. Custody to the mother, today.

The rest is mostly Latin and Dana. Mara pushes back her chair and turns around to her daughter.

**INT. STANLEY MOSK COURTHOUSE - FIFTH FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY**

Ruth puts her black rosary in Mara's scarred palm and folds the fingers closed with her own. Then she goes to tell Pinsky something about his tie.

Tess sits on the bench beside Dana and reads her legal pad.

INSERT - DANA'S LEGAL PAD
The FACT column runs onto a second page. Its last line: My daughter knows me.
The FEELING column is blank all the way down.

BACK TO SCENE

Dana holds out the Ziploc. Tess takes a cookie. Mara sees it and stops.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

DANA
Well? Your first courtroom. What did you think?

Tess looks back through the door at that one buzzing tube.

TESS
Somebody should get them a lamp.

**EXT. COUNTY CEMETERY, GALLUP, NM - DAY (MARCH)**

Where the numbered plate was, a granite stone lies flat to the dirt: GREG QUINN, and two years. A smooth gray rock sits on it. Tess, her hand in Ruth's, crouches and straightens it so it sits square.

**INT. MERIDIAN BANK - REVIEW FLOOR - MORNING**

Mara's monitor says 7:38. Owen's already at the desk beside hers, his lanyard around his neck where a lanyard goes.

Her pencil cup: a dozen sharp pencils and one yellow Ticonderoga that isn't. It bothers her every morning. She lets it.

Priya stops at the desk with her almonds.

PRIYA
The guard rode up to nine on December fourteenth and found nobody. Officially, you were never here. Legal tabled your motion to give every CONFIRM a second look.

MARA
I'll move it again next quarter.

PRIYA
I'll second it.

Owen slides a box across the gap without looking at her. Pilot G2s. The 0.7s, in black.

OWEN
Sorry. They came in.

ON MARA'S SCREEN, the first file in her queue is one of her own old ones, sent back because she asked. She clicks the face before she reads a line of the money.

TIME CUT TO:

A new file. A plumber in Sun Valley, paid every other Friday since he was nineteen. Then four new accounts in one week, money in and out within hours. FLAG: MONEY MULE.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

CONFIRM sits green under her mouse. In the corner, a gray square the size of a stamp. She clicks it.

Sunburned across the nose. He tried to smile for the DMV and got about halfway there. A chipped tooth, and a small gold cross on a chain.

She looks long enough to see all of that. Then she reads every line. He's a plumber.

CLEAR. The second screen. The third. She types.

INSERT - THE REASON BOX
Customer is the victim. New accounts opened with his stolen ID. Call him today.

BACK TO SCENE

REVIEW TIME 00:06:12.

**INT. 14 LARKSPUR COURT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Dark in the ordinary way, every red light out. The new smoke detector doesn't talk. It beeps, as God intended.

On the counter, an unplugged black router labeled DEAD ZONE.

Tess has the couch, Takis and an old Poirot at normal speed, her earbuds hanging out of her pocket. Mara takes the other end. Her phone lies face up between them, and her hand lies beside it.

MARA
(to the TV)
We need a new word.

Tess eats a Taki.

TESS
We don't.

On the cushion, the phone lights and buzzes. UNKNOWN.

It could be the dentist. It could be anybody's voice at all, saying anything it likes.

It rings and rings. Mara keeps her hand still. It stops.

Tess's hand comes across the cushion and finds hers. On the TV, Poirot has everybody in the library.

Tess keeps her eyes on him.

Then she squeezes. Short, short, short.

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS

FADE OUT.

**THE END**

ORBITAL RANCH STUDIOS