

PRINCESS

Written by

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FADE IN

EXT. QUINTON, IOWA - DAY

Music plays - "Constant Craving" by k.d. lang (Glee cast version)

Overhead view of Quinton, Iowa, a Norman Rockwell-worthy small town surrounded by corn and soybean fields on one side and pig farms on the other (it is Iowa, after all). A drone's eye view shows us the welcome sign before we wind along the roads of a town with all the expected accoutrements and tell-tale signs of civilization. It's Spring (but you'll still need a sweater at night) and trees are well leafed out and in bloom.

If we go left down a residential street, we see that the well-maintained road is lined with a mixture of small gablefront, carpenter gothic, and American craftsman-style houses. An array of trees - oaks, elms, and cottonwoods with broad crowns to scrawnier redbuds, crabapple, and dogwoods - complete the scene.

Something about a small 2-story house and its white, knee-tall picket fence around it draws our attention. A mailbox with the name "WEBB" stenciled on it tell us who lives there. Three handprints around the name (1 man-sized, 1 woman-sized, 1 kid-sized) are adorable. A vivid pink balloon tied to the metal flag announces a birthday.

INT. WEBB HOUSE - DAY

As we walk through the front door (with its blue-flowered semi-circle window at the top and Ring doorbell next to it), the screen door creaks, then slams behind us. The house seems... oddly still. The dining room table has presents on it, star and rainbow paper just waiting to be torn through. The decor is casual and comfortable.

The lower level appears to be empty; maybe there's someone on the second floor. The first room on the right is coated in pink and frills, though it is starting to transition into the pinnacle of neo-80s revival perfection. Basically, it looks like Jojo Siwa was the interior decorator. The room's resident, RYLEIGH, 11, sits on the floor with a sketch pad on her lap and a stuffed unicorn before her. Her hair is pulled back behind a blue ribbon headband.

Certainly, she's not home alone and sure enough, just down the hall is the master bedroom where her father, BRADY, 40, is on the bed. He stares at a picture on the night stand of (we presume) his wife.

His side of the bed still hasn't been pulled up, but hers is perfectly made. Behind the picture, an envelope from Morten and Sons Funeral Home and Grounds Care rests against the lamp.

His cell phone rings. Brady checks the caller ID. "JACKSON, MISSY". He closes his eyes and does not answer it.

He appears startled and opens his eyes when he hears Ryleigh speak. She's standing in the bedroom door, spinning a fuzzy-ball-topped pencil between her fingers (always a source of great pride amongst middle schoolers).

RYLEIGH

Who's on the phone, Daddy?

He smiles at her and sits up, swinging his feet to the floor.

BRADY

No one, Princess. Well, not no one. It was your Aunt Missy, but I don't want to talk to her.

His daughter crinkles her nose, bunny-style, and enters the room. She sits next to her father on the bed.

RYLEIGH

Aunt Missy was drunk at Mom's funeral.

Brady puts an arm around her and kisses the top of her head.

BRADY

Aunt Missy was definitely that.

RYLEIGH

I don't think you should talk to her ever again.

BRADY

I don't think that's an option. You know what I do think is an option?

RYLEIGH

The next time you talk to her, you being drunk instead?

BRADY

(acts thoughtful)
Maybe... maybe that will work.

Or maybe we should go get ice cream. I hear 31-flavors has 32 today.

No one gives a disparaging look and an eye roll like a tweenage girl.

RYLEIGH

Really? That's what you're going with? 32 flavors?

BRADY

So, that's a... no, then?

RYLEIGH

Rocky road?

BRADY

Gives ya zits.

RYLEIGH

Does not. Mom debunked that a year ago.

An exaggerated lean backwards and a scrunched face are unmistakable hallmarks of a Dad Moment (tm).

BRADY

Debunked? What are they teaching you kids in schools these days?

RYLEIGH

We have to learn quick, Daddy. There's more to learn now than when you were my age.

BRADY

Truer words have never been spoken.

Ryleigh hops off the bed and grabs his hand.

RYLEIGH

Ice cream!

Brady laughs and gets up, following her out of the bedroom. The expertly spun pencil remains on the bed.

EXT. QUINTON, IOWA MAIN STREET - DAY

Brady and Ryleigh walk down the street, hand-in-hand. She's carrying a postcard in her other hand, with a picture of an ice cream cone and the words "Happy birthday!" on it. Someone's about to get their free ice cream on.

The upcoming ice cream parlor with barber poles and a pink and white striped awning over the door indicate the founder clear had a torrid love affair with 1950s movies. "SMARL'S" is etched in the frosted glass on the front door.

I/E. SMARL'S ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

There's something (no pun intended, I swear) indelibly sweet about a father and daughter sitting at a table near the window, eating ice cream sundaes. They're laughing and generally looking like they're having a good time.

A Seethrough Interstate Travel bus pulls past the ice cream parlor and stops at the bus station. We don't see the people get off, just their feet from under the bus. It's a rather dubious mixture of sandals and cowboy boots, with an errant pair of untied sneakers thrown in for good measure.

The bus pulls away, revealing our adorable father-daughter duo exiting the ice cream parlor. Ryleigh looks at the bus and the people walking away from it. Her interest draws his.

BRADY

See anyone you know?

RYLEIGH

No. I think they're here for the hog convention. Mrs. Garver was telling us about it last week.

BRADY

And how would Mrs. Garver know that?

RYLEIGH

Because Sheriff Garver is her husband and he is setting up patrols and traffic controls to work around it. They're bussing in from the Courtyard in Sioux City or wherever.

BRADY

That is way too much for you to know about, little girl.

EXT. QUINTON, IOWA MAIN STREET - DAY

Brady and Ryleigh walk down the street, the ice cream parlor behind them. They walk past a park where a few kids - around Ryleigh's age and a bit older - play flag football.

RYLEIGH

I feel like kind of a freak.

BRADY

Sorry, kiddo. With who your parents are, you didn't get much choice in that.

RYLEIGH

I'm serious. I'm the only one at school whose mom died.

BRADY

I'm sorry, honey. Do the kids at school...?

RYLEIGH

They mostly don't ask. I mean, my friends do, but mostly they don't talk about it. I talk about it and they get stupid and then I stop.

BRADY

Anyone ever pick on you for it?

RYLEIGH

Like this is YouTube, Daddy.

BRADY

Like this is... Geez, Ryleigh. OK.

They pass a row of hedges used to conceal the park's electrical box at the other end of the park (why would you want that eyesore?). A rustling within the bush goes unnoticed. Suddenly, Ryleigh's head jerks back a bit, like her hair caught on something.

RYLEIGH

Ouch! Oh, man! Daddy!

She stops and pulls her head back forward. Brady's hand immediately goes to the back of her head.

BRADY

Geez, baby, are you OK? What happened?

One careful father inspection of a daughter head later reveals no need for a hospital trip.

RYLEIGH

Ow, that really hurt.

BRADY

What did you get caught on?

RYLEIGH

Must've been a branch, I guess.

BRADY

Not still caught are you? Haven't been scalped? No hunks missing? Didn't pull your brain out did it?

RYLEIGH

Uhm, ow, yuck, no.

She rubs her head and looks back at the hedges. Not trusting them (and who would after that), the street-side of the sidewalk seems a safer place to walk.

BRADY

(exaggerating looking through her hair like a monkey)

You sure?

RYLEIGH

Oh, gross, monkey-man, stop it!

It's the moment of levity needed to help her forget that she was, as my grandmother used to say, nearly snatched bald-headed. As much as an 11-year-old can move a grown man, she shoves at her father. Dad Moment (tm) number two emerges as he overacts the effect of her shove.

BRADY

Watch it! Could be something in there!

They continue to walk home, the hedges and the incident fading quickly. What they don't see is the ribbon from Ryleigh's headband being slowly pulled into a hedge.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - EVENING

If the box on the kitchen counter is correct, tonight's dinner offering is spinach and mushroom thin crust pizza. Brady checks the box as he turns on the oven.

BRADY

(mutters to himself)

Well, if it says four hundred, then why would I put it at three seventy five? Can't we just get one delivery place here?

Ryleigh enters the kitchen and sits on a bar stool at the island.

RYLEIGH
Are you talking to yourself again?
They say that it's a sign of
insanity.

BRADY
(absently, while reading
the box again)
Who says?

RYLEIGH
Everyone.

BRADY
It's only insanity if you answer
yourself.

RYLEIGH
But only if you argue with your own
answer.

Brady turns around and gives her a fierce grin. That definitely shows how much she got from her mother.

BRADY
Absolutely. So, ready to eat in
fifteen minutes, or so it says.

RYLEIGH
I'd do it less than that. Otherwise
the edges burn.

BRADY
Microwave popcorn make you the
expert on burnt?

Ryleigh bangs her head lightly on the island in tween exasperation.

RYLEIGH
(muffled)
Don't remind me.

Brady's laugh abruptly halts when he notices something. It's enough to make him frown, wipe his hands on a towel, and walk towards Ryleigh.

BRADY
Baby? What did you do?

She picks her head up quickly and looks around.

RYLEIGH

What did I do where who now?

BRADY

No, no, go back down, where you were.

He pulls back her hair when she complies. There's a scratch, and a pretty good one, too, that starts about mid-way down on the back of her neck and stretches up into her hair. There's a little streak of dried blood left on her skin that her shirt didn't wick away. Brady makes the mistake of touching the scratch.

RYLEIGH

Ow! What's that? That burns!

She sits up and moves his hand out of the way, replacing it with her own. She rubs her hand over it and frowns.

BRADY

Burns? Does it hurt?

RYLEIGH

No, not really. Not until you touched it. Didn't even notice it.

BRADY

Huh. Must have happened when that branch reached out and tried to make you a tree person earlier.

No time like the present for the world's best tree imitation. Ryleigh straightens out her arms in front of her and crooks her fingers. She sucks in her cheeks and rolls her eyes back into her head. Maybe she gets a bit from her father, too. Fatherly concern gives way to laughter, which sends her into peals of giggles.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Wow. Didn't know zombie trees were a thing. Here, let me get something to clean that up with.

Because kitchens are accident-prone places, they keep a first aid kit in an island drawer, just like they were taught in their home safety class. Brady finds that useful kit and takes out a betadine wipe and two bandages (some generic type, because product placement and all).

BRADY (CONT'D)

OK, Princess, head down, hair up. Let me see if we need stitches back here.

INT. RYLEIGH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's the dead, dead, dead ass of night. Fast asleep in her bed, Ryleigh clutches the plushie unicorn she had been sketching earlier under a thick comforter.

It's a bit windy outside and a branch knocks against the window. Once. Twice. With a long, maybe five minute pause between.

Then another knock. Then another. Not so long between. She does not wake up, even as the knockings continue to intensify. What does wake her up? The wind that blows across her face from her now open window.

Have you ever dreamed a scream so real that it's woken you up and you're not sure if it actually was a dream?

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Brady sits bolt upright in bed, clearly terrified. He rips back his side of the covers.

BRADY

Ryleigh?

Branches knock against his window rhythmically, the way a parent might pat their infant's back to encourage sleep. Slowly, this reality welcomes him back and he shakes his head.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Jesus.

He scratches his chest in some effort to slow his heart and swings his legs around to put his feet on the floor. Goose pimples (arrector pili if you're biology-minded) prick up the hair on his legs and arms and are accompanied by a full body shiver.

Wind, distant and high-pitched, whistles into his bedroom from the hallway. Not remembering any windows being open, Brady's concern rises.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Ryleigh?

He shivers in the chilly room and pads down the hallway to Ryleigh's door. The bottom of his pajama pants flutters from the draft under the door as it licks up his leg.

Slowly, he opens her door and peers in. The room is gently lit from the light left on in her closet.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Rye?

Ryleigh's blanket and sheets are gnarled at the foot of her bed. The window remains open, but no branches are near the panes. Terror blocks out the sound of the wind and strains his voice.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Rye?

He steps closer to the bed and sees that the bedclothes are twisted around a small, leafless tree bough. They snake up towards five branches at the end, like a sleeve on an arm.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF WEBB HOUSE - NIGHT

Five local and county law enforcement vehicles block the street, which by now has nearly all porch lights on. Several officers talk to neighbors and one guards the front door. Presumably, there are also officers inside the house. Brady sits on the sidewalk steps that lead to his front porch.

INT. WEBB HOUSE MONTAGE - NIGHT

A. Officers in the kitchen.

B. (From earlier that night) Brady running to the window in Ryleigh's bedroom, panic-stricken.

C. Officers down the hallway.

D. (From earlier that night) Brady leaning out of Ryleigh's bedroom window, shouting (silent).

E. Officers in Brady's bedroom.

F. (From earlier that night) Brady racing down the hallway.

G. Officers in Ryleigh's bedroom.

H. (From earlier that night) Brady bolting outside and around the house to look up at Ryleigh's window.

I. Technician examining the sheets and branch.

J. (From earlier that night) Brady running down the sidewalk, yelling (silent).

K. Technician examining the window ledge and frame.

L. (From earlier that night) Brady on his cell phone, still frantic, still panicked.

M. Technicians examining the grounds around the house.

SHAKER
Sir? Mister Webb?

Dazed, Brady looks up at SHAKER (an in-his-40s federal agent, who's in casual wear but with a smart, recently-ironed sports coat).

BRADY
Br... Bra... Brady.

Shaker openly displays compassion with a smile and a hand on Brady's shoulder before sitting down next to him on the step.

SHAKER
Brady. Now first off, let me tell you without question you did the right thing calling this in as soon as you did. There's gonna be some uncomfortable questions coming your way that will piss you off. And not just from me.

BRADY
They... they already asked me some.

SHAKER
Yeah, heard about you scuffling it up with one of them about wanting to take her toy. It's OK.

BRADY
O... OK.

SHAKER
Mind if I take notes?

Brady shakes his head. Every sound from the street - a radio squawk, a door slam, a dog bark - makes him start, look up, wild-eyed, expecting Ryleigh to emerge from the darkness.

Such activity on such a quiet street in such a quiet town compels neighbors in equal numbers to filter into the street and peek out of their windows. One woman in a pink terry cloth bathrobe speaks to two deputies. The sheriff stands nearby to Shaker and Brady, listening.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Do you remember who I am?

BRADY
N... N... No. I'm sorry.

SHAKER

It's OK. You've been through some shit. Name's Shaker, and I'm with the Bureau. The federal one. Your locals called in your report. They're not exactly equipped to deal with missing persons.

Brady nods, already spacing out of the conversation. He's jolted back into it when Shaker nudges him.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Hey, Brady, you with me?

BRADY

Yeah. Shaker. Feds. Got it.

SHAKER

C'mon. Let's go inside and do this. No sense in risking the old wives' tale about sitting on cold concrete.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Brady sits at the table, staring at a cup of what is likely cold coffee, no cream, but there is a spoon in the cup. Shaker gives some quiet instructions to an officer before he sits at the table, next to Brady, notebook out and pen ready.

SHAKER

What woke you up tonight?

BRADY

Storm, I guess. No... bad dream. Heard a scream.

SHAKER

In the dream or real life?

BRADY

I... I don't know.

SHAKER

Anyone else in the house besides you and your daughter?

BRADY

No. Other than the cat. It's just us since my wife died a few months back.

SHAKER

Oh, that sucks, man. I'm sorry to hear about that. How'd she die?

BRADY

Car accident. Drunk driver.

SHAKER

Fuck that sucks. Where'd that happen?

BRADY

On a weekend. Had gone up to help her sister unload a storage unit.

SHAKER

How're you coping, the two of you?

BRADY

As well as, I guess. Some days are harder than others. Work helps, taking care of Rye helps, nights are bad, mornings are worst. It's funny how much you miss waking up next to someone, you know?

SHAKER

Can't even imagine.

BRADY

You married?

SHAKER

Mhmm. Together almost twenty years now, married for almost seven.

BRADY

Kids?

SHAKER

Mhmm. Four. One's right about Ryleigh's age.

Brady's sad smile sends him off into reminiscing and his attention drifts again.

BRADY

Her birthday is tomorrow. She'll be twelve.

Slowly, he casts his look towards the dining area.

SHAKER

Keep those presents, Brady. She'll open them.

Brady nods and looks back towards the table as if looking at the presents will cause a breakdown.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

OK, so, no one else here but the cat. You had a dream, woke up...

He reaches out and takes the cup from in front of Brady before standing and heating it up in the microwave (without the spoon of course). It's not until the sound of ceramic against the table is heard when he sets it back down that Brady comes out of his fog.

BRADY

What? Oh. Yeah. Right. Dream. Woke up and it was cold. Jesus was it cold. Felt a breeze under the door. Know how you wake up and you're not quite sure if you're still asleep, like if you're in the dream or not?

SHAKER

Little disorientated?

BRADY

Yeah.

SHAKER

Yeah. How long did that last?

BRADY

Until I stood up.

SHAKER

So you wake up, are cold, feel the breeze, stand up, and then what?

BRADY

Go down the hallway. Still cold. Fucking cold. Wind is coming from under Ryleigh's door. I remember thinking 'why would she open the window, it's fucking cold outside tonight'. Open the door, see window's open, see Ryleigh's not in bed. Just... empty bed.

Brady tears up and puts his hands around the coffee mug.

BRADY (CONT'D)

I went to look for her... Christ, I looked! Under the bed, in the closet, out of the window, down into the bushes, down the streets, yelled for her, and... nothing. Then... then...

He chokes up and cries, knuckles going white from gripping the mug. He sniffs loudly and lets go of the mug to wipe his eyes with his sleeve.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Uh, and then... called the sheriff.

SHAKER

What'd you do earlier that day?

BRADY

Uh, went to center of town... walked around... Smarl's.

SHAKER

Smarl's?

Monotone speaking makes Brady sound like he's reciting some old ad copy.

BRADY

Sweet shop. Ice cream parlor. Make their own with milk from local cows.

SHAKER

Anything odd happen? Any weird people?

BRADY

No. They don't come out until the summer.

Brady sure isn't coming off like his typical suspect. Shaker finds him amusing and the conversation easy.

SHAKER

How long have you lived here, Brady?

BRADY

Fourteen, fifteen years.

SHAKER

Where are you originally from?

BRADY
Naples. Florida. Not Italy.

SHAKER
And your wife? Where was she from?

BRADY
Uh, Chicago. Well, Crystal Lake.
Out west of there.

SHAKER
Like Friday the 13th Crystal Lake?

BRADY
Yeah. Only no percentage off the
back-end.

SHAKER
How'd you meet her?

The chance to remember happier times, content times makes Brady's face soften. Nostalgia has a funny effect on people and Shaker has learned to use that to his advantage.

BRADY
Business trip. She was walking dogs
and I tripped over a leash because
I'm a dumbass.

SHAKER
Clumsy at least. She find it cute?

BRADY
Not a bit. Laughed at me.
Especially after the sheepdog sat
on me.

SHAKER
Never pass up an opportunity to
meet someone the dog likes. The
hell made you move down here?

BRADY
Milder winters. Not by much, but
better. Small town life. Smaller
pond, opportunity to be part of a
real community. Safer. So... safe.

At that moment, Brady is questioning every single one of his life's decisions and it shows.

SHAKER

Nothing wrong with moving here.
Hell, I might move here out of
Omaha.

With zero reference whatsoever, Shaker doesn't seem like he's
a Cornhusker.

BRADY

The hell brought you to Omaha?

SHAKER

The job, man, the job. Believe me,
my husband never lets me forget it,
either. Took him out of
Philadelphia for this.

BRADY

Denizens of steel and concrete.

SHAKER

Yep, looks like. How were you and
your wife? Happy marriage? Any
trouble? Finance problems? Hate
your in-laws?

BRADY

Happy, yeah. We were happy. Had
fights, dumb shit, but nothing
serious. No cheating, no money
problems, paid off student loans.

SHAKER

Doing better than I am. What is it
you do?

BRADY

Advertising. Graphic design.

Instinctually, Shaker looks around the kitchen.

SHAKER

Not a lot of opportunities to piss
people off.

BRADY

You'd be surprised.

SHAKER

What about your wife? What was her
name?

BRADY

Celina.

SHAKER
What'd Celina do?

BRADY
Lawyer.

Admission of a lawyer in the family brings Shaker's attention back to front and center.

SHAKER
Definitely a lot of opportunities
to piss people off.

BRADY
Yeah. Intellectual property law.
Had her own firm. So fucking proud
of her.

Comforting nostalgia fades back into brutal reality. He tears up again and for the first time takes a sip of the coffee. Whether it's hot still or cold, we can't tell from his face. May as well be water.

SHAKER
How'd Ryleigh do after Celina died?

BRADY
Got her into therapy. Me, too.
Still in it. Go twice a week. Uh,
separately, and then once a week
for family therapy. Seem to be
making progress.

SHAKER
Either of you suicidal?

BRADY
No.

SHAKER
Did she act out after her mother's
death?

BRADY
What, like pee the bed, set fire to
things, start destroying things,
hitting people?

SHAKER
Those are good places to start.

BRADY

No. Call her school. Ask them. She'd go cry in the bathroom sometimes, punch pillows in the counselor's office, but never got into fights with anyone there or anything like that.

SHAKER

Kids pick on her afterwards?

BRADY

No, I asked. She said life wasn't YouTube and that mostly people just didn't know what to say.

SHAKER

Smart girl.

BRADY

Yeah.

SHAKER

Any chance she'd run away?

BRADY

No. She never even did it as a joke during hide-and-seek games.

SHAKER

Anyone in the family she was really close to? That she might go to if she was upset?

BRADY

No one in town. Everyone is up either around the Lake or in Naples.

SHAKER

She know how to board a bus?

Episodes of Twin Peaks gave Brady the same feeling he's having now. Lots of surreal, are-you-serious moments.

BRADY

What?

SHAKER

If she wanted to take the Greyhound to see family. She know how to do that?

BRADY

No!

SHAKER

Any friends she might be staying with?

BRADY

What? I... I... maybe.

SHAKER

Can I get a list of her friends? Maybe talk to the school?

BRADY

Yeah, sure.

SHAKER

She got a nickname? Something only intimates may know?

BRADY

I was the only one to call her Princess. Most everyone else called her Ryleigh or Rye.

SHAKER

Why Princess?

BRADY

Because her Mom did. Was a... was a labor joke because of how fast she crowned. Said only a princess would have her own timeline.

Shaker chuckles and settles into his chair.

SHAKER

Any business trouble? Family fights?

BRADY

What do you mean?

SHAKER

Any reason why anyone might want to take her from you?

The thought of this being a ransom situation just dawned on Brady with that question. Cue his what-the-fuck face.

BRADY

What?

SHAKER

Brady, we have to look at all possibilities.

A crime scene technician comes into the kitchen, garbed in a full-body protective suit. His clipboard says he means business, but his tone is compassionate.

TECHNICIAN

Excuse me, Agent Shaker?

Shaker looks back at the technician, not annoyed or frustrated.

SHAKER

Yeah?

TECHNICIAN

We've finished with the house but are still working the grounds. Should be about another thirty minutes. Officers are still talking to the neighbors.

SHAKER

Yeah. Yeah, OK, thanks.

The technician exits the kitchen, leaving Brady and Shaker alone again.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Need a warmup?

BRADY

No. Thanks. Look, all I want... is my little girl back.

SHAKER

And we're working on that, but I have to have information first.

When Brady nods and stares at the table again, he continues his questions.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Ryleigh have her own bank account? Debit card? Credit card? Cell phone?

The thought of an 11-year old having such things gives Brady an incredulous look that just might border on hysterical.

BRADY

Are you fucking kidding me?

SHAKER

I've seen six year olds with those.

Brady scoffs and shakes his head, looking abjectly cynical.

BRADY

Jesus Christ. Uh, no. None of that.

SHAKER

Do you still have yours?

BRADY

Have my what?

SHAKER

Cards, checkbook, phone.

Brady's expression makes it clear he has no idea if he still has those things. And because you never let anyone go anywhere by themselves during an investigation, Shaker stands.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

C'mon. Let's go look.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shaker stands at the door, while Brady flips on the wall switch. His cell phone is on the nightstand, atop its wireless charger.

BRADY

Well, there's the phone.

He walks over to the dresser to find his wallet, which he opens and counts his credit cards.

BRADY (CONT'D)

No, everything's here. And I don't have a checkbook.

SHAKER

She know any of your passwords to anything? Memorized card numbers?

BRADY

Jesus! Is this your job? People actually do this?

Shaker had had the same thoughts when he'd first started.

SHAKER

Yeah. So, did she?

BRADY

No.

SHAKER

Just so you know, our technicians did take her computer.

BRADY

Jesus.

SHAKER

We need to see who she was talking to, if anyone might have been able to convince her to meet them.

The realization that their child may have been trafficked is enough to swipe the knees out from any parent. Brady breaks down again and sits on the edge of his bed. He grabs the unicorn plush he'd snatched from a technician earlier and squeezes it like he might be able to absorb it through his chest. Shaker squats down in front of him and puts a hand on his knee.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Hey man, it's OK. Let it out. I just want you to know we're covering everything, OK? No stone unturned.

Brady nods, mutely, and rubs his face with his sleeve again. Shaker continues to take notes, but Brady doesn't notice. He's too wrapped up in the agent's last words.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Anyone you can think of that might want to take Ryleigh, for any reason? Brady.

Brady shakes his head, dashing the thoughts away for now.

BRADY

Yeah. Yeah, what?

SHAKER

Anyone you can think of that would want to take her?

BRADY

No.

SHAKER

Can you provide me a client list from both you and your wife?

BRADY
 Celina's clients? What? Why would--

SHAKER
 We just need to cover everything.
 Do you have that?

BRADY
 Mine, sure, but not hers.

SHAKER
 OK. Any bad blood in the family?

BRADY
 No.

SHAKER
 When was the last time you talked
 to them?

BRADY
 Few days ago. Sister-in-law called
 yesterday but I didn't talk to her.

SHAKER
 Why not?

Brady sighs and loses another inch off his posture with his slump.

BRADY
 She's a pain in the ass. Was drunk
 at the funeral. Keeps apologizing.

SHAKER
 How much of a drunk was she?

BRADY
 Enough that she was taken home in
 the middle of it.

SHAKER
 She up around Crystal Lake?

Brady nods and stares out of the window.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
 Name?

BRADY
 Missy. Uh, Melissa. Jackson.

SHAKER
 That Celina's maiden name?

BRADY

No.

SHAKER

What was that?

BRADY

Kelly. Celina Kelly. Dad's a doctor, runs a concierge clinic up there.

He drifts off again as Shaker talks, unable to maintain a presence on this plane, perfecting his thousand-yard stare.

SHAKER

Brady? Hey.

Blink. Back to the conversation.

BRADY

Yeah?

SHAKER

That's all for now. I'll be in touch later today. You have a pre-paid or a contract cell plan?

Shaker stands but Brady remains sitting.

BRADY

Contract. Auto-debit. Company sets it up. It's a... it's a benefit.

SHAKER

Good. So it won't be shut off. If anyone calls you about Ryleigh, text me during it. Got it?

BRADY

Yeah. Got it. You... you've been in her room?

He looks up, despondent, hopeful that maybe Shaker saw something in there that the techs may have missed, that he missed.

SHAKER

First thing I did, man. First thing I did. My sister's room looked like that during her early-Madonna phase.

Brady cracks a smile for the first time.

EXT. QUINTON AROUND TOWN - NIGHT

A sheriff's deputy staples a missing poster of Ryleigh to a telephone pole. Several people are seen putting posters on pretty much everything that isn't living and capable of running away. Most look sad, a few look determined, but none of them look hopeful.

INT. WEBB HOUSE UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Brady stands in front of Ryleigh's room, unable to quite bring himself to cross the threshold. He stares at the bed, the imprint of Ryleigh's head gone from the pillow as so many have turned it over and over in their evidence collection.

The realization that some someone took away a physical reminder enrages him. He lets out a roar and launches into the room. He flips the bed, knocks the lamp off onto the floor, stands there, panting.

Wind whistles from somewhere in the house. A faint scratching on the roof. A knock from within the walls.

Horror dawns. He's disturbed more in Ryleigh's room than any tech ever did. He chokes out a sob and stumbles towards the bed. Aggrieved, he hastily rights the frame, puts the mattress back on the supporting slats, then tries to arrange the bedclothes as he remembers them. He falls onto the bed and gathers up her pillow into his arms.

The lamp rolls on the floor and the light shows nothing under the bed.

BRADY

Baby, where are you?

INT. QUINTON MIDDLE SCHOOL - DAY

Shaker sits in the PRINCIPAL'S office, who's behind her desk, and Ryleigh's TEACHER seated next to him. He's still apparently not gotten the memo about federal agents needing to wear suits and dress shoes.

SHAKER

Thank you for meeting me, both of you.

Clearly fraught, right down to the vibrato of her voice, the principal looks like all she wants to do is hammer back a few fingers of bourbon.

PRINCIPAL

I cannot tell you how badly this has shaken us. Ryleigh... who on Earth?

TEACHER

Girl was smart, liked to talk back like she was her Momma's daughter. Kid had an inner lawyer and a passion for animals.

SHAKER

She ever give you any trouble? Truancy? Late? Disruptive?

The teacher shakes his head vehemently.

TEACHER

No, no. Nothing like that. After her mom died, she withdrew a bit, stuck to her closest friends, but nothing worrying.

The principal taps into her computer and shakes her head as well.

PRINCIPAL

She had a few days off after the funeral, of course, but Brady's always so good about letting us know if she has an appointment or can't come in, or whatever. He really stepped up after Celina passed. I mean, he was always involved and an active parent, but...

She takes a deep breath to steady herself, aware she's rambling.

TEACHER

Hasn't been perfect, but really, no complaints here.

SHAKER

How were her grades?

TEACHER

Solid B student.

SHAKER

Any after school, extra-curricular activities?

TEACHER

Photography Club and volunteered to walk dogs at the animal shelter.

SHAKER

Disagreements? Anything with bullying or anything like that?

TEACHER

No, no, not that we were aware of.

SHAKER

Mind if I see her desk?

PRINCIPAL

May we do that after school lets out? The children are upset enough.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Brady stands at the sink, staring out the window. The dark circles scream we're on day two or three and he's seen every second of them.

The phone on the counter next to him buzzes. He looks down at it. The caller ID reads "Jackson, Missy". He lets it go to voicemail. The on-screen notification indicates forty-seven missed calls and thirty-two new voicemails.

The wind kicks up a bit outside. Tree boughs brush against the roof, sounding like a ticking clock and he shudders.

BRADY

Shut up. Just shut up.

INT. SMARL'S ICE CREAM PARLOR - DAY

Shaker enjoys an ice cream cone at an internal table as it's threatening to rain. Looks like mint chocolate chip in a sugar cone (no chocolate rim, though. No sense in going overboard). TIM (according to his name tag) comes over and joins him. His white pinafore apron is starched and spotless. Rather odd for one who works in an ice cream parlor, if you ask me.

SHAKER

How long you worked here, Tim?

TIM

Since before I graduated high school.

SHAKER

Local, huh?

TIM

As they come.

SHAKER

You heard about what happened,
right?

Tim has a peculiar way of pronouncing certain words. Cursed is curse-ed. Family is fam-ily. Needed is need-ed. And so on.

TIM

That poor Webb family. It's like they're cursed. Some folks saying, I'm not talking out of turn here, but some folks are saying that it's because they needed to go to church more and now the God's taking out his wrath on their lack of attendances.

SHAKER

Well, I'm not one to go against the good Lord, so mind if I just go with what I got here and let Him deal with that what's above?

TIM

Yes, yes, leave the above to the Lord.

SHAKER

Thanks. How were they, the Webbs? In town, I mean?

TIM

Oh, fine, fine. Never had any of those public fights like you see on the telly-vision or internets, and never heard the neighbors whisper about things behind close-ed doors, neither.

SHAKER

Well-liked then?

TIM

Well enough. Came here... right about the same time I start-ed here I guess. Came by before Ryleigh was borned, kept right on coming after.

(MORE)

TIM (CONT'D)

He came by to bring his dear sweet lady an ice cream cone when she was still in the hospitals.

SHAKER

And they kept coming after she died? He and Ryleigh?

TIM

Yes. I think it kept them close to her. In their lives somehow. Never got a third cone or anything that might could be weird like that, though.

Shaker points his pen at the tip jar on the counter.

SHAKER

They good with that?

Tim turns around and nods dramatically when he looks back to Shaker, as if to suggest otherwise might constitute heresy.

TIM

Lord, yes. Just good, honest, decent folk. Really should be more of them like that.

Shaker slides a \$20 bill across the table.

SHAKER

That's for your jar.

INT. WEBB HOUSE UPSTAIRS - NIGHT

Starting upstairs, we see that Brady's bedroom is empty, the door to Ryleigh's room is closed, and no one is in the hallway. If we go downstairs, we see the living room which is also devoid of human occupancy. The front porch light is on.

As we come into the dining room, a laptop is open on the table with an Email pulled up. Sporting the Blankspot Designs logo, the Email is from a Gerard Farini, managing partner.

EMAIL

Brady,
The firm's thoughts and sympathies are with you during this time. Your Blankspot family cannot imagine what you are going through and pray daily for you and Ryleigh.

(MORE)

EMAIL (CONT'D)

Please attend to your family's needs and let us support you with paid leave until Ryleigh is found. Your clients have been informed of an extended absence and send their sympathies. If you need anything, please reach out.

*Gerry

INT. DES MOINES FBI FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

Shaker sits behind his desk, laptop open with three external monitors docked behind it on a stand. Foregoing jeans, he's in dark slacks and a 'Sugarhill Gang' band t-shirt and tennis shoes. His desk is littered with two cell phones, dozens of photographs, stacks of notes, no fewer than three stress balls, a pen holder that looks like a dead body, about a bazillion sticky notes, files, and one rather tattered stuffed bunny.

There's a whiteboard behind him with Ryleigh's picture taped to it, Brady's and Celina's pictures below hers, a dozen other names with corresponding photographs, and yarn stretched across it to make connections.

SHAKER

Fuck!

Frustrated, he shoves himself back away from his desk and scrubs his hands through his hair. For surely what is the hundredth time that day, he checks his phone to see if there are any recent calls with a 712 area code.

The computer monitors reflect Ryleigh's picture from her school's Photography Club Instagram account.

INT. WEBB KITCHEN - DAY

Brady stands at the stove, robe-clad, unwashed, unshaven. A pan of eggs burns before him. Robotically, he scrapes them into the sink. It looks like three or four pans-worth of eggs have met a similar demise prior to this one. Pan back on the oven. Crack two eggs. The phone rings as the first sizzle is heard.

Brady looks like he might have just had a mild heart attack. He looks at the phone next to the stove. A 402 area code shows up with "Federal Field Office" as the caller ID.

Hands shaking, he pushes the green answer button.

BRADY
Shaker?

SHAKER
Hey, Brady. Yeah, it's me.

BRADY
Well... well... anything?

SHAKER
No. Not yet.

The whiplash of adrenaline production and release, anticipation and relief, hope and let-down, makes Brady vomit into the trashcan. He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

BRADY
Christ. Yeah, sorry.

SHAKER
You good?

BRADY
Sure.

SHAKER
Hear anything on your end yet?

BRADY
(choked up)
No.

SHAKER
Mind if I come over?

BRADY
Yeah, uh, I guess. Why?

SHAKER
Wanna take a walk.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - BIT LATER IN THE DAY

Brady opens the kitchen's exterior door, where Shaker waits.

BRADY
Jesus, man, you look like shit.

SHAKER
You're one to talk. Nice robe.

Brady smirks and stands aside for Shaker to enter. You get the feeling that under other circumstances, they would have BBQs together.

Dishes are stacked up in the sink, mostly with food still on them. The unholy fragrance arrangement of burned eggs and vomit is, frankly, wretched. There's a couple of pillows on the floor in the kitchen, next to a cat bed with, conveniently enough, a cat on it.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

What the hell happened in here?

BRADY

Eggs have some kind of order to self-immolate.

SHAKER

Uh huh.

He opens the window over the sink and the one in the door to get some cross-flow action, because holy God. He ties the garbage bag up next and sets it outside through the open window, because the stench's breeding ground needs to be removed.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

You uh, hanging in?

Brady notices Shaker looking at the pillow set up he's got going on.

BRADY

He's friendly if you want to pet him. Name's Norris, because he looks like Mrs. Norris from the Harry Potter movies.

SHAKER

Yeah? Who came up with that name?

BRADY

Celina did. She and Ryleigh must have read those books about seven times each. And Ryleigh couldn't say Crookshanks yet, so Norris it was.

SHAKER

Cute. But seriously, man... You bedding in here?

BRADY

Not sleeping much. But when I do
want to sit, sit there.

SHAKER

You and the couch not on speaking
terms?

Brady looks towards the doorway that leads to the living
room.

BRADY

Too close to the bedroom.

Shaker nods like he understands.

SHAKER

Bags?

Brady motions towards the sink. Sure enough, bags are kept
under there. Shaker puts a new one in the bin.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

You been up there since she
disappeared?

BRADY

No. Not since that first night.

Shaker turns on the faucet for the water to warm. Thinking
he'll catch Brady in an inconsistency, he gently probes.

SHAKER

No? How'd you get the robe then?

BRADY

What? Oh. Maggie brought it out for
me.

The agent starts to wash the glasses, lets some dishes soak
(because eggs don't just come off after they've dried on
ceramic), and puts some in the dishwasher.

SHAKER

Who's Maggie? That your girl?

Brady looks like someone just punched him in the stomach and
sits down at the table where he first chatted with Shaker.

BRADY

No. Lady down the way. Thought I'd
be cold.

SHAKER

You getting enough to eat?

Brady looks to the refrigerator and motions in its general direction.

BRADY

Guess so.

The sink now in a more respectable state of existence, Shaker dries his hands off on a dish towel and opens up the refrigerator. Casserole dishes, plastic wrapped sandwiches, plastic storage containers and bowls with snap-tight lids, and a seriously sad bag of salad in the bottom drawer greet the eye.

SHAKER

Guess so. Looks like they're taking good care of you. These all from her?

BRADY

No. Everyone, pretty much, I guess. Freezer's worse. Think there might be a whole hog in there.

SHAKER

Something about your case, man. Bugs me.

Brady looks at him quizzically. Shaker closes the refrigerator and leans against the counter.

BRADY

Bugs you? More than normal missing people cases?

SHAKER

Yeah. Either you're a world-class psychopath or I don't know what the fuck.

BRADY

What do you mean?

SHAKER

Look, for the record, I don't think you're a world-class psychopath. I interviewed Tommy Gates and you don't strike me like he did.

BRADY

Tommy Gates? The Lovers' Lane guy?

SHAKER

Same guy. Never got a bad feeling about him, never had any doubt about what he was saying, which worried me.

BRADY

So, you doubt me? My story?

SHAKER

Yeah. I mean, that's normal. Should be some shadow of a doubt. Otherwise, it's a CIA-level cover story that's been rehearsed. It's too perfect, too clean. If you'd told me you'd had a perfect marriage, never any arguments, I'd call bullshit. If you'd had this perfect kid, I'd suspect abuse or someone about to pop.

Brady shakes his head and looks at the table.

BRADY

Wow.

SHAKER

Pretty fucked up, right? What I'm saying is, you and your family, are normal. Usual average everyday shit we'd expect to see. It's when things go outside the normal that we start to look. That includes being too normal. Which, frankly, you're almost guilty of.

BRADY

Great.

Shaker smiles and shakes his head.

SHAKER

Look, you're not a suspect.

BRADY

Thought the first person to call it in always was a suspect?

That elicits a chuckle.

SHAKER

Four thousand eyes around here convinced me otherwise.

(MORE)

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Not that Iowans are known for tongue-wagging, but none of that, either. Your neighbor thinks you're a dick for not pulling up your gladiolas because they stick up above the fence, but I'm with you on that. And apparently, the lady down at the end of the street likes the way they smell when she walks her dog down the back lane.

Shaker shrugs and Brady chuckles at his recounting of small town Iowa life.

BRADY

Pretty standard then.

SHAKER

Financials look good, no heinous debt that might make you sell your kid.

Brady's head snaps up, his face twisted with wrath. His body tenses as if he'd fight that very concept out of existence.

BRADY

Jesus!

SHAKER

It's what I see, man.

BRADY

Well, your job sucks!

SHAKER

Some days, yeah, it does.

The lingering cloud of abused eggs and revisited stomach has lifted from the kitchen. A breeze flutters through, making Shaker take a deep breath inwards.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

I want to walk through your day, the day she disappeared. From here to everywhere you went. I want you to tell me everything you said, everything she said, anything you heard around you. Tell me about anything, absolutely anything that happened along the way. If she farted by the prize-winning begonia display, I want to know about it. If you scratched your nose next to the mailbox, tell me.

(MORE)

SHAKER (CONT'D)

If you stepped on a spider, I wanna know how long it twitched after and how many legs you brought home on the bottom of your shoe. Think you can do that?

BRADY

That's oddly specific.

Shaker just raises an eyebrow to ask his question again.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

SHAKER

Shower first. Ain't walkin' out with you like that.

EXT. CLINTON DOWNTOWN AREA - DAY

Brady and Shaker walk into sight of the downtown area. Fortunately for the entire town, Brady has changed into less gossip-triggering clothes than his earlier (evidently) ratty attire.

BRADY

You really think begonias would be ready this time of year? Where are you from anyway?

SHAKER

New Orleans. Shit grows all year there.

BRADY

Careful talking like that out in the open. Methodists will jack up their prices on you. They'll cuss a blue streak out on the farm or in the living room, but don't you let no one hear you talk like that out in public.

SHAKER

Give my Aunt Rhoda a run for her money.

BRADY

You do not have an Aunt Rhoda.

SHAKER

Sure as the sun is yellow. Wears a snap-down housecoat, too.

BRADY

So, we walked down here. Begonias won't be out until at least end of May. Walked by these bushes. Smarl's is up there, at the end of the square.

He points ahead where, sure enough, the various shades of candy cane striping beckons in the distance.

SHAKER

They are so serious with that. Did you go anywhere before this?

BRADY

No, just straight from home to the ice cream parlor. She got a free ice cream for her birthday. They send out these postcards to redeem, then stamp it with what kind you got. Stupid.

SHAKER

Any prizes for it? Like, be here ten years, and you get free ice cream for a year?

BRADY

Probably. Never read the fine print. Ryleigh could tell you. She always reads that.

SHAKER

That from her momma?

BRADY

Yeah. I just click "accept the terms and conditions".

SHAKER

Same, man. Same. OK, so then what?

Brady scratches his head and looks around.

BRADY

Uh, shit. Well. This is harder than you'd think. Home, ice cream parlor. No bugs. No farting. Ice cream parlor... sat inside. Near the window. Saw a bus unload over there.

He points to the bus stop across the street.

SHAKER

Where from?

BRADY

Not sure. Sioux Falls, maybe? I dunno.

SHAKER

Why'd you talk about it?

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Happened to notice it. Ryleigh said her teacher - who's married to the sheriff - told them about a hog convention in town. Guess people were being bussed in.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

See how this works?

BRADY

Yeah. OK. Where to next. Uh, out and heading back home. Didn't talk about much, really. Can't remember.

They walk down by the park, close to where Ryleigh had her head snatched.

SHAKER

All right, down here. What's this, a park? What goes on here?

BRADY

Whatever. Picnics, kite flying, whatever.

SHAKER

What was going on that day?

Light overlay of the game Brady and Ryleigh had walked by. Brady sounds far away during the memory as they walk.

BRADY

Was a... flag football game. Mixed. Boys and girls. Girl on the red team was running for the goal line.

Shaker stops them by the crowding of hedges around the electrical box. He may not be a gardener, but he knows hedges don't grow like that naturally.

SHAKER

What's this thing here?

BRADY

Uh, electrical box. I remember when they planted these hedges here to cover up the abominable eyesore of metal and man's inability to blend with nature.

SHAKER

Wow.

BRADY

Yeah. That was from the 4-H Club.

SHAKER

I might've guessed.

Shaker rubs a hedge's leaf between his fingers, peeks into the bush like he's looking for nests or bugs, and even sniffs it.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Anything happen during the walk?

BRADY

No, nothing. Wait. Yeah, actually. Ryleigh's ribbon, in her hair, got caught on a branch or something.

SHAKER

Branch?

BRADY

Yanked it pretty good. Ripped it right off from her headband.

SHAKER

Still got the headband at home?

BRADY

Yeah, I think. Unless Rye went to bed with it on.

SHAKER

You get the ribbon back?

BRADY

No, no. Actually, no, we didn't. Figured one of the kids from the game snagged it to be an asshole or something.

Brady shrugs it off as a 'kids will be kids' incident. His attention is drawn to the electrical box, where a missing poster of Ryleigh is posted.

The realization hits him in the gut and he leans on Shaker.

BRADY (CONT'D)
How is this real? When did those go
up?

SHAKER
Don't know. Only know that it is. I
think the deputies went out the
same night she disappeared.

BRADY
(winded)
People are staring, aren't they?

SHAKER
Yeah, a little bit.

BRADY
'k. Can we keep walking?

SHAKER
You tell me.

BRADY
Yeah. Yeah, we can.

They make it all the way down to Smarl's and sit outside. No one comes to greet them, though a family leaving the parlor does wave as they leave.

SHAKER
Well, that was nice anyway. You
said you ate here. What did you
have?

BRADY
Sundaes. She hates bananas, so just
walnut with caramel sauce. No
whipped cream. No cherries.

SHAKER
And what'd you have?

BRADY
Same thing. Missed the whipped
cream, though.

SHAKER
And when did she lose her ribbon?
On the way here or on the way back?

Brady takes some time to think and speaks slowly, like he's walking back through it in his memory.

BRADY
On the way back.

SHAKER
OK, so let's head back.

They get up from the table and Brady raises his hand to Maggie across the street. The men's walk takes them back down the same way they approached the ice cream parlor.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Who's that?

BRADY
That's Maggie. Must be out getting flowers for her dad's grave. She does every week.

SHAKER
Nice lady. Celina buried around here?

BRADY
Huh? What? Yeah. I mean, no. She's up at Sunrise Springs, halfway between here and Crystal Lake. We decided on it so no one had to drive further than the other to visit her.

SHAKER
Where's that?

BRADY
Just outside Cedar Rapids.

SHAKER
How often do you go visit her?

BRADY
About once a month or whenever we feel like we need to be closer to her. Been about seven, maybe eight times now, I guess.

SHAKER
Maggie ever go with you?

A sharp look from Brady makes him take it back, hands raised.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Just asking, man. Just asking. Trying to build a whole picture here.

He stops walking when the hedges start again and runs his hand over the top of them.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Where along here did the ribbon get taken?

BRADY

How am I supposed to remember that?

SHAKER

Think back on the conversation you were having.

Brady exhales, exhausted, and rubs his head.

BRADY

OK, fine. Uh, back from ice cream, see the game, she says she feels like a freak because she's the only one at school who's mom died. I make some smartass comment about being bullied or something and she makes her crack about YouTube. And then... she cries out. Says ow, something hurt her. She rubs her head and I check it out. She calls me a monkey-man. Think it just startled her mostly.

SHAKER

Alright.

Mini-flashlights are fabulous for looking up and under things. He pulls through some branches, rustles them around (which really irritates a bird who'd been trying to hide by staying still, but there's only so much a little winged thing can tolerate), runs his hand along the dirt, and scratches his finger around the roots.

BRADY

Find anything?

SHAKER

Nope.

He stands, repockets the flashlight, and peers down through the hedges again in several spots.

BRADY

What are you looking for?

SHAKER

I was thinking... that if the branch had caught it, there'd be something, some little thread or fuzz from the ribbon. But... nothing. Probably some kid.

BRADY

That's what I thought, too.

SHAKER

OK, then what?

BRADY

Back home.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Norris voices his displeasure at being abandoned loudly from the kitchen table. Brady points to a kitchen chair.

BRADY

Came home, Ryleigh sat there, and we discussed... fuck all, I don't remember. I know we did talk about dinner a bit later. Had pizza. No, wait. God, it's all so fuzzy.

(beat, and then...)

I guess we didn't really talk. She went upstairs to wash her hands, then came back down. I razed her about burning popcorn, bitched about the pizza, and that's when...

He spaces out again, remembering. His hands have been going through the motions of opening the pizza and turning the oven on, like he's recreating that night.

BRADY (CONT'D)

When I noticed she had a scratch on the back of her neck.

SHAKER

What kind of scratch?

BRADY

What do you mean, what kind of scratch? A scratch is a scratch.

SHAKER

No, like from a human nail, a rusty nail, the cat, a pin, those branches out there, a thorn, a--

BRADY

OK, OK, Christ, I get it. Not very big, thin, maybe a couple of inches long. Little blood, I guess. She said it burned. I put some betadine on it and a bandage and then had way too much blue cheese on my pizza.

SHAKER

She talk about it again, like before she went to bed, in the bath, anything?

Brady shook his head and lifted the cat from the table, who'd been patiently waiting for someone to pay attention to him, to cradle the feline against his chest. Loud purrs are the best reward.

BRADY

No, no, nothing she mentioned.

SHAKER

Mind if I go up there?

BRADY

Haven't you already been in there?

SHAKER

You ever walk out of a room, then back in and see something you didn't before?

BRADY

Celine used to accuse me of that with ketchup in the frig.

Shaker leaves the kitchen, leaving Brady to cuddle and nuzzle his cat.

INT. RYLEIGH'S BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Shaker walks into Ryleigh's room, taking in the big picture first. The bed hasn't been made, but the tree limb is gone. He examines the dresser first, opening drawers and lightly lifting clothing. As he goes, he takes (what will end up being hundreds) of pictures with his cell phone.

SHAKER

No diary. Yet.

Next, he inspects the closet by pulling back clothes to see if anything is hidden behind them or falls out of them.

He checks shoes next and the toy box inside. He pounds on the wall, ceiling, floor in the closet. Secret compartments can be anywhere. But...

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Nothing here, either.

Next up on the inspection agenda are Ryleigh's jewelry boxes. Most of it is kiddie jewelry, stickers, and peel-away nail polish, but there is a nice gold bangle, a birthstone ring, and a heart locket. He opens it and sees a picture of Celina.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Look more like your dad, kid.

He feels all the stuffed animals and looks behind all the posters to check both the wall and the backs of the posters.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Nothing there and nothing from your computer, either. Lots of books.

He opens a few of them, ruffles through the pages, shakes them out. The lack of any clues leaves him visibly stymied. He feels the top and sides of the mattress, then checks under it.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Nothing here, either. Damn.

Down on his knees, he checks under the bed. Slats rather than a box springs means he can see the bottom of the mattress and that nothing weird is distorting it. He releases a loud, slow release of a breath as he stands and goes to the window.

It's closed and latched, but he opens it and checks the outside first.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
No way to open this from the outside. No marks on the sill. Brady!

BRADY (O.C.)
Yeah?

SHAKER
You all always lock the windows?

BRADY (O.C.)
Uh, yeah? I guess? We knew it was going to storm a bit, so probably. She just got that new rug up there and didn't want it wet.

Shaker looks down and sees he's standing on a vibrantly pink rug with a white and yellow daisy on it.

BRADY (O.C.) (CONT'D)
You find something?

SHAKER
No, not yet. Be down in a second.

He leans out over the window sill and looks down.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Nope. No way in hell any anybody is going down this way without a ladder. Tree's not close enough. They didn't find ladder marks outside. Would an eleven-year-old know to knot sheets and shimmy down? Would a forty-year-old know to do that?

He shakes his head, closes, and re-latches the window. He tugs on it, taps on the glass, pushes against the frame. If he's not careful, he might pop it out entirely.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Pretty solid. New windows?

BRADY (O.C.)
Yeah. Had them installed about five years ago.

Seemingly satisfied with his tossing of the room, Shaker leaves with another look at the window over his shoulder.

SHAKER
Where the fuck did you go?

EXT. SUNSHINE SPRINGS CEMETARY - MORNING

An ornate wrought-iron gate with Sunshine Springs and the year 1850 in Old English font bid entrance to the cemetery. Even in the morning, the site lives up to its name. The notice boards on the left lives hours and the caretaker's contact information (one Mr. Tawdrick Cottonwood whose phone number is 319-555-0319). The one on the right lists the day's internments.

Heavily-treed, well-maintained grounds have a smooth dirt path (out of account of anyone's heels and accessibility for them's that ain't walking right, the caretaker will tell you if you tour the grounds) and trimmed grass on either side.

Each tree has a small plastic disk on it with the row designation.

A series of urn walls stand on the far right, with more traditional headstones marking the rest of the graves. There are a couple of mausoleums with easily identifiable names on them.

Several benches beneath shading boughs dot the cemetery, as do periodic stacks of stools in case there's not a bench close enough to commune with your loved one.

Shaker sits in his car, talking on the phone. The driver's window is down so he can wave cars around him. He's scribbling out notes on a notepad balanced precariously on his thigh.

SHAKER

(on speakerphone)

Yeah, OK, so what you're saying is pretty much anyone can come in here at any given time. Uh huh. OK. Yeah, right. And what time do the grounds normally close? Sundown, right. Unless there's a service. Gotcha. And open? Sunup. Gotcha. Yeah, no, that's all. Thanks.

He hits the red disconnect button and checks his side mirror. With no one coming, he steps out of the car. Today's wardrobe choices have put him in a baseball cap, a button-down shirt, and a pair of dark slacks. He carries a bouquet of daisies with him.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Plot eleven dee. Off to the left.

He opens the gate and enters the grounds. The first thing to draw his attention is a trashcan. A quick peek inside reveals dead flowers from someone's cleaning spree. He follows the path along the outside of the plots and comments on a few of the grave markers he notices.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Nice place. I can see why people would want to be here for eternity. Wow, whole family? OK then. Huh. Hey, nice that they let you put the family pooch here next to you. I dunno about putting the canary with you, though. What? Beloved tarantula?

He comes upon the eleventh row marker. He turns right and walks between the plots, scanning the ground and reading off the other markers as he goes.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Ay, bee, cee... dee. Here we are.
Celina Renee Webb, revered wife,
mother, daughter, friend. Aw,
that's nice.

He squats next to her headstone and replaces the rotting flowers in the vase next to it with the ones he brought.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Well, Ryleigh certainly hasn't been
here. Ground's not disturbed,
flowers are from around when Brady
said he was here, grass isn't
tamped down.

He shakes his head and stands, tapping the dead flowers against his leg. Looking off across the cemetery, he walks towards one of the mausoleums.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Betcha never think I'd look there,
would you?

INT/EXT. SUNSHINE SPRINGS CEMETARY - DAY

Back in his car, Shaker looks through his phone's pictures, his life in reverse since the day the Webb Family came into his life. The dead flowers are on the passenger seat. We see photos of the cemetery, Ryleigh's room when he did his second sweep, pictures of the house, of the town, of the branch from the night she disappeared, more pictures of Ryleigh's room.

He closes the photo app and starts up the car.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Two bowls of food and a still steaming casserole dish (on a trivet, of course) are on the kitchen table. Brady and Maggie sit across from each other. Brady has changed his clothes from when he took his walk with Shaker, now in a blue t-shirt and jeans. Maggie's yellow sweater contrasts nicely with it and she's one of those women who rock an envious messy bun. They don't say anything, but share a sympathetic look.

Brady's phone buzzes. Caller ID once again lists "Jackson, Missy" as the interrupter. He turns his phone off.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

Shaker sits at his desk, the same chaotic arrangement of case file articles present. There might even be an empty bag or two added that once (and may possibly still) held burritos in there now.

SHANE

Hey, partner. You look like shit.

Shaker's partner, Denelia SHANE darkens the doorway. Does he look up at her? Nope. Just tap, tap, taps his pen against a report from the Midwest Botanical Society.

SHAKER

Never thought I'd ever learn this much about Goddamned trees.

SHANE

You still on that Quinton missing girl?

SHAKER

It look like I found her yet?

Ouch. That came across with some teeth.

SHANE

Sorry I was out on leave when that came down.

She moves into their shared office and behind him, looking over his shoulder.

SHAKER

You all caught up?

SHANE

Yeah, came in earlier and reviewed. Stuck, huh?

SHAKER

Yeah, I'm stuck. Where the fuck is this kid? Did aliens come and yeet her back to the mother planet?

SHANE

I'm pretty sure that's the wrong definition of yeet.

SHAKER

Fine. Return her to the mother planet?

SHANE

That's better.

SHAKER

I don't know where else to go.

SHANE

Then where have you been?

Shaker pushes back away from his desk and stands. The two have worked together for years and this is not the first time she's seen this routine. Alternating between patient and bored because she already knows the outcome, she leans against the mini-frig.

SHAKER

Town. Started there. House. Brady's a good guy. Gut tells me he didn't do this. Man just lost his wife, now his kid. Least he could bury his wife.

SHANE

What about the house?

SHAKER

Standard small town two-story gingerbread house. Four bedroom.

SHANE

Large family?

SHAKER

No, was just the three of them. Each adult had their own office.

SHANE

You check those?

SHAKER

Yeah. Ran down client lists of them both. Every one. I hate successful people. Way too many people to talk to. That took about a week and that was with four juniors on it.

SHANE

Damn. None panned?

SHAKER

Not a one. Truck out front?

EXT. FOOD TRUCK OUTSIDE FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

The two agents enjoy a gyro at a stand-up table next to the food truck advertising authentic Greek food using a family recipe that goes back five generations.

SHANE

AIC talk to you about your wardrobe again?

She laughs as Shaker raises a middle finger around his bite.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Not worth the comment? Nice. OK, so, no clients panned out. That where we were?

SHAKER

Yeah. Next came... the town. Postcard small town, but not Stepford or Twin Peaks. Pretty much everyone said they were a nice family. Everyone felt bad after Mom died and now the girl? Everyone feels worse.

SHANE

Pretty much everyone?

SHAKER

Eh, next door neighbor hates gladiolas.

Shane laughs at that and moves around to the other side of the table to avoid the sun.

SHANE

What's Lab say?

SHAKER

No semen on the bed, in the room, bathroom, any of the drains. Nothing on any clothes. No other bodily fluids, either. No urine or feces like if you scared someone badly. No bleach or evidence of clean-up. No ladder marks on the house or ground outside. Nothing in the room missing. No bags packed. No phone, no money. No ransom calls. No Poltergeist-in-the-closet activity that I'm aware of.

SHANE

You asked?

SHAKER

May as well. What else have I got to go on?

SHANE

Fair enough. Then what?

Shakes finishes his sandwich, tosses the paper into the metal basket under the table, and rubs his hands together.

SHAKER

Walk?

Shane shrugs and follows, still eating her sandwich.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Talked to the girl's school, nothing. School's IG account, comments section. Zip. Ice cream parlor, nothing. Uh, his boss, his family, his in-laws. Nothing. Checked the cemetery where Mom's buried. Hell, I even looked in mausoleums to see if maybe kid slept there or something. Nothing.

SHANE

You check out that hog convention she talked about?

SHAKER

Yeah. 'Bout gave myself a heart attack, too. Turned the corner into the room where they drain. Rows of hog corpses hanging upside down... thought I'd found her.

SHANE

Jesus. Glad I missed that.

SHAKER

That's what I said. Local LEO and I held each other up.

SHANE

What's Tech say?

SHAKER

Pretty much what Lab does. Kid's computer is clean.

(MORE)

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Whatever online activity she did was composed of Google Classroom stuff, watching TikTok, and funny cat videos. Pretty much exactly what you'd expect.

SHANE

No VPN, no privacy windows, frequent browser history clears, Emails, drop mails, drafts, videos, camming...

With each option, Shaker's head indicates no.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Careful. Going to make yourself dizzy.

SHAKER

Then start saying something I can say yes to.

SHANE

What's the Tunnel Rat got to say?

SHAKER

Nothing's popped up on either the Deep or the Dark Web or anything in between. She's not up on any sale sites, no auctions, not in any rings, no merchandise vouchers, no manifests, no flights, no passport dings with photo recognition, nothing snuffy, nada. Girl is in the ether.

SHANE

Could be in someone's basement, or attic, or a box under their bed. Closet, pantry. Root cellar. Buried bus.

SHAKER

No one's reported her, no video feed has popped hot.

SHANE

Yet.

SHAKER

Yeah, I guess. Yet.

SHANE

Could be captive, private
enjoyment, not ready to share yet.

SHAKER

Could be. That severely limits our
chances at all. You see how far
they got with Smart and Ariel's
girls.

SHANE

That's my point. We might just have
to wait for her to surface.

SHAKER

In a lake.

Shit. She's seen this kind of connection before. Seeing it in
her partner worries her.

SHANE

Maybe. Look, Shaker, I'm not
telling you to let it go. I'm not
saying stop looking. I'm not saying
that those are even what happened.
I'm just saying you need to be
prepared that if we come across
her, you need to be ready for that.
And you need to know what you want
to say to... what's his name? Dad?

SHAKER

Brady.

SHANE

Yeah, Brady. How do you want that
to play out?

SHAKER

Working on that.

SHANE

You run data to see if anyone has
some kind of weird tree fetish?

They take a seat on a bench next to a pond after Shane
pitches her sandwich wrap.

SHAKER

First thing I thought of, actually.
I mean, that's a pretty big
signature, right?

SHANE
Let me guess. Zip.

SHAKER
Less than.

SHANE
What was it again?

SHAKER
Black thorn tree.

SHANE
That even grow around here?

SHAKER
Nope. Well, I mean, it could, if someone planted it. But it's not native.

SHANE
Anywhere in town? Around the house?

SHAKER
Not that I could see. I talked to the lady at the town museum, with its attached garden, if you must know, and she said no, nothing like that was in town. Nursery, too. Nope.

SHANE
Wasn't there something in your notes about the girl having a scratch?

SHAKER
Yeah, back of her neck. Day of her disappearance.

SHANE
Any chance that went septic and she died at the local hospital and Dad's in some sort of denial fugue?

Shaker looks at her as if she is one of his potential alien suspects who need to educate him about the proper use of the word 'yeet'.

SHAKER
Where do you come up with this shit?

SHANE
(laughing)
Look, I'm happy to go down all the
routes you haven't.

SHAKER
Go on down those rabbit holes,
Alice.

SHANE
Shall we?

SHAKER
Where?

SHANE
I'm dying to see this town. But
first, we're on the red-eye to
Jason's hometown. I want an eye-to-
eye chat with her family.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Brady sleeps at the kitchen table, a pillow under his head and Norris in the chair next to him. His phone is plugged in next to him and shows a full charge. He hasn't checked his voicemails, as the number still says thirty-two.

A dream disturbs his rest. His arms cover his head, his face a mask of pain. He screams and sits bolt upright. Norris hisses and arches his back, deeply unhappy about being awoken in such a manner. Brady clutches his chest, eyes wide, and gasps for air.

INT. SHANE'S CAR - NIGHT

Shane drives back from the airport. She turns on the 480-South, the traffic surprisingly light. They both look annoyed. It's the first time they've been able to talk without anyone eavesdropping.

SHANE
Well, that was about the most
useless fucking trip I've made in
my life.

SHAKER
I get why they moved to Quinton,
Iowa.

SHANE

Nice place, that. Not sure I'd want to retire there, but I get why people would want to live there. That sister... she's the one who Brady said called him that day, right?

SHAKER

Yeah. Missy. Trip, wasn't she?

Shane low whistles and shakes out her hand, like she's drying it off.

SHANE

I'm wondering if she's been sober at all since her sister's funeral.

SHAKER

I'm thinking not so much. Keeps calling him, too.

SHANE

He picking up?

SHAKER

Nope. Told her he'd call when he heard something.

A faint buzzing sound comes from Shaker's phone in the center console's drink holder. Seeing who it is, he shakes it at Shane and puts it on speaker.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Brady, you're--

BRADY

Shaker! Oh, thank God.

SHAKER

You OK, man?

Brady tries to catch his breath.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

You running from something? You OK? Brady?

BRADY

I... I... another dream. I don't know.

Shane mouths 'losing it?' to her partner, who nods in agreement.

SHAKER
Someone call you?

He makes a cutting motion over his neck, a sign that he's changing their original destination.

BRADY
No. Let me... no.

SHAKER
You hear something?

BRADY
Yeah. Ryleigh. She screamed again.

SHAKER
She in the house? Outside? Like last time?

BRADY
I don't know.

SHAKER
OK, where are you?

BRADY
Kitchen.

SHAKER
Get up, look around. Tell me what you see.

He inputs the Webb's address into the onscreen GPS - 3216 4th Avenue, Quinton, Iowa. The route pops up with an 83-minute travel time, thanks to Shane's quick U-turn.

BRADY
Uh, cat. Pillow. Food. Uh...

SHAKER
Door locked?

Without needing to be told, Shane plays her favorite game of Beat-the-GPS-Time and floors it.

BRADY
Yeah. Window, too.

SHAKER
Sink off?

BRADY
Yeah.

SHAKER

Check your other doors, windows.

BRADY

Do I have to go upstairs?

SHAKER

Yeah.

BRADY

I... I don't think I can do that.

SHAKER

If you think there's a chance
Ryleigh might be up there, you'll
go.

BRADY

'k. Ryleigh? You up there, baby?

The road sign says eight miles to the Iowa border.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shane makes a mug of chicken noodle soup (the kind from the red box) in the microwave. Brady stands in the doorway between the kitchen and the dining room, with Shaker behind him.

BRADY

Is it... is it normal for FBI
agents to come over in the middle
of the night?

SHANE

Yanno, I'm not sure. I think I
skipped the chapter on normal in
the manual.

SHAKER

No, it's not normal.

BRADY

I'm sorry.

SHAKER

No, it's all good. Told you... this
case bugs me.

BRADY

Still nothing?

SHAKER

No.

SHANE

It's only been a week, though.
Nothing's cold yet.

BRADY

Then why make a show called the
First 48?

Shaker and Shane share a smile, like Shane gets now why he
likes Brady. She hands Brady the mug of soup.

SHANE

What's with your attic? You got
raccoons living up there?

Brady takes a sip, and really looks like he could use about a
gallon of it. Too much weight lost just in the week and not
enough sleep have left him looking gaunt.

BRADY

No. They won't pay the ghosts rent,
so they can't stay.

SHAKER

Told ya he's funny.

BRADY

It's the branches on the roof.

SHANE

What kind of tree is that out
there?

BRADY

Oak, so they tell me. We were going
to build a treehouse up there so
she could get away from me when I
invariably pissed her off during
prime teenage years.

SHANE

We've looked in the attic, right?

BRADY

Nothing up there anyway but the
insulation. Not a proper prairie
home.

SHAKER

Yeah, we looked anyway.

SHANE

Mind if I look around outside?

BRADY

No. But beware... Warden next door may blaze his surface-of-the-sun flashlight on you.

SHANE

Warden?

SHAKER

Because his name is Joliet.

Comedian status confirmed, Shane chuckles.

SHANE

Why not just have a motion light?

BRADY

Because he was cited for that. It was like being at a stadium for a night game.

SHANE

Cool if I poke around a bit?

BRADY

You're the only one who hasn't.

Shane shakes her head and leaves the men alone in the kitchen. Time for her to explore the house a bit.

SHAKER

Have you thought about sleeping pills for a bit? You gotta get some z's you know. Won't do anyone any good if you're too tired to pick up the phone.

BRADY

Might sleep through a call. No way. I'll catch them when I catch them.

SHAKER

Brady...

BRADY

No, Sh-- what's your first name anyway?

SHAKER

Marcus.

BRADY
Marcus? Like Aurelius?

SHAKER
If you wanna make me that old,
sure.

Brady looks down at the mug as if it's the first time he's noticed it, even though he's already consumed half of it.

BRADY
Was this in my cupboard?

SHAKER
No, Shane picked it up along the
way. Figured it might help.

BRADY
Did you guys fly here? I didn't
think we were on the phone for an
hour...

SHAKER
Shane's got a lead foot.

BRADY
What's your husband think?

SHAKER
About me having Shane as a partner?

BRADY
No, about you coming here in the
deadass of night?

SHAKER
I'll have to--

Shane opens the kitchen door from the outside and sticks her head in.

SHANE
Shaker? I talk to you a minute?

SHAKER
Yeah. Sit down, Brady. We'll be in.

Shaker leaves the kitchen and follows Shane around the house.

EXT. BACK YARD OF THE WEBB HOUSE - NIGHT

SHAKER
Alright, boss, whatcha got?

Shane stands at the big oak tree, running her hand over the bark.

SHANE

Good tree, this. Wish it could talk.

SHAKER

Wish it could, too.

SHANE

Branches don't go to the window, so it's been trimmed recently. Means--
Ow! Jesus!

A beam of light that actually could cause retina damage if stared into long enough pierces the darkness. Both agents shield their eyes with their hands.

SHANE (CONT'D)

If you don't shut that off, Joliet,
I will shoot your ass through it.

The light goes off and the sound of a creaky metal porch door is heard. It takes them both a few moments to rub their eyes and let them readjust.

SHAKER

Boy, he wasn't lying. Should have planted Italian Cypress instead of gladiolas.

SHANE

Lord a'mighty. Wow. I think I might actually have holes in the back of my skull.

SHAKER

So, why'd you call me out here?

SHANE

How'd the branch get into the bedroom?

SHAKER

What?

SHANE

The branch. That... blackthorn tree branch. How'd it get in? I mean this old, big, beautiful girl didn't do it. Someone fire it like an arrow into the room? Someone with an axe to grind?

SHAKER

Maybe. But fine, so someone trebuchets a hunk of blackthorn tree into a little girl's bedroom at midnight-thirty. Did she ride it back out of there? Some pulley line system?

SHANE

When you've exhausted the probable.

SHAKER

Explore the improbable.

SHANE

So, let's say she did ride it out of there. How'd it get back in?

SHAKER

Maybe it was the anchor and she rode something else out, like a boatswain's chair.

SHANE

OK, I'll buy that. Rope?

SHAKER

Temporary tie? Yank hard enough, it comes loose, like a sheep's knot.

SHANE

Stick with nautical terms.

SHAKER

What?

SHANE

Nevermind. OK, so where's she go?

SHAKER

Could be in the tree, she swings or rides over, yank, away goes the rope, then down the tree they go.

SHANE

Alright, I'll buy that. But...

SHAKER

But no footprints, no tire tracks, no wheel marks.

SHANE

What about in the next yard? Back of the yard?

SHAKER

Fuck.

Shaker takes his phone from his pocket and answers a call.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Hey, babe? Yeah, sorry. I was on my way home but got a call. Yeah, I'm in Quinton. Yeah, about that little girl. Gonna stay here overnight. I'll see you tomorrow. Yeah, I know. I will. Love you, too.

He ends the call and pockets his phone again.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

After you.

INT. RYLEIGH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shane's taken up the bed for the night. She's sleeping fully prone, not sitting up so if someone did come in, they would think something was amiss. Her hand's under the pillow, hiding the fact that she's holding her sidearm. Still clad in jeans and her socks, she did put on one of Brady's shirts to help sell her 'no, really I'm here sleeping' bit.

When she hears the oak's heavy branches against the roof, she cracks open an eye.

SHANE

Shut the fuck up, will you? Already gave you attention today.

INT. BRADY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Shaker opts for the larger bed. Not bothering to change his clothes, he didn't even bother removing his shoes. He's downloaded the Ring app on his phone and signed into the Webb's account so he can see whatever the cameras sees. His phone is next to him on the bed and like his partner, he's holding his sidearm under the pillow.

He's not asleep, staring instead at the ceiling.

SHAKER

Where are you, baby girl? Who has you?

The sound of the branches has him curious. He gets up and walks to the window. A quick inspection reveals nothing of interest.

He opens the window and sticks his head out of it, looking up. On the opposite side of the house, the oak (while impressive) doesn't stretch over to that side of the house. He looks down and sees several rose bushes.

Puzzled and a little creeped out, he closes the window and lays back in the bed, not pulling the covers up this time.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

I'm here. Come for me,
motherfucker.

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - MORNING

Brady sits at the kitchen table and the two agents are nowhere to be found. The coffee is fresh, at least if the green light on the front of it is to be believed. The sink is free of dishes (and if we check, so is the dishwasher).

The two agents enter. Brady looks up, hopeful.

BRADY

Did Joliet tell you he was going to call the police thanks to the assholes who were keeping him up talking outside his house at all hours?

SHANE

Mhmm. Then I told him that my Pokemon was more powerful than his and he should sit down.

SHAKER

Pretty much exactly like that, too.

BRADY

Well? Anything around the house? Fences? Anything?

Shaker hesitates and looks to Shane. Shane hesitates and sits at the table. Brady slams his hand down on it, rattling both the sugar and the creamer on their saucers.

BRADY (CONT'D)

Damnit! Well?

SHANE

None that we wouldn't expect.
Raccoon. Dog. Cat.

Defeated, Brady sinks into his chair. His descent to the floor is only halted because one of his feet hits Shane's foot.

BRADY
What do we do?

SHANE
We just wait.

Shaker looks like he may want to throw up.

INT. FBI FIELD OFFICE - MORNING

Shane walks out of an elevator and down the hallway to the office she shares with her partner. That he's not there isn't particularly worrying and she doesn't look like she's even looking for him. Putting her things down, she flips open her laptop and inserts her ID card.

Startling her, Shaker pops his head into the door way, out of breath.

SHAKER
Let's go.

INT/EXT. CAR - DAY

Shaker is almost pulling out of the spot in front of the building before Shane is fully in the vehicle.

SHAKER
Look at this shit!

He pokes his phone with his finger in a way not recommended by the manufacturer. The Ring app from the Webb house comes up.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Go to the videos from last night.

Shane navigates as directed, fortunately not looking at the dozen traffic violations her partner just incurred. She watches the video on four-time speed because last night would otherwise take ten hours.

SHANE
What am I looking for here?

Her eyes scan the feed from both doors.

SHANE (CONT'D)
No, seriously, what am I looking
for?

As he hits the highway, Shaker drives at a speed likely not
endorsed by the Bureau.

SHANE (CONT'D)
There's nothing here.

SHAKER
Right. Exactly.

SHANE
What?

SHAKER
There's nothing there. Nothing. At
all. Not even a... a... whatever
the hell stalks the streets of
small town Iowa. Cow. Pig. The
thing behind the corn. Nothing.

SHANE
Wait. There's the sheriff. That's
something. So?

SHAKER
So, I called Brady last night,
check up on him, right?

SHANE
Yeah.

SHAKER
No answer.

SHANE
So? He doesn't answer most of his
calls. We've seen his records.

SHAKER
Yeah, but he always answers mine.
Mine don't go to voicemail.

Shane looks like she's thinking back on it.

SHAKER (CONT'D)
Uh huh, see, you know I'm right. My
gut says I'm right. Something's
wrong. Like really, really wrong.

SHANE

OK, so you're right. Maybe he was in the shower. On the shitter. Forgot to plug his phone in.

SHAKER

You're not that much of an optimist.

SHANE

You think he offed himself.

SHAKER

Yeah, so I called the sheriff down there and had him do a welfare check.

SHANE

And?

SHAKER

And nothing.

SHANE

There, see?

SHAKER

No, I mean nothing. Brady's not there.

SHANE

What do you mean, he's not there?

SHAKER

I mean, poof. Like his kid.

SHANE

How the fuck did you come up with that?

SHAKER

Because the sheriff went into the house. Looked all through it. Found Brady's phone in the kitchen, his shoes, the pillows, everything. Only no Brady.

Shane sets her jaw and focuses her stare out of the windscreen.

SHANE

Drive.

EXT. WEBB HOUSE - DAY

A familiar scene. One that will make at least one family decide to leave town. Several law enforcement vehicles are parked outside of the Webb home. The only real differences are the time of day and now, more neighbors are out to pay witness. Maggie stands off with a deputy, sobbing, his arm around her for comfort. Shane is with them, asking her questions.

Shaker speaks with the sheriff until he catches his partner's gaze. Then, they come together on the steps leading up to the front door.

SHAKER

What's she got?

SHANE

Guess they hooked up a couple of nights ago? Comfort thing, you know.

SHAKER

Yeah. How was it after?

SHANE

Fine, according to her. She didn't stay the night, left around nine, and no one thought anything untoward. No one in town even knows they banged. Well, now the deputy knows. I told him if I heard anyone else saying anything about it, I'd lock him up.

SHAKER

Think he believed you?

Shane checks back over her shoulder. The deputy lowers his eyes immediately and starts talking to another officer.

SHANE

Yeah, think so. What's he got?

SHAKER

Said house was eerie. Like how it is when you first walk into someone's house after they die.

SHANE

Christ, it's like my grandmother's house then. Let's go.

They walk up the steps and enter the house through the front door. Sure enough, it's eerily quiet. Even the sounds of people doing their jobs seem to be muffled.

Shane shudders involuntarily.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Jesus.

SHAKER

Yeah, no kidding.

He doesn't sound too sure of himself as he walks through the living room and up the stairs to the second floor.

SHANE

You hear something?

SHAKER

Not sure.

She follows him up and then into Ryleigh's room. The window is open, though there's no breeze today. Not yet.

SHANE

Shaker?

She sounds as unsure as he did earlier. She looks at the window with the same expression he does that just telegraphs 'I know that was shut and he doesn't come up here'.

Slowly, they back out of the room and into the hallway. They share a look, like they know they have to go down into Brady's room but would rather be bleeding in a shark cage off the Great Barrier Reef before doing that.

SHANE (CONT'D)

(quietly)

Techs process up here yet?

SHAKER

Probably so.

SHANE

They pull anything?

SHAKER

Not sure.

SHANE

You send the sheriff out to that cemetery?

SHAKER

No. Thought we might hit there first.

VOICE FROM DOWNSTAIRS (O.S.)

Phone call!

SHAKER

Jesus Christ!

SHANE

Jesus Christ!

The partners jump and laugh nervously. She holds on to his arm then pounds her chest.

SHANE (CONT'D)

Oh, the tension. Lord, I'm coming home. This how you felt with the pigs?

SHAKER

(back over his shoulder)

Who is it?

VOICE FROM DOWNSTAIRS (O.S.)

Uh... seven-seven-nine...

SHAKER

(as an aside)

Crystal Lake. Her side.

VOICE FROM DOWNSTAIRS (O.S.)

Four-three-six-eleven-forty.

SHAKER

(as an aside)

Mother-in-law.

VOICE FROM DOWNSTAIRS (O.S.)

Prunellier, Amelie. Voicemail!

SHAKER

(yelling towards
downstairs)

Check it!

Thirty seconds later, and the voice from below ends their suspense.

VOICE FROM DOWNSTAIRS (O.S.)

Mother-in-law, wanting to know what time he'll be home because she'll be in tomorrow to help with some things.

SHAKER

Shit.

Shane sighs deeply and turns her attention back towards Brady's room.

SHANE

Well? May as well, since we've already had the shit scared out of us.

SHAKER

Ladies first.

SHANE

And just like that, you have a new partner.

Shaker actually is the one to enter first, weapon drawn, and down at his side. He rolls his shoulders, feeling way worse about being in this room than he did in Ryleigh's.

SHAKER

Feels like it did that night she was taken.

SHANE

It's cold in here.

SHAKER

Yeah. Very.

Gingerly, he makes his way around the room. Shane follows suit, checking the opposite side, before they cross and check over each other's work.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Anything?

SHANE

Not a goddamned thing.

SHAKER

Hey. There.

He nods towards the window. It's open and as with Ryleigh's room, there's no breeze coming through it. With it being on the full-sun side of the house, there wasn't any way the room should be that cold, even if the window had been left open all night.

SHANE

He make a practice of leaving that open?

SHAKER

He says no. Hell, he hasn't been up here in two weeks.

SHANE

What's this?

Shaker looks over his shoulder to see what she's talking about.

SHANE (CONT'D)

You sure he hasn't been up here?

SHAKER

Other than that night we raced over here, yeah. And I'm pretty sure he didn't hang around long. We heard him on the stairs.

Shane picks up a pillow that had fallen on the ground. She smells it and gags.

SHANE

Oh, that's nasty. Here. Take a whiff.

Shaker leans in and sniffs the pillow, then crinkles his nose.

SHAKER

Uch, what is that?

SHANE

Reminds me of when we went to the rainforest. Rotting jungle plants.

SHAKER

Take it down, let tech bag and tag it.

SHANE

(towards the door,
yelling)
Tech! Bag!

INT. WEBB HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Shane and Shaker stand in the kitchen. The coffee pot light is green and the pot is full. The timer indicates he'd set it previously to come on at 6am.

SHANE

When did you call him?

SHAKER
Around midnight.

SHANE
Midnight? Why so late?

SHAKER
Gut feeling.

SHANE
Didn't occur to you that he'd be
asleep?

SHAKER
Nope. Too scared of missing a
ransom call, proof of life,
something.

SHANE
What time did you send the sheriff
around for on a WACO Call?

SHAKER
Around five. Said he got here
around six, heard the coffee pot
come on, scared the bejeezus out of
him. Boys got here about fifteen
minutes before we did.

SHANE
When's the last time you talked to
him?

SHAKER
Around nine last night.

Shane holds her hand out for his phone. She goes through the
Ring app footage again.

SHANE
So, he didn't leave from the front
door, kitchen door, or back door.
We checked the attic and again, no
footprints outside the window. No
ladder marks, no rope burns.
Nothing.

Shaker bends down and picks up Norris, who's been content to
wend his way around his legs.

SHAKER
Why can't you talk, hm? Did you see
something? Why can't we look into
your brain?

SHANE

See if what's-her-name hook-up can take him.

SHAKER

Maggie. Her name's Maggie.

SHANE

Any chance she had anything to do with it?

SHAKER

You see her on the Ring?

With a head shake admitting defeat, Shane sighs and hands Shaker back his phone. Brady's phone, previously unresponsive on the table, chimes with a calendar reminder. It was time to leave, it said, to leave for the anniversary celebration.

A technician (the same one that was there that first night, actually) steps into the kitchen, carrying three evidence bags; one quart-size, one gallon-size, and a larger one that had something dark and hard in it.

TECHNICIAN

Agents? They said outside you wanted to know if we pulled anything out of the guy's bedroom. Other than that pillow you sent out, here's what we had.

He sets the evidence bags on the table next to the phone. Shane picks up the smallest one. It has an empty bandage package and a used betadine wipe and its packaging.

SHANE

Looks like he cut himself shaving or something.

SHAKER

Huh?

Shaker looks over at her, as she picks up the gallon-size bag. In it are a pair of running shoes.

SHAKER (CONT'D)

Hey, he wore those the other day. On our walk.

SHANE

Yeah, but a lace is missing.

Horror dawns on Shaker's face as his eyes focus on the larger bag. We hear a voiceover as he recalls the conversation he had with Brady during their town walkthrough.

SHAKER (V.O.)
Anything happen during the walk?

BRADY (V.O.)
No, nothing. Wait. Yeah, actually.
Ryleigh's ribbon, in her hair, got
caught on a branch or something.

SHAKER (V.O.)
Branch?

BRADY (V.O.)
Yanked it pretty good. Ripped it
right off from her headband.

SHAKER (V.O.)
You get the ribbon back?

BRADY (V.O.)
No, no. Actually, no, we didn't.

In the bag, there's a tree branch in the shape of a hand. The ID tag reads: 'Webb, Brady Master Bedroom Bed' with the day, time, and the technician's initials.

SHAKER
Jesus.