SECRETS & LIES

"The Trail"
Episode #101

Revised Network Draft
12.20.13

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Kapital Entertainment
Hoodlum

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SECRETS & LIES

"THE TRAIL"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

1 EXT. CHARLOTTE/CATAWBA RIVER/WOODS - DAWN (1) 1

Early morning, dawn just creeping in. In the distance, a city skyline is barely visible through persistent, thin drizzle under a sky heavy with dark clouds. But if you stare hard, you'll recognize the distinct fountain pen-like top of the Duke Energy Center, and you'll know we're in Charlotte, North Carolina. It's cold. Not bone-chilling, but global warming makes for moderate winters in certain places.

The Catawba River's darker than the sky, almost black in the rain. On either side of it, thick woods, canopied to fool us into thinking it's still night. The eerie silence would enhance the ruse, except for the insects and birds telling us it's time to face the day. Water drips steadily from worn leaves, ripples the surface of a puddle on a narrow, windy trail. We're deep in the throes of nature until --

A worn Nike SPLASHES into the puddle, followed immediately by its mate. A man's feet POUND on the dirt, sliding on wet leaves and over exposed rock slick with rain. Shrubs lash at the runner's toned shins leaving scratches and scrapes, but still, he powers on with unwaning intensity.

The runner is BEN GARNER (40), a fit, handsome but ordinary man, in shorts and sweat shirt. What's extraordinary is that he seems to be running for his life. He SLIDES and his arms wheel as he struggles to maintain his balance and speed. His breaths are ragged, his expression desperate and haunted. The danger becomes clear when we see, along with rain and sweat trickling down his skin, BLOOD smeared on his clothes.

An errant branch causes Ben to tumble. He slips in the mud, falls to his knees. But he doesn't stop. He can't. By sheer force of will, he gets back up and keeps running. As he runs past a sign pointing to 'Chelsea Bay Drive' --

2 EXT. CHELSEA BAY DRIVE - DAWN (1) 2

Feet now POUNDING against pavement, Ben runs from the trail, onto his cul-de-sac. Back in civilization, gasping, he yells --

BEN
Help! Someone... help --

A light rain continues to fall and the still illuminated street lights compete with the emerging daylight.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 2

The houses, ranging from modest to done, largely two stories, are dark inside, but outside, they're decorated for Christmas.

Ben, now on pure adrenaline, charges toward his own lovely home, races up to the front porch. He bangs on the door, panting. Rings the bell. Bangs again, harder, yelling --

BEN (CONT'D)
Christy!

The door is opened by Ben's wife CHRISTY (39), in a nightgown, still half asleep, but sexy nonetheless. She's taken aback by his shouts and appearance: muddy, wide-eyed, and the blood.

CHRISTY
Ben? What's going on--

BEN
(gasping)
Phone.

3 EXT. WOODS TRAIL - EARLY MORNING (1) 3

A BRIGHT FLASH engulfs the sweet face of a small four-year-old boy. And then another. Someone is taking photos of TOM MULLEN, in flannel pajamas and winter jacket, innocent, peaceful. But as we WIDEN, we get the full picture. The stills are not to capture a moment, but a CRIME SCENE. Tom is lying on the ground. Surrounding his tiny, lifeless body --

A CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG POLICE PHOTOGRAPHER snaps photos. CMPD UNIFORMS cordon off the area with police tape and walk the perimeter searching for evidence. CSIs process the scene.

Further down the trail, Ben stands with a UNIFORM, answering questions (MOS). The Officer nods, takes notes, but Ben isn't looking at him. He can't tear his eyes from the dead boy, in little boots, feet pointed out. Ben stares with such intensity, as if willing Tom to wake up. But he won't.

4 EXT. CHELSEA BAY DRIVE/BEN'S HOUSE - MORNING (1) 4

The sun is starting to beat out the clouds. It's daylight, making it easier to see the lovely, well-kept cul-de-sac.

A SQUAD CAR's parked in front of an ordinary home with a kid's tricycle out front. We'll soon know it's Jess's house, the mother of the dead boy.

Next door is a neat but unimpressive home, overdone for the holiday with the Nativity and a Rudolph in evidence. KEVIN and ELAINE HAYNES (60s), twenty year veterans of the block, are out front, fussing with their holiday decor in a vain attempt to appear something other than what they are - nosy.

4 CONTINUED: 4

Clearly the neighborhood watch decal on their front window is not just for show.

Opposite Kevin and Elaine's is Ben's home - much prettier and well taken care of, with a white picket fence. An ND SEDAN's parked out front, and in the driveway are parked both a luxury SEDAN, and Ben's painter's SUV.

Ben walks up slowly from the entrance to the trail. As he nears his house, Elaine approaches. Kevin stays back a bit. It's subtle, but he seems to have no use for Ben.

ELAINE
Ben... Are you alright?

Ben, uncertain how to answer her, shrugs. A beat, then --

KEVIN
Was it really... is Tom...?

Ben offers confirmation by looking across to Jess's house. The curtains are closed. Elaine gets a bit emotional.

ELAINE
That boy was such a ray of sunshine...

Kevin nods somberly, then, with a strange tone--

KEVIN
Have you seen Jessica yet?

Ben shakes his head. Then gesturing to his house --

BEN
I... I should go--

Elaine nods. Ben turns, goes to --

5 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - MORNING (1) 5

As Ben steps onto his porch, the front door is opened by Christy, wearing a warm robe and a mask of deep concern. Her face asks a million questions. Ben preempts them --

BEN
I'm okay.

As Ben enters, Christy hugs him, but it's strangely awkward and she pulls away quickly, then closes the door.

6 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING (1) 6

Ben and Christy remain by the door, as --

6 CONTINUED: 6

CHRISTY
Do they know what happened?

Ben takes a breath, but before he can speak...

NATALIE (O.S.)
Is it true? Dad?

NATALIE, 16, too sexy for her own good, in tiny shorts and a tank (her version of pajamas), approaches.

NATALIE (CONT'D)
Is it?

Ben looks at her, unsure what to say. Christy saves him --

CHRISTY
Later. There's someone here.

7 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING (1) 7

Ben follows Christy into the kitchen. Christmas cards hang on a ribbon, strung along the wall. Some are generic, but most are of smiling, happy families perched in front of the tree, the fireplace, the wreathed front door.

DETECTIVE ANDREA CORNELL (40) stares intently at the photos. There's the slightest hint of sadness in her eyes, but it vanishes the second she spots Ben. There's a natural beauty to her, so to prevent that from becoming a distraction, she overcompensates with minimal make-up and conservative pants suits. Also, she keeps her hair in an immaculate bun. It's effective, because the only air she gives off is professional. She's also impossibly hard to read.

CORNELL
Mr. Garner? Detective Andrea Cornell.

She extends a hand and as Ben shakes, he clocks Cornell's prominently displayed badge. Christy feels awkward, but --

CHRISTY
I really need to get ready for work.

CORNELL
This shouldn't take long.

Christy hesitates. Ben nods: it's okay. So Christy leads Natalie out. Ben gestures for Cornell to sit. She does.

BEN
Coffee?

CORNELL
You having some?

7 CONTINUED: 7

BEN
No.

CORNELL
(beat)
Well, I'd love one.

And that right there speaks volumes about Cornell. She's odd, but it's intentional. Her calm is disconcerting, her pauses just long enough to make it awkward. Her unflappable nature makes you doubt yourself. If she were a man, you might describe her as formidable. But she's not a man.

Ben scoops the coffee from a canister on the counter, as Cornell pulls out her iPhone. In spite of her sometimes strange non sequiturs, make no mistake: Cornell is the smartest person in the room, always.

CORNELL (CONT'D)
The officer at the scene sent over the notes from your interview.
(beat)
I never cease to marvel at technology.
(perusing screen)
Terribly shocking, what happened.

BEN
Yeah. He was... Tom lives... lived across the street his whole... life--

Cornell pulls a note pad from her jacket, writes. Regardless of what Ben says, her expression never seems to change.

CORNELL
He used to come here? Tom?

BEN
Yeah, my uh... my daughter Natalie babysat him... two, three days a week. Jess - Tom's mother - she works part-time, but it gives her - gave her - a break. Milk?

CORNELL
Natalie babysat him here?

BEN
Here and over there. She has a key.

CORNELL
Black.

It takes a second for Ben to realize what she's saying. Ben hands Cornell the mug of black coffee. She sips it, then --

7 CONTINUED: (2) 7

CORNELL (CONT'D)
Sumatra. Hmm.

Ben looks at her, then at the glass canister. How the hell did she know that? But she goes on --

CORNELL (CONT'D)
You couldn't sleep?

BEN
What?

CORNELL
Your wife mentioned you weren't supposed to run this morning.

BEN
Right, it's usually every other day.

CORNELL
Why couldn't you sleep?

BEN
I don't know. I mean, we all have trouble sleeping sometimes, right?

Any normal person would say, "Sure." But Cornell is not any normal person. She waits, knowing that Ben, like most of us, will talk to end uncomfortable silences. And he does.

BEN (CONT'D)
I had a couple of drinks last night... wanted to run them off.

CORNELL
So you woke early. Still dark out?
(off his nod)
Ever fall? Twist an ankle?

BEN
Been running there for years... I know the trail pretty well.

CORNELL
Even after a few drinks?

This is starting to feel strange.

BEN
Yes. Detective, what does any of this have to do with--

CORNELL
Lucky you didn't break your neck, when you came across him.

7 CONTINUED: (3) 7

Ben glares at Cornell's lack of sensitivity.

BEN
I don't feel particularly lucky.

CORNELL
Of course. How'd you know?

BEN
Know what?

CORNELL
Tom was dead? It was dark, wet. When did you realize he was dead?

Ben thinks for a beat, then almost reliving it --

BEN
When I... felt the back of his head.

CORNELL
So you moved the body?

BEN
I... I tried to resuscitate him.

CORNELL
After you felt the back of his head?

Ben's confused, getting flustered.

BEN
I... before. I saw him lying there, I - I shook him, he didn't respond. I didn't know what to do. I started CPR - it wasn't working - I went to pick him up and his head was...

CORNELL
Did you see anyone else?

Ben shakes his head, then a realization sets in. But they're both distracted by a small NOISE. They turn, catch movement in the hallway. Ben gets closer, sees a sheepish, nervous, ABBY (12), hiding around a corner, watching.

BEN
It's okay. You can come out.

She does, slowly approaches. Then, to Cornell --

BEN (CONT'D)
My youngest daughter, Abby.

7 CONTINUED: (4) 7

CHRISTY (O.S.)
Abby!

Christy enters, now in a suit. She sees Abby, holds up her hands as if to say: What did I tell you? Cornell clocks the family dynamic.

BEN
It's okay. Abby, this is Detective Cornell.

And for the first time, Cornell actually smiles, as --

CORNELL
It's nice to meet you, Abby.

ABBY
Is... is Tommy okay?

Ben crouches to Abby's level, holds her gently, then --

BEN
No, sweetie. Tom is... he's dead.

She processes, shocked, then to Cornell --

ABBY
Do... do you know what happened?

And then, so matter-of-factly that we know it to be true --

CORNELL
That's what I'm going to find out.

A WOMAN'S SCREAM is heard from the yard. They all go to --

8 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - MORNING (1) 8

Lounge chairs, a table and barbecue, welcome us into this tranquil oasis. A converted garage serves as a guest house. Based upon the mess outside, it's clearly being inhabited. Empty beer cans, take-out containers, and bags of garbage.

DAVE CARLYLE (38), handsome but goofy, in a flannel and tightie whities, tries to push a chubby WOMAN in a skimpy dress over the fence, out of Ben's yard. She's stuck halfway --

DAVE
Come on, babe, almost there. East German judges are all about the dismount--

He puts his hands on her ass, giving a final push as --

8 CONTINUED: 8

WOMAN
Easy, it's still sore from last night.

BEN (O.S.)
Dave!

Dave and the Woman turn to see Ben, Christy, Cornell, Natalie and Abby... staring. Um. Awkward. Dave musters a wave.

9 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT PORCH - MORNING (1) 9

Ben and Christy watch as, on the street, Dave and his guest finish getting questioned by Cornell. A CAB arrives and the Woman gets in. Dave gestures for her to call him. Her look says: Not a chance. As the cab leaves and Dave goes back to the guest house, Christy watches him, annoyed --

CHRISTY
You need to remind him about the rules. And the rent. And the guest house is disgusting.

BEN
I know. He's just... trying to figure out his life.

CHRISTY
He's been trying to figure it out since we were nineteen.

BEN
Christy... he's my friend.

CHRISTY
Yeah. Your friend. Not your child. And certainly not mine.

A cold beat. They notice a UNIFORM exit their house behind them with a paper bag, labeled as evidence. Disconcerting.

BEN
Why do they need my clothes?

CHRISTY
Probably just procedure.

The Officer brings the bag to the ND Sedan, in which Cornell is sitting, as two UNIFORMS escort JESS MULLEN (30), beautiful, broken, from her home across the street.

CHRISTY (CONT'D)
That... poor woman.

BEN
We should say something.

9 CONTINUED: 9

Christy starts to protest.

CHRISTY
Ben... I--

BEN
(pained)
I found him.

And before she can say another word, he's down the stairs.

10 EXT. CHELSEA BAY DRIVE - JESS'S HOUSE - MORNING (1) 10

JESS, fragile, walks slowly, flanked by UNIFORMS who lead her to a SQUAD CAR. As Ben walks toward her, he calls out --

BEN
Jess?
(off no response)
Jess...

This time Jess hears, looks up. But Cornell, clocking the exchange, has gotten out of her car. She stands in front of Ben, holding out an arm, indicating Ben should stay back --

CORNELL
Mr. Garner...

BEN
What?
(then)
Jess...

Jess shoots Ben an unreadable look, then she is helped into the back of the squad car. Then, said like someone who knows --

CORNELL
This is difficult. Probably a good idea to leave her alone right now.

Ben watches the squad car go, then looks back at Cornell.

CORNELL (CONT'D)
Were you drinking alone last night?

She clearly already knows the answer.

BEN
I was with Dave.

CORNELL
How much did you drink?

10 CONTINUED: 10

BEN
(opts for truth)
Too much.

CORNELL
And you drove...?

BEN
We took a cab.

CORNELL
What time did you get home?

BEN
(trying to recall)
I don't... remember.

CORNELL
(long beat, then)
What are your plans over Christmas?

BEN
We'll be here. Why?

Cornell watches Ben with her inscrutable gaze, then goes to her car. Ben's starting to sense that something's not right. The feeling's exacerbated as Cornell drives off and Ben sees:

The whole street's outside. Down the block, an OLD MAN huddles with a YOUNG COUPLE. Near them, a MAN and his TEENAGE SON, in a Carolina Panthers sweatshirt, speak in hushed tones. A bit further, a HOUSEWIFE chats with an OLD WOMAN. Understandably, all are looking in the direction of the drama, but to Ben, it feels like they're staring at HIM.

Ben turns to go inside, sees Kevin and Elaine are still out front, watching him, too. Busted, they look away.

On the other side of Jess's house, in the door of Chelsea Bay's fanciest home, VANESSA TURNER (40) looks over cautiously with her husband DR. JOSEPH TURNER (42) behind her. When Ben locks eyes with them, Dr. Turner nods, friendly but reserved. Vanessa smiles nervously, then shuts the door.

Ben turns back toward his house and sees Christy, also watching, her expression unclear. She goes back inside and we're off Ben, suddenly feeling very exposed and alone as we --

SMASH TO:

"SECRETS AND LIES"

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

11 INT. WINDYGAP ESTATE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY (1) 11

Ben, in his painter's whites, uses a pole and roller to paint the high ceilings of this large, bright room, in a magnificent Charlotte estate. French doors open to a backyard replete with pool, cabana and perfectly manicured topiaries. Inside, the antique furniture is covered in drop cloths and in the center, covered in clear plastic, is a huge TV, showing whatever commercial we can clear. Then a NEWSCASTER comes on with an update. Ben doesn't watch, so neither do we, as --

NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
Good afternoon. I'm Roz Suarez with an ABC news update. Tragedy struck today on Chelsea Bay Drive, when earlier this morning a four-year-old boy, Tom Mullen, was found dead...

Ben stops painting, stares at the TV. Through the plastic, he sees the image of an adorable, smiley Tom. He gets closer.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
...In the woods, by a jogger. The boy's mother, Jessica Mullen, had been unaware the child went missing.

Tom's photo is replaced by footage of Jess returning home.

NEWSCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
No further details are being released at this time, but homicide detectives were on the scene and police are asking anyone with information to please come forward.

Ben takes that in, turns away as...

NEWSCASTER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
In other news, President Obama is again headed to the Middle East to...

Ben takes a beat, gets back to work.

12 INT./EXT. BEN'S SUV/CHELSEA BAY DRIVE - DAY (1) 12

Ben, lost in thought, drives home. He rounds the corner onto his block and is shocked to see:

THREE NEWS VANS parked in the street. REPORTERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS and CAMERA CREWS are mobbed on the sidewalk.

12 CONTINUED: 12

Ben steers slowly through the mob and into his empty driveway. But when he gets out of the car, they're instantly upon him. He tries to get to his door without engaging as --

REPORTER #1
Mr. Garner, what happened?!

CAMERAMAN #1
Over here... Mr. Garner!

REPORTER #2
Ben, what did you see? Do you think Tom Mullen was murdered?

And as the cameras FLASH and the throngs shout more questions, Ben does his best to ignore them, moving quickly into --

13 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - CONTINUOUS 13

Ben slams the door, locking it behind him.

BEN
My God!

NATALIE (O.S.)
Right? It's crazy...

Reveal Natalie is staring out a front window, as --

NATALIE (CONT'D)
Our street's like, famous.

BEN
Don't talk to them.

Natalie glares at him, 'duh'. Ben is used to it.

BEN (CONT'D)
Are you... all right?

A beat, then, with genuine sadness --

NATALIE
I can't believe Tommy's dead.

BEN
Yeah. But are you... doing okay?

She gives a noncommittal shrug. Communicating with a teenager is a misery unlike any other. As Natalie heads to the TV --

BEN (CONT'D)
I better call your mom, warn her about the reporters --

13 CONTINUED: 13

NATALIE
She's home.

Ben reacts, but Natalie doesn't notice, because she's just turned on the TV and is surprised to find --

NATALIE (CONT'D)
Holy sh--

BEN
Hey!

NATALIE
But... our house is on--

Ben moves around her to see: on TV, REPORTER #2, standing right in front of their gate, reporting live --

REPORTER #2
Unfortunately, Mr. Garner was unwilling to share any information--

Ben shuts it off.

NATALIE
What're you doing?

BEN
Read a book. Bigger vocabulary will help you make better language choices.

Before he has to see her grimace, he goes to --

14 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (1) 14

Ben enters. Christy's on the phone, preparing dinner.

CHRISTY
...Queens Road's perfect, huge master, has the Jack and Jill bathroom for the kids... I'll call right now...
(sees Ben, then)
I'll let you know how it went.

She hangs up the phone, then --

BEN
Were you gonna tell me about the flash mob out there?

CHRISTY
I wish they were a flash mob.
(then)
I just got home.

14 CONTINUED: 14

BEN
Where's your car?

CHRISTY
I saw the insanity, parked a block over.

BEN
Do you think... are the girls okay?

CHRISTY
I dunno. Abby was playing around with her window lock earlier.

BEN
We should talk to them, make sure.

CHRISTY
I'd rather you looked at the locks.

BEN
We gotta say something.

CHRISTY
Okay. How about there's someone out there killing kids? Or, sorry girls, but you can't leave the house 'til you're fifty--

Christy is goading. Ben refuses to engage.

BEN
Don't you have a work call to make?

15 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY (1) 15

Ben exits the house, sees Dave, in sweats, lounging by the guest house, his home. His laptop's open, guitar nearby. Through the guest house door, we see evidence of Dave's life -- old poster of his band, more empty beers, dirty laundry on the floor, but the outside is now clean. Dave sips a beer --

DAVE
Like a damn Bieber fest out there, huh? Maybe I should play for 'em, get more exposure.
(off Ben's grin)
Listen, about this morning--

Ben, used to Dave, lifts his hand, don't apologize.

DAVE (CONT'D)
We were hammered, overslept--

15 CONTINUED: 15

BEN
If you could just maybe try not to let the kids see it. We're at least pretending to raise 'em right.

Dave offers Ben a beer from his six-pack. Ben takes it, as --

BEN (CONT'D)
Thanks for cleaning up.

DAVE
I got the hint when Christy gave me the hairy eyeball earlier...

Ben looks at him... she's my wife. Be good.

DAVE (CONT'D)
I know. She allows me to stay here. There are rules. Guest house must remain pristine. No women. No music. No entering the main house without an embossed invitation. Long as I avoid really... everything, it's all good.
(then)
You can tell her you spanked me.

An understanding between the closest of friends. They both drink their beers, look out at the yard. A long moment before --

DAVE (CONT'D)
Poor little kid. And they're saying it was... murder. I can't believe someone would do that... to him...

Ben looks at him, plagued with guilt and sadness --

BEN
I wish... I keep thinking, if I ran faster, I'd have gotten there quicker. Maybe I could've... done something.

DAVE
Don't... stop being hard on yourself. They're gonna catch the bastard...
(off Ben, unconvinced)
You okay?

BEN
No.
(smiles)
But thanks for asking.

16 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT (1) 16

Ben, Christy, Natalie and Abby eat dinner. Abby's eyes dart between her parents. Ben and Christy share a look, then --

BEN
Listen. I think we should talk about--

NATALIE
No. We shouldn't.

ABBY
What?

NATALIE
He wants to talk about Tom. I don't.

CHRISTY
Nat--

NATALIE
It's depressing. And morbid. And macabre.
(to Ben, pointed)
How's that for vocabulary?

Natalie rises.

CHRISTY
Honey, sit down...

NATALIE
I'm not hungry.

Natalie goes to her room. Ben looks to Abby, about to speak --

ABBY
They don't know who did it. Do they?

CHRISTY
No. Not yet.

BEN
Monkey, whoever it was is probably far away by now.

ABBY
We're still doing the tree?

Ben blinks, thrown.

BEN
What?

16 CONTINUED: 16

ABBY
The Christmas tree? And dinner on Christmas day?

BEN
I don't think we should be talking about that right now.

Abby glares at her parents, then goes to her room. A beat.

CHRISTY
Good talk.

17 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT (1) 17

Ben does the paternal sweep, checking the doors are locked and lights are out. When he turns off the lamp, he sees a FEW REPORTERS still outside, waiting, watching. He spots a light on in Jess's house, can't help himself, dials, then --

JESS (O.S.)
Hi this is Jess--

TOM (O.S.)
And Tom...

JESS (O.S.)
(whispering)
Last name, goose--

TOM (O.S.)
Oh! Sorry... Tom Mullen--

JESS (O.S.)
We're not here right now--

TOM (O.S.)
Yes we are, mommy...

Jess giggles. So does Tom. His is infectious, takes us to --

FLASHBACK TO:

18 EXT. JESS'S HOUSE - THREE MONTHS AGO - DAY (FB1) 18

HEAR Tom giggling. A QUICK POP: Tom rides his tricycle for probably the first time. He's excited, happy. Ben, smiling, claps and cheers, urging Tom toward him, and we go back to --

19 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - RESUME PRESENT 19

Ben stands there, not smiling, still holding the phone, but there's no sound and he realizes it's recording. But Ben, caught off guard, can't leave a message. So he hangs up.

20 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT (1) 20

Ben moves through the house, shutting the other lights. He passes Natalie's room, looks inside her open doorway.

Natalie is at her desk, sitting in the dark, on her laptop, listening to music through earbuds. He watches her, grateful to have his kids safe. After a beat, Natalie spots Ben --

BEN
Bed.

She nods resignedly. Ben moves down the hall, passing Abby's doorway, sees she's asleep with the lamp on. He enters --

21 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - ABBY'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS 21

Ben steps inside the perfect preteen's room. Pastel. Fluffy. A few teen idol posters, but still enough stuffed animals to indicate Ben hasn't lost her yet. Abby's tossing and turning, and the blanket is twisted around her legs. He untangles her, then tucks her in properly. He gently brushes the hair off her face. She frowns lightly in her sleep.

BEN
(whispers)
It's okay, monkey.

He shuts her light. Looks at her a beat, then goes.

22 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT (1) 22

Christy, in a nightgown, not frumpy or sexy, is in bed. Ben climbs in, too. Christy rolls onto her side to face him.

CHRISTY
(a long beat)
What happened this morning?

BEN
I told you already.

CHRISTY
Everything?

Ben turns to look at her.

BEN
What are you asking me?

Christy regards him for a beat.

CHRISTY
Forget it.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED: 22

CHRISTY (CONT'D)
(can't help it)
I've always said you shouldn't go running on that trail--

BEN
Really... now?

CHRISTY
Someone else could have found him.

BEN
Well, it was me.

She rolls onto her back. Silence, then --

CHRISTY
Michael's all set for after Christmas.

BEN
I don't wanna talk about your brother.

CHRISTY
He already cleared out the guest rooms for the girls and me... He's happy to take us sooner--

BEN
No! Let's... just have one last Christmas together... as a family. We agreed.

Christy shuts her light and rolls over. Off Ben --

23 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - MORNING (2) 23

TIGHT on Ben. Running. Fast. But his surroundings don't change, because he's on a treadmill. Dave emerges from the guest house, in his underwear and an ill-fitting thermal. He scratches his balls, then spots Ben, looks confused --

DAVE
What the hell? You hate that thing.
(off Ben's look)
Right. No trail, no press. Sorry.

Ben gets off the treadmill, wipes his sweat with a towel.

BEN
You know the house I'm painting on Windygap -- I'm kinda behind. Wanna give me a hand?

We can actually see Dave mentally searching for an excuse.

23 CONTINUED: 23

BEN (CONT'D)
You're always crying about being strapped--

DAVE
Seriously, I'd love to help you out, but I'm in the middle of rewriting this song... Guy from Virgin says he's interested. Hopefully in the song and not me...

Ben, used to Dave being unreliable, manages a grin. Then, from the street, comes the sound of a commotion and LOUD VOICES. Dave and Ben exchange a look and Ben goes to --

24 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE/CHELSEA BAY DRIVE - MORNING (2) 24

Ben comes out front, sees a SQUAD CAR, down the street, blocking a GARBAGE TRUCK from entering the cul-de-sac. A small mob of angry RESIDENTS gesture angrily to UNIFORMS.

Mrs. Turner spots Ben from her doorway, checks the street. Seeing that the PRESS is safely distracted by the commotion, she hurries to him. She's every bit the doctor's wife, down to her Chanel flats and British accent.

BEN
Hey, Vanessa.

MRS. TURNER
Ben... so devastating. Tom was... he was quite like all of ours.

BEN
Yeah, he was.

Then, genuine, but tinged with neighborly gossip --

MRS. TURNER
What's Jess to do now? First she splits with Paul - not that that's necessarily bad, he surely wasn't a kind man. I suppose I shouldn't say that - but, Tom was all she had. How do you go on?

BEN
I honestly have no idea.

MRS. TURNER
And you... found him. You poor man...

Ben deflects the chat from himself, gestures to the crowd.

24 CONTINUED: 24

BEN
What's going on?

MRS TURNER
Police aren't allowing the garbage to be collected. Scuttlebut is they want to search all our bins.

BEN
So... let 'em. Who cares?

She looks at him quizzically --

MRS. TURNER
Really?
(off his shrug)
Yes, I suppose it's alright.

Ben notices Dr. Turner looking out the window from inside the house. Ben waves. The Doctor waves back hesitantly, then retreats further inside. Vanessa immediately explains --

MRS. TURNER (CONT'D)
He's put off by all the press. They really are quite the nuisance.

Ben nods, as the garbage truck pulls away amidst the protests.

25 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - MORNING (2) 25

Morning crazy, as the Garners get ready to go. Ben's in his painter's whites. Christy, in a suit, grabs her stuff --

CHRISTY
Hurry up girls!

Natalie enters, wearing a perilously short skirt. Abby follows, dressed normally. Christy isn't facing them.

NATALIE
(to Christy)
How do I look?

ABBY
Like a slut.

CHRISTY
Abby!

Ben, who has already seen the outfit, shoots Christy a look. She turns to see Natalie. Oh. But then she checks her watch.

CHRISTY (CONT'D)
Too late to change now.

25 CONTINUED: 25

BEN
You going with me or mom?

NATALIE
(as if to an idiot)
Uh... mom.

ABBY
I'll go with you, daddy.

CHRISTY
I'll drop both of you off.

And they exit to --

26 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS 26

The family moves off the porch toward the driveway, as --

BEN
I can pick them up.

CHRISTY
They can take the bus.

NATALIE
I am not taking the bus.

REPORTER #1 (O.S.)
Ben! Do the police have any leads?

He turns to see the PRESS moving en masse toward them --

PHOTOGRAPHER #1
Over here... Ben!!!

As the photographer FLASHES a shot of him --

BEN
Ignore them. I'll see you guys later.

Ben goes to give any of them a kiss. Only Abby lets him. The girls get into Christy's car, parked in front of Ben's which is closer to the street. Ben rushes to his SUV, as --

REPORTER #3
Mr. Garner, do you think Tom's killer is still around the neighborhood?

REPORTER #2
Ben! How well did you know--

Ben gets in, slams the door, drowning them out. He puts the car in reverse, turns to get a better view, sees:

26 CONTINUED: 26

UNIFORM #1, blocking his way, motioning for Ben to stop. Ben does, then rolls down his window as Uniform #1 approaches --

UNIFORM #1
Mr. Garner, Detective Cornell has a few more questions.

BEN
Sure. Of course.

Ben gets out of the car, sees UNIFORM #2 keeping the press back, but doesn't see Cornell. Christy stands by her car --

REPORTER #2
Is there a suspect yet?

BEN
Where is she... Detective Cornell?

UNIFORM #1
At the station. We'd like you to take a ride with us.

Ben shoots a look to Christy, who stares back. He is acutely aware of all the faces and cameras staring at him.

UNIFORM #1 (CONT'D)
Mr. Garner?

BEN
Yeah. Sure. I just need to--

Christy approaches, and he hands her his car keys, as --

CHRISTY
Call me...

Abby and Natalie watch out the back window of Christy's car, concerned. Ben walks, escorted by the officers to the SQUAD CAR. And the reporters, smelling blood, get frenzied --

REPORTER #2
Officers, where are you taking him?

REPORTER #3
Ben, what's going on?

Ben drowns them out as Uniform #2 helps him into the squad car, but the press continues their onslaught. As they drive off, Ben passes Kevin, standing on his lawn, staring. And we're off Ben, confused and scared --

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

27 INT. CMPD - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY (2) 27

Ben paces in a small, standard Interview Room. He looks lost. Finally, a COP opens the door, letting in DANIEL GOLD, 50s, warm, avuncular, suit and briefcase. Ben's surprised.

BEN
Danny? What are you doing here?

DANNY
Christy called.

BEN
But... I don't need a lawyer.

DANNY
Well... probably not this lawyer. You need someone who does more than divorces and title transfers.

BEN
But I'm just here to answer questions, right?

DANNY
They haven't indicated to me what they want.

Danny sits, gestures for Ben to as well. Cornell enters.

CORNELL
Mr. Garner. Mr. Gold - a bit out of your depth here, no?

DANNY
That would depend, Detective, on what it is we're doing here. My client has been very cooperative--

CORNELL
We'd like a DNA sample.

Ben stares at her, confused. Danny's look indicates he is, in fact, out of his depth. Then, as Ben realizes --

BEN
Mine?

Cornell just stares, gauging Ben's reaction. A beat, then --

27 CONTINUED: 27

BEN (CONT'D)
Wait... was Tom... molested?

Still, Cornell stares, silent. She NEVER shows her hand. Danny knows enough to shut this down.

DANNY
I'd like to confer with my client.

Cornell takes a beat, then exits. Ben's mind is racing --

BEN
Why won't she answer me?

DANNY
Because she doesn't have to.

BEN
I don't understand... why are they... what's happening here?

DANNY
You found the body. You were inside the crime scene. It's possible they want a comparison sample to eliminate you as a suspect. Or... they think you had something to do with it.

BEN
Wait... are you saying I'm a suspect?

As the gravity hits Ben hard, he becomes terrified.

BEN (CONT'D)
I just... I went for a run.
(beat)
What should I do?

DANNY
If they had any real evidence, they could just compel a DNA sample. They wouldn't ask.

BEN
But... I have nothing to hide.

DANNY
Cases like this, there's a lot of pressure to make an arrest - the higher ups, the media. The cops aren't looking out for you, so you have to tread carefully.

Danny pulls out a legal pad. And with a disconcerting edge --

27 CONTINUED: (2) 27

DANNY (CONT'D)
Now, I need you to tell me everything you told them.

And we're off Ben --

28 EXT. CMPD - DAY (2) 28

Ben waits as Christy's car pulls up. He quickly climbs in.

29 INT./EXT. CHRISTY'S CAR/STREET - DAY (2) 29

Christy drives and Ben dials his cell. As it rings --

BEN
I could've taken a cab.

CHRISTY
How would that look?

BEN
Like a guy taking a cab.
(into phone)
Hi, Mr. Arkin... Ben Garner. Sorry I didn't finish painting the... yeah, tomorrow. First thing. I promise.

He hangs up. Silence for a moment.

CHRISTY
I had people ready to sign an offer--

BEN
Well, I could have taken a cab.

CHRISTY
(unraveling a bit)
I didn't know if you were coming back! Why do they keep wanting to talk to you?!

BEN
They wanted a DNA sample.
(off her look: And?)
No. I didn't give them one.
(off her disapproval)
I didn't do anything!

CHRISTY
The harder you make it, the longer this'll go on--

BEN
Can we just... not?

29 CONTINUED: 29

And as they drive off in silence --

30 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (2) 30

Ben and Christy, hiding from the press, enter through the sliding glass doors. As they do, Ben notices...

Christy's brother MICHAEL BOOKER (40s) - always Michael, never Mike - sits at the table. The stick up his ass is apparent before he even speaks. Abby's with him, doing some craft project. The abject misery on her face disappears when she sees Ben. She jumps up and hugs him. Then --

MICHAEL
(cold)
Ben.

BEN
(colder)
Michael.

Ben looks at Christy. What the fuck is he doing here?

CHRISTY
Someone needed to watch the girls.

BEN
Natalie's almost seventeen--

MICHAEL
She's upset.

31 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - NATALIE'S ROOM - DAY (2) 31

The walls are collaged in cut-outs from fashion magazines, aspirational images of hotness and coolness, along with photos of Natalie and her friends. Natalie, in bed, faces the wall.

Ben, standing outside the slightly open door, KNOCKS.

NATALIE
Go away.

BEN
(entering)
Hey, angel. What's goin' on?

A beat as Natalie debates, then points her arm to the open laptop on her desk. She's letting Ben in... a little.

Ben goes to the laptop, looks at the screen.

ON SCREEN: Natalie's Facebook page. A message reads: "Your dad is a kid killer -- he should have killed U!" The caption is accompanied by a press photo of Ben, looking very angry.

31 CONTINUED: 31

Ben stares, stunned. His eyes move down to the other hate mail messages below. Ben sucks in air, trying not to react.

BEN (CONT'D)
Did you respond?

NATALIE
If I write back, those douches - it'll be like sharks with blood. I'm totally screwed.

Ben opens his mouth to comment on her language... but doesn't.

32 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (2) 32

Dave, at the counter with Natalie, works her laptop like a pro. Ben watches. Michael prepares two cups of tea.

DAVE
Gotta treat 'em like the little bitches they are. Slap 'em down. Isn't that right, Mikey? Tight-ass little bitches like a good slap?

Michael stares daggers at Dave - no love here.

MICHAEL
That's not a nice word.

NATALIE
It's what they are Uncle Michael.

DAVE
(hits enter)
There ya go. And for the cherry on top of the sundae...

Dave grabs her cell, pulls out the back of his pants and takes a photo of his ass. As he hands her the phone --

DAVE (CONT'D)
Upload this little masterpiece.

Natalie finally manages a smile. She takes her stuff, exits --

MICHAEL
For God's sake...

DAVE
Don't be jealous, Mikey. I'll get you a hard copy. Can even laminate it so it's easy to clean--

Incensed, Michael exits, carries the teas to the deck, joining Christy. Ben grins. Dave gestures to Mike and Christy, as --

32 CONTINUED: 32

DAVE (CONT'D)
I'm thinking the girls'll be at it for a while. Let's get outta here.

33 EXT. CATAWBA RIVER - DAY (2) 33

Ben and Dave sit, overlooking the river, drinking beer --

DAVE
A year from now, you'll look back at all this and laugh.
(off Ben)
Maybe not all... okay, none of it. But it's gotta blow over eventually.

BEN
Christy wants the girls.

DAVE
When did that happen?

BEN
Night we went out.

DAVE
That was the night before you--

BEN
Found Tom, yeah.

DAVE
(beat, then)
You know... you <u>can</u> tell me stuff...

BEN
I'm telling you now.

DAVE
I guess you and Christy have been tense for awhile now. I thought it was 'cause of me.

Ben shakes his head.

BEN
We've been married a long time.
(beat)
That cop thinks I did it.

DAVE
Nah. Just a cop being a cop. And that one clearly hasn't been laid in awhile. Want me to get in there? Do my thing?

33 CONTINUED: 33

Ben suppresses a laugh. Dave gets an idea --

DAVE (CONT'D)
Hey. Ashley - the chick from the fence - she's got a sister... it's kind of an ass of temptation/face of redemption situation, but maybe it could get your mind off everything?

Ben shakes his head, grins. Thank God for Dave.

34 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - TV ROOM - NIGHT (2) 34

Ben enters from the kitchen, sees Christy, Natalie and Abby, watching the news.

NEWS REPORTER (O.S.)
...Questioned Ben Garner, the man who allegedly found the body of murdered local boy Tom Mullen...

ON SCREEN: Ben goes with the police, looking, well, guilty.

NEWS REPORTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
The four-year-old boy was a regular visitor to the Garner household--

Christy senses Ben, then, half-hearted --

CHRISTY
Turn it off.

ON SCREEN: the NEWS REPORTER stands outside Ben's house.

NEWS REPORTER
The police have not yet charged Ben Garner, and they refuse to comment on whether or not he's a suspect--

Ben watches the screen; it just keeps getting worse. He looks up, sees the girls staring at him. The DOORBELL RINGS.

BEN
Your mother said turn it off!

Abby shuts it off, then, as Ben goes to the door --

CHRISTY
Don't answer it.

Ignoring her, Ben cautiously opens it to REVEAL: Kevin Haynes, holding a Pyrex, his grimace tinged with surprise.

KEVIN
I didn't expect you to be here.

34 CONTINUED: 34

Ben doesn't reply. Christy joins. Kevin hands her the dish.

KEVIN (CONT'D)
Hello Christine. Elaine made a lasagna, in case you and the girls...

CHRISTY
Thanks. We ate but... it'll freeze.

Kevin's eager to go but can't help himself. Then, to Christy --

KEVIN
Any... word from the police?

Christy shakes her head. Then, looking at Christy but intended for Ben --

KEVIN (CONT'D)
Anyone who hurts a child... I say kill 'em and let God sort it out.

Kevin turns to go. They shut the door.

BEN
I told you he hates me.

CHRISTY
You must've done something.

35 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (2) 35

Ben scrapes plates into the trash. The girls wash and wipe. Christy puts leftovers away in the fridge. Silence, then --

BEN
Has anyone gone to see Jess, yet?

Christy ignores him; Natalie looks away. Abby just stares.

BEN (CONT'D)
We used to watch him. He was here all the... What's wrong with you?

Ben throws cutlery loudly into the sink and storms out.

CHRISTY
Ben, leave her alone!!

36 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE/CHELSEA BAY DRIVE - NIGHT (2) 36

Ben exits his home, heads with purpose to Jess's. He forgot about the press until a FLASH illuminates his face and --

REPORTER #1
What'd the police say, Mr. Garner?

36 CONTINUED: 36

Ben ignores them, approaches Jess's front door, on which is a hand-made wreath - Tom's work. A beat, then he KNOCKS, as --

BEN
Jess...

INTERCUT WITH:

37 INT. JESS'S HOUSE - FOYER - NIGHT (2) 37

Inside, in a doorway, someone stands in the shadows.

RESUME BEN who continues to knock, as --

REPORTER #2
Ben? Why'd they take you to the station?

Ben KNOCKS again, louder. Then peeks in the nearest window. His POV: Through a gap in the curtains, a female figure hesitates in a doorway, then retreats out of sight...

RESUME INSIDE, where Jess hides in the shadows, indecisive, seemingly frightened, as Ben keeps knocking and calling out.

BEN (O.S.)
Jess? Jess!

But she leans against the wall.

RESUME BEN who goes to knock again, but stops as a ND SEDAN pulls up. Cornell gets out, carrying a briefcase, then --

CORNELL
Mr. Garner. Have a moment?

A CAMERA FLASHES. Cornell turns calmly to the press --

CORNELL (CONT'D)
I suggest you give me a wide berth.

And Cornell's reputation must precede her, because that's enough to make them back up.

38 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (2) 38

Ben and Cornell join Christy. She looks up, surprised.

CORNELL
Mrs. Garner.

Cornell opens her briefcase on the counter, as Abby quietly joins. Cornell then, silently, lays out four pictures.

38 CONTINUED: 38

CORNELL (CONT'D)
Do you have any of these?

Ben moves to see the photos are of black metal flashlights, including a Maglite. Recognition quickly crosses his face. He looks to Christy, willing her to stay silent, but she's focused on the photos. Then, pointing to the Maglite --

CHRISTY
Didn't we get you a kit with one like this? For your birthday... two, three years ago?

Ben looks at her, then to Cornell, whose eyes are sparkling.

39 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT (2) 39

Ben, Cornell and Christy walk toward his SUV.

BEN
Every painter has one.

CORNELL
I imagine many people do.

Ben opens the back of his SUV, pulls out a tool kit, opens it to reveal half a dozen spots for tools cut out of hard black foam. Only one spot is empty... shaped like a Maglite.

Ben freezes, shocked. Cornell doesn't seem surprised.

BEN
I don't know... where it went.

And Cornell, pointed and almost smiling, says --

CORNELL
I'm sure it'll turn up.

Off Ben, what the fuck?

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

40 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - PRE-DAWN (3) 40

Christy's in bed next to Ben, tossing and turning. They're both awake, and they both know it, but they're silent, until --

BEN
How could you do that to me?

She sits up, angry.

CHRISTY
I told the truth...

BEN
You know how many Maglites there must be in this city--

CHRISTY
But yours is missing. I've told you a thousand times to lock the car--

BEN
Yes Christy. You're right. You are always right. If I hadn't run on the trail... if I had locked the car... The only mistake you've ever made is marrying me.

CHRISTY
That's not the problem, Ben.

BEN
No... the problem is that a little boy who never did anything to anyone... a boy that we loved, is dead. And I'm a suspect in his murder. DO YOU GET THAT?

CHRISTY
YES.

BEN
I didn't do it!

CHRISTY
I get that, too. What I don't get is why that detective is looking for a flashlight?

Ben looks at her. Christy finally realizes. Then, horrified --

40 CONTINUED: 40

CHRISTY (CONT'D)
Oh God... that's what killed him.

A wave of emotion washes over her. The image of little Tom being hit. And then, she starts to cry. A beat --

CHRISTY (CONT'D)
You know what's awful? I keep thanking God that it wasn't...

BEN
Our kid. I know.

Ben takes her hand and she lets him. And for just a moment, they're a couple united. But then she pulls back her hand.

41 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING (3) 41

Ben, unable to get back to sleep, pours coffee as he looks at the microwave clock, 5:53 AM. He's startled by a KNOCK at the window, turns to see Cornell, staring back.

42 EXT. WOODS TRAIL - MORNING (3) 42

Ben walks unhappily beside Cornell, retracing his steps; another DETECTIVE records them. Two UNIFORMS wait nearby.

BEN
He was right there.

Cornell points a little further down.

CORNELL
Not there?

BEN
All looks kinda the same in the dark.

CORNELL
But you know the trail so well...

Ben looks at her, was that sarcasm? But before he can reply --

CORNELL (CONT'D)
So you didn't have a flashlight?

In spite of her blank face, Ben knows he's being toyed with.

BEN
No.

CORNELL
When was the last time you saw yours?

42 CONTINUED: 42

BEN
I have no idea.

CORNELL
Vitamin E.

BEN
What?

CORNELL
They say it helps with memory.
(off his look)
You don't recall when you got home... when you last saw your flashlight.

BEN
Is this a game to you?

CORNELL
Hardly. Did you have a phone?

BEN
No. Did you have fun looking through my trash?

CORNELL
(ignoring)
You tried calling Jessica Mullen...
(checks notes)
...Twice in the last two days.

BEN
I have every right to.

CORNELL
Of course you do.

BEN
She lost her child... Obviously you're not a parent.

Cornell flinches but it's barely noticeable. Ben clocks it --

BEN (CONT'D)
Or just not a good one.
(off nothing)
You do realize that by focusing all your time and energy on me, you're letting the actual killer get away?

Cornell takes a long beat, then --

CORNELL
I'm curious why you won't give us a DNA sample.

42 CONTINUED: (2) 42

Ben glares, then walks out of the woods. Cornell follows.

43 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY (3) 43

Ben, with Cornell following, walks onto his cul-de-sac to see: a parked FORENSICS VEHICLE, TWO SQUAD CARS, an ND SEDAN and a few CSIs entering and exiting his home, carrying kits. He turns to look at her --

BEN
What the hell?

She doesn't respond. Nor does she speed up as he runs into --

44 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - DAY (3) 44

Ben enters, and is stunned to see UNIFORMS and more CSIs rummaging through EVERYTHING, making a mess. He runs into --

45 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 45

Ben finds a FEMALE DETECTIVE questioning Natalie at the table. Christy stands nearby with Abby, watching the chaos, anger all over her face. When she spots Ben, she heads out, as --

CHRISTY
I'm late for work. We need milk.
(then, leaving)
I told the girls they could just stay home today.

Cornell enters, passing Christy exiting.

CORNELL
Mrs. Garner.

Christy shoots her a hateful look, exits. Abby goes to Ben.

ABBY
Dad--

BEN
(gentle)
Wait here, okay?

Furious, he blocks Cornell's path. They're inches apart. A UNI approaches, protective, but Cornell indicates she's fine.

BEN (CONT'D)
Do you have a search warrant?

CORNELL
We got permission from your wife.

Ben digests that, then, cold and quiet --

45 CONTINUED: 45

BEN
Arrest me. If you think I did it, arrest me.

Ben stares at Cornell, his rage building. But neither his proximity nor his pugilistic stance give her the least bit of pause. She serenely stands her ground. And now he gets louder, yelling in her face --

BEN (CONT'D)
Then get the hell out of my house.

She doesn't react. After a beat, Cornell gestures to her people to pack it up, but Ben knows, as do we, that she'll be back. We're off Ben, the noose tightening.

46 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/TV ROOM - DAY (3) 46

Abby unloads the dishwasher. In the TV room, Natalie, wearing too little, as usual, lies on the couch watching TV. Ben is cleaning up the cops' mess while talking into his cell.

BEN (into phone)
Yes, Mr. Arkin, I'm so sorry. I was... I'll top-coat it tomorrow and start the bedrooms. I'm sorry...

He hangs up, agitated, and moves to the TV room. ON SCREEN: REPORTER #2 interviews Elaine Haynes about the Mullen case.

ELAINE
...he's always seemed like a lovely man...

REPORTER #2
Well, how well do any of us really know our neighbors?

When they cut back to Elaine, looking worried, that's all Ben can take. He goes to the TV, shuts it off.

NATALIE
Seriously? Again?

BEN
Haven't you got anything else to do?

NATALIE
No. Actually.

DOORBELL rings. He storms to the door, flings it open, as --

BEN
What the HELL--!

46 CONTINUED: 46

On the stoop stands a young, startled DELIVERY MAN; behind him is a large box with a plastic Christmas tree inside.

DELIVERY MAN
Um... your Christmas tree?

Off Ben, shit.

47 INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - AISLE - DAY (3) 47

Gaudy Christmas decorations hang above the aisles. Ben carries a half-gallon of milk, Abby by his side.

ABBY
M&M's?

BEN
The snack size.

ABBY
What if you want some?

Off his grin, she goes for the M&M's. Ben passes a display of greeting cards. He peruses them, picks a sympathy card. Then he heads up to the register, where Abby stands with a pound bag of M&M's. He glances up at the clerk, NELSON (20s).

BEN
How are you, Nelson?

Nelson nods, forces a smile, but he's clearly uncomfortable.

BEN (CONT'D)
You open on Christmas?

Nelson, looking down, gestures to a sign behind him --

NELSON
Open seven days. Twenty-four hours.

Ben looks at the sign, spots a small TV on a bracket above. That explains it. Nelson finishes ringing them up.

NELSON (CONT'D)
Eight-fifty.

Ben hands him a ten, ushers Abby out.

NELSON (CONT'D)
Your change?

BEN
Keep it.

48 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - DAY (3) 48

Ben and Abby pull up to the usual - REPORTERS, CAMERAMEN - preparing for the assault. The minute they exit the car, a camera FLASHES. Ben holds Abby close, rushing to the house --

REPORTER #2
Mr. Garner, why are you refusing to give the police a DNA sample?

Ben and Abby push through the throng. She's terrified.

REPORTER #1
What are you hiding, Mr. Garner?

REPORTER #2
Ben, did you kill Tom?

Ben turns, but before he can respond, Abby snaps loudly --

ABBY
Stop it! Leave us alone!

Ben looks at his scared, upset daughter. Threshold reached, he changes his mind and bundles her back into the truck...

49 INT. CMPD - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY (3) 49

Ben sits in a chair, while a LAB TECH stands there with a swab. Cornell is present. Only the Tech speaks.

LAB TECH
Open your mouth, please.
(swabs it, then)
One more time.

As the Tech gets another swab, Ben's eyes lock on Cornell's.

50 INT. CMPD - CORRIDOR - DAY (3) 50

Abby sits alone, arms folded across her chest. When Ben exits the doorway nearby, she stands.

BEN
Let's go, monkey.

Ben and Abby leave down the hall. After a beat, Cornell comes from the doorway, watches them, inscrutable.

51 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (3) 51

Ben and Christy clear the table, fighting, but it's modulated.

BEN
What were you thinking?

51 CONTINUED: 51

CHRISTY
A police officer comes to the door and asks me to look around. Next thing I know there's ten of them and--

BEN
Why didn't you just say no?

CHRISTY
I didn't see the harm.

The sounds of cupboards BANGING deeper in the house.

NATALIE (O.S.)
Maybe make more noise!

ABBY (O.S.)
I'm looking for something!

Christy looks at Ben - deal with that.

BEN
Abby?

Abby enters. And with 12-year-old frustration --

ABBY
I can't find the decorations.

52 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT (3) 52

The Garner family trims the tree. CHRISTMAS CAROLS play softly. The lights are already up, and Abby's totally into it, handing Ben ornaments to hook onto the branches. He's trying to be enthusiastic. Natalie texts on her phone. Christy participates the bare minimum.

ABBY
...I did one at Maggie Flint's house. It looks pretty as a centerpiece with the gumdrops and Nat could help--

NATALIE
Not a chance--

ABBY
...And they sell the kit at Macy's and we can eat it for dessert--

CHRISTY
Sounds great. I love gingerbread.

But as she says it, a wave of emotion passes over her. The desperate tableaux of a family clinging to what remains, "celebrating" their last Christmas together. It's too much.

52 CONTINUED: 52

So before she loses it, she exits. Natalie's PHONE RINGS. She tenses. Ben looks to see who's calling, but she hides it from him, picks up quickly.

NATALIE
(into phone)
Hey. Lemme just get to my room.

Ben gives her a look, but she's already gone. Alone, Abby looks at Ben, upset by the state of her family.

BEN
It's okay... Here.

He pulls a star from a box of decorations, hands it to her and lifts her up. She places it proudly atop the tree.

BEN (CONT'D)
Nice.

Ben puts her back down. A beat, then Abby looks at him.

ABBY
I know you didn't do it.

BEN
Thanks... monkey.

He needed that. He hugs her tight, struggling to stay composed. And she hugs back, for dear life. Then --

BEN (CONT'D)
Wanna light this sucker?

Abby reaches down, flips the switch. The tree lights up and for just a moment, all is right with the world. And they sit together and stare at the tree, in silence.

53 EXT. CHELSEA BAY DRIVE - EARLY MORNING (5) 53

Just after dawn. It's quiet. All's still.

54 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - EARLY MORNING (5) 54

Ben exits his house, feeling a little better knowing at least Abby believes he's innocent. He tucks his key into his new running shoe, is about to run, when he stops short, staring.

Ben's POV: On his white picket fence is painted in blood red: "CHILD KILLER." And we...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

55 EXT. BEN'S HOUSE - MORNING (4) 55

ON Ben's new sneakers as RED LIQUID drips onto them. PAN UP to see he's got a bucket and is sweating profusely as he SCRUBS hard to remove the painted words. But in the vein of Out Damn Spot, it doesn't seem to make a dent.

Christy, barely awake, opens the front door, looks at him.

CHRISTY
What are you doing?

Ben continues to scrub furiously as --

BEN
Go back inside.

56 EXT. WOODS TRAIL - MORNING (4) 56

Ben, in his red paint stained sneakers RUNS with fierce intensity. He's a man searching for an outlet for his pain, his rage, his broken heart. As he pants and sweats, we know what he's thinking about. Tom. Christy. Natalie. Abby. Jess. Cornell. He can't stop his racing mind, so he just runs, harder.

57 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING (4) 57

Ben chugs some water. Through the screen door to the deck, he can hear Natalie on the phone.

NATALIE
(into phone, quietly)
Why would I tell anyone? Yeah...

Ben gets closer, listens, as --

NATALIE (CONT'D)
(into phone, quietly)
There's press outside. The police are showing up every ten seconds... They're watching me like a hawk, I can't just... yeah. Okay. Bye.

She hangs up, tense. She enters, starts at Ben being there.

BEN
You okay?

She's about to be snarky, but then, just nods.

57 CONTINUED: 57

BEN (CONT'D)
Who were you talking to?

It takes a trained eye to know she's lying. Ben's trained.

NATALIE
Missy's boyfriend is a douche and she's all a mess about it.

The lie is worse than the language. But he lets both go.

BEN
What about you?
(off her look)
Facebook, the press... you alright?

NATALIE
I'm fine.

BEN
I'm just worried about you.

And for once she doesn't sass him. She means this --

NATALIE
I know. I'm really fine.

58 INT. WINDYGAP ESTATE - MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING (4) 58

Ben paints a bedroom right out of "Town & Country." Floor to ceiling windows offer triple exposure. NATHANIEL ARKIN, (40), moneyed, classy, enters. Ben puts down the roller.

BEN
Mr. Arkin... hi.

ARKIN
Hello, Ben.

BEN
I'm sorry about all the delays this week. It's been kind of crazy--

ARKIN
It's fine. How much do I owe you?

BEN
I haven't finished.

ARKIN
Yes. How much for the work so far?

BEN
But... there's still half the house...

58 CONTINUED: 58

Arkin pulls out his checkbook, his mind clearly made up.

BEN (CONT'D)
Hell of a way to negotiate a discount.

59 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (4) 59

Natalie and Abby sit at the table. Christy's in a suit, about to go, when Ben enters. He didn't expect to see her.

CHRISTY
Why are you back?

BEN
What?

CHRISTY
I thought you went to work.

Ben takes a beat. He can't deal right now, so...

BEN
Mr. Arkin had visitors... said to come back next week.

It's not clear if she believes him, but --

CHRISTY
I'm not sure when I'll be home.

She kisses the girls. Not Ben. Abby takes that in. Christy hands Natalie a hundred dollars, as --

CHRISTY (CONT'D)
Christmas shopping today?

NATALIE
Yes.

CHRISTY
That's for both of you.

Natalie rolls her eyes. No sooner is Christy gone, then... the sliding door opens and Dave enters.

DAVE
Who wants pancakes?

ABBY
Are you making them?

NATALIE
(to Abby)
Are you insane? He can barely dress himself.
(MORE)

59 CONTINUED: 59

NATALIE (CONT'D)
(to Dave)
Waffles...

ABBY
I don't want to go out.

BEN
Come on... it'll be fun. I have some work stuff to do, but after breakfast, Dave can take you to get a nice present for your mom.

Dave's about to make an excuse, but Ben stares, pleading. Dave nods okay. As the girls head out, Dave stands there. Ben realizes, hands Dave a twenty. Dave looks at Ben, seriously? Ben holds open his empty wallet for Dave to see.

DAVE
Oh... sorry. Back in a few hours.

Ben nods, thanks. As he and the girls go, Ben hears --

NATALIE (O.S.)
I'm driving.

DAVE (O.S.)
Your father will castrate me.

NATALIE (O.S.)
Hasn't my mother already done that?

The door slams, then Ben makes more coffee. As it brews, he grabs his book of clients, dials. Then, into the phone--

BEN
Mrs. Butters, Ben Garner. Just calling to see if you still want the Trumpe l'oeil in the foyer... okay...

IN A SERIES OF QUICK CUTS:

60 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (4) 60

Ben's seated, mid-plea with another customer --

BEN
But I've got a special going for the holidays, Mr. Halotek. Interiors, exteriors... everything really...

61 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (4) 61

Ben stands. He's beyond the middle of the book, trying again.

61 CONTINUED: 61

BEN
How about the back porch, Mrs. McCreary? It's been a few years...

62 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY (4) 62

Ben's now near the end of his book of clients. It's hard to stay positive, or even pretend. He speaks into the phone --

BEN
Yes, I'm looking for Mr. Williams... no, this is Ben Garner, the house--

CLICK. And they hang up on him. Ben stares at the phone.

BEN (CONT'D)
Screw you!

He's pissed and dejected. He goes to pour his HOT coffee, as his CELL RINGS. He picks up, hopeful --

BEN (CONT'D)
Ben Garner.

CORNELL (O.S.)
Mr. Garner. Andrea Cornell.

Ben burns himself with the hot coffee, endures the pain, as --

BEN
What do you want?

CORNELL (O.S.)
Just checking in. Wanted to see if you were alright.

And now Ben loses it on her. Actually yelling.

BEN
I. Didn't. Do. Anything!!

CORNELL (O.S.)
(perfectly calm)
No one said you did.

BEN
You...

It takes all his restraint not to say: BITCH.

BEN (CONT'D)
I won't let you do this to me!!

CORNELL (O.S.)
Do what?

62 CONTINUED: 62

BEN
Leave me the hell alone!!!

He hangs up, SLAMS the phone on the counter. It takes a minute for Ben to calm down, but then he remembers his pain. He flips open the freezer, grabs an ice-pack and puts it on his burnt hand. He SLAMS the freezer, and a photo, attached by magnet, FALLS to the floor. Ben reaches for it, sees:

It's of Tom, Natalie and Abby, smiling, eating cotton candy.

FLASHBACK TO:

63 INT. ARCADE - BUMPER CARS - 4 MONTHS AGO - DAY (FB2) 63

JOYFUL SCREAMS and LAUGHTER. A crowded arcade. We MOVE with Ben, driving his and Abby's BUMPER CAR. Natalie drives Dave. And Jess drives Tom, who's devouring a COTTON CANDY, having a blast, swaying with each bump. Christy's absent.

Ben BUMPS Jess and Tom's car. Jess laughs. But Tom drops his cotton candy, gets sad. Jess, noticing --

JESS
Oh, muffin, don't worry. I'll get you another one.

Ben, seeing Tom's upset, points to the cotton candy, shouts --

BEN
Dave!

Dave, realizing he's closer to the cotton candy, mobilizes --

DAVE
Nat... get me over there.

She looks at him, he gestures - do it. So she rides past the cotton candy on the ground and Dave swiftly picks it up.

DAVE (CONT'D)
To the little man... pronto, driver.

Dave eats off the outer, dirty layer.

NATALIE
You are so gross.

She drives, gets the car inches from Jess. Dave gives Tom his cotton candy. And as Tom's smile reappears and he eats --

JESS
Thank you!
(then, to Tom)
Should we get 'em back?

63 CONTINUED: 63

Tom nods with glee. Jess SLAMS her car into Ben and Abby. Tom giggles.

TOM
We got you!!!

Abby looks to Ben, grins. It's on. He smiles back, starts to chase Jess and Tom. A day you wish could go on forever...

64 INT. BEN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - RESUME PRESENT 64

Ben's eyes are locked on the photo, pained.

65 EXT. WOODS TRAIL - DAY (4) 65

Ben walks the narrow, dry trail. Insects and birds again do their thing. The only other noise is the crackling of leaves and branches as Ben steps on them. He carries the sympathy card. Peaceful turns to creepy when he reaches the broken police tape. He stops, sees it's no longer a crime scene, though remnants remain. Ben's POV:

The spot where he found Tom is now completely covered: stuffed animals, bouquets of flowers, store bought cards, as well as handmade. Messages crafted on construction paper and oaktag: "We miss you Tommy." "Taken too soon." "We love you."

Ben stares, his emotions rising, until he hears a SOUND. He turns to see someone's coming. He freezes, unsure what to do. As the figure gets close, Ben can only tell it's a woman. He knows running away would just make him look guilty, so he decides to walk toward her. As they get closer, Ben realizes it's Jess Mullen. And the way she walks with purpose, eyes fixed on Ben, we get the sense she knew he was here. Finally, they're upon each other. Jess looks empty, frail, exhausted.

Ben braces himself for the horrific accusations to come. He opens his mouth preemptively, but can't find the words, then --

JESS
I believe you.

BEN
(stunned)
Wh... why?

JESS
Because I know who did it.

Off Ben, we --

FADE OUT:

END OF SHOW