

VERVE

I HEART MURDER

Written by

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BLACK

TITLE: I HEART MURDER

SUPER: GLENCOE, WEST VIRGINIA. FOUR YEARS AGO.

Click.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

The basement of an old house, dusty and cluttered, lit by a single hanging bulb that gently sways.

A human figure is on the floor. DORA BISHOP (27), a former beauty queen, suddenly snaps awake with a GASP. As Dora blinks, groggy, she realizes that her arms and ankles are bound around a support column.

Dora SHRIEKS and violently struggles against the ropes. No use. She SCREAMS at the top of her lungs for help.

Nothing. Dora slumps back down and starts to sob.

A NOISE. A SHADOWY FIGURE shifts in the darkness behind her. Dora turns. The figure is looking for something on the basement shelves. Dora's eyes widen in terror.

DORA
(whisper)
...Who are you?

The figure says nothing, continues rummaging.

DORA (CONT'D)
What do you want from me?

No answer.

DORA (CONT'D)
Please. You can take anything. My
bank card's upstairs in my purse.
My car keys are on the...

Nothing. Dora loses it.

DORA (CONT'D)
Why are you doing this? WHY ARE YOU
DOING THIS? WHY?!

ANA (V.O.)
Why?

At last, the figure finds what they've been searching for: a gas can. Dora sees it glint in the dim light.

DORA
No.

ANA (V.O.)
Why did the killer use fire?

The dark figure pulls the stopper and begins to splash gas all over the floor around Dora, careful to not get any on her.

ANA (V.O.)
After all, torching a house is
hardly the most convenient way to
kill someone. Especially in the
state with the 3rd highest gun
ownership rate in America.

DORA
(sobbing)
Please don't. Please don't. Please
don't...

ANA (V.O.)
Fire was a choice.

The dark figure steps forward into the light at last.

ANA (V.O.)
We can't know what Dora Bishop saw
that night.

REVEAL: A man wearing a fetish dog mask made of glistening black latex. Dora lets out an inhuman SCREAM of pure anguish.

ANA (V.O.)
We can't know how she felt; how
terrified she was in her final
moments. But even though she's
gone, Dora can still tell us
things...

She begins to thrash and scream hysterically at the top of her lungs again. The Dog-Masked Man pauses for a moment to watch her flail helplessly. He puts down the gas can and makes a "Shh" gesture with his finger. Dora doesn't stop.

ANA (V.O.)
Bruising on her forehead tells us
that she was struck with a hard
cylindrical object.

THWIP. With a flick of his wrist the Dog-masked Man whips out a telescoping baton. THUNK! He smashes Dora across the face with it. Dora slumps and her screams become a low, ragged moan.

ANA (V.O.)

No such weapon was ever found at the crime scene.

The Dog-Masked Man carefully folds his baton. Dora continues to moan. The Dog-Masked Man cocks his head.

ANA (V.O.)

The .035 milligrams per liter of oxycodone the coroner found in her bloodstream tells us that, like so many others, Dora had a drug problem.

The Dog-Masked Man inserts a syringe into a medical vial and fills it with clear liquid. He flicks it. Once, twice. Then he jams the syringe into Dora's neck. She goes quiet. Her breathing is barely audible now.

ANA (V.O.)

She was probably too high that night to even fight back.

The Dog-Masked Man steps backward and strikes a match. It burns for a moment between shiny black-gloved fingertips.

ANA (V.O.)

Dora Lynn Bishop burned to death on the night of June 21st, 2015. That fire was a choice.

The Dog-masked Man flicks the match through the air. WHOOMP! The gas ignites.

ANA (V.O.)

See, fire isn't the easiest way to kill someone or dispose of a body.

As the flames grow higher around Dora's unconscious form, the Dog-masked Man unzips his pants and starts to masturbate.

ANA (V.O.)

But it is a damn good way to cover your tracks. Dora's death could have been logged accidental. House fires happen. Especially when you live alone in the middle of nowhere.

The fire spreads and Dora's flesh starts to sizzle and burn. The Dog-masked Man's breathing accelerates.

ANA (V.O.)

There would have been no investigation. No unsolved murder case. And most importantly no *me* -- in your earbuds while you're sweating away on the elliptical -- trying to solve it.

As the flames burn hotter, the Dog-masked Man finishes. He quickly pulls out a wet wipe and cleans up.

ANA

Too bad for the killer, it didn't go down like that.

The Dog-masked Man disappears up the basement stairs.

EXT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Appalachian mountains. A beautiful old Victorian house stands alone in the moonlight. All around are deep, dark woods. A curvy two-lane mountain road passes by it. Black smoke pours from the basement windows.

ANA (V.O.)

A storm came. Five inches of rain in five hours. Local record.

Lightning dances in the distance. THUNDER rumbles. The Dog-masked Man walks down the front steps of the house.

ANA (V.O.)

Enough rainfall to slow the burn at Dora Bishop's house until the local fire department arrived at 5 AM the next morning and put out the blaze.

The man removes his mask and gets into a nondescript gray sedan and drives off, leaving the house to burn.

ANA (V.O.)

So instead of ashes we a body.
Instead of smoke we have evidence.
Instead of an accident we have a mystery.

A patter of rain starts to fall.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BASEMENT

Dora's flesh is half melted off now, blackened and bubbling.

ANA (V.O.)
But it won't be one forever. We
will catch the person who did this.
Because I won't quit...

SMASH TO:

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - RECORDING BOOTH - DAY

ANA COHEN (29), a cute hipster in cool glasses, sits at a desk in a soundproof booth. She reads from a script into a microphone.

ANA (CONT'D)
...until there is justice for Dora
Bishop.

A beat. Ana takes a sip of water. She looks at a different sheet of paper.

ANA
Are you tired of getting killed on
overpriced mattresses from your
local retailer?

SUPER: PRESENT DAY.

ANA
Icarus offers a top-quality
mattress for a fraction of the
price. Your vacuum-sealed Icarus
mattress is hand-delivered, right
to your door. Sleep on it for 30
days and if you don't like it,
return it for a full refund. You
won't, though. Because each Icarus
mattress is handcrafted, right here
in America, from nine different
layers of patented Somni-foam to
create the ultimate deep-sleep
experience. Icarus: it's like
sleeping on a cloud. Only cheaper.

Ana takes another sip of water and rolls her neck a little.

ANA
How was that?

On the other side of the glass is SETH HOWARD (30), non-threatening and noticeably less trendy than Ana. Seth also wears headphones and operates a mixing board. He gives Ana a thumbs up. Ana nods, clears her throat and continues.

ANA

This is *I Heart Murder*, the podcast where we investigate the killing of Dora Bishop. I'm your host, Ana Cohen...

ANGLE ON Ana's in-studio cork board, connecting various photos, articles and documentary evidence from the case with red yarn. At the top is a photo of Dora with the date 6/21/2015. Below are photos of her 3 main suspects.

ANA

Fire was a choice. Disguising a homicide as a house fire suggests premeditation. Planning. I think our killer knew Dora had the murder weapons -- a gallon of gas and 30 feet of rope -- just sitting in her own basement. Maybe it was someone close to her...

ANGLE ON a photograph of JOE IVEY (mid 40s), a tall, fit man in a khaki sheriff's uniform. A little smirk on his face. Handsome and he knows it.

ANA

Someone like Joe Ivey? To recap Episode 4 -- currently available on iTunes, Spotify and everywhere you get your podcasts -- Joe is the married Sheriff's Deputy who was allegedly having an affair with Dora at the time of her death. And Joe certainly does seem to have a mean streak...

ANGLE ON a newspaper article "OFF-DUTY SHERIFF'S DEPUTY ARRESTED IN BRAWL"

ANA

Arrested in 2014 for beating a man unconscious. Dude lost an eye, by the way. Numerous Excessive Force complaints on the job. Yeah, we FOIA'ed those. Maybe Dora wanted to break it off and Joe got mad? Or maybe she threatened to tell his wife and he needed to shut her up? Then again...

ANGLE ON a mugshot of CODY VARGA (15) a hulking, dead-eyed Goth kid with long, stringy black hair. He looks like every mass shooter ever.

ANA

...perhaps the killer was an outcast. A creep who studied the details of Dora's life from the shadows. In that case, Cody Varga might just be our man. Or boy, I guess.

ANGLE ON printouts of various social media posts that say things like: *"burn it all."* and *"everything is an illusion. only the pain is real. but the fire will outlast you-- the last thing that you feel."*

ANA

Judging from his social media profile, Cody is a pyro. The kid reputedly tortured animals. He was known to ride his 4-wheeler up and down the trails behind Dora's house. And his classmates claim he was obsessed with "Ms. Bishop" ever since he took her Marketing class in 8th grade.

ANGLE ON a Newspaper article "SUSPECT ARRESTED IN MURDER INVESTIGATION"

ANA

Oops, almost forgot! Cody was arrested for the murder. Though later released without being charged...

(beat)

But maybe our killer was a bit of both: a psychopathic outsider with a foothold in Dora's personal life. Consider Ronnie Burnett...

ANGLE ON: A smiling mugshot of RONNIE BURNETT (50s) a leathery convict with a patchy goatee. He has a Screaming Eagle tattoo on one side of his neck and a pair of S.S. Lightning Bolts on the other. His eyes bulge. He looks wrong. Evil.

ANA

The local Neo-Nazi drug dealer who allegedly sold pills to everyone in town. Could that explain the Florida pain clinic's worth of Oxy found in Dora's system?

(MORE)

ANA (CONT'D)

Oh, and I don't have to say "allegedly" for this one: Ronnie Burnett served eleven years in prison for murdering his own wife.

ANGLE ON an old newspaper clipping with the headline "GLENCOE MAN CHARGED WITH WIFE'S MURDER".

ANA

Joe Ivey, Cody Varga and Ronnie Burnett: the *I Heart Murder* Holy Trinity. In the coming weeks we will continue to examine these three men's motivations, their relationship to Dora and of course their alibis for the night of June 21, 2015.

(beat)

As always, if you have any tips, leads, fan theories -- or, hey, if you just want to confess -- you can contact me on social media @iheartmurder or email the show through our website. Maybe you could be the one who breaks this thing wide open.

(beat)

And don't forget to join us next week for another episode of *I Heart Murder*.

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - OFFICE SPACE - DAY

Seth and Ana walk out of the recording booth into a converted Brooklyn loft. Artful, framed mugshots of famous killers hang on the walls and a large, neon I HEART MURDER logo is suspended from the ceiling. It would be a pretty cool space if it weren't so cluttered with boxes and papers.

Ana shows Seth her phone: a nicely framed shot of the evidence cork board and an accompanying social media post:

"the connections are becoming clearer mwahahahaha" [upside down smiley face emoji]"

ANA

...How's that look?

SETH

Like every detective show ever. You sure somebody's not going to sue us?

ANA

Please. You can't copyright the
"crazy wall". I'm posting it.

She does. Nearby the podcast's lone employee SHARON (22), a chipper intern, sits at a laptop.

ANA

Speaking of which, Sharon, we need
more push pins for the crazy wall.
Red ones to match the yarn. The
assorted colors look... too crazy.

SHARON

On it.

Ana notices the iTunes podcast rankings open on Sharon's computer.

ANA

Where are we at?

SHARON

Last week's episode is still in the
Top Ten!

SETH

Nice!

ANA

What spot?

SHARON

Well... ten.

Ana scowls.

SHARON

Also happy to report #RonnieDidIt
and #CodyDidIt are both trending in
the U.S.

SETH

Man, nobody ever thinks #JoeDidIt.
Guy's too handsome.

ANA

That's good. I'm posting that.

Ana whips out her smartphone and posts Seth's comment to social media.

ANA

Anything from the message boards?

SHARON

Yeah, 400 new threads. The hot theory is that Dora was the victim of a heretofore unknown serial killer the fan community has dubbed "The Mountain State Murderer".

ANA

Ha. Love it. Our fans are bonkers.

SHARON

And a package came. Addressed to you.

ANA

Does it look like anthrax?

SHARON

Hmm. Kind of.

Sharon holds out a dirty, beat-up manila envelope sealed with lots of tape. Ana takes it gives a cursory glance. No return address.

ANA

Anything else?

SHARON

Mmm. Somebody named Dan Pedrossian from Netflix called.

Ana and Seth freeze.

ANA

...Okay, Sharon, I know this is your first media job or whatever but that's what we journalists call "burying the lede".

SETH

Pedrossian is their True Crime development guy.

SHARON

I took his number.

Sharon holds up a Post-It. Ana snatches it and continues toward the door.

SETH

Thank you Sharon. Good job. You can, uh, take a break now or whatever.

SHARON
No thanks. Happy working.

Sharon puts her earbuds in and turns back to her computer. Seth catches up with Ana.

SETH
(to Ana)
...So you're a "journalist" now?

Ana rapidly scans social media on her phone, liking and sharing various *I Heart Murder*-related posts.

ANA
Of course I'm a journalist. The *Times* called me "Truman Capote in Warby Parkers".

She points to a recent *New York Times* article about the podcast, framed on the wall.

SETH
Eight months ago you were a fact-checker at *Ladies' Home Journal* Googling unsolved murders at work.

Ana pinches Seth's cheek.

ANA
And aren't you lucky I found one?

Ana goes back to her phone. Seth looks around the office and takes it all in.

SETH
God. This is nuts... right?

Ana looks up.

ANA
Nuts?

SETH
Like, we have a hit podcast and a real office and Dan Pedrossian is calling and we're-- well you're, like, quasi-famous because of it.

ANA
Hey. Quasi-famous? I got recognized at the gym this week. I think I'm at least *semi*-famous.

SETH

You better watch out for the paparazzi at the panel thing tonight.

ANA

Ugh. Do I have to go to that?

SETH

Ana. It's the American Podcast Festival. They're giving the show an award.

ANA

Getting an award for best podcast is like winning a beauty contest in the burn ward.

Seth shakes his head.

SETH

Jesus. She's already outgrown the medium that made her. *Journalist* Ana Cohen truly has become *semi-famous*.

(yelling to no one)

I knew her when, folks. I knew her when.

Across the office, Sharon pulls her earbuds out, confused.

SHARON

Huh?

ANA

Nothing, Sharon. Get back to work.

INT. NYU AUDITORIUM - THAT NIGHT

Ana sits on a panel onstage with OTHER PROMINENT PODCASTERS and a MODERATOR before a LIVE AUDIENCE. This is the Q and A portion of the panel.

A GRUFF COMEDIAN speaks to the crowd.

GRUFF COMEDIAN

...You know a lot of comics try to be tough guys. They don't come on my show intending to cry. But I get 'em all eventually.

Audience CHUCKLES. Ana's phone BUZZES. She discretely checks it.

ANGLE ON a social media Direct Message from an anonymous account called @southwillrise88:

"why are you poking your nose where it don't belong bitch?"

PODCAST SUPERFAN (O.S.)
Question for Ana.

Ana is startled. Out in the audience a SUPERFAN of the show, wearing an official I Heart Murder t-shirt, holds a microphone.

MODERATOR
Go ahead, please.

PODCAST SUPERFAN
Hi. Huge, huge fan of your work.
What you're doing is so important.

ANA
Thanks. Cool shirt.

PODCAST SUPERFAN
So... can you just tell us who you think did it?

The audience LAUGHS. Ana grins. Coy.

ANA
I could... But I won't. I need proof. Until I have it my mind has to be open to every possibility.

SUPERFAN
OK. I respect that. Blink once if it's Ronnie Burnett.

The audience LAUGHS again. Ana laughs too this time.

ANA
I will say this: there are three suspects in this case. I am certain one of them murdered Dora Bishop. One day -- soon I hope -- we will all know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, which one of the bastards did it.

The audience APPLAUDS. The Superfan beams at this answer and sits down. The Moderator scans the crowd.

MODERATOR
Another question?

A mousy UNDERGRADUATE takes the mic. She stares at her feet and mumbles her question.

UNDERGRADUATE
Yeah, um, what about the other two?

ANA
The other two?

UNDERGRADUATE
Like, the two guys that didn't kill her. What about them?

ANA
They get to *not* go to prison.

The audience LAUGHS.

UNDERGRADUATE
No, but I mean their lives are--

ANA
Look, you're young so you may not understand this yet, but the world is a fucking dark place. Our only glimmer of hope is the truth. Before we started investigating, it had been four long years of nothing on the Bishop case -- no progress from the bumblefuck keystone cops down in Glencoe. Think about what that must have felt like for Dora's family.

UNDERGRADUATE
I read online that the family won't even talk to you--

ANA
I Heart Murder has over 30 million downloads. The Bishop case is actually in the news again. Not to brag, but that's because of us. We are closer than ever to solving this thing. Is there going to be fallout from that? Sure, maybe. I can't control that.

UNDERGRADUATE
OK. But how are you not, like... exploiting a tragedy?

ANA

How about the murderer who is currently walking around free? How about the police who get paid to solve crimes and don't? Me? I have no power. I have no authority. I have a microphone. All I'm trying to do is tell a story. Hopefully I can tell it well enough that it can make some small measure of difference against the darkness.

The audience APPLAUDS drowning out the undergraduate.

UNDERGRADUATE

I mean, do you really think it's that black and--

MODERATOR

Please. Let's give everyone a chance to ask their question. You.

The undergraduate reluctantly gives up the mic to a WILD-HAIRED WOMAN who blinks strangely.

WILD-HAIRED WOMAN

I have a question for Ana.

GRUFF COMEDIAN

(under his breath)

Jesus. Seriously?

WILD-HAIRED WOMAN

Do you think the fact that Dora Bishop's murder took place on June 21, 2015 is significant.

ANA

How-- how do you mean?

WILD-HAIRED WOMAN

June 21st. That's the Summer Solstice. Litha. A holiday of great significance to pagans and occultists everywhere.

ANA

Are you suggesting that Dora Bishop was murdered by... witches?

WILD-HAIRED WOMAN

Well, as you just said: demonic influence seems to be pervasive in our sick, modern society.

SMASH TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN STREET - NIGHT

Ana steps out onto the dark, rain-slick street with the rest of the crowd. She clutches a small lucite podcasting award for "Outstanding Achievement In The Medium".

As Ana walks toward the subway, she looks only at her phone, liking and sharing more *I Heart Murder* content.

ANGLE ON iTunes Rankings. "I Heart Murder - Episode 19: The Choice of Fire" is currently at #8.

Ana grins.

Then she rereads the threatening message from earlier:

"why are you poking your nose where it don't belong bitch?"

She types back: *"It's a living."*

Send. A beat. Ana's phone BUZZES with a new message:

"not for long"

Ana glances around. The crowd has thinned now. A few stragglers here and there, hypnotized by their phones.

An OLD MAN in a stained, threadbare suit sits on a nearby stoop, clutching a bottle in a brown bag and glaring at Ana. They lock eyes. The old man doesn't blink. His gaze is pure hatred.

ANA

...What?

OLD MAN

I'll eat your pussy.

ANA

Fuck off.

The old man gives a joyless HISSING LAUGH revealing that all of his front teeth are missing. Ana keeps walking.

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - DAY

Ana sits at her desk talking on her phone.

ANA

Yes, hi. I'm calling for Dan
Pedrossian.

(beat)

Ana Cohen. Right, mm hmm. From the
murder podcast. Oh, thank you.
That's very flattering... Well, if
I told you who did it, you wouldn't
keep listening! Ha ha. OK. Sure
just have him give me a call back
when he gets in. Thank you.

She hangs up and sees Seth standing nearby. He gazes
longingly at the little podcasting award now sitting on the
corner of her messy desk.

SETH

Did they, by any chance, give you
another one of these? For your,
ahem, producer?

ANA

No. You can have that one.

SETH

Cool.

Seth takes the award. He places it on his own desk three feet
away.

ANA

Hey, check this out. Somebody wants
me dead.

Ana shows Seth the creepy messages on her phone.

SETH

Jesus.

ANA

Yeah. It's only 20% worse than what
I usually get online but still.

SETH

I mean... Should we stop doing the
podcast? Do I need to update my
résumé?

(beat)

Do you think I could be, like, a
rodeo guy?

Ana cracks a smile.

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - RECORDING BOOTH

Ana records *I Heart Murder* - Episode 20.

ANGLE ON a detailed county map of West Virginia.

ANA

...West Virginia. Wild and wonderful. Forty-ninth poorest state in the union. Fiftieth in life expectancy. Coal mining is dead. Opioid addiction is alive and well. It's a place where too many bad things happen to too many people. What's another tragedy, more or less?

ANGLE ON a photo of DALE HAMMOND (50s), a portly red-faced man practically bursting out of his sheriff's uniform.

ANA

At least that seems to be the attitude of Corbett County Sheriff Dale Hammond. You'd think solving the grisly murder of a local high-school-teacher-slash-former-Miss-West-Virginia would be the department's top concern. Nope. Not for

(hillbilly accent)
Sheriff Dale.

ANGLE ON Ana's crazy wall-- again the newspaper article with headline that reads "SUSPECT ARRESTED IN GLENCOE MURDER INVESTIGATION"

ANA

The day after the murder, deputies made a single arrest: Cody Varga. Discharged without explanation 48 hours later. Cool.

ANGLE ON Cody Varga's mugshot.

ANA

And since then... nothing. No more arrests. No indictments. No press conferences. Nada.

Ana grabs a sheaf of printouts from a nearby stack and reads.

ANA

In the meantime, however, these amazing supercops have made... 19 collars for underaged drinking, 8 for marijuana possession, and 3 for, get this, cow tipping. Oh and in February the whole department went to Morgantown to do a ropes course for "team building".
Priorities.

ANGLE ON Joe Ivey's picture.

ANA

Needless to say, the department has never acknowledged Deputy Ivey's alleged affair with Dora, despite the ample evidence that we, here, at *I Heart Murder* were able to dig up on social media.

ANGLE ON: Printouts of old Facebook posts between Joe and Dora that strongly hint that the two are dating.

ANA

That is, before Joe deactivated or deleted all his accounts. Enjoy that digital detox, Joe. Sometimes I wish I could unplug too.

ANGLE ON Ronnie Burnett's mugshot.

ANA

Ronnie Burnett wasn't even questioned. Despite witnesses claiming they heard him say he would "like to choke that stuck up bitch". Despite the fact that he's got a mile-long rap sheet culminating in second degree murder.

ANGLE ON various arrest records for Ronnie Burnett, mostly for assault and possession of narcotics.

ANA

Weird. Ronnie Burnett spent his entire adult life in and out of prison until approximately November 8, 2011. The day Dale Hammond, was elected Sheriff of Corbett County, West Virginia. Fun fact: I recently discovered that Dale and Ronnie are first cousins.

ANGLE ON a printout of a family tree from a pro genealogy website, connecting Ronnie Burnett and Dale Hammond.

ANA

Yep. Thanks ancestry.com. Isn't that quite a coincidence? But hey, everybody down there is related, right? And people can change. I used to love kombucha. Now I can't stand the stuff. Maybe Ronnie, the wife-murderer with the Nazi neck tattoo simply woke up one day in 2011 and decided not to do any more bad stuff. Maybe it's got nothing to do with his cousin running the local police. Yeah. Maybe...

Ana picks a printout of a press release.

ANA

But it seems I'm not the only one who's disappointed in the Corbett County Sheriff's Department. I'm thrilled to report that today the West Virginia State Police released the following statement:

(reading)

"After years of stalled progress, the West Virginia Bureau of Criminal Investigation's cold case unit will officially open an investigation into the 2015 murder of Dora Lynn Bishop. We believe in devoting the resources and manpower necessary to finally solve this case. There will be justice for Dora."

Ana puts down the printout. She grins.

ANA

Progress. And not for nothing but... it sounds we have some new fans of the podcast.

INT. TRENDY RESTAURANT - THAT NIGHT

A loud, hip restaurant. Ana is on a Tinder date with JASON a square finance bro. She is already fairly drunk.

As he drones on about his job Ana discretely compares him to his profile photo. Photo is much better looking.

JASON

...So that's basically what
automated high-frequency currency
arbitrage is all about.

ANA

(quietly)

Jesus Christ, I'd kill myself.

JASON

(yelling over the noise)

Huh?

Ana downs the rest of her glass of wine.

ANA

So, if I'm understanding correctly,
your job is to make money for
someone... somewhere?

JASON

And hopefully myself.

ANA

That's what you want to spend your
life doing?

JASON

Sure. You should see my apartment.

ANA

What about, you know, right and
wrong? The greater good? Morality?

Jason laughs.

JASON

In my experience, every do-gooder
claiming to help other people is
just as self-centered as me, only
they can't admit it. You know, Ayn
Rand said that true altruism
doesn't even exist.

ANA

Yep. You just dropped Ayn Rand.
That means its time for the check.

Ana gestures to a passing SERVER but Jason laughs and waves
them off.

JASON

No, no. I want to hear how exactly
you make rent that's so noble?

ANA

I host a podcast. Investigate unsolved murders.

Jason shudders.

JASON

Morbid. That's what you want to spend *your* life doing?

ANA

Yeah.

JASON

Why?

Ana considers this for a long moment as she pours herself another glass of wine.

ANA

...When I was 11 my cat Juniper got sick and died.

JASON

I'm... very sorry for your loss?

ANA

Only something was off. Juniper was young; healthy. And one day he just barfs up a bunch of blood and keels over? Plus my neighbor Jenny Chung's cat had just died two weeks earlier. Something was off. I knew it. So I froze him.

JASON

You froze your dead cat?

ANA

Yep. And I mailed his corpse to the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine requesting an autopsy.

JASON

Did they... do that?

ANA

For some reason-- maybe it was the adorable sixth-grade-girl handwriting on loose leaf notebook paper-- they did. Six weeks later I got a letter.

(MORE)

ANA (CONT'D)
Cause of death: venlafaxine
poisoning. Do you know what
venlafaxine is?

JASON
No. No I don't.

ANA
It's an antidepressant. Fatal to
cats.

JASON
So, what? Juniper got into the pill
cabinet?

ANA
Nope. Nobody in my house was on
antidepressants. Probably should've
been. But they weren't. So I start
going through neighbors' trash.

JASON
Oh my God.

ANA
Sure enough, I find an empty pill
bottle in Mrs. Shapiro's garbage:
Effexor. That's the commercial name
for venlafaxine. So I stake out the
Shapiro house.

Jason has become visibly uncomfortable.

JASON
Uh.

ANA
Four months I watch from the
bushes. Before school. After
school. It's tough for a kid, you
know. But one day I catch her. Mrs.
Shapiro steps out on her back patio
and puts out a plate of cat food.
Mrs. Shapiro doesn't have any cats.
After she's gone, I check the food.
There's some crushed up white
powder on it.

JASON
No.

ANA

Yep. Mrs. Shapiro killed Juniper.
She killed Jenny Chung's cat. She'd
been doing it for years.

JASON

But... why?

Ana shrugs.

ANA

Bitch didn't like cats. And you
know what happened when I called
her on it?

JASON

What?

ANA

I'm the one who got in trouble.

Ana takes another swig of wine.

ANA (CONT'D)

That's when I learned that I don't
give up. And I don't back down. And
I don't let people get away with
it.

JASON

But didn't she get away with it?

ANA

Nah. She left the neighborhood six
months later. Couldn't handle the
thought of someone out there
knowing who she really was.

Ana stares intently at Jason for a long moment, sizing him up.

ANA (CONT'D)

Most people can't.

Jason waves to the server.

JASON

(meekly)

Yeah, can we get the check?

EXT. BROOKLYN STREET - NIGHT

Ana, drunk, walks alone down an eerily deserted Brooklyn street. Her phone BUZZES. She stops and looks at it.

ANGLE ON another Direct Message from @southwillrise88:

"i told you to drop it jew cunt"

Ana looks around. The dark street is empty.

Suddenly SOMEONE lurches into the streetlight ahead. Ana can only make out a silhouette charging toward her, arms flailing.

Ana stumbles backwards as the figure bears down on her. She turns to run, but trips over a pile of garbage and falls backwards.

The person rushes past her toward a nearby trashcan and starts to LOUDLY VOMIT into it. Ana can see now that he is just a drunken COLLEGE STUDENT.

A group of LAUGHING COEDS follows behind, making fun of their hammered friend. Ana catches her breath.

ANA
(weakly)
Watch it, asshole.

The puking kid doesn't hear her.

INT. SUBWAY TRAIN

Ana stares at her phone. She overhears two nearby PASSENGERS discussing her podcast.

MALE PASSENGER
...Cody absolutely did it. He is a textbook psychopath.

FEMALE PASSENGER
How can you, just, like diagnose someone from afar like that?

MALE PASSENGER
No, I read a book about it.
There's, like, this test you can do...

Ana smiles despite herself, and looks at her phone again. Ana replies to @southwillrise88:

"Please, Jew Cunt was my mother's name. Call me Ana."

A beat. Ana's phone BUZZES again.

"laugh now. soon you'll scream"

Ana frowns. She gets up and exits the train at the next stop.

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - NIGHT

Ana enters the darkened studio and flicks on the lights.

Ana hits a vape pen and studies her crazy wall: photos of Ronnie Burnett, Cody Varga and Joe Ivey connected to other pieces of evidence.

She looks at her phone again. Across her desk she notices the manila envelope.

Ana rips it open. Photocopied pages tumble out. She starts to read them. Her face lights up.

ANA

Holy shit.

INT. SETH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Seth and his girlfriend LISA sit on the couch watching a baking competition show.

ONSCREEN a nervous BAKING CONTESTANT attempts to bake a Swedish Princess cake.

SETH

Never going to win with that showstopper, Brett.

LISA

The layers are so uneven.

Suddenly there is a POUNDING on the door, startling them both. Seth and Lisa look at each other. Seth gets up and tentatively goes to answer it.

SETH

Hello?

ANA

(through door)

Seth! Open up!

Seth opens the door to see Ana standing on the other side.

SETH
Ana, Jesus, it's nearly midnight.

Ana barges in.

ANA
You have to look at this. Now.

She hands Seth the manila envelope. Seth takes out the pages and reads them.

ANGLE ON photocopied pages of Corbett County Sherriff's Department Letterhead. It's a confession written in an ugly childlike scrawl.

SETH
(reading)
My God. This is a handwritten confession. From Ronnie Burnett.

ANA
Yep. Taken down on Corbett County Sheriff's Department letterhead. Only nobody's ever mentioned that Ronnie confessed to anything. They covered it up.

SETH
This is proof. If it's real.

ANA
I think it is. And I think he knows it's out there now. That's why he's fucking with me online. He can't be happy about the state police taking up the case.

SETH
Wait. You're saying the death threats are coming from Ronnie himself?

ANA
I looked it up and after he lost his murder trial he used the exact same phrase
(re: her phone)
He called his lawyer a "Jew Cunt"--

LISA
Uh, hi, Ana.

ANA

Oh. Hello, Lisa. Sorry I'm being loud. Me and your boyfriend are solving a murder in your kitchen.

LISA

OK. Well... I guess I'm going to bed?

SETH

Don't worry, I'll come soon--

Lisa exits without another word to Seth.

SETH

(to Ana)

Dude. You don't have to be rude to her.

Ana shrugs.

ANA

I'm rude. I thought I was clear about that. Anyway, we need to get down there. ASAP.

SETH

Down there? To-- to West Virginia?

ANA

Yeah.

SETH

Why?

ANA

We have to confirm the authenticity of this confession and nobody at the Corbett County Sheriff's Department will return my calls. Plus I'd like to get something on tape with Ronnie himself.

SETH

Seriously? An interview with the dude who wants to kill you?

ANA

I don't think he *really* wants to kill me. He's trying to scare me.

SETH

Ana, he's a convicted murderer.

ANA

Think about it: it would be super dumb of him to do anything to me. Semi-famous, remember? Anyway, yes, we need to go to Glencoe.

SETH

But we've-- our podcast has forever associated that town with a horrible murder. I--
(lowering voice)
I'm not sure they like us very much down there.

Ana shrugs.

ANA

Being liked isn't the goal.

SETH

Plus it's a bad time for me to travel right now. Lisa is going through some drama at work and-- Honestly, can the show actually afford a big trip like this? The budget is--

ANA

Seth, this is why the show exists. I need you buddy. This thing has always been me and you. Looking for answers -- the truth. Nobody's going to hand it to us. And there's only so much we can do hiding in a recording booth in Brooklyn.

(beat)

Plus I don't know how to drive.

Seth sighs deeply. A smile slowly spreads across Ana's face.

ANA

I know that sigh. That's a "yes" sigh.

SETH

...When do we leave?

ANA

Tomorrow.

(checking phone)

Today, actually.

Ana types a social media post:

*"Time to take this show on the road. New evidence has come to light and we're traveling to Glencoe to investigate.
[Sherlock Holmes emoji] #IHeartMurder"*

Send.

INT. FILTHY GARAGE - NIGHT

ANGLE ON a heavy duty garbage bag open in the trunk of a car. An UNSEEN FIGURE breathes heavily as Ana's disembodied voice plays through tinny speakers somewhere nearby.

ANA (AUDIO)
...the coming weeks we will
continue to examine these three
men's motivations...

A black gloved hand tosses a roll of duct tape into the bag.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
...their relationship to Dora and
of course their alibis for the
night of June 21, 2015.

A hacksaw follows the duct tape.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
As always, if you have any tips,
leads, fan theories -- or, hey, if
you just want to confess...

A pair of pliers. A sledgehammer.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
...you can contact me on social
media @iheartmurder or email the
show through our website.

A blowtorch. A ski mask.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
Maybe you could be the one who
breaks this thing wide open.

The figure cinches the garbage bag closed.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
And don't forget to join us next
week for another episode of *I Heart
Murder*.

The trunk SLAMS shut.

EXT. CHARLESTON AIRPORT - DAY

A SMALL JET lands on the runway of a tiny airport.

SUPER: CHARLESTON, WEST VIRGINIA

INT. RENTAL CAR AGENCY - DAY

Ana and Seth, carrying clamshell cases filled with recording equipment, enter a rental car agency. A RENTAL CAR AGENT stands behind the counter.

ANA

Hi. I have a reservation. Nissan Versa for Cohen.

RENTAL CAR AGENT

Alrighty Ms. Cohen. Just need to see your drivers license.

ANA

Welp, you called my bluff. Seth?

Seth puts his license on the table. The agent takes it then types something into his computer.

RENTAL CAR AGENT

(while typing)

Would you like to sign up for the supplemental insurance to--

ANA

Nope. Supplemental insurance is a scam.

RENTAL CAR AGENT

Hmm.

(typing, to Seth)

Brooklyn, huh? You know we have two new brewpubs, right here in town.

Ana ignores him, looking at her phone.

SETH

Cool, man. That's... great.

The agent finishes up.

RENTAL CAR AGENT

And... you're all set, Mr. Howard. Welcome to West Virginia. If you don't mind me asking, where are y'all headed today?

SETH
Um. Corbett County?

The Rental Car Guy grins mischievously. He whistles the theme from "Deliverance."

EXT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Seth drives the winding mountain roads -- beautiful, green woods dotted with abandoned, burned-out houses and occasional pockets of post-industrial squalor: slag heaps, rusting mining equipment, disused train tracks, covered in kudzu.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

SETH
Jesus, these roads. I'm going to throw up.

ANA
(looking at phone)
See? This is why I could never drive.

SETH
So what's the plan when we actually get there?

ANA
Check in to the motel. Then swing by the Sheriff's department and try to talk to Hammond. After that, I'd like to pay a visit to the State Police cold case unit. See what they know. Then maybe grab a bite to eat at...

(checks phone)
Either the Black Diamond Diner or Burger King, I guess?

SETH
Hmm. I could really go for some Thai food.

ANA
Great. Looks like the nearest Thai restaurant is...
(checks phone)
134 miles away. In Pittsburgh.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - AFTERNOON

Their car tops a mountain. In the valley below, a tiny defunct coal mining town of about 1,300 people glows in the afternoon sun.

ANA
Glencoe, West Virginia.

As the car descends into the valley, closer to town they pass an abandoned drive-in movie theater, overgrown with weeds. The letters on the old rusty marquee say "I KILLED DORA".

SETH
Well, that's not spooky at all.

Ana leans out the window snaps a photo with her phone, which she immediately posts to social media.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - AFTERNOON

The car pulls into the parking lot of the town's only motel, the CHIEF LOGAN INN. There are only two other cars in the parking lot. The sign features a huge (racist) statue of a stoic Indian chief. Seth winces.

SETH
I feel like staying here might technically be a hate crime.

ANA
It's this or sleep in the car.

INT. MOTEL - FRONT OFFICE

A bell on the door jingles as Ana and Seth enter the front office of the motel. It's deserted. Seth grins.

SETH
Hey, check it out.

On the counter is a small spinning rack of bootleg I HEART MURDER keychains. Ana frowns and starts to manually jingle the bell on the door. She doesn't stop until an elderly man, MR. MULLINS, emerges from a back room, blinking.

MR. MULLINS
Sorry, just catching my forty winks. Four in the afternoon but the hospitality industry demands strange hours of a man. How can I help you fine folks?

ANA

Room for two please. Two beds.
Obviously. And one of these.

She takes a keychain and slaps it on the counter.

MR. MULLINS

Oh are y'all fans of the podcast?

ANA

Heard a couple episodes. You like
it?

MR. MULLINS

Honestly, that girl's voice gets to
me--

Ana grits her teeth.

MR. MULLINS (CONT'D)

--but, hell, it put this little
nothing town on the map. Folks
around here hate it. But no press
is bad press, you ask me.

Mr. Mullins tips his bifocals down

MR. MULLINS

You know, if y'all are interested,
I do an informal *I Heart Murder*
tour for out-of-towners. I can take
you around to the high school, the
trailer park where the Varga boy
lives, Dora's house. All the main
attractions, so to speak. Very
reasonable rates.

ANA

Mmm. Maybe next time.

MR. MULLINS

(lowering voice)

My two cents? It was Ronnie Burnett
killed her. That boy always had a
devil in him...

He hands them two sets of keys.

MR. MULLINS

Okey-doke, Room 126.
Not gonna lie, the toilet is...
tricky.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Ana and Seth enter their motel room: acrylic bedspreads, nicotine-stained wallpaper, Abstract Expressionist water damage on the ceiling.

Seth instantly recoils.

SETH
(choking)
Jesus it smells like somebody died
in here.

ANA
Oh my god, how great would that be
for the podcast?

They toss their suitcases on the bed. Ana snaps a photo of the room with her phone and attaches it to a social media post:

"Just checked into the Ritz-Carlton Glencoe, WV. Let the sleuthing begin! #IHeartMurder #IHeartShagCarpeting"

Send.

INT. CORBETT COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - EVENING

A one-story fluorescent-lit Sheriff's Department office. A receptionist, MRS. SYKES (50s) sits at a desk.

Her office phone RINGS. After a single ring, she presses a button to send it to voicemail. A beat. The phone RINGS again. She sends it to voicemail. The calls don't stop. Each time, a single ring and sent to voicemail.

Ana and Seth enter. Seth carries a microphone and digital recorder.

MRS. SYKES
Can I help you?

ANA
Yes, hi, my name is Ana Cohen and
I'd like to speak to the Sheriff
about the Dora Bishop case.

Mrs. Sykes's eyes narrow. The phone RINGS. She sends it to voicemail.

MRS. SYKES
Cohen?

Ana nods. The phone starts RINGING yet again.

MRS. SYKES

You got a lot of nerve showing your face down here.

ANA

Do I? I'm just looking for the truth, ma'am.

The phone keeps RINGING.

MRS. SYKES

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, this damn phone rings.

ANA

Yeah, I noticed that. I left six messages. Nobody ever got back to me.

The phone keeps RINGING.

MRS. SYKES

Lunatics from all over the world keep calling, thinking they cracked the damn Bishop case!

ANA

And I'm sure your officers are rigorously chasing down every lead.

MRS. SYKES

Thanks to your little website--

ANA

Podcast

MRS. SYKES (CONT'D)

--it has become impossible to get anything done around here!

Mrs. Sykes slams the button sending the call to voicemail.

ANA

Oh, I think the department wasn't getting anything done long before I came along.

Ana peers past Mrs. Sykes through a glass door beyond. On the other side, she spots Sheriff Hammond. He is having a heated argument with Deputy Joe Ivey -- inaudible thanks to the glass. Another deputy TONY YATES (mid 50s) -- a small, trim man with a gray mustache -- watches impassively.

Joe is stricken with rage, veins bulging out of his neck. He angrily points toward the front reception area. Hammond puts a hand on Joe's chest, trying to stop him from doing something rash.

ANA
(to Mrs. Sykes)
Is that Deputy Ivey? I'd love a word with him, too.

For an instant Ana and Joe's eyes meet. He looks furious, like an animal.

MRS. SYKES
Deputy Ivey is not available for comment at this time.

ANA
(still staring at Joe)
That's fine. Happy to direct all my questions to Sheriff Hammond.

MRS. SYKES
Nobody is available for comment at this--

Sheriff Hammond steps out from the back office with an unctuous grin on his face.

SHERIFF HAMMOND
Howdy. Can I help y'all?

INT. SHERRIFF HAMMOND'S OFFICE - EVENING

Ana and Seth sit across the desk in Hammond's office. Hammond takes a big sip from a "HILLARY FOR PRISON" mug.

SHERIFF HAMMOND
Welcome to Glencoe, West Virginia.
(to Seth)
First things first, I'm going to need you to turn off your recording device, son.

Seth looks at Ana.

SETH
Uh.

ANA

Nope. We're journalists. We have a Constitutional right to record here.

SHERIFF HAMMOND

Do you? Well maybe we can call the New York City ACLU to come sort it all out. In the meantime, I'm going to have to insist.

Long beat as the Sheriff stares them down, weird, fake grin still plastered on his red face. At last, Seth turns his recorder off.

SHERIFF HAMMOND

...There's a good boy. Now, what brings the liberal media to our little corner of the Mountain State.

ANA

Dora Bishop. You remember her. Or maybe not?

SHERIFF HAMMOND

Regarding the Bishop case: it is not the policy of this department to comment on ongoing investigations.

ANA

That's fine. I just need to check your letterhead to authenticate this confession.

Ana holds up Ronnie Burnett's confession. Sheriff Hammond's smile drops.

SHERIFF HAMMOND

Confession?

Now Ana smiles.

ANA

Yep. Your cousin Ronnie's.

SHERIFF HAMMOND

He's not my-- Look, I barely know that man-- We don't-- No comment. No comment, goddammit.

ANA

You seem agitated, Sheriff.

SHERIFF HAMMOND

I don't know a damn thing about a confession! You're trying to stir up trouble. Come down here and make our town look foolish with your "gotcha" questions. Now you got the damn State Police breathing down our necks. For what? Look, I'm sorry you came all this way for nothing. No comment.

Sheriff Hammond stands and gestures toward the door.

ANA

You sure you don't want to get out ahead of this Sheriff?

SHERIFF HAMMOND

It's fake news. You need to leave right now, Ms. Cohen.

Ana hesitates.

SHERIFF HAMMOND

Leave right now or I reckon you'll be staying the night.

Ana lights up.

ANA

...Are you threatening to arrest me?

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE PARKING LOT - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Seth and Ana walk back toward their car.

SETH

...Was that, er, how you were hoping that would go?

Ana is ebullient.

ANA

Absolutely. The Sheriff of Corbett County threatening to lock me up for solving the case? Audio gold.

SETH

The recorder was off, Ana.

ANA

Not mine.

Ana holds up her iPhone. She plays the audio.

SHERIFF HAMMOND (AUDIO)
...He's not my-- Look, I barely
know-- We don't-- No comment. No
comment!

Ana stops the recording.

SETH
I'm torn. That's pretty impressive
but the audio quality is...
(shuddering)
atrocious.

ANA
I'm sure you can clean it up in
post. Now let's talk to some real
cops.

BEHIND THEM Joe Ivey stares out through the glass as the sun sets on parking lot casting long, strange shadows. His face a tight grimace, both his fists are balled tight.

EXT. GLENCOE STREET - NIGHT

Fully dark now. Ana and Seth walk Glencoe's deserted main street lined by mostly vacant storefronts. The town's best days are 100 years behind it. Seth still carries the digital recorder. Ana stops at a storefront that clearly used to be a dentist's office.

ANA
This is the address.

She peers through the window. Inside, it's mostly empty. Ratty carpet and the ghostly outlines of dental hygiene posters that used to hang on the walls. A single cheap desk is piled high with file boxes. An uncovered fluorescent light flickers overhead.

Ana knocks on the front door.

ANA (CONT'D)
Hello?

After a moment, TERRY WEBB (early 20s) a smooth, baby-faced man in an ill-fitting suit rushes out of the bathroom toward the door, still drying his hands with a paper towel.

WEBB
Sorry, folks. This isn't a
dentist's office anymore.

SETH

Hi. No. We're actually looking for
the, uh, State Police cold case
unit's field office?

Webb brightens.

WEBB

Oh. You're in the right place then.
Come on in.

Seth and Ana enter.

INT. STOREFRONT OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

WEBB

Trooper Terry Webb. Bureau of
Criminal Investigation.

Webb awkwardly hands Ana his card.

ANA

You're eleven.

WEBB

Twenty-two, ma'am.

ANA

Great. Is there someone we can
speak to? Like a sergeant or...
maybe a parent?

WEBB

Nope. Just me.

SETH

You're the... unit?

WEBB

Yes, sir. Got my own office and
everything.

He proudly waves to the grungy space around him. Off Seth and
Ana's look, he catches himself.

WEBB (CONT'D)

...Pardon the mess. We're still,
uh, settling in.

ANA

So let me get this straight, after that big announcement about "manpower and resources" the State Police devoted exactly one detective to solving the Bishop case?

WEBB

No ma'am. I'm not a detective, not yet anyway. This is actually my first plainclothes assignment. So far it beats writing speeding tickets out on I-64 all day.

ANA

This is bullshit--

Seth cuts Ana off before she can go any further.

SETH

What my colleague means to say is: here is some evidence that the Bureau of Criminal Investigation might find, uh, compelling.

Seth hands Webb a photocopy of the confession. Webb starts to read it. A beat.

ANA

...You don't strike me as a fast reader, so I'll summarize: It's Ronnie Burnett's signed confession.

WEBB

Uh huh. Interesting... And, um, who is that, exactly?

ANA

Dude. Seriously?

Webb waves to the file boxes.

WEBB

Ma'am, I just started this detail three days ago and I'm still familiarizing myself with all the ins and outs of the investigation. But for something like this, (uncertain) I'd probably need to pass it along to the state crime lab for analysis.

SETH
And how long will that take?

Webb thinks about this for a moment.

WEBB
Four to six weeks? Could be longer.

EXT. GLENCOE STREET - MINUTES LATER

Seth and Ana walk away from the office. Ana nods to Seth's recorder, still running.

ANA
You get all that?

SETH
Oh yeah.

ANA
Call me a cynic, but Trooper Terry
Webb didn't strike me as the
world's greatest crime solver.

SETH
His fly was down the whole time.

INT. PARKED CAR - CONTINUOUS

SOMEONE sits in a parked car, clutching the steering wheel with black-gloved hands and breathing heavily. They watch Seth and Ana distance as they walk down the dark street.

EXT. GLENCOE STREET - CONTINUOUS

ANA
So yet again it falls to us to do
the cops' job for them.

SETH
Can we at least get dinner first?

ANA
Yeah, we-- wait.

Ana freezes. In the distance she spots a hulking figure walking across a gas station parking lot.

ANA
Seth, I'm pretty sure that's Cody
Varga.

SETH

Really?

Ana starts to fast walk and then jog toward the him.

ANA

Cody? Hey, Cody, I'd like to talk to you!

Cody Varga -- a big teen with bad skin, dark baggy clothes, and long black hair -- sees Ana stalking toward him.

CODY

No.

Cody turns and bolts back across the parking lot.

ANA

Cody, stop!

Ana chases after him and finds herself at a chainlink fence. Beyond it are train tracks surrounded by tall weeds. Cody has climbed over and disappeared into the darkness beyond the streetlights.

Seth arrives a few moments later, winded.

SETH

(panting)

He... dropped something... back there...

ANA

What?

Seth holds up a half-eaten pack of Skittles.

INT. THE BLACK DIAMOND DINER - NIGHT

A quaint, small-town diner full of LOCAL PATRONS, many elderly, chatting amiably as they eat.

Ana and Seth enter, mid-conversation.

ANA

I still say you should've gone over the fence.

SETH

And catch Lyme disease? No thanks.
Why didn't you do it if it was so...

The diner falls quiet. Everyone in the place turns to stare at them. It is instantly clear that they all know exactly who Ana and Seth are.

Seth hesitates.

SETH
(quietly to Ana)
Um. Maybe... ah, Burger King?

ANA
That's ridiculous. Don't be scared of these yokels.

The two of them take a seat at a booth by the window. A WAITRESS appears. She pulls out her pad and silently glares.

ANA
Good evening. I will have the
(re: menu)
Western omelette with a fruit salad
instead of home fries.

SETH
And I'll take the burger. Thanks.

The waitress snatches their menus and disappears into the kitchen. The other patrons still stare at Ana and Seth in awkward silence. A few whisper darkly amongst themselves. It is intensely uncomfortable.

Seth struggles to maintain eye contact only with Ana.

SETH
(to Ana)
So... how about... the weather?

LYNETTE (O.S.)
Y'all can get back to eating your dinner now. Go on now. It's rude to stare. Even for hillbillies.

The noise of the diner resumes, though at a somewhat lower pitch. A cute, freckle-faced woman, LYNETTE HAGAN (30s), approaches Seth and Ana's booth. She sits down beside them.

LYNETTE
Don't mind them. This town just happens to be populated by a bunch of judgmental, dumbshit hicks.
Pardon my language.

ANA

The guy who runs the motel seems cool.

(extending hand)

My name's Ana by the way.

LYNETTE

Oh honey. *Everyone* knows who y'all are.

She shakes Ana's hand.

LYNETTE

I'm Lynette. I'm-- I *was* friends with Dora.

SETH

(looking around)

You sure you want to be sitting with us, Lynette?

LYNETTE

Everybody in Glencoe already hates me. In case you didn't know, I'm a slut and a home-wrecker.

ANA

Wait, Lynette *Hagan*? You work at the high school, right?

Lynette nods.

LYNETTE

Administrative assistant. I just want to say I appreciate everything y'all are trying to do.

(beat)

When-- when it happened. Those of us who knew her got... no answers. Nothing. And now the people around are more pissed off about your show than they ever were about Dora's murder. Makes me sick.

INT. PARKED CAR - CONTINUOUS

Same car, now parked across the street from the Black Diamond Diner. The gloved driver watches Seth and Ana talk to Lynette through the window of the restaurant.

The car pulls out and drives off down the street.

INT. THE BLACK DIAMOND DINER - CONTINUOUS

ANA

Well, we're here for a couple of days. Anything you think we should know?

Lynette grips Ana's arm intensely and lowers her voice.

LYNETTE

It wasn't Joe Ivey. He's got a temper on him. But... he would never do something like that. Never.

ANA

Who then?

SETH

Cody sure didn't seem eager to talk to us.

LYNETTE

Boy's certainly odd. Can't say I really know him. But my money is on Ronnie Burnett. Ronnie's a son of a bitch. And Dora-- Well I'm not telling you anything you don't already know: Dora had a wild side.

(lowering voice)

She bought pills from Ronnie from time to time. We both did. Hell, I probably introduced him to her--

CLANK. The waitress plops two plates of food down in front of them. She leaves without a word.

Seth gingerly opens his burger with his fork. Sure enough there is a distinct glob of phlegm in it. Seth swallows.

SETH

...I don't want to think about what's in the omelette.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The gloved driver barrels down an empty two-lane road through the dark woods. Thirty miles over the speed limit.

The driver plugs an audio jack from their five-year-old smartphone into the car stereo. Ana's voice comes over the car speakers. I Heart Murder - Episode 20.

ANA (AUDIO)
...Isn't that quite a coincidence?

The driver accelerates. On the road ahead, a small animal shape scuttles out of the underbrush and onto the shoulder. Its eyes glow in the darkness.

ANA (AUDIO)(CONT'D)
...But hey, everybody down there is related, right?

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

A POSSUM is frozen in the headlights of the oncoming car.

ANA (AUDIO)(CONT'D)
...And people can change.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The driver floors it.

ANA (AUDIO)(CONT'D)
...I used to love kombucha.

At the last moment, the driver swerves toward the creature. THUNK.

ANA (AUDIO)(CONT'D)
...Now I can't stand the stuff.

EXT. TWO-LANE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The car rolls to a stop.

ANA (AUDIO)(CONT'D)
Maybe Ronnie, the wife-murderer
with the Nazi neck tattoo...

The possum SQUEALS in agony. A nightmare sound. Its back half has been crushed by the vehicle's tires and its guts are smeared across the asphalt. Somehow it is still alive.

ANA (AUDIO)(CONT'D)
...simply woke up one day in 2011
and decided not to do any more bad
stuff...

The vehicle's trunk pops open. The driver gets out and walks to the back. They remove something and approach the dying animal.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
...Maybe it's got nothing to do with
his cousin running the local
police.

With a downward overhand swing -- CLANK -- a sledgehammer
bursts the creature's head, splattering its brains onto the
pavement.

ANA (AUDIO) (CONT'D)
Yeah. Maybe...

Beat.

A black gloved hand picks up the dead possum by its tail and
starts to walk back toward the car's open trunk.

EXT. CHIEF LOGAN INN - MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Ana and Seth approach their room at the motel, carrying
Burger King bags.

SETH
OK. This time I'm holding my breath
because I know what to expect--

The door is unlocked. Ana examines it. It has been smashed
open.

Ana and Seth look at each other. They look around. The
parking lot is still virtually empty. Beyond are dark woods.

Ana nudges the door and it slowly swings open to reveal the
motel room beyond. Seth flicks on the lights.

The room has been ransacked and vandalized with swastikas
with threatening graffiti "LEAVE TOWN NOW BITCH"

"FUCK OFF JEWS" has been spray painted above the beds.

SETH
(confused, to himself)
...but I'm not Jewish.

Ana notices something.

ANA
Oh God.

REVEAL a bloody, mutilated animal carcass lies in the middle
of the floor. Seth sees it and wretches.

Ana covers her nose and mouth with her sleeve and pulls out her iPhone to snap a picture.

Seth stumbles backward, pale and shaking.

SETH
What--what is it?

ANA
Hard to tell. But I think it's a possum?

SETH
Does that mean maybe it's just... pretending to be dead?

Ana looks at Seth.

ANA
No, Seth. It's not just pretending to be dead. Get the manager.

Seth runs off toward the front office. Ana begins a social media post:

"First night here and the locals have graciously invited us to try a local delicacy! Yum! #IHeartMurder"

Ana attaches a photo of the bloody, dead possum.

Send.

A moment later, Mr. Mullins arrives with Seth. Mullins does a double-take.

MR. MULLINS
(re: room)
Aw, what in the hell is this? Did y'all do this?

ANA
Yes. You solved the case, Columbo.
We'd like to turn ourselves in.

Ana sarcastically holds out her wrists to be cuffed.

MR. MULLINS
Ain't no time for jokes, missy.
Jesus this looks like
(appraising)
\$400 worth of damage!

ANA
Can we see your security footage?

MR. MULLINS
Cameras are all fake.

SETH
What? Seriously?

MR. MULLINS
You think I'm made of money?

ANA
Did you happen to notice anything
strange? See anyone coming or
going?

Mr. Mullins shrugs and shakes his head.

MR. MULLINS
Lady, I was asleep.

ANA
Well I'm calling the cops.

Ana pulls out her phone and dials. A beat.

ANA
...aaaand it went straight to
voicemail.
(leaving voicemail)
Hi. My name is Ana Cohen. I'm
staying at the Chief Logan Inn and
somebody broke into our room. Call
me!

She hangs up.

ANA
OK. Well we need to switch rooms.

SETH
Ana, shouldn't we just leave. I
mean...

Seth gestures toward the bloody possum.

SETH (CONT'D)
...If we start driving now we can
probably still find another hotel
somewhere in Maryland before--

ANA
Nope. That's what he wants us to
do. Run. We're staying right here
at the racist Indian motel.

MR. MULLINS

Look, that sign is from a different era, OK? You can't just erase the past. And again the cost to replace it would be--

SETH

Is there anyone else here?

MR. MULLINS

Just one other room occupied.

SMASH TO:

EXT. MOTEL - ROOM 207 - MINUTES LATER

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! Ana pounds on the door to Room 207. Seth stands behind her with a mic and digital recorder.

After a beat, FEMALE MOTEL GUEST in a Garfield nightie cautiously cracks the door. Her HUSBAND, a large bald man in glasses, sits on the bed in his underwear.

FEMALE MOTEL GUEST

Can I help you?

ANA

Hi, my name is Ana Cohen. I'm the host of the hit podcast *I Heart Murder*. If you hereby consent to be recorded, don't say anything.

A beat.

FEMALE MOTEL GUEST

Uh...

ANA

Cool. Earlier our room was broken into and I need to know if either of you saw anything.

The woman looks at her husband.

FEMALE MOTEL GUEST

Well, I didn't see anything happen but...

ANA

But what?

FEMALE MOTEL GUEST

I did notice someone, a man, in the parking lot. He looked... a little creepy. Kind of made my skin crawl.

ANA

Could you describe him?

FEMALE MOTEL GUEST

He was white. Probably in his fifties. Not fat but not exactly skinny either. Goatee. And it looked like he had a bunch of tattoos.

Ana reaches in her bag.

ANA

Is this him?

Ana pulls out a crumpled printout of Ronnie Burnett's mugshot. The woman nods.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Ana and Seth toss their bags and recording equipment onto the respective beds in their new room.

Seth puts the deadbolt and the chain lock on the door. He closes the curtains and peeps out through a gap.

Ana flops onto her bed and begins scrolling through social media on her phone.

SETH

...Ana, this a bad idea. What if Ronnie comes back?

ANA

Then I'll interview him. Oh my God, check it out.

She shows him her phone.

ANA (CONT'D)

Dead possum pic already has 3,000 Likes.

SETH

Nice... I guess? But there's no way I'll be able to sleep tonight.

ANA

Good. You can keep an eye on the door.

SETH

An eye on the door?

ANA

Yeah. The locks here clearly suck.

Seth stands by the curtain peering out onto the empty parking lot.

Ana rolls over and turns out the light. A moment later her phone BUZZES. She checks it.

ANGLE ON a new message from @southwillrise88

"came calling. nobody home. see you soon bitch"

Ana furrows her brow. She replies:

"How does tomorrow work for you?"

Send.

THE NEXT MORNING

Seth snaps awake in the chair where he was keeping watch. He moans and rubs his neck.

SETH

Jesus. My neck.

Ana yells from the bathroom.

ANA

(O.S.)

What's wrong? Did somebody murder you, Seth?

Ana steps out of the bathroom, already showered and dressed, drying her hair. Annoyingly energetic. Seth groans.

ANA

C'mon. Get ready.

SETH

Why?

ANA

We're gonna go interview Ronnie Burnett.

SETH

Again, I'd like to register my
complete objection to this idea.

ANA

OK, registered. Now hop in the
shower so we can get a move on.

SETH

That's not how my complete
objection works!

ANA

Seth, this is it. This is what
solves a literal murder and takes
the show to the next level.
Everything we've worked for. We
nail him. On tape. We're heroes.
Justice for Dora. Case closed.

Seth takes a deep breath and they stare at each other.

ANA

Look at me: Ronnie Burnett is not
going to hurt me.

SETH

Cool. What about me?

Ana pauses and considers this for a moment. She cocks her
head.

SETH

...Ana, what about me?!

ANA

I'm joking. You're safe, Seth. And
honestly I'd go without you but,
you know...

Ana pantomimes turning a steering wheel and beeping a horn.
Seth frowns.

SETH

That's not how driving works.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - DAY

Seth and Ana drive the twisting backroads of Corbett County.
Forested mountains loom on either side of the road, casting
deep shadows into the valley.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Ana attempts to make a phone call as Seth drives.

ANA

Hi... right, yes. This is Ana Cohen from *I Heart Murder*... Ana Cohen.. I'm just returning Dan Pedrossian's call... Hello? Hi, I can't--Sorry, breaking up... Hello?

The call is dropped.

ANA

Damn it. The cell service is terrible around here.

SETH

Ana, I'm having a slow-rolling panic attack. If we're really doing this shouldn't we at least... buy a gun or something? I mean, you can just do that here, right?

Ana laughs.

ANA

What would you do with a gun, Seth?

SETH

(mumbling)

...I could use a gun... I could shoot a guy with my new gun.

WHOOP! WHOOP! Ana sees a Sheriff's Department cruiser in the rearview mirror, lights flashing.

SETH

Aw, Christ.

Seth pulls over.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Joe Ivey, gets out of the car and walks toward the vehicle. Deputy Tony Yates reluctantly follows.

SETH

Was I, uh, speeding or something, offic--

JOE

Shut the fuck up.

SETH

OK.

Joe stares at Ana, his face a mask of rage. He's breathing so hard he's practically panting.

ANA

Hello, Joe. We meet at last.

JOE

You ruined my life.

ANA

Just doing my job. Speaking of which...

Ana holds up her iPhone and starts to film the interaction.

ANA (CONT'D)

...just want to let you know you're being recorded.

JOE

It's all some kind of game to you. But I had a family. My wife left me. Took my kids. People I've known my whole life think I'm a fucking murderer now.

TONY

Easy, Joe.

ANA

I'd say the wife thing's on you if you didn't run the whole "open relationship" thing by her first. But I'd be happy to do a formal interview where you set the record straight about Dora's death--

CRACK! Joe punches the back driver side window, making a spiderweb crack. Ana and Seth flinch back. Blood trickles down Joe's knuckles.

ANA

...I guess that's a "No"?

Tony stares at the ground and chuckles nervously.

TONY

All right, Joe. Losing it is the last thing you need to do right now.

JOE
I'm in control, Tony.

Joe slowly turns toward Ana. She sees one of his eyes has burst a blood vessel. He speaks very slowly, almost calmly. Terrifying.

JOE
This is a warning: you have no sway down here. You're nothing in West Virginia. You poke around where you don't belong and you will get hurt. Maybe worse.

Joe turns and walks back toward the cruiser leaving Tony awkwardly standing there.

TONY
Uh. Sorry about that. He's just-- well, that's Joe for you.

Tony shrugs and follows Joe to the car. The cruiser PEELS out speeding past Seth and Ana's Nissan.

A beat. Seth exhales.

SETH
This goddamn place. Is this what the rest of the country is like?

ANA
Couldn't say. But that guy sure is mad. Suddenly I'm way less sure that Ronnie Burnett is guilty. Also... I think I might have a crush on him.

SETH
Aw, come on!

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - LATER

Seth and Ana's Nissan turns off the main road onto a gravel side road heading up the mountain and into the woods.

INT. CAR - DAY

Ana spots a ramshackle house at the end of the road.

ANA
This is the place.

Seth pulls over and takes a deep breath.

ANA
Relax. The whole world knows
exactly where we are.

EXT. BURNETT HOUSE - DAY

Ana and Seth, carrying recorder and microphone, slowly walk onto a rundown property at the end of a dark holler. At the edge of the woods stands a dilapidated one-story house. A rusty black Ford truck is parked out front.

The patchy front yard is littered with junk: an old washer-dryer, a rusted out lawnmower, a pile of cinder blocks and more. A faded Confederate flag and a Nazi flag flutter side by side on the side on a flagpole.

SETH
Jesus.

Flies buzz around a flayed deer that hangs on a tree. Clearly dead awhile. It reeks and maggots continuously boil out of its eye sockets. Nearby a hunting knife, encrusted with fur and dried blood, is jammed into a tree stump.

Seth frantically fumbles with his phone.

SETH
(quietly)
Goddammit. Still no service. Ana if
something happens we can't even--

THUNK! A crossbow bolt lodges in the deer carcass 3 feet ahead of them. Seth SCREAMS. Ana whirls and scans the woods. Her heart is racing. Nobody there. The dead deer spins lazily from the impact.

ANA
...Hello?

A beat. From the weeds a filthy blond boy, TRAVIS (10), emerges laughing. He tosses a heavy hunting crossbow onto the ground.

ANA
...Is your father home?

TRAVIS
He ain't my Daddy bitch.

RONNIE
But I am home.

REVEAL Ronnie Burnett is now standing, shirtless, in the darkened doorway of his house.

RONNIE
Might as well come on in.

Ronnie turns and disappears inside. Seth and Ana look at each other. They follow him.

INT. BURNETT HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The inside of the house is dark and squalid, flies circling piles of trash and rotting food. It's a backwoods drug den.

Two rail-thin women, who might be 20 or 50, MISTY and AMBER, nod off on the floor. Ronnie steps over them. He cracks a beer and sits down on his ratty couch. Ronnie gestures to a pair of folding lawn chairs. Seth and Ana awkwardly sit. A porno DVD plays silently on the TV behind them.

RONNIE
Now...

Ronnie moves a Tweety Bird blanket to reveal an AR-15 with a CeraKote Confederate Flag design on it, laying on the couch beside him.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Tell me why I shouldn't blow your
fucking heads off for trespassing
on my goddamn property.

A beat. Ana tries her best not to react.

ANA
Because we're just here to listen.
To your story.

RONNIE
'Course. You people are always so
inquisitive, ain't you? Some would
say *nosy*.

Ana doesn't take the bait. Ronnie picks up the AR-15. In the half light, his eyes are bloodshot, crazy.

RONNIE
But I'm an honest American and I
got nothing to hide. So here's what
we're gonna do: I'll answer your
questions long as you answer mine.
And you tell the truth now...

Ronnie chambers a bullet.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
Or I'm gonna get real unhappy.

ANA
Works for me. We rolling Seth?

Seth checks the equipment and nods. Ana leans in.

ANA
Ronnie Burnett, I want to ask you
for the record, did you murder Dora
Bishop?

Ronnie gives a rancid grin.

RONNIE
Nope. My turn: You scared right now
honey?

ANA
Of course.

RONNIE
That's good. You should be scared
of a white man. A white man is
powerful.

ANA
Great to know. Did you break into
our motel room? Have you been
sending me threatening DMs?

RONNIE
The fuck are "DMs"?

ANA
Direct messages. Like email on
social media.

RONNIE
(indicating house)
Bitch, you see a computer anywhere?

Ana looks around the small house. She doesn't.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
I don't touch that shit. It's how
the fucking feds keep tabs. 'Course
I don't have to tell you that now
do I, Cohen?

ANA

You could use an app on your phone.

RONNIE

You mean this piece of shit?

Ronnie tosses her a 10-year-old Nokia flip phone. Ana inspects it. It sucks.

ANA

You're a drug dealer. Why don't you have an iPhone?

RONNIE

My business is face to face.
Personal connections. Trust. Plus
there ain't no damn service out
here.

Ana hands the phone back to him.

ANA

Fine.

RONNIE

My turn again: Do you think you're somehow better than me?

ANA

Yes.

RONNIE

Bullshit. You're exactly the same as me. You do what you do no matter who you fuck over.

ANA

Well I didn't murder my wife, for starters.

RONNIE

I paid my debt to society and that bitch deserved it. But you won't admit you're a bloodsucking parasite. You don't give a shit about that dead Bishop girl.

ANA

I do--

Ronnie levels the AR-15 at Ana's face.

RONNIE (CONT'D)
(ice cold)
Go on. Say it. Say "Ronnie, I'm a
fucking parasite."

ANA
...Ronnie, I'm a fucking parasite.

Ronnie lowers the gun and smiles.

RONNIE
(to Seth)
Ha. You get that, you little
faggot?

Seth nods, terrified.

ANA
Next question, Ronnie: Did you
write this confession?

Ana hands Ronnie the photocopied confession. Ronnie scans it and laughs joylessly.

RONNIE
Nice Jew trick. Ain't my
handwriting. You come here thinking
you were somehow gonna nail my ass
with this bullshit?

Long beat.

ANA
Yes.

RONNIE
Well I got news for you, honey, I
did 11 years at Mount Olive
Correctional Complex. I was locked
up with all types of racial
mongrels and crazy-ass
motherfuckers. Shit like this don't
mean nothing to me anymore. I'm
invincible, bitch. Now... you get
one more question.

ANA
OK. What's with all the Confederate
flags?

Ronnie balks. For the first time he's flustered, taken off guard.

RONNIE

...What?

ANA

You have Confederate flags
everywhere. Why?

RONNIE

It's about my goddamn heritage you--

ANA

No it isn't. This is *West* Virginia.

RONNIE

So?

ANA

West Virginia fought against the
Confederacy in the Civil War.

Ronnie darkens.

ANA (CONT'D)

Get a computer and Google it,
Ronnie.

RONNIE

Get the fuck out of my house. Now.

SMASH TO:

EXT. BURNETT HOUSE - DAY

Ana and Seth walk back across Ronnie Burnett's front yard.
Seth is ghostly. He looks like he might faint at any second.

Behind them Ronnie fills the doorway, still clutching the AR-15.

RONNIE

You come around here again and I
ain't gonna be so nice. On this
land I'm a goddamn sovereign
citizen! Anything I do is legal.
You hear me?

Travis snickers from the weeds.

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

Seth and Ana jump into their car and slam the doors. Seth peels out. He's shaking all over, practically hyperventilating.

SETH
Jesus. Christ. What-- what was that?

ANA
The best damn interview I ever did.

SETH
We almost died, Ana. That--that man's insane.

ANA
I don't think he did it.

SETH
What?

ANA
I'm saying Ronnie Burnett is innocent.

SETH
Are you kidding me?

ANA
My gut says he was telling the truth about his handwriting. Ten to one says the State Police crime lab tells us the same thing in four to six weeks. And he's not the person who's been threatening me either. No computer; no Internet on that phone. Speaking of which...

Ana waves her own phone around as the car descends the twisty road down from the holler.

ANA (CONT'D)
Still can't get reception with these mountains--Wait, hang on, two bars!

ANGLE ON Ana's phone. She quickly begins to type a social media message:

"Finally interviewed RB (charming host!). At the moment, honestly feeling like he didn't do it. Next week's episode will be a real doozy. #gutfeeling #IHeartMurder"

Send.

There is a quiet moment as they drive and the adrenaline wears off.

SETH
...You said on tape that we're, uh,
parasites.

ANA
You can just edit out all the stuff I said. Except for the Confederate flag thing. I really nailed him with that.

Ana's phone BUZZES. She checks it.

ANA (CONT'D)
Wow people do *not* want to believe Ronnie could be innocent.

ANGLE ON social media replies to her post, pouring in:

- @glitzwell86: "Can't be true. #Ronniedidit"
- @RyeCatM: "Do not trust him. He's a snake. Look deeper."
- @monophyte: "No. No. No. This man is a MURDERER!"
- @theliza: "He is guilty and should burn in hell."

She scrolls through dozens more just like this.

SETH
...I mean, we did just spend the last 20 episodes convincing all our listeners he's a monster.

Ana starts to argue but before she can, her phone RINGS. It's an unlisted number. She answers.

ANA
Hi. Uh huh. Yes, this is her. OK.
Yes, we'll be there in 20 minutes.

Ana hangs up. She looks thunderstruck.

SETH
Who was that?

ANA
The Bishop family. They finally want to talk.

EXT. DORA'S MOM'S HOUSE - DAY

Ana and Seth's car pulls up in front of a well-kept two-story house closer to the center of town. Seth and Ana get out.

ANA

OK, this is a very delicate situation. We need to tread lightly here.

SETH

And you think *I'm* the one who won't do that?

Ana rings the bell. After a moment a woman answers the door. JOYCE BLAIR (late 40s) looks strangely dressed up, too much make-up with big hoop earrings and a sparkly sequin sweater.

ANA

Hello, we spoke on the phone.

JOYCE

Welcome, welcome. Nice to finally meet you. Come on in.

INT. DORA'S MOM'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the house is a shrine to Dora Bishop. Photos from childhood, her beauty pageants, college graduation, all the way through 2015, cover nearly every surface. Heartbreaking.

Ana and Seth follow Joyce through the eerily quiet house.

ANA

I'm sorry, I didn't even think to ask your name over the phone.

JOYCE

It's Joyce. Joyce Blair.

She extends her hand. Ana shakes it, looking a little confused.

JOYCE (CONT'D)

Can I get y'all anything? Sweet tea? Coke?

Ana shakes her head.

SETH

I'm good. Thank you.

Joyce leads them into a living room. More photos of Dora stare back at them from the walls.

In a wheelchair in the corner sits BERNICE BISHOP (60s) Dora Bishop's mother, breathing from an oxygen tank. She looks terrible, broken. Her skin is gray, her hair is unwashed, her eyes are hollow. She silently stares at nothing.

ANA
(quietly to Seth)
Dora's mother.

An awkward beat.

ANA
Hello, Ms. Bishop. I-- I just want
to say how sorry I am for your
loss.

Bernice doesn't respond.

JOYCE
Bernice is not feeling well today.

Joyce grabs the wheelchair handles

JOYCE
(loudly to Bernice)
OK IT'S TIME TO GO WATCH TV NOW.

Joyce wheels Bernice into the adjoining TV room. She returns, closing the door behind her. She takes a seat at the dining room table.

JOYCE
She's been through so much.

SETH
Would another time be better? We
could always come back--

JOYCE
No, I'm happy to answer your
questions.

ANA
Look, I don't mean to be rude, but--

Seth places a calming hand on Ana's arm.

SETH
We were really hoping it would be
possible to speak with Dora's, ah,
immediate family.

JOYCE
I represent the family.

ANA
And who are you again?

JOYCE
Joyce Blair.

ANA
Yeah. You said that.

JOYCE
My mama is a Bishop. She and
Bernice are first cousins. So I'm
Dora's cousin.

ANA
Second cousin.

JOYCE
Exactly. Now, before we get
started, I just wanted to ask...
how much do y'all pull in a week
from those mattress ads?

SETH
What?

JOYCE
I'm sorry. Was that rude? I only
ask because I happen to be an
entrepreneur myself. I have
two passions in life: wellness and
business

SETH
OK?

JOYCE
I own a multi-level marketing
franchise called ZoobaLife, which
is an herbal energy drink system.

She hands Seth a business card with a picture of a strange green beverage on it. Seth looks at it for an awkward moment.

SETH
Mmm. Gotcha.

He tries to hand the card back to her. Joyce doesn't take it.

JOYCE

So, what I'm looking for is the opportunity to create some, ah, synergy between our two brands.

SETH

I'm sorry, I don't really follow.

JOYCE

(re: card)

I have an online store.

SETH

Oooh. OK. I see. Well, we don't really do advertising like that.

Joyce's eyes narrow.

JOYCE

As I said, I have information that may be crucial.

SETH

Don't you want to solve your cousin's murder for its own sake?

JOYCE

Second cousin. And I don't see why we can't both benefit here.

Ana and Seth look at each other. Ana takes the business card from Seth.

ANA

This the URL?

Joyce nods. Ana types something into her phone.

ANA

There. Just posted it from the show's account. You're welcome.

Joyce immediately softens.

JOYCE

Excellent. You should know Zoobalife increases your baseline energy level to maximize daily potential without all the harmful chemicals in caffeine. An spot on your podcast would really--

ANA

We can talk business later. What's
the information?

JOYCE

Well, it pertains to the letter I
mailed you.

Ana's eyes widen.

ANA

Wait, you're the one who sent the
envelope to our studio?

Joyce nods. Ana holds up Ronnie's "confession".

ANA

How did you get this?

Joyce is confused.

JOYCE

I mean, that boy sent them right to
Dora's house. I found them when I
was going through her belongings.
She kept everything, poor girl.

SETH

Found the confession?

JOYCE

...The letters. Cody Varga sent
them to Dora.

Seth is about to say something but Ana stops him.

ANA

Can we see them?

Almost despite herself, Joyce flashes an unseemly grin and produces a shoebox. She opens it dramatically to reveal that its full of handwritten letters in opened envelopes.

JOYCE

The boy sent 244 of these to her.
He was obsessed. Everyone says he's
some type of Satanist. Y'all know
that right?

Ana takes one of the letters out of its envelope. The handwriting is small and strange; words crowded onto the page. She reads it.

ANA

*"I know the time is not right and
you have said it will never be but
I know we can be together. The
things I feel must be true, and
even if you don't feel them maybe
you will one day? I will be here,
always, waiting for that moment."*

JOYCE

They're all like that.

SETH

Yikes.

ANA

And you say you contacted our show
about these?

Joyce is extremely confused now.

JOYCE

Yes, I sent you a letter... and you
wrote me back?

SETH

No. We never recei--

ANA

Can I see what I said to you?

JOYCE

Sure?

Joyce looks through he box and pulls out another envelope.
She hands it to Ana.

ANA

(reading)

*"...Thank you for bringing this
material to our attention. For now
we'd like to keep this quiet as it
pertains to our ongoing
investigation of the Bishop case.
But when the time is right, we'd
like to discuss further. Sincerely,
Ana Cohen."*

Ana checks the envelope. The return address is P.O. Box 1810
Terrace Park, OH.

JOYCE

I figured since y'all were here in
town, the time was right.

ANA

How did you get this address?

JOYCE

When I found the letters, I reached out to the podcast through social media. Your assistant replied and gave it to me.

ANA

Do you remember the assistant's name?

Joyce shrugs and chuckles.

JOYCE

Couldn't say. You must have a lot of people working for you if you can't keep track of all of them. I hope to get to that point with my business.

ANA

Can I take these letters?

Joyce puts her hand on the box, a little too quickly.

JOYCE

...I'm not sure Dora would want them out there. I mean she was a very *private* person.

Awkward beat.

ANA

You know, maybe we *could* record a 30-second post-roll ad for your Zoobalife store?

JOYCE

Oh my God, that would mean the world to me! I really, really believe in the product.

Joyce slides the box over to Ana.

ANA

Before we go, do you think there's any chance we could talk to Bernice.

JOYCE

I don't see why not.

INT. DORA'S MOM'S HOUSE - TV ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ana cracks the door and Seth follows close behind. Bernice sits in her wheelchair staring past the muted TV at nothing.

ANA

Hi again, Mrs. Bishop. I just wanted to talk to you. For our podcast.

Bernice doesn't respond.

ANA

We've been working really hard to try and tell your daughter's story

Long beat.

BERNICE

...My daughter's story.

ANA

Yes.

BERNICE

Her story? Her story. Her story is over now.

ANA

No, what I mean to say is--

Bernice turns and stares Ana right in the eyes. Perfect clarity.

BERNICE

You don't have children do you?

ANA

No. I'm not sure that's in the cards for me.

BERNICE

When you have a child your soul goes into them. Your own soul. It lives outside your body now. It's in another person.

ANA

I can only imagine.

BERNICE

Yes. You can only imagine.
When Dora died, I died. Only...
(MORE)

BERNICE (CONT'D)
(regarding her own hands)
my body is somehow still alive?

ANA
Mrs. Bishop, I'm trying to find the
person responsible.

Bernice suddenly stands, causing Ana to flinch backwards.

BERNICE
Don't you understand? It doesn't
matter who's responsible because
it's NOT going to bring her back.
NOTHING will ever bring her back.
Nothing.

Bernice grabs Ana by the shoulders, implacably strong. She
pulls Ana closer against her will.

BERNICE
And whoever did it? They killed
Dora once. But you? You keep
killing her. Every week. Over. And
over. And over again...

ANA
I--

BERNICE
YOU KEEP KILLING MY DAUGHTER! YOU
KEEP KILLING ME!

Ana struggles and breaks free of her grasp but stumbles
backward, knocking over a coffee table. Seth helps her
scramble out of the room.

BERNICE
(yelling after them)
YOU KEEP KILLING ME!

INT. CAR - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Seth and Ana get into their car. For the first time Ana looks
pale and frightened. Seth goes to start the car and then
pauses.

SETH
You can't... It's not really about
you... she's a grieving mother
so... you know.

ANA
Just drive.
(re: box of letters)
We have to find Cody Varga.

EXT. VARGA TRAILER - LATER

Seth and Ana exit their car at a small trailer park by the train tracks and surrounded by woods. They approach a tumbledown double-wide that is completely covered in graffiti. "MURDERER"; "FRY IN HELL DEVIL WORSHIPPER"; "YOU DID IT" are spray-painted on the outside.

Nearby a Yamaha 4-wheeler, much cleaner than the trailer, is parked under a blue tarp nailed between three pine trees.

Ana knocks on the door.

JACKIE VARGA, a wary-eyed woman in her late 40s who looks much older, cracks the door. She keeps the chain lock fastened.

JACKIE
What?

ANA
Hello, Ms. Varga. We're looking for your son.

JACKIE
Grandson. What did he do?

ANA
We'd just like to talk to him.

JACKIE
Well I don't know where the hell he is. He don't tell me nothing. Four-wheeler's here so try the school. Reckon he still goes sometimes.

SETH
Ah. Well, maybe you wouldn't mind answering a few--

She slams the door in Seth's face.

INT. GLENCOE HIGH SCHOOL - LATER

Ana and Seth walk across the parking lot toward the high school.

It's lunch time and a few hundred HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS mill around outside. Seth attempts to somehow hold his recording equipment in an inconspicuous way.

SETH

...So are we going to clear this with the front office or what?

ANA

There's no way they'd say yes.
Forgiveness not permission, Seth.
Haven't you learned that yet? Just
be discrete--

RANDOM TEEN

Hey, murder lady!

Ana turns to see a group of TEENS standing in a cluster.

ANA

That's Ms. Cohen to you, but yes.

A RANDOM TEEN steps forward. His face is totally ashen. He looks around nervously.

RANDOM TEEN

Look, I have to tell you something.

ANA

What?

RANDOM TEEN

I know who killed Ms. Bishop but...
(nervous whisper)
I'm scared to say.

ANA

Who was it?

RANDOM TEEN

...Me!

His friends burst out laughing.

ANOTHER TEEN

Don't listen to him. He's just
trying to protect me. I did it. I
killed her. And I'd do it again,
too!

TEEN #3

I honestly think it was Principal
Lynch. Guy's an asshole.

More laughter.

LYNETTE
All right. Break it up geniuses.

Lynette Hagan approaches and the teens disperse. Still, most of the other students and a few of the FACULTY are staring at Ana and Seth from a distance now. Everyone knows who they are.

LYNETTE
(quietly)
I really don't think y'all are
supposed to be here.

ANA
We just wanted a quick chat with
Cody Varga.

LYNETTE
You... really think he did it?

Ana shrugs.

LYNETTE
Well when he bothers to show up for
school, Cody has vo-tech up in
Blackwell for half the day. If you
want to talk to him, he gets back
at 3. But you didn't hear it from
me.

Lynette disappears into the crowd.

INT. CAR - AFTERNOON

Ana and Seth wait in the rental car. Seth watches the school parking lot while Ana talks on her phone.

ANA
Yep... Just returning Dan
Pedrossian's call. Mmm hmm. Ana
Cohen. From the podcast. No, yeah,
cell service is terrible where I am
so I was hoping... OK, thanks for
taking the message.

Ana sighs. Outside a school bus pulls up and students start get off. Seth perks up.

SETH
Ana. There.

EXT. GLENCOE HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

Cody Varga exits the bus alone. He has no friends.

Ana approaches, all smiles.

ANA

Cody, hi, again.

CODY

I don't want to talk to you.

Cody starts to walk away. Ana grabs his arm. Cody stops and turns back. He towers a foot over her at least.

ANA

Cody we want to hear your side.

Ana holds up a new pack of Skittles. Peace offering. Cody stares into Ana's eyes for a moment. He easily yanks his arm out of her grasp.

CODY

No, you don't actually.

ANA

I promise you we want to understand. That's all.

CODY

You want a prop. You want a creep, or a devil-worshipper, or a school-shooter because that's the role you're casting. Right?

ANA

You don't think I know what it's like to be an outsider? Please. I had purple hair and a favorite serial killer at my all-girls prep school

SETH

I played Dungeons & Dragons until I was 19.

CODY

Yeah, that's right. Empathize with me. Then I'll confess everything.

ANA

...Is there something you want to confess.

Cody sighs and rolls his eyes. Unbelievable.

CODY

Look, I'm sorry things were tough for you at your rich girl school but I am *completely* alone in this town. I doubt you have any idea what that's like.

ANA

I-- I guess I don't.

CODY

The world does one thing to people like me. It's just a matter of when.

Cody puts a pair of earbuds in and starts to walk away.

CODY

Don't contact me ever again. I don't want to talk to you.

ANA

We have your letters.

Cody stops.

CODY

What did you say?

ANA

The letters you sent to Dora.

Cody turns, his eyes burning.

CODY

Those are not for you!

He lunges toward Ana. Seth steps in his path.

SETH

Hey, c'mon. Easy, big guy.

CRACK! Cody decks Seth who crumples to the ground. Cody leaps on top of him and starts pummeling him. Ana tries to get him off, but Cody easily throws her aside, knocking her down.

ANA

Help! Somebody help!

JOE

Get off him, freak.

Joe Ivey drags Cody off of Seth by the hair.

JOE
You're 18 now, Cody. That means big boy jail.

CODY
Fuck you.

Enraged, Joe rears back to slug Cody. Tony grabs his arm.

TONY
Not again, Joe.

Joe somehow masters himself. Instead, he violently wrenches the boy's arms behind his back and cuffs him.

Seth moans on the ground, his face bloodied.

ANA
Thank you. I don't know what we--

JOE
Shut up.
(to Seth)
You. Up. You're under arrest.
Disorderly conduct.

ANA
What? But he attacked us!

JOE
That's for a fucking judge to figure out. You shouldn't be here on school grounds. That's why we got called. I'm hauling your ass in too.

He grabs Ana by the wrist. A CROWD of students and faculty has formed now, staring at the scene. Lynette Hagan steps forward.

LYNETTE
C'mon now, Joe. I saw the whole thing. She wasn't part of the fight. You can let her slide on the trespassing, can't you?

Joe stares at Lynette hard for a long moment, nostrils flaring. Lynette holds her hands out and something unspoken passes between them. Almost imperceptibly, Joe softens.

JOE

...Fine.

(re: Seth and Cody)

But the other two are mine.

Tony steps forward and helps Seth up. He shrugs apologetically.

TONY

Sorry, son. Not up to me.

Tony handcuffs Seth, who is still groggy from the beating.

ANA

Don't worry Seth. I'll get you out.

You hang in there...

Seth doesn't answer. Ana watches as Cody and Seth are both loaded into sheriff's cruisers and are driven away.

RANDOM TEEN

...Wow. That sucks, murder lady.

ANA

Shut up.

Ana carries the recording equipment across the parking lot to the rented Nissan Versa. She looks at the car, then looks at the keys. She sighs.

Ana pulls out her phone and types a social media post:

"No Uber in Glencoe, WV so I'm about to walk the 3 miles back to my motel. Oh and my producer just went to jail. [cowboy hat smiley-face emoji] #outlaws #IHeartMurder"

Send.

EXT. TWO-LANE HIGHWAY - EVENING

The sun sets and darkness gathers as Ana, laden with recording equipment, walks along the shoulder of a two-lane highway. Every few minutes a car whizzes past. Otherwise it's deathly quiet.

A vehicle behind Ana slows down to her walking speed. Ana keeps walking. The car continues to follow. Ana stops and the vehicle stops. She turns but she can't see anything in the glare of the headlights.

ANA

...Hello?

A woman leans out of the window of the green Toyota. Ana recognizes her. It's the female guest from the Chief Logan Inn.

FEMALE MOTEL GUEST
You need a ride, honey?

INT. GREEN TOYOTA - CONTINUOUS

Ana climbs into the passenger side of the vehicle. The driver is TRACEY MILBANK (40s), plump and cheerful.

ANA
Thank you so much, ah... I don't think I got your name the other night.

TRACEY
Tracey Milbank. Glad I recognized you from the road. Did your car break down?

ANA
Something like that... I don't technically know how to drive.

TRACEY
My gosh. How do you get anywhere?

ANA
Take the subway. Maybe a Lyft if I'm feeling rich. I live in New York.

TRACEY
Oh, I visited New York City one time. Don't think I could live there. Too crowded. Plus there's all the gangs and whatnot.

ANA
Fun fact: the state of West Virginia actually has a higher murder rate than New York City.

Awkward beat.

ANA (CONT'D)
...OK maybe it's not a *fun* fact per se.

TRACEY

Well, I'm from Ohio, anyway. So what brings you down this way? You said it was a "podcast"?

ANA

Yep. Hoping to solve a murder.

TRACEY

The awful one I heard about on the news?

ANA

Probably.

TRACEY

Doesn't everybody think the drug dealer man did it?

ANA

At this point I'm not so sure.

TRACEY

They said he's got a criminal record. Didn't he kill his wife or something?

ANA

Yeah, but something doesn't quite add up.

Tracey pulls into the parking lot of the Chief Logan Inn.

TRACEY

Come to think of it, the man I saw in the parking lot last night looked a lot like the picture I saw on the news... Oh my gosh, maybe it was him?

ANA

Yeah, maybe... Anyway looks like we're here. Thanks for the ride.

Ana gets out of the car.

TRACEY

Alrighty. Good luck solving your mystery, Ana!

Tracey smiles cheerily as she pulls away.

EXT. BURNETT HOUSE - NIGHT

A gloved hand wrenches the bloody hunting knife out of the stump in Ronnie's yard.

INT. LYNNETTE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

Lynette lounges on her bed in her underwear and talks to someone in the next room.

LYNETTE

...I don't know. I can't believe it was Cody. Dora always had a soft spot for that boy--

JOE (O.S.)

He was stalking her. He's a goddamn psycho.

LYNETTE

He's strange sure. But he just doesn't strike me as the type. Ronnie Burnett on the other hand...

Joe steps back into the bedroom, wearing only his boxers. His jaw is clenched tight and his eyes are intense.

JOE

It was Cody, Lynette. And it was my fucking fault he got off. I roughed him up during the arrest and his goddamn lawyer made hay over it.

LYNETTE

All right. Calm down, Joe. You're the cop. I'm just the high school admin assistant. I believe you.

Joe softens. They kiss. Joe pulls away and starts to put on his pants.

LYNETTE

Stay.

JOE

Can't.

Lynette frowns. Joe continues to get dressed.

LYNETTE

This is about your wife.

JOE

She's the mother of my kids,
Lynette. People can't know that
I'm... You were Dora's best
friend... It's just not the time
for us to... go public with this.

LYNETTE

"Go public". Jesus.

JOE

Damn it. You know what I mean.

Joe goes to kiss Lynette again and she turns away. He frowns and finishes buttoning his shirt. He leaves.

Lynette sighs and turns on the TV. Infomercial. She changes it. Rockford Files episode. She changes it. Weather Channel. She hears a noise. Lynette sits up in her bed.

LYNETTE

Joe?

Nothing. Lynette gets out of bed.

LYNETTE

Joe is that you?

INT. LYNETTE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

Lynette creeps into her darkened kitchen. She flicks on the lights. Nobody there. Lynette breathes a sigh of relief.

Then she notices that the backdoor is ajar.

A HULKING FIGURE wearing an orange ski-mask steps out of the pantry behind her. Lynette turns and screams.

The hulking figure lunges toward her and Lynette bolts.

INT. LYNETTE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM

Lynette dives inside her bedroom. She slams the door behind her and locks it. She frantically searches for her phone. At last she finds it on the dresser. She starts to dial.

CRACK! The huge masked figure bursts through the door, splintering the wood of the frame. Lynette SCREAMS again.

The figure tackles her to the ground. Lynette screams again as the figure clamps a gloved hand over her mouth. Her eyes bulge with terror.

The figure drags the blade of a stained hunting knife across her throat slicing it open in a fountain of blood. Lynette shudders violently and lets out one last ragged gargle.

INT. CORBETT SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - THE NEXT MORNING

The office phone RINGS. Mrs. Sykes presses a button to send it to voicemail. She scowls as she sees Ana walking through the front door.

MRS. SYKES
You again.

ANA
(overly cheerful)
Good morning to you too! I'm here
to post bail for Seth Howard.

INT. CORBETT COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - HOLDING CELLS

Tony Yates leads Ana back into the department's four holding cells. Seth slumps on a bench inside his cell. Cody Varga broods silently in the next cell over.

Tony unlocks Seth's cell door.

TONY
All right, Mr. Howard. You're free
to go.

SETH
Great.

Seth glares at Ana, clearly pissed. She now sees he's got a wicked black eye.

ANA
Seth, your eye. Jesus.

SETH
I know, right? But hopefully we got
some good audio of me getting my
ass kicked.

Before Ana can respond, Seth elbows past her out of the cell. Ana notices Cody staring at her.

ANA
...What?

CODY
I don't torture animals.

ANA
OK?

CODY
You said that on your show. You said I torture animals. But I don't. There was a turtle that some asshole shot with a BB gun. It was dying, so I put it out of its misery. I didn't torture it.

ANA
OK. Sure. I'll issue a correction.
(beat)
Is somebody coming to bail you out?

CODY
Ha. You think I'm worth \$500?

ANA
What about your grandmother?

CODY
There was exactly one person who ever gave a shit about me. And she died 3 years ago.

Cody crosses his arms and turns away. Ana's phone BUZZES.
It's a new message from @southwillrise88:
"i did it again. you're next."

Before Ana can reply, a YOUNG DEPUTY rushes toward Tony.

YOUNG DEPUTY
Tony it just came in over the radio. We have a Code 12 at 2750 Redbud Drive.

The color drains from Tony's face.

TONY
...Code 12?

YOUNG DEPUTY
Yessir.

TONY
Good Lord.

Tony and the young deputy rush out of the station toward their cruisers.

Ana hurries after them. Seth follows.

EXT. CORBETT COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ana frantically Googles on her phone as they exit the building.

ANA

Seth, Code 12 is the Corbett County Sheriff's Department code for homicide.

Seth stops walking.

SETH

Stop it with the Nancy Drew shit Ana. I'm not fucking doing this anymore!

ANA

What?

SETH

You get me beat up. Thrown in jail. What's next?

ANA

Please, Seth. I know I don't say this often enough or actually ever, but... I'm sorry, OK?

Ana holds up her phone.

ANA (CONT'D)

Please. 2750 Redbud Drive is Lynette Hagan's address.

Seth sighs deeply.

SETH

Fine. But after this I'm going home. You're on your own down here.

ANA

OK. The car is still parked at the high school so we need to hurry.

Seth and Ana head off on foot, almost at a jog.

EXT. LYNETTE'S HOUSE - LATER

Seth pulls up to Lynette's house. The whole yard has been cordoned off with police tape. Various DEPUTIES take photos of the crime scene and collect evidence.

Sherriff Hammond stands to the side and talks on a cell phone. As he sees Ana and Seth approaching he tries to ignore her..

ANA

Excuse me. What happened here?

SHERIFF HAMMOND

Can't talk about it.

ANA

Is Lynette Hagan dead?

SHERIFF HAMMOND

This is an active crime scene. Move along. Now.

ANA

How was she killed?

SHERIFF HAMMOND

Move along, dammit!

As Seth and Ana walk back toward their vehicle, they notice Joe Ivey sitting in his cruiser. He stares straight ahead, both hands gripping the steering wheel, knuckles white. He's virtually catatonic.

Ana taps on the window. Joe turns toward her. She is surprised to see his eyes are full of tears.

ANA

Joe, what happened.

JOE

Lynette's been... Somebody... somebody cut her throat.

ANA

Who?

JOE

I don't know... but when I find them they're fucking dead....

Joe starts to sob. Ana doesn't quite know what to do.

ANA
I'm... sorry, Joe.

Joe doesn't respond. Ana regroups with Seth.

ANA
This is connected to Dora. The creep account messaged me again.

She shows Seth the latest message from @southwillrise88 on her phone.

SETH
And Cody couldn't have done it. He was locked up with me all night.

ANA
Damn it. I was wrong. I mean I was right all along. It's got to be Ronnie.

Ana returns to Sheriff Hammond, who again tries to ignore her.

ANA
Sheriff, you need to arrest Ronnie Burnett.

SHERIFF HAMMOND
Here we go again with this bull puck. Did you see something, darling?

ANA
No.

SHERIFF HAMMOND
Then you can't just throw around wild accusations--

ANA
Accusations against your cousin?

SHERIFF HAMMOND
That's not-- That don't have dick to do with it. You need evidence to arrest somebody!

ANA
Fine. We'll get it.

Ana turns and heads back toward the car. She starts to unload the recording equipment cases. Seth watches her.

SETH
What are you doing?

ANA
You don't have to drive me to
Ronnie's place. I can walk. It's
only...

Ana checks her phone.

ANA (CONT'D)
5.2 miles.

Seth grits his teeth and shakes his head.

SETH
Don't be an idiot. Get in the damn
car.

A small smile spreads across Ana's face as Seth wearily
climbs into the driver's seat.

ANA
I just need to make one quick stop
first.

INT. CORBETT COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY

Mrs. Sykes sighs and closes her eyes. She smiles. For once
the phones are silent. Someone walks through the front door.
She opens her eyes and sees Ana. Mrs. Sykes glares.

MRS. SYKES
Oh, hell no.

ANA
Yep. Just can't stay away.

MRS. SYKES
What do you want this time?

ANA
I'd like to post bail for Cody
Varga.

Ana slaps some bills down on the desk and turns to leave.
Mrs. Sykes is confused. She counts the money and sees that
under the bills is a pack of Skittles. The phone starts to
RING.

EXT. BURNETT HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Seth and Ana exit their car and cross Ronnie Burnett's yard. His truck is gone. The rotting deer carcass slowly twists in the wind. Ronnie's ramshackle house looms ominously ahead. Seth notices something.

SETH

Look. The knife is gone.

Sure enough the stump no longer has the crusty hunting knife lodged in it. Ana takes a deep breath and looks around. The woods are eerily quiet. She pounds on the door. There's an instant of unbearable silence.

Misty -- one of the two women Seth and Ana saw before -- answers the door. She seems bleary-eyed and disoriented in the light of day.

MISTY

What're you... what do y'all want?

ANA

We're looking for Ronnie.

Misty shakes her head.

MISTY

Ain't here.

ANA

How long has he been gone?

MISTY

I don't... I'm not...

Misty is thoroughly befuddled. The boy, Travis, edges forward from behind her.

TRAVIS

He's been gone since yesterday.

SETH

Did he say where he was going?

Travis grins.

TRAVIS

Yeah. Up your ass.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Someone watches Ana and Seth from the trees as they walk back toward their car and get in.

INT. CAR - DAY

Seth and Ana drive along the curvy ridgeline road back toward town.

SETH

So what do we do now?

ANA

I guess we try to find Ronnie, but
I don't know where to--

Ana's phone RINGS, startling her and Seth. A moment of decent cell reception. She slowly answers it.

ANA

...Hello?

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Sharon sits at her desk in front of her computer screen.

SHARON

Hi, Ana it's me.

ANA (O.S.)

Jesus, Sharon. You scared the shit
out of me.

SHARON

I'm... sorry?

ANA (O.S.)

No, no, it's fine. We're just kinda
busy right now. What's up?

SHARON

I wanted to touch base and make
sure you guys are OK. I've been
checking the forums and... Was
there, like, another murder?

INT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

ANA

Yeah. Somebody already posted about it?

SHARON (O.S.)

Mmm hmm. This morning.

(reading off computer)

"Just read about another killing down in Glencoe. Lynette Hagan, Dora's best friend, has been brutally murdered. Looks like Ronnie Burnett struck again. When will this animal be locked up?"

ANA

Who posted it?

SHARON (O.S.)

Somebody called RyeCatM.

ANA

Is there a timestamp on the post?

SHARON

Uh, 6:52 AM. I tried to Google the murder but... I couldn't find anything.

It slowly dawns on Ana.

ANA

That's because there haven't been any news stories about it yet... Thanks Sharon, I have to go.

SHARON (O.S.)

OK. Stay safe.

Ana hangs up. She takes a deep breath.

ANA

Seth, I think somebody's trying to frame Ronnie Burnett. And I think they might have killed Lynette to do it.

SETH

What?

ANA

First they pretend to be Ronnie online to bait me.

(MORE)

ANA (CONT'D)

Then they send that fake-ass confession. Now they're talking up Lynette's murder online like Ronnie did it.

SETH

I don't know, Ana. It's a big coincidence, sure, but--

ANA

They implicated him *before* the police even knew!

SETH

It's weird... but couldn't it just be some local busybody who already heard about it somehow? Like, from whoever called it in maybe? Gossip seems to be the fastest-moving thing around here.

Ana considers this.

ANA

We could do a test. If I say Ronnie is innocent again, I bet they'll react...

ANGLE ON Ana's phone as she composes a social media post:

"Wow. Just received some very compelling new evidence that completely exonerates Ronnie Burnett. Stay tuned Murder Hearters! #IHeartMurder"

Send.

Ana lowers her phone. Immediately it BUZZES.

ANA

It's a reply. From RyeCatM.

ANGLE ON a direct message on Ana's phone:

@RyeCatM: "what evidence?"

Ana chews her lip. She types back:

"I know you're involved in Lynette's murder. I know you're trying to set up Ronnie Burnett. Tell me who you really are."

Send.

SETH

...Anything?

Ana waits. Nothing. She sags, disappointed. Then she types a direct message to @southwillrise88.

"Maybe you prefer using this account?"

Send.

A beat. With a horrendous CRASH their car is t-boned off the side of the road. It tumbles over the lip of the ridge into the trees below.

SMASH TO BLACK

EXT. SIDE OF THE ROAD - DAY

Ana flashes in and out of consciousness.

-Ana's face is covered in blood. She's still strapped in the passenger seat and a fire is burning somewhere nearby.

-Someone, face obscured, drags Ana out of the burning car, but leaves Seth inside.

-The person looks at Ana's phone and types something on it then tosses it onto the ground. Then they gingerly set the cases containing the podcast's recording equipment on the grass beside her. Ana tries to say something but she can't speak. Can't move. Blood drips into her eyes.

-The figure notices the shoebox full of Cody's letters, reads one, then sets them alight on the burning car, before leaving.

-Ana lies on the ground, staring up at the trees. The sky is beautiful. Flashing blue lights mingle with the flickering oranges of the burning car nearby. Ana loses consciousness once more.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Ana awakens with a GASP. She looks around to see that she's in a dark, quiet hospital bed. She has bandages on her face and neck and her right arm is in a cast. An IV drip gives her fluid.

Behind her a dark figure rises from a chair. Ana whirls, panicked. Joe Ivey holds both hands out.

JOE
Easy.

ANA
Where am I? What-- what happened?

JOE
Methodist Hospital in Booneville.
You had a car accident. You're
lucky to be alive. If I'd gotten
there a couple minutes later...

Ana tries to get up but winces and slumps back down.

JOE
Look, I need to find him.

ANA
Who?

Joe's face hardens into a tight grimace.

JOE
Ronnie Burnett. His truck was
abandoned in the parking lot of
your motel. I know you know where
he is. I need to get to him...
before anybody else does.

ANA
Why?

JOE
You know why.

ANA
Joe, he's innocent.

A little of Joe's anger gives way to confusion.

JOE
He confessed.

ANA
What?

JOE
You posted the damn video.

Joe pulls out his phone and shows the latest post from
@iheartmurder:

VIDEO of Ronnie Burnett. He's in a dark room. A bright light shines directly in his face. Ronnie looks dazed and speaks in a hoarse whisper.

RONNIE (VIDEO)
My name is Ronald James Burnett and
I'd like to confess to the murder
of Dora Bishop four years ago and
the murder of Lynette Hagan
yesterday.

The shaky video cuts off.

ANA
No. It's wrong. Somebody's forcing
him to say those things. Where's my
phone?

Joe looks around and picks it up off a side table and hands it to her. There's a crack in the screen from the crash, but otherwise it works. Ana checks it. She's locked out of her social media accounts.

ANA
Damn it. He's using my account. He
changed the password.

JOE
Who?

ANA
Whoever ran us off the road.

Ana starts to get up. She pushes through the pain yanks the IV out of her arm.

JOE
What the hell are you doing?

ANA
If he's not already dead, Ronnie
Burnett's life is in danger. It's
the same people who killed Lynette.
I have to go.

JOE
No goddamn way.

ANA
I know where he is, Joe.

JOE
Where?

ANA
I'll tell you when we get there.
Where's Seth?

INT. SETH'S HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Joe waits in the hall as Ana, now wearing her own clothes again, enters another hospital room.

All of her resolve drains as she sees Seth lying in a hospital bed, unconscious, bandages covering his burns. One arm and both legs are in a cast. His injuries are far worse than Ana's.

ANA
(quietly)
Seth?

No answer.

ANA
Seth, are you--

SETH
(hoarse whisper)
Yeah.

Tears start to well in Ana's eyes.

ANA
How-- how bad is it?

SETH
It's bad.

ANA
Jesus Christ. What the fuck am I doing? What the have I done to you?

Ana breaks down and begins to cry.

ANA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Seth. I'm so sorry.

SETH
Yeah.

ANA
What was I thinking? It was stupid to come here. We have to get back to New York. We have to--

Seth lets out a horrible, raw sound. He's laughing.

SETH
Are you fucking kidding me?

Ana blinks.

ANA
What?

SETH
This is where you stop? This is where you finally give up?
Unbelievable.

ANA
No. You were right all along. I can't let anyone else get hurt. I can't be re--

SETH
You are responsible! And for once, you are going to fucking listen to me.

Ana wipes the tears away from her eyes.

ANA
OK, Seth. OK. I'm listening.

SETH
You're going to finish what you started. You're going to make this matter.

ANA
But--

SETH
Make this mean something!

Seth slumps back in his bed, asleep or unconscious.

Shaken, Ana stumbles backward out into the hall. Joe checks to make sure the coast is clear, and leads her toward the elevator.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Ana sits in the passenger side. Joe stares straight ahead as he drives. The lights of the oncoming cars cast strange, dancing shadows on their faces.

JOE

Ronnie Burnett is a human scumbag.
The worst of the worst.

ANA

I agree. But killing him is still a
crime.

JOE

If we get there, and you're wrong
about Ronnie being innocent... I'm
going to do what needs to be done.

ANA

I probably can't stop you.

JOE

So where the hell are we going
anyway?

Ana turns to look Joe in the eyes.

ANA

Dora Bishop's house.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Cody Varga races his 4-wheeler down a mountain trail in the darkness. He's traveling way too fast. Branches claw at him. Tree trunks whip past and he barely manages to avoid them. He seems to have a death wish.

Cody screeches to a hard stop where the trail crosses the road. A instant later Cody watches Joe's cruiser speed past, headed up the mountain.

Cody rips off his helmet.

EXT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Joe's cruiser pulls up to Dora's house. It's abandoned now, falling apart, with black soot stains climbing up from every window.

ANA

Look.

There is already a car parked here, a green Toyota with a huge dent in the hood.

JOE

Fine. You're right.

Joe speaks into his radio.

JOE
This is Officer Ivey requesting
immediate backup out on County Road
655 at the old Bishop place. Over.

Joe takes a deep breath, draws his gun, and exits the cruiser. Ana starts to follow him.

JOE
What the hell are you doing? Stay
in the car.

Ana frowns as Joe stalks toward the front steps of the house.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT

Joe slowly opens the door, flashlight in one hand, gun in the other. Inside the house is dark. It's been burned out and empty for 3 years. The floorboards are warped. Mold and spiderwebs and even a few stray vines creep up the walls.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joe proceeds into the ruined dining room, checking it with his flash light. All clear. Joe hears a MUFFLED WHIMPER. It's coming from the basement. Joe slowly opens the basement door and descends into darkness.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Joe descends, each step groaning under his weight, into the charred basement. Another WHIMPER.

His flashlight beam lands on Ronnie Burnett. Ronnie is completely nude, bound to a blackened chair. His mouth is covered in duct tape but otherwise his face and neck are untouched. The entire rest of his body, however, is marked with burns, bruises and open wounds. Several bloody implements of torture -- pliers, hacksaw, sledgehammer, blowtorch -- are piled on the ground at his feet.

JOE
Jesus.

Ronnie WHIMPERS again. His eyes are practically bulging out of his head. He's looking at something behind Joe. Joe turns.

At the top of the stairs a hulking figure in a ski mask now darkens the basement door.

The masked figure lunges and Joe raises his gun but it's a moment too late. BANG! Joe fires wide and the pistol clatters out of his hand, as he is knocked to the floor.

The two men scuffle on the ground, masked man on top. Joe is strong but the masked man is much bigger and heavier. Joe reaches for his gun but the masked figure stabs the hunting knife all the way through Joe's palm pinning his hand to the floor. Joe SCREAMS in pain.

The masked figure wrenches the knife free and goes for Joe's neck when--

WHAM! Ana swings a hardshell sound equipment case right into the masked man's face, knocking him off Joe.

JOE
I told you to stay in the car!

ANA
I'm not a great listener, Joe.

The masked man moans and tries to push himself up off the ground. Joe grabs his gun with his left hand.

JOE
Hands up shithead!

The masked man slowly raises his hands.

JOE
Take the fucking mask off!

The man removes his mask. He's a bald, doughy man who looks more like a Little League coach than a murderer. Joe doesn't recognize him. But Ana does: it's the man staying in Room 207 of the Chief Logan Inn.

JOE
Who the fuck is that?

Before Ana can answer -- THUNK -- crossbow bolt sprouts from Joe's throat. He wobbles for a moment then falls to the ground, bleeding out of his mouth and neck.

Ana turns.

ANGLE ON Tracey Milbank holding Ronnie's hunting crossbow. Her hair is wild and she wears a blood-stained "I Heart Murder" t-shirt. She smiles strangely, tears welling in her eyes.

ANA
...Tracey?

TRACEY

Ana, I'm such a huge fan.

Tracey loads and cocks another bolt into the crossbow.

TRACEY

Sorry I lied to you earlier. But I had to be undercover to help solve the mystery. And I did.

She grins and points to Ronnie Burnett.

ANA

...Uh huh.

Ana's eyes flit to Joe's gun. The big man, now on his feet, kicks it away.

TRACEY

Did you see the video we posted? It took awhile but Stu and I got Ronnie to confess. Oh gosh, where's my head, I didn't introduce you to my husband Stu.

STU extends a meaty hand. Ana shakes it.

TRACEY

He loves the podcast almost as much as I do. We listen to each episode over and over again to make sure we don't miss anything. It got us through some real tough times.

Ana speaks very carefully, hoping not to upset anyone.

ANA

...I'm glad you like my show... So now that you've captured the real killer, we should take him to the police--

TRACEY

NO!

Tracey's face twitches strangely.

TRACEY

They'll just let him go. They don't care.

Tracey spits at Joe's corpse.

TRACEY
What we want is justice for Dora.

Tracey aims the crossbow at Ronnie and a horrid smile spreads across her face.

TRACEY
Justice for Dora.

She shoots. The bolt lodges in his chest with a THUD. Ronnie shudders violently against his ropes and goes limp.

Ana makes a break for it, darting up the basement stairs.

TRACEY
GET HER!

Stu lumbers after Ana.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ana bursts out of the basement door and stumbles through the darkened house. With no light, she keeps colliding with objects, tripping over burned, broken furniture.

Ana fumbles with her phone as she flees. She wants to call someone, anyone. "No Service"

ANA
(almost crying)
God damn it!

She tries to open the front door but she can't. Tracey has padlocked it shut. Ana slams her shoulder into it once. Doesn't budge.

Ana hears the sounds of Stu in pursuit. She runs up the stairs to the second floor.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ana races down the hallway and ducks into a bathroom. Stu's heavy footfalls echo on the stairs behind her.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ana hides inside the bathtub and yanks the moldy shower curtain closed after her. She's winded, but she tries her damnedest to not even breathe.

Ana hears Stu's steps as he walks down the hallway outside the door. He pauses for an unbearable moment at the bathroom to listen. Then he continues on.

Ana breathes an inaudible sigh of relief. Her phone RINGS.

ANA
Fuck!

Ana answers it frantically and screams into the phone.

ANA
I'm at Dora Bishop's house and
they're trying to kill me!

INT. STUDIO OFFICE - DAY

A beautiful office space in Beverly Hills. A tan, handsome man in a deep v-neck black tee shirt, DAN PEDROSSIAN (45) sits at a desk and talks into a speakerphone.

DAN PEDROSSIAN
Um... Hi, this is Dan Pedrossian
calling for Ana Cohen?

ANA (O.S.)
PLEASE! YOU HAVE TO--

The phone goes silent.

DAN PEDROSSIAN
...Hello?

Dan Pedrossian looks at his ASSISTANT. She shrugs.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Stu holds Ana's iPhone that he just crushed in his meaty hand. Ana makes another break for it but Stu grabs her with one arm and hurls her across the room. Ana's head smashes against a radiator. She instantly loses consciousness.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

Ana comes to. She's been tied up to the same support beam where Dora was burned alive. Joe's body, bolt still protruding from his throat, lies on the ground beside her in a pool of blood.

Ana looks up to see Tracey sitting on the stairs nearby, staring at her with unblinking eyes. Stu looms silently behind.

ANA
(weakly)
Let me go.

TRACEY
I can't. You were looking for answers. And I knew they were out there. I wanted to lead you to the truth. And gosh I thought you would be happy that all has finally become clear.

She gestures towards Ronnie's corpse.

ANA
He didn't do it.

TRACEY
Yes. He. did.

ANA
You two killed Lynette Hagan just to frame him.

TRACEY
You were losing the thread! You needed more clues!

ANA
She was an innocent victim.

TRACEY
Read the message boards! The pieces are all there! Lynette used drugs. She was Ronnie's accomplice. They murdered Dora Bishop together. Poor Dora.

Tracey starts to cry. Her body heaves with big, too-loud sobs. Stu puts a big hand on her shoulder.

ANA
...You're insane.

Tracey wipes her eyes.

TRACEY
I really hoped it wouldn't have to come to this.
(MORE)

TRACEY (CONT'D)
But you're just like the others,
you want to bury the truth.

Tracey nods to Stu. The big man places a cheap digital recorder onto the ground in front of her. He plugs in a ten-dollar microphone.

TRACEY
So we're going to have to record
the final episode of *I Heart
Murder*, right here, right now. You
need to tell the whole world, once
and for all, that Ronnie Burnett is
guilty of Dora Bishop's Murder.

Stu turns the recorder on. Slowly, Tracey levels the crossbow at Ana.

ANA

...

THUMP. A muffled noise from upstairs. Stu and Tracey look at each other.

EXT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Tony Yates kicks at the front door of his house.

TONY
Joe? Joe, are you in there?

Tony kicks again. And again. This time the padlock splinters off the doorjamb.

INT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Stu chambers a bullet in Joe's gun and creeps up the stairs, surprisingly quiet for such a large man.

Still aiming the crossbow at Ana, Tracey puts a finger to her lips. Shh.

Both of them listen. Footsteps creaking the floorboards above them.

TONY (O.S.)
(muffled)
Hey, who the hell are--

Gunshots -- BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! -- a body falls. Silence. Then a single set of quiet footsteps make their way back toward the basement door.

Tracey's sick grin returns as she turns back to Ana and holds up the mic.

TRACEY

Now repeat after me: My name is Ana
Cohen and you're listening to I
Heart--

BANG! The top of Tracey's head explodes, splattering Ana with blood and gore. Tracey flops forward onto the digital recorder.

Tony Yates descends the stairs, smoking gun in his hand.

TONY

Well, looks like I got here right
in the nick of time.

ANA

You saved my life... I'm sorry...
Joe didn't... He's...

Ana starts to cry. Tony looks at Joe then he stares at her for a long moment as he strokes his jaw.

TONY

Well, shoot. You probably shouldn't
have come down to West Virginia.

Ana looks up.

ANA

...What?

TONY

Bad luck for you. Still, probably
for the best. I can't have you
poking around here anymore.

ANA

What are you talking about?

TONY

Too much attention, what with all
the amateur detectives and now the
Bureau of Criminal Investigation.
Who knows what somebody might turn
up if they actually look? No, no,
no. It just won't do.

Ana struggles against the ropes.

ANA

Untie me, Tony. Please.

He doesn't. Instead he moves toward Tracey's body.

TONY

Hmm. This is a little messier than I like to do it. But hopefully we can wrap up all the loose ends.

He crouches and places the gun he just fired into Tracey's limp hand. Curls her fingers around it and fires into the basement wall -- BANG -- causing Ana to flinch backwards. For the first time she notices Tony is wearing shiny black gloves.

TONY

There. You and Joe came here to save Ronnie. These two maniacs killed Joe and then themselves. And I arrived

(checks watch)

20 minutes from now? But by that time the fire was already out of control. Luckily no rain in the forecast this time.

ANA

What fire?

Tony chuckles and holds up a 32 oz. bottle of lighter fluid. He starts to squirt it onto the piles of partially burned debris all around Ana.

TONY

Haven't you noticed? Look around these hills. So many of these people are just... trash. Pill-heads and meth-heads and whores. They're trash. Lazy, disgusting trash. Ana, my job is to burn the trash.

Tony pulls on a black latex dog mask.

TONY (CONT'D)

On behalf of decent folks everywhere.

ANA

You... murdered Dora.

TONY

Yes. And many others. Though most of them weren't so photogenic.

(MORE)

TONY (CONT'D)
Just toothless hillbilly drug
addicts so nobody bothered to
investigate. Lesson learned.

Tony chuckles again.

ANA
...Why her?

TONY
Dora Bishop was fornicating with a
married man.

He nudges Joe's lifeless head with his toe.

TONY
Trash.

Ana struggles against her ropes and screams at the top of her lungs.

ANA
HELP ME! SOMEBODY! HELP!

Tony shakes his head.

TONY
You really need to calm down. This
should help.

Tony crouches close to Ana and starts to fill a syringe from a vial of oxycodone.

With an unexpected lurch, Ana headbutts Tony's hands, sending vial and both clattering away into the darkness. Under the mask, Tony's face twists in fury. Then he catches himself and slowly smiles.

TONY
So you want to do it the hard way?

Quick as a snake, Tony whips out his telescoping baton and cracks Ana across the face, silencing her. She slumps, dazed by the blow.

Tony steps back and strikes a match. He admires it for a moment and tosses it onto the ground. WHOOMP! The lighter fluid around Ana goes up in flames. Tony unzips his pants, closes his eyes, and starts to masturbate. Pure bliss.

As the flames burn higher, Ana blinks and sees something glinting in the firelight. She twists and stretches and manages to get two fingers around the crossbow bolt poking out of Joe Ivey's neck.

By straining and wrenching her weight she somehow manages to rip the bloody bolt out of Joe's throat. Using the arrowhead she starts to saw at her ropes.

Tony's pace quickens and his breath starts to accelerate.

With a pop, Ana cuts through the ropes. She leaps over the gathering fire and dashes up the basement stairs.

EXT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Black smoke billows from the basement window. Ana bursts out of the front door of the house, racing full speed toward Joe's cruiser. She throws open the door.

BANG! A bullet shatters the side mirror. Tony stands on the porch, still in his dog mask, dick out, gun in hand.

Ana jumps into the driver seat and slams the door behind her.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Tony walks calmly toward the vehicle as Ana fumbles.

ANA
Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

The keys are still in the ignition. Ana starts the car. The engine whines as she turns the key too far.

CRASH! Another bullet shatters the driver side window in a hail of tinkling glass.

Ana floors the gas. The engine roars. The car doesn't move.

ANA
What?

Ana pulls the gearshift into drive and the car leaps forward.

EXT. DORA BISHOP'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ana speeds away down the twisty mountain road, tires SQUEALING. Tony zips up his pants, climbs in his own cruiser and follows.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Ana speeds and swerves down the nightmarishly twisty road, struggling to keep control of the vehicle.

She barely misses a copse of trees, overcorrects and nearly goes over the ridge. Utterly terrifying.

With a CRASH, Tony's car rams Ana's from behind. The impact nearly forces her off the road. Somehow she keeps vehicle from going over the edge.

Tony tries to ram her again and Ana swerves at the last second, causing him to spin out.

Ana pulls away. Tony backs up and floors it to catch her.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Ana is nearly at the bottom of the mountain now. She's going to make it.

INT. TONY'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Tony leans out the window and fires his gun bursting one of Ana's tires.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Ana loses control of the car and skids into a ditch, crumpling the front bumper against a tree.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Tony slows to a stop behind her and gets out of his cruiser. He rolls his shoulders and slowly walks towards Ana's vehicle, gun in hand. Tony clucks his tongue.

TONY

I'm very frustrated with you right now. Very, very frustrated.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

Ana is dazed. As the airbag deflates, she fumbles with the seatbelt. It's locked. She can't seem to get it undone. Her fingers don't quite work right. Her vision is blurry.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Tony stops as he hears a WHINING sound coming from the woods. It's an engine. Tony squints in the headlights as a 4-wheeler pulls up to the main road. Cody Varga jumps off.

CODY
Leave her alone!

Tony shoots at Cody but misses. Cody slams into Tony and, for a moment, it seems like he might be able to overpower the smaller man and wrestle the gun away. Cody yells at Ana.

CODY
Go on! Drive!

Yet with his other hand Tony whips out his telescoping baton. He beats Cody repeatedly across the face and shoulders with it, forcing the boy back. With a final blow to the head, he knocks Cody to the ground.

INT. JOE'S CRUISER - CONTINUOUS

In the rearview mirror Ana sees Tony slowly point his gun at Cody's head.

ANA
No.

Ana starts the car. She throws it into reverse and floors it. The tires SCREECH as she backs over Tony Yates at 30 miles an hour -- KATHUNK -- instantly crushing him to death.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Ana, stumbles out of the cruiser and helps a groggy Cody to sit up. She sits on the ground beside him and the two of them stare out into the night.

The headlights of another car approach. A two-door compact with a police flasher on the dashboard rolls to a stop. Trooper Terry Webb stumbles out, gun in hand.

WEBB
Call came in over the radio. Came as fast as I could. Are you OK?

ANA (V.O.)
...Am I OK? I have a broken arm, two fractured vertebrae, and scars on my face that won't ever heal. I wake up screaming some nights. But hey, this turned out to be one hell of a podcast, right? Now I know you're probably wondering: is this the end of *I Heart Murder*?

SMASH TO:

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - RECORDING BOOTH - DAY

Ana sits in the recording booth. Bandages gone, she now has bright scars across her neck and forehead. Her arm is still in a cast.

ANA (CONT'D)

...I think it is. For now. When I started this podcast I had no idea where it would lead me or what it would mean to people. But I hoped what I would find in the end was the truth.

ANGLE ON Ana's cork board with the photos of Dora, Joe, Ronnie and Cody, connected by red yarn.

ANA

Along the way, good people got hurt. Others died. I almost did. And I found the truth. Or I guess it found me. But the question I keep asking myself is: was it worth it?

Ana sits in silence for a long moment.

ANA

...Well, was it?

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - OFFICE SPACE - DAY

Ana steps out of the recording booth -- she walks with a slight limp now -- followed by her new producer LEO (30) a non-threatening quasi-hipster, bubbling with enthusiasm.

Sharon sits at her laptop.

LEO

Sharon, what've we got?

Sharon points to the iTunes podcast rankings on her computer and grins.

SHARON

Still #1.

LEO

Hell yeah!

SHARON

Eat shit Ira Glass.

ANA
Anything else?

SHARON
Oh, and it looks like Pedrossian's
office messengered the final
contract over.

Sharon hands Ana a manila envelope.

ANA
Thanks.

Ana limps to her desk and sits down. She opens the envelope
and starts to look over the contract. Leo follows. He hovers.

ANA
What?

LEO
...So I know we're basically in
preproduction with Netflix, but I
just wanted to float a couple
things your way.

Ana rolls her eyes.

ANA
Leo, c'mon.

Leo places a sheet on her desk. It's an FBI missing persons
poster showing a pretty, young AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN.

LEO
Chantal Goodwin. Detroit, Michigan.
Missing since 2011. Only her
brother swears she's still alive.
We've done the whole creepy
backwoods hillbilly thing. This
would have more of a hardscrabble,
Midwestern urban vibe.

Ana shakes her head.

ANA
Seriously I really can't even think
about this right now.

LEO
No? How about Kristina Wythe-
Rockefeller?

He puts down another. A printout of an article about a murder
with a photo of an elegant BLONDE DEBUTANTE.

LEO (CONT'D)
Murdered last year in New Canaan,
Connecticut right in her own
kitchen. No arrests. Lotta crazy
suspects. And yes, it is *those*
Rockefellers.

ANA
Stop.

LEO
Just one more. Kim Ricci. Lived in
Bushwick. Body found in a park in
Staten Island in February of 2015.
They put her mailman in jail, only
the DNA doesn't match. For this one
you wouldn't even have to leave the
city.

He places another printout: this one shows a PRETTY HIPSTER
in cool glasses.

ANA
You done?

LEO
OK, OK, I'll drop it.
(beat)
Anyway, Sharon and I are going to
Costello's for a few. Apparently
she's got an idea for a podcast she
wants to pitch me. It's like
relationship advice but also sketch
comedy somehow? I don't really get
it. Anyway, you're welcome to come
along, if you like.

ANA
Nah, I think I'll just finish up
here.

LEO
Okay don't work too hard.
(yelling)
Sharon! Let's ride!

Sharon and Leo leave Ana alone in the office, poring over the
contract.

Ana pauses. She sucks at her teeth as if trying to decide
something. Then she pulls out her phone.

INT. SETH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Seth sits in a wheelchair, both legs still in casts, bandages still covering the burns on his arms face and neck. He and Lisa watch another episode of the same baking competition show as before. This time Seth isn't smiling.

Seth's phone BUZZES. He looks at it. On the screen he sees the name "Ana".

A beat. Seth declines the call.

INT. PODCASTING STUDIO - OFFICE SPACE - NIGHT

Ana puts down her phone. She looks around the empty office and drums her fingers on her desk. She sighs.

Then she picks up the article about Kim Ricci and starts to read...

SMASH TO BLACK