

THE RED ZONE

Written by

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**SUPERIMPOSE OVER BLACK:**

THE RED ZONE: 1. THE LAST TWENTY YARDS OF THE FOOTBALL FIELD  
A TEAM MUST CROSS BEFORE SCORING A TOUCHDOWN.

2. THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF CLASSES AT A  
UNIVERSITY CAMPUS, DURING WHICH TIME THE  
MAJORITY OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS OCCUR.

FADE IN:

**INT. FRAT HOUSE - NIGHT**

A raucous college house party. Red cups. Blaring dubstep.  
Football players dance with their fans, towering over them.

Grey jerseys everywhere: "GILEAD UNIVERSITY GREY WOLVES."

SUPERIMPOSE: "AUGUST."

**ZEKE CARVER** -- 20, tall, white, with quarterback good looks --  
dances with a couple girls. A good ol' boy with raven hair,  
the kind of guy dads want for a son-in-law.

From across the room, **LEAH ANDERSON** -- 18, the epitome of  
Basic Southern: plaid button-up, daisy dukes, blonde --  
stares at Zeke. There's a lusting fire in her eyes.

**ABBY GREEN** -- 18 and also Basic Southern -- pulls Leah aside,  
a little concerned.

ABBY

You don't have to do this.

Zeke's friend, **PAUL WHITTAKER** joins him. He's 19, shorter,  
built like a linebacker, black. He catches Leah staring at  
Zeke, nudges him.

They lock eyes. There's fire there.

LEAH

I want to.

She takes a deep breath, squeezes Abby's hand for support.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Wish me luck.

Leah walks off.

Abby hangs back, watches Leah speak to Zeke and Paul. As the  
music picks up, Leah grinds up on Zeke.

**EXT. VERONA APARTMENTS - NIGHT**

A red Dodge Charger parks in front of a three-story lime-green apartment building. Zeke helps Leah out of the car, and Paul watches him nearly carry her into the building.

**EXT. BLEEKER DORMITORY - DAWN**

Undisturbed dewdrops sparkle in the early morning light.

The Charger rips through the silence as it approaches a college campus and parks next to a brick building.

Leah emerges from the car, shivering in her button-up and daisy dukes. She takes one last look at Zeke in the driver's seat before closing the door. No words.

Zeke drives off, and Leah's alone on the curb. She waits for a long moment, not crying, not distraught. Her face is completely empty -- she could be thinking anything.

Leah pulls out her phone, taps out a text message.

**INT. STATION WAGON - DAWN**

Leah scrolls into the window of a brown station wagon that pulls up beside her. Leah collapses into the passenger seat of Abby's car, stares at her friend for a long beat.

She finally breaks down. She covers her face and sobs. Horrible, heaving wails.

Abby puts a hand on her back, but Leah recoils from the touch, tensed up like a wounded animal.

Abby hangs her head.

ABBY

I told you.

She drives away from the dorm building.

**INT. EXAM ROOM - DAY**

Leah's bare feet stand on a large sheet of butcher paper. Her shorts drop down to her ankles.

An **S.A.N.E. NURSE** (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) -- 40s, wearing scrubs, face mask and gloves -- lays the shorts next to Leah's other clothes on an evidence table.

Sobbing and shaking, Leah removes her bra, now totally nude.

**SERIES OF SHOTS:**

- A few stray hairs fall to the butcher paper at her feet. The nurse collects them with tweezers.

- The nurse scrapes Leah's fingernails.

- The nurse swabs Leah's genitals as she sits in stirrups.

- The nurse combs through Leah's pubic hair for fibers and foreign hair.

- The nurse navigates a colposcope toward Leah's genitals -- a large camera on an articulated arm.

- The nurse takes photos of Leah's body with a handheld camera, from every angle. CLICK. CLICK. CLICK. CLICK.

All the while, Leah can't control her sobs -- this exam might be worse than sexual assault itself.

**INT. SHERIFF CHAPPELL'S OFFICE - NIGHT**

Leah sits across from **SHERIFF JIM CHAPPELL** -- 50s, portly, who takes care of things at his own pace.

While the Sheriff types up Leah's report M.O.S., Leah's anguished sobbing continues over this scene.

FADE TO BLACK.

**TITLE CARD: "THREE MONTHS LATER"**

FADE IN:

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - GARY'S OFFICE - DAY**

CLOSE on a computer screen, with a large image of the puppet leader of Burma, a well-composed Southeast Asian woman in her fifties.

A large headline obscures her face:

"AANG SAN SUU KYI: POWERLESS WOMAN"

We scroll down past beautifully formatted text, block-quotes, interactive imagery and layers of photographs all moving with an elegant parallax effect.

It's a beautifully coded and formatted article, longer and more in-depth than the average person has time to read during their morning social media fix.

KAREN (O.S.)  
So? What do you think?

PULL BACK to reveal **KAREN CUNNINGHAM**, 34, a born fighter and fierce intellectual, across the desk from **GARY CHOI**, 60s, with a calm, unruffled cynicism after all these years.

GARY  
I got one more note. I know I'm not supposed to, and Liam's gotta re-code the whole thing, and blah blah blah. Just humor me.

Karen crosses her arms while Gary scrolls down, searching for the right part of the article.

GARY (CONT'D)  
Yeah, this whole thing about her Buddhism and everything -- cut that part.

KAREN  
But that humanizes her.

GARY  
And you gotta put "genocide" or "genocidal" or something in the title.

KAREN  
No, I thought we resolved this. It's not a portrait of a villain.

GARY  
If we don't, we won't get any --

Karen points a threatening finger in Gary's face.

KAREN  
Don't say it, Gary. Don't you dare.

GARY  
Clicks.

KAREN  
Sensationalism.

GARY  
Whatever gets people to click. The truth is in the content of the article.

KAREN

Not when you're making me boil  
everybody down into cartoon  
villains. I can't even mention that  
she's a Buddhist ironically?

GARY

Wait, so she's not really a  
Buddhist?

Karen groans.

KAREN

Our job is to tell the truth, no  
matter how boring it is.

GARY

In theory.

KAREN

When is it ever better to tell a  
lie than it is the truth?

Off Gary.

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - BULLPEN - DAY**

Karen walks through the busy bullpen, bustling with dozens of  
newspeople, assistants, interns, and other staff.

Across the main wall, the logo of The Messenger is emblazoned  
in large, sans-serif type.

Karen crosses the floor to the office kitchen:

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - KITCHEN - DAY**

The only person in the well-stocked kitchen is **DANA REED** --  
24, a young woman and above-average drinking buddy, whom  
Karen very obviously hopes to claim as her protege.

KAREN

I didn't ask you to make me any  
coffee.

Dana nods toward the mug she's attending to.

DANA

I know. This is for Tom.

KAREN

Tom?

DANA  
Is someone jealous?

KAREN  
Tom's going to drown you in  
paperwork.

DANA  
The other interns don't seem to  
mind.

KAREN  
Just trust me, you don't want him  
to know you're competent.

While Dana's not looking, Karen grabs a bunch of sweetener  
packets and opens them.

DANA  
How'd the meeting go?

KAREN  
I don't want to talk about it.

DANA  
He cut out that part about her  
being a Buddhist, didn't he?

KAREN  
I said I don't want to talk about  
it, Dana.

DANA  
Don't worry. Everybody here knows  
you're still a crazy truth Nazi.

Another **MESSENGER REPORTER**, 40s, walks into the office to  
grab something out of the fridge.

KAREN  
I am not a truth Nazi.

MESSENGER REPORTER  
You kind of are, Karen.

The reporter exits with a sandwich from the fridge.

KAREN  
What does that even mean?

DANA

When you found out Carlo's GPA was off by a tenth of a point on his resume, you could have just fired him in private, but you didn't.

KAREN

I taught him a lesson.

DANA

You humiliated him in front of all the other interns.

KAREN

Taught them a lesson, too.

While Dana's busy grabbing creamer out of the fridge, Karen empties the sweetener packets into Dana's coffee.

DANA

And you wonder why they all started working for Tom.

KAREN

Probably because all of them lied on their resumes too.

DANA

As if you don't have any skeletons in the closet.

KAREN

Guilty as charged. I sabotaged your coffee.

Dana takes a sip of it. Grimaces.

DANA

Ew, why?

KAREN

Dana, I'm telling you, give Tom a hand and he'll take your whole arm.

DANA

(mock shock)

Are you encouraging me to... to lie to him?

KAREN

Did he tell you if he wanted sugar or sweetener?

Dana shakes her head, chuckling.

DANA

Lincoln must be turning over in his  
grave.

She heads out of the kitchen, and Karen remains. Her attention shifts to a TV mounted near the ceiling, playing a news story on CNN, with the headline:

"HEISMAN FRONTRUNNER ACCUSED OF SEXUAL ASSAULT"

ON TV: a woman in her 40s, corporate pantsuit, speaks at a podium while cameras flash in her face. The lower third identifies her as the **BEATRICE CITY ATTORNEY**.

BEATRICE CITY ATTORNEY (ON TV)

-- pains them to suffer what amounts to a cover-up by their own sheriff's department. Law enforcement didn't interview the accused, didn't collect his DNA for months, threatened my client, and threatened to make the case a public spectacle.

GARY (V.O.)

(prelap)

You heard about this thing with Zeke Carver?

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - GARY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Karen sits across from Gary, nods.

KAREN

Yeah, the rape thing?

GARY

The victim's lawyer says the sheriff's working for the school.

KAREN

What's the perp saying?

GARY

His lawyer's not letting him talk at all. Law enforcement only got his DNA to test yesterday.

Karen snorts.

GARY (CONT'D)

I know, right? What do you think?

He looks at her expectantly. She's confused for a moment, and then it hits her.

KAREN

What? No way. I've been working on those Russian leaks for a month!

GARY

Karen, you need to do a big story. Just once.

KAREN

I just did a feature on the Rohingya Genocide.

GARY

Bigger than that.

KAREN

How the heck is this bigger than that? There's a college football rape case every other week.

Gary turns on a TV mounted on his office wall. On TV is a **SPORTS CENTER ANCHOR** on ESPN:

SPORTS CENTER ANCHOR (ON TV)

-- Carver's attorney claims an eyewitness present during the alleged rape can corroborate Carver's story--

KAREN

None of these stories ever make it past ESPN.

Gary changes the channel to an **NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT**.

NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT (ON TV)

-- accusations have jeopardized Gilead University's hopes of its first-ever national championship --

Gary flips to a **FOX NEWS ANCHOR**:

FOX NEWS ANCHOR (ON TV)

-- major conference contract at stake. If the Grey Wolves win out, it could earn the school hundreds of millions over the coming --

KAREN

Ok, ok, I get it.

GARY

And it's trending on Twitter.

She grabs the remote and turns off the TV.

GARY (CONT'D)

Imagine if somebody told you Tim  
Tebow was a rapist.

That hits home for Karen. But she shakes her head.

KAREN

Still, though, I don't do crime or  
human interest. I'm in politics.

GARY

And this piece is going to be about  
college sexual assault writ large.  
Especially those committed by  
student-athletes. And how the Zeke  
Carver case epitomizes everything  
that's wrong with how we handle  
these cases.

Karen considers.

KAREN

I'll need to do more research  
beyond just this case.

GARY

Pick an intern. Any intern.

Karen's running out of excuses.

GARY (CONT'D)

You don't even need to prove he did  
it or anything.

Gary hands her the case file. Karen flips through it.

KAREN

Where's this?

GARY

Beatrice, Alabama. Tiny little  
town.

KAREN

How many churches per capita?

GARY

They're in competition with the number of fans of this football team. I think the churches are winning.

Karen flips to the Sheriff's report that Leah filed in August. All names have been blacked out.

KAREN

Ok, we got a timeline, good...

Karen flips to a news article.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Carver's attorney says his client 'committed no wrongdoing.' What does that mean?

GARY

It means he's expecting the DNA tests to match Carver.

Karen keeps flipping through newspaper clippings, magazine cutouts, and internet printouts of reports and photos.

KAREN

So he's going to argue that they did have sex, but it was consensual?

GARY

Pretty standard legal defense.

Karen studies some photos of Zeke, his attorney, Leah, Chappell, Paul, and even Abby.

KAREN

Clear eyes, full hearts, am I right?

Gary chuckles.

One photo catches Karen's eye:

A house covered in toilet paper and rotten vegetables, surrounded by jersey-clad protesters and news crews at the edge of the white picket fence.

Looking out of a crack in the window curtains is a sliver of Leah's face. Trapped inside her house, dead in the eyes.

**FLASHBACK: in a cheerfully decorated apartment, water seeps out from underneath a bathroom door.**

Karen blinks away the image -- clearly affected by it. We'll find out what it means in time.

GARY

There's one more thing. I want you to get the vic on camera.

KAREN

What? To do what with?

GARY

To build a format around it. She hasn't done any other interviews, so if we can be exclusive, that's our hook. Come for the video, stay for the text.

Karen shakes her head, trying to find the right rebuttal.

KAREN

Most folks don't watch video when it's attached to a text article.

GARY

That's because those articles usually just paraphrase the video. We're not going to do that.

KAREN

She's not gonna want a camera shoved in her face.

GARY

She's going to want an ally.

Karen stares at the photograph of Leah, still on the fence.

#### **INT. KAREN'S STUDIO APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Karen sits on a mattress on the floor of her dingy, claustrophobic studio apartment near piles of dusty moving boxes, never unpacked.

She has the photo of Leah up on her laptop, part of a news article. She scrolls down to the comments:

"IF ZEKE IS A RAPIST THEN PIGS CAN FLY. SMH"

Karen picks up her phone, dials a call. Keeps reading:

"THIS GIRL'S A FUCKING SLUT. TRUST ME, I KNOW HER. SHE'S RUINING ZEKE'S LIFE AND SHE'S THE VICTIM? FUCK THAT."

Karen listens to the phone ring.

"CONVENIENT TIMING THAT THIS GIRL ACCUSES HIM RIGHT WHEN GILEAD'S ABOUT TO GET INTO THE PLAYOFFS."

Karen hears something on the phone.

KAREN  
(into phone)  
Hey, it's Karen. I'll do it.

**EXT. GILEAD FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY**

The small stadium has no jumbotron, and seats a mere twenty-thousand, but it's packed to the gills with the grey-clad home crowd. They live for college football.

The music blaring from the loudspeakers is a country punk cover of 99 Problems But a Bitch Ain't One.

**ON THE FIELD**

The Grey Wolves logo is emblazoned right over the center of the field: a snarling wolf breaking through a black 'G.'

Two teams line up right on top of it, facing each other. The last grey jersey to arrive reads 'CARVER' on the back:

Zeke Carver, in his element and totally at ease -- watches the opposing defense with a sly grin, reading their scheme without a moment's confusion.

He audibles final adjustments to his team, and they shift positions ever so slightly. Every inch makes a difference.

The center snaps the ball to Zeke.

And it's pure magic. Even to the untrained eye, it's clear that this kid is something special.

**CUT BETWEEN VARIOUS TV SCREENS:**

We don't see where these screens are, but the point is clear: everyone and their mother is watching this game.

Zeke Carver nimbly dodges tackles as he waits for his receivers to get open. Eventually, he rushes the ball himself. Ten, fifteen, twenty yards.

Until a defender finally closes in...

But another Gilead player slams into the defender like a cannon. His jersey reads "WHITTAKER."

Zeke breaks free. And then it's open field all the way to sweet, sweet pay dirt.

### **IN THE STANDS**

The crowd goes wild. Shirtless, body-painted frat bros high-five each other, scream their approval.

A few rows up, Karen and Dana stick out like sore thumbs among the sea of grey, watching the game with a more detached eye than the fans around them.

KAREN

How'd they get him?

DANA

What do you mean?

KAREN

How'd a dinky little school like this snag a quarterback like him? They've only been to three bowl games in the last ten years.

Dana shrugs.

### **ON THE FIELD**

Zeke's teammates finally catch up to him and mob him with chest bumps and helmet smacks.

As he runs back to the sidelines, he pulls off his helmet and lets his beautiful raven locks fly free.

The girls in the stands go wild. Security can barely stop them from flinging themselves at him. Literally.

As Zeke flashes a roguish smile at the ladies, he spots a **GREY WOLVES FAN** in the front row, holding her **FIVE-YEAR-OLD BOY** up so he can see Zeke better.

Zeke goes straight to the kid, gives him a high five, makes him laugh.

A team assistant brings over a football and a Sharpie. Zeke signs the ball for the kid. Makes his day.

The kid's mom looks like she could marry Zeke Carver.

### **IN THE STANDS**

Karen and Dana share a look: this guy's their rapist?

But Dana notices something else:

DANA  
Whoa, check out Whittaker.

**ON THE FIELD**

Paul sits on the sidelines, watching Zeke with disdain. Zeke barely notices him as he talks to the coach.

KAREN (O.S.)  
He's gonna have a lot to talk about.

**EXT. BEATRICE - EVENING**

Karen and Dana drive into Beatrice as the football stadium recedes behind them.

Directly outside the college are a handful of streets packed with apartments, but the development gets sparse quickly.

Karen and Dana are glued to the sights passing by:

- A large paper mill whose smokestacks haven't breathed in seemingly an eternity. Ivy covers most of its rusty shell.
- A trailer park with more RVs than the town has homes.

DANA (V.O.)  
Wow. The world forgot about Beatrice, Alabama.

- A big-box store with the shadow of a Wal-Mart logo. Its massive parking lot is now frequented by tweakers and junkies.
- Sears kit homes sitting on large lots with spacious lawns between them. Many are crumbling, abandoned: the American Dream of the 1950s locked in time and turned to ruin.

KAREN (V.O.)  
And Gilead might be their only chance to be remembered.

- Every American flag flying on homes and car antennae, accompanied by a grey Gilead flag. Other school memorabilia, signs, posters, decorate the homes of even more ardent fans.
- A main street composed of a dozen mom and pop stores. Not enough to warrant traffic lights or crosswalks. Every store's shuttered with the same sign: "CLOSED FOR FOOTBALL GAME."

The Civic turns onto a street with a house covered in toilet paper: the Andersons' home. A dozen local news vans are parked on the street.

Karen drives slowly past it, and she and Dana watch it for a long beat before driving away.

KAREN (V.O.)  
Get her attorney on the phone, see  
when we can meet with the family.

**EXT. BEATRICE - EVENING**

Karen's Civic is parked on main street.

DANA (V.O.)  
(inside the car)  
I have Karen Cunningham for you.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - EVENING**

Dana hands the phone to Karen.

KAREN  
(into phone)  
Hello, Ms. O'Leary? Thanks for  
taking the time.  
(beat)  
I completely understand. It's so  
easy to get burned out when the  
media's on your doorstep. I can --  
(beat)  
Would you please ask them anyway?  
Have them check out some of my  
other features in the --  
(beat)  
Thank you.

She hangs up, disappointed.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
The attorney's protecting the  
family. We'll need another in.

**EXT. MUSKOGEE INN - NIGHT**

Karen's Civic pulls into a seedy motel that's seen its fair share of hookers and meth-heads. The neon sign flickers. Dead bugs float in the swimming pool.

Attached to the motel is the Muskogee Diner, open 24 hours. Probably the only place in town open right now. A couple taxis sit outside, their drivers asleep behind the wheel.

Karen and Dana get out of the car, take a moment to marvel at the sight of the urban decay like visitors at a museum.

**INT. MUSKOGEE INN - LOBBY - NIGHT**

Dana checks in with the **TOOTHLESS LANDLADY**, 60s, who's wearing a grey Gilead t-shirt, and typing on what looks like a crusty Windows 95. Karen grabs some cash from an ATM.

TOOTHLESS LANDLADY  
How long you gonna be stayin' here?

KAREN  
Two weeks.

**CHASTITY** enters, a gaunt 30-something who's done enough meth to look like she's in her 50s. Yellow teeth and a fearless miniskirt that shows off needle marks on her legs.

CHASTITY  
Hey, could any y'all spare a dollar for the vendin' machine?

KAREN  
Sorry, all I got are credit cards.

The Landlady gives Karen a look, but doesn't say anything.

DANA  
I think I might. Hang on.

Dana digs out a dollar bill and hands it to Chastity.

CHASTITY  
Gee thanks. Say, y'all are news reporters, ain't ya? You here on account o' that Zeke Carver business?

Karen gives Dana a warning glance. Chastity picks up on that, scowling.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
OK, fine I get it. Tryna stay confidential an' all that.

TOOTHLESS LANDLADY  
Y'all shoulda stayed up in Montgomery at one o' them Marriotts or Hiltons. They're awful nice.

The Landlady chuckles, but there's an edge to her words. She's not entirely joking.

KAREN

We like being closer to the story.

CHASTITY

Lemme know if you need any tips on the good fast food joints around here and whatnot. I'm Chastity.

TOOTHLESS LANDLADY

Y'all's are in room two-oh-nine.

CHASTITY

Shee-it! That's right next to mine!

SMASH CUT TO:

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Karen and Dana try to sleep through the moans and grunts of sexual ecstasy coming from Chastity's room, perfectly audible through the paper-thin walls.

Dana heads into the bathroom with a blanket and a pillow, but Karen just lies awake in the darkness, simmering.

She turns on the TV, flips through local news channels. Their words intermingle, jumble together:

LOCAL CBS REPORTER (ON TV)

-- Carver offered his DNA voluntarily --

LOCAL ABC ANCHOR (ON TV)

-- victim went home with Carver --

LOCAL NBC REPORTER (ON TV)

-- Sheriff's department followed protocols --

**INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY**

Karen and Dana walk into a press room with a healthy smattering of local and national reporters, print and TV.

Karen nods to a couple of reporters she knows, and then she and Dana take a seat next to one of them, **FRANK WILLIS**, 50s, an eagle-eyed veteran in the field.

FRANK

Didn't think I'd see you here.

KAREN

Frank, this is my assistant, Dana Reed. Very bright girl.

Dana shakes Frank's hand.

FRANK

Karen's got a knack for picking the good ones. If you ever want to write for the Post, let me know.

Karen steers Dana away good-naturedly.

KAREN

Ok, alright. She doesn't want to move out of New York just yet. Back off.

FRANK

You doing a feature on this?

KAREN

Technically it's on student-athlete sex crimes writ large, told through the lens of the Zeke Carver case.

FRANK

Classic Gary.

He and Karen laugh.

KAREN

Am I the only one doing a long-form piece?

FRANK

I think so. I'm just covering it for the Post while it's hot.

Karen chews on that.

Sheriff Chappell walks into the room, flanked by a couple deputies. The press quiets down immediately as Chappell takes the podium with his nameplate on it.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL

Since the details of the alleged crime itself are a matter of public knowledge, I'm gonna be coverin' our department's investigation in the months following the incident.

He glances at one of his deputies, exchanges a few words off-mic. Then he returns to the podium.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)

The victim reported to us in August, and did a rape kit, but she declined to press charges 'cause she was worried about the community's reaction. Rumors that me or anybody in the department threatened her not to press charges are completely untrue.

Karen and Dana glance at each other.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)

We tried to speak to Mr. Carver in September, but his legal counsel advised him not to speak with us. At that stage, we could've got a warrant for Mr. Carver's DNA, but without the victim's participation and court testimony, the DNA alone wouldn't have met the burden of proof standard to make it worth goin' to trial. Unfortunately, this is a common aspect of sex crimes.

He takes a sip of water and then continues:

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)

When the news got leaked and the names of the individuals became public knowledge, Mr. Carver came forward voluntarily and gave us a DNA sample in good faith, which we're now testin'. That about brings us up to speed. Any questions?

Hands shoot up, including Karen's. Chappell points at one of his buddies, grins.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)

How you doin', Andi?

It's the local NBC reporter:

LOCAL NBC REPORTER

Fine, thanks, Sheriff. What do you make of the fact that the victim accepted a ride home from Mr. Carver immediately after he allegedly raped her?

SHERIFF CHAPPELL

It does cast doubt on the victim's story for us, I must admit.

(MORE)

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)  
We're currently lookin' into that.  
Thank you.

Chappell picks another softball reporter he recognizes:

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)  
Dan. Good to see you.

LOCAL CBS REPORTER  
Likewise. Is the upcoming college  
football schedule affectin' the  
timeline of the investigation at  
all?

SHERIFF CHAPPELL  
We are aware that we could be  
disruptin' the education and  
potential career of a very gifted  
young man, and we're accountin' for  
that as we wait for the truth.

Dana stands up, catching everyone by surprise. Even Karen.

DANA  
Is the victim's emotional and  
psychological distress affecting  
the timeline of the investigation  
at all?

Karen YANKS Dana back into her seat.

Chappell sizes them up.

His deputies are looking at them strangely, too, as are some  
of the locals in the room.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL  
Absolutely it is. My job is to help  
victims get justice and feel safe  
in their community, but everyone is  
innocent until proven guilty. Can't  
forget that.

Off Dana, unable to keep the anger out of her eyes.

KAREN (V.O.)  
(prelap)  
Don't ever do that again, ok?

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - DAY**

Karen drives through town. Dana sits shotgun.

KAREN

You paint a target on our backs, we  
can't get anything done here.

DANA

I'm sorry.

They sit in silence a moment. Dana's still upset.

Karen parks on a small residential street and opens her door.

DANA (CONT'D)

What are we doing here?

KAREN

I want to talk to some of the locals  
before we get a reputation around here.

DANA

You sure that's a good idea?

But Karen gets out of the car.

**EXT. BEATRICE - DAY**

Karen and Dana head up to a ramshackle house, knock on the  
door. A hound dog BARKS inside.

An **APPREHENSIVE MAN** cracks open the door.

KAREN

Hello, sir. I work for The  
Messenger. I'm investigating the  
Zeke Carver --

APPREHENSIVE MAN

Not interested.

He slams the door in her face.

**AT ANOTHER HOUSE**

Another door opens to an equally suspicious woman.

KAREN

Hello ma'am. I'm wondering what you  
could tell me about this business  
with Zeke Carver --

The door slams.

**AT A THIRD HOUSE**

KAREN (CONT'D)  
-- could you tell me anything about  
Zeke Carver --

The door slams.

**AT A FOURTH HOUSE**

KAREN (CONT'D)  
-- Zeke Carver --

The door slams.

**AT A FIFTH HOUSE**

KAREN (CONT'D)  
-- Carver --

A DOUBLE-BARREL SHOTGUN pokes out the door.

Karen and Dana haul ass back to the car and peel away, tires screeching and smoking.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - DAY**

Karen and Dana catch their breath as they speed off.

KAREN  
I'm not sure that was a good idea.

Dana shakes her head, laughs.

**EXT. VERONA APARTMENTS - DAY**

The Civic parks next to the lime green apartment building where Zeke brought Leah.

A gaggle of news vans are parked across the street, but the main difference between this building and Leah's place is the conspicuous lack of vandalism.

Karen and Dana get out of the car and head into the building.

**INT. VERONA APARTMENTS - LOBBY - DAY**

Karen and Dana walk past a lobby decorated with elegant concrete slabs and waterfalls cascading down frosted glass, to the front desk.

**JEB HARTLEY** (40s), the greasy haired manager, sits behind it.

KAREN  
Excuse me, this is where Zeke  
Carver lives, right?

Jeb shrugs.

JEB  
Maybe. Maybe not. Who's askin'?

KAREN  
Listen, uh...  
(reading his name tag)  
Jeb. You want to name a price,  
or...?

JEB  
Really? Starts at two hundred bucks.

Karen and Dana glance at each other. It's been a rough morning.

KAREN  
Screw it.

She pulls some cash out of her money clip, gives it to Jeb.

JEB  
Yeah, he lives here.

KAREN  
You wouldn't happen to have seen  
Carver bring that young woman back  
here that night, back in August,  
would you?

Jeb shakes his head.

JEB  
Front desk's manned nine to five.

KAREN  
Did anybody from the Sheriff's  
department ever come by to talk to him?

JEB  
No sheriff ever came around here. I  
seen his daddy come by a few months  
ago, though. Kid's the spittin'  
image of his old man.

Dana frowns, grabs the case file out of her bag.

KAREN  
Hm. Alright. Oh, and you don't have  
any security cameras?

Jeb shakes his head.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
 Alright, thanks for your time.

DANA  
 You ever seen Carver with this guy?

Karen glares at her, hoping this isn't another outburst like the one at the press conference.

Dana shows Jeb a photo of Zeke and his attorney.

Jeb shrugs.

JEB  
 I dunno.

Karen shoves more cash at him, scowling.

JEB (CONT'D)  
 Yep. That's him. That's his daddy.

DANA  
 Yeah, that's not Carver's dad.  
 That's his attorney.

JEB  
 Huh. I just assumed --

DANA  
 When did you see him here exactly?

Jeb stays mum.

KAREN  
 Seriously? Come on.

She gives him some more cash.

JEB  
 Round the end of August. First or  
 second day of classes.

Karen and Dana share a significant look.

KAREN  
 What's Carver doing with a criminal  
 defense attorney a full month  
 before the Sheriff says he tried to  
 talk to him?

Just then, the elevator doors open, and who emerges but none other than Zeke Carver himself.

Almost in slow motion, he passes by Karen and Dana, flashes a smile at them as they watch him intently. Probably thinks they're fans.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - DAY**

Karen drives toward campus while Dana sits shotgun.

DANA

Should we have set up a time to talk to Carver back there?

KAREN

No, we don't show our hand until we've got solid evidence against him, or else he'll just cover his tracks better.

**EXT. FITTS DORMITORY - DAY**

The Civic parks outside a brick building. The marquee reads: "FITTS DORMITORY."

KAREN (V.O.)

We'll probably never get to hear his honest story, though, unless he gets drunk and blabs to somebody.

Karen and Dana emerge and head into the dorm building.

**INT. FITTS DORMITORY - LEAH AND ABBY'S DORM ROOM - DAY**

Karen looks around a two-person dorm room with standard-issue college beds and desks. All function over form. Dana stands by the door.

Abby Green watches Karen, awkwardly clutching her elbows like she's naked.

Karen picks up a framed photo of nine-year-old Leah and Abby in a small wooden fort in the backyard of Leah's house.

KAREN

You've known Leah a long time, huh?

ABBY

Yeah, we been best friends since we were nine.

KAREN

Mind if I take some notes, Abby?

Abby shrugs. She glances at Dana, who gives her an encouraging smile.

Karen replaces the photo on Abby's bookcase, beside dog-eared volumes overflowing with pink post-its. Karen pulls out a notepad and a pen.

KAREN (CONT'D)

She's been living with her folks, I take it?

ABBY

She's thinkin' of movin' back here, actually. You know, 'cause her folks' place is gettin' vandalized an' everything.

Karen turns to Leah's side of the room, which is completely bare -- no one's lived here for a few months. Karen slides a finger across the dust collecting on Leah's desk.

KAREN

You guys knew Zeke a long time?

Abby shakes her head.

ABBY

He's from Texas, I think. Came here for college, to play football.

KAREN

What about Paul Whittaker?

Abby shrugs.

KAREN (CONT'D)

He went to your high school, didn't he?

ABBY

He was two years ahead of me and Leah. We didn't really know him.

Karen raises an eyebrow at that.

KAREN

You picked her up the night of the, uh, incident, is that right? What was she like?

Abby remembers for a second, darkening.

ABBY

She was cryin', didn't want to be touched. I mean Leah's still real tore up. I don't blame her. When somethin' like that happens to you, you start lookin' twice at everybody.

Karen watches Abby's dead eyes, reliving a horrible memory.

KAREN

Here's what I'm wondering: she'd just been sexually assaulted by Zeke Carver. Why would she accept a ride home from him?

ABBY

Because she'd just been sexually assaulted! Would you risk sayin' 'no' to the guy that did it?

Karen considers.

ABBY (CONT'D)

An' the whole reason I had to pick her up is 'cause she gave him a fake address. She was too scared to tell him where she really lived.

KAREN

She just got dropped off on the side of the road?

ABBY

At another dorm.

Karen knows the conversation took a wrong turn. She softens.

KAREN

I'm sorry. I don't mean to be so, you know... I just want to get to the truth. And I'd really love to get Leah's side of the story.

Abby backs off a little, too.

ABBY

Lotta people think she's just tryin' to bring down a quarterback. But who'd do that? I mean that's fuckin' suicide around here. Besides, he wasn't famous or anything when he an' Leah... you know.

KAREN  
What do you mean?

ABBY  
He only got promoted from being the second-string quarterback in September, like a month later. We started winnin' after that.

KAREN  
So nobody really knew him until then or...?

ABBY  
Nah-uh. Not like they do now.

Karen makes a note of that. Abby looks satisfied with herself.

Dana's been looking at the bookshelf. She picks up a copy of *A Tale of Two Cities*, also victim to the post-it scourge.

DANA  
You got quite the collection here.  
You an English major?

LEAH  
No, uh, comparative literature.

KAREN  
No way! I was a comp. lit. major back in the day. You know, when dinosaurs walked the earth.

Abby smiles.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
You must be a fan of Woolf.

Abby frowns, confused.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Virginia Woolf? She said a woman needs a room of her own to write.

Karen gestures around Abby's dorm room.

Abby finally gets it, gives a courtesy chuckle.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Bad joke. I'm sorry.

Dana rolls her eyes.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - EVENING**

Karen drives through Beatrice while Dana sits shotgun.

DANA  
She could get us a meeting with the  
Andersons.

KAREN  
That was my hope.

Karen grins at her. Great minds think alike.

Dana notices Karen's phone case, picks it up to get a better look. It's got a painting of a mythological Indian deity.

DANA  
I like your phone case.

KAREN  
It's Yudhistir.

DANA  
What now?

Karen's not surprised at the reaction.

KAREN  
He was a great king in the  
Mahabharat, the epic Indian poem.  
He was so honest that his chariot  
floated above the ground. Not even  
his enemies doubted him.

DANA  
An Honest Abe for a different age.  
Now it makes sense.

**EXT. MUSKOGEE INN - NIGHT**

The Civic pulls into the parking lot, while Karen continues telling the story:

KAREN (V.O.)  
(inside car)  
The enemy kingdom had a great  
elephant who was named after their  
prince, Aswatthama.

Karen and Dana emerge from the car, trudge up to their room.

KAREN

During a time of war, Lord Krishna advised Yudhistir to kill the elephant and let the news spread, very carefully: "Aswatthama is dead." No more, no less.

DANA

Jesus.

Dana leaps back from their motel room door.

Karen's confused until she follows Dana's gaze to:

The door: it's cracked open.

Karen and Dana stay frozen, unsure what to do.

Karen takes a deep breath, gets herself ready, nods at Dana.

Karen flings the door open!

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

They find the room exactly as they left it. Beds hastily made, clothes on chairs. No maid service here.

While Dana checks the drawers for all their belongings, Karen stares down the closed bathroom door.

DANA

Nothing's missing. I'll check with the owner if anyone came by earlier.

She heads out. Karen heads toward the bathroom.

She grabs a hair curler from the sink outside the toilet, wields it above her head like a weapon.

She opens the door to the toilet...

Ever. So. Slowly.

A dark shape behind the closed shower curtain.

Karen readies her weapon. Reaches out...

And FLINGS the curtain open! The shower's empty. The dark shape behind the curtain was just a shadow.

A SCREAM makes Karen jump out of her skin. But it's coming from next door: merely Chastity at it again.

Karen grumbles. Dana returns a moment later.

DANA (CONT'D)  
Landlady said nobody's come by at  
all today, and we've got the only  
keys to the room.

Karen and Dana take a moment, stare at each other, silently trying to rationalize this. But no dice.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Karen sits on the bed alone, using her laptop.

The motel door now sports the added protection of a table, armchair, and two suitcases wedged up against it.

Chastity's sex moans carry through the wall again. The sound of the news playing on TV and the shower -- presumably Dana -- don't quite do enough to cover it up.

The sound of the water gets louder and louder until:

**FLASHBACK: A sliced-open forearm floats on blood-red water, spilling over the edge of a bathtub.**

Karen shakes herself out of it. Flips channels, turns up the TV. All of them report on Zeke Carver or Gilead. She finally stops on ESPN.

SPORTS CENTER ANCHOR (ON TV)  
If Gilead wins out, they're getting  
an invite to the SEC, no doubt about  
it. The question is: what does that  
mean for the future of the program?

SPORTS CENTER EXPERT GUEST (ON TV)  
One estimate says an SEC contract  
could triple the annual revenue of  
the entire university.

Karen's phone rings. She doesn't recognize the number on the caller ID. She answers:

KAREN  
(into phone)  
Karen Cunningham.

BILL (V.O.)  
(over phone)  
Hi, this is Bill Anderson. I'm  
Leah's father. Our lawyer mentioned  
you wanted to speak to us.

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - DAY**

**BILL ANDERSON**, 40 -- a dad who looks like he has a sizable gun collection -- leads Karen and Dana into the living room, where Leah and her mother, **IRIS**, wait for them.

BILL

This is my wife, Iris.

Karen and Dana ad-lib introductions with Iris, who looks like she probably makes the best damn apple pies in town.

Leah's been sizing up Karen and Dana like a dog ready to pounce. She's become a ragged shell of herself.

KAREN

And you must be Leah.

She doesn't shake Karen's hand.

LEAH

Our lawyer said it'd help with the legal bills to do an interview.

IRIS

Leah, honey!

KAREN

I can't offer you money, unfortunately, but I can offer you something better.

LEAH

Like what?

Karen thinks for a moment. A practiced performance.

KAREN

I was talking to one of my friends from another paper the other day. Turns out I might be one of the only people doing a feature on this story.

Before Karen can explain:

LEAH

I know what a feature is.

KAREN

Then you know that I might be the only journalist who's going to dig deep enough to get to the truth.

Leah's face doesn't change at all.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I think your community's confused about what really happened, and I think the people responsible are right outside.

Karen nods toward the news vans through the crack in the window curtains.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Their daily crime columns and nightly news updates just cover the latest soundbites. They never put it all together into a comprehensive story at the end; they just move onto the next spectacle. Nobody ever gets the whole picture, and god forbid if you unplug for one minute and miss half the story. But even if you don't, there's just so many news stories every hour, every minute, that you forget stuff in the noise. You can't help it. You remember what the big story was last week? Seriously. Do you?

Leah shakes her head.

KAREN (CONT'D)

That's half the reason folks are rooting against you. Because they don't really know this story.

LEAH

Or 'cause I'm the bitch that's ruinin' football season for 'em.

IRIS

Leah!

KAREN

What I'm offering is a unique opportunity to tell your whole story, start to finish, in a single, detailed article that'll give people everything all at once. The truth.

Karen lets that enticing opportunity hang in the air.

BILL

Karen, that sounds real smart. I think it'd be a good idea to do an interview, get the truth out there.

He looks at Leah, compelling her to agree. Leah shrugs.

LEAH

You gonna publish this story before the fifth?

KAREN

What's on the fifth?

Leah, Bill, and Iris all glance at one another. Bill offers to tell her.

BILL

That's Gilead's final game of the regular season. If they win on the fifth, then that shitstain wins the Heisman -- pardon my French -- and the team goes to the playoffs. It's huge for them.

Karen shoots Dana a knowing glance.

KAREN

That's what? Uh, two weeks? That's awfully fast. But we'll do our best to make it work.

IRIS

He just, he made us scared to live in our own home, in our own town. And we been here all our lives. We want him to know what that feels like, to be scared.

Karen watches Leah to see if she reflects that. But she seems to be so far beyond that point, dead in the eyes.

KAREN

I should mention. We'd like to do Leah's interview on camera.

Leah's parents glance at one another, unsure. But Leah shrugs, doesn't seem phased.

IRIS

Y'all got a TV show too?

KAREN

No. It's going to be a long-form text article on our website with the video interview as the main feature.

(beat)

Here, I can show you our site.

She pulls up the site on her phone, hands it to Bill and Iris, who squint down their noses at it.

KAREN (CONT'D)

We're kind of like Vox or Medium.

Bill and Iris nod politely, clueless.

IRIS

Is anybody here gonna read that?

Karen hesitates. But Leah voices her thought:

LEAH

If I don't do any interviews anywhere else, prob'ly.

IRIS

And you ain't offerin' money?

Karen doesn't know what to say. She knew this would happen.

**EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - DAY**

The front door opens and Karen and Dana emerge. Bill, Iris, and Leah see them off from the stoop.

IRIS

So, uh, where y'all off to next?

KAREN

Talking to a former classmate of Leah's actually. Paul Whittaker?

LEAH

Oh yeah, him and me never had any classes together. He was like two years ahead of me in high school. And, like, he was a jock. We didn't even know each other until I met him an' Zeke in August.

Everybody's a little taken aback at Leah's sudden loquaciousness.

LEAH (CONT'D)  
 Just, you know, to clarify. You  
 know. For the story.

Off Karen and Dana.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - DAY**

Karen and Dana get in the car and close the doors. Thinking  
 about what Leah just said.

They look at each other. Dana pretends it wasn't a big deal:

DANA  
 What?

KAREN  
 What the hell was that?

DANA  
 What, Leah? I mean, I didn't know  
 everybody at my high school.

KAREN  
 Yeah, but you didn't grow up in a  
 town with just a couple-thousand  
 people.

Dana considers. Shrugs.

DANA  
 Guess we can ask Paul.

But it's a bigger deal to Karen. She sits in that moment a  
 little longer. This could actually be something she could  
 sink her teeth into, get interested in...

She turns on the car, drives.

**EXT. WAYMAN CHAPEL AME CHURCH - DAY**

Karen's Civic approaches a modest white church, the lone  
 building in the middle of a two-acre clearing. The sounds of  
 an upbeat BLACK GOSPEL CHOIR emanate from within.

**INT. WAYMAN CHAPEL AME CHURCH - DAY**

**PASTOR BOYD**, 67, leads the choir, smiling wide, while the  
 congregation claps and sings along.

Karen and Dana watch from the back, attracting odd looks.

Paul Whittaker is near the front of the congregation, singing his heart out.

A **FIVE-YEAR-OLD GIRL** breaks away from her mother and runs up toward the choir.

Paul doesn't skip a beat, takes the girl's hand and dances with her, laughing all the while.

**EXT. WAYMAN CHAPEL AME CHURCH - LATER**

Karen and Dana wait outside while the congregation emerges from the church and loiters, chit chatting. A few members head out of the clearing via a dirt footpath.

Finally, Paul emerges from the church.

Karen and Dana watch from a distance as he shares a few words with the other congregants.

But after a moment, he approaches Karen himself.

PAUL  
You reporters?

KAREN  
Now why would you think that?

PAUL  
Somethin' tells me you ain't  
Methodists.

Dana steps forward, tries to bridge this a little.

DANA  
I'm Lutheran, but hey, we all the  
Lord's children, alright. Don't  
start gatekeepin' now.

Paul chuckles.

PAUL  
Alright alright. Take it easy.

DANA  
I'm Dana. This is my boss, Karen.

Their conversation catches the eyes of churchgoers nearby. Even Pastor Boyd, who's emerged from the chapel, is watching.

PAUL  
Guess you probably already know who  
I am.

DANA  
Wouldn't be talkin' to you if we  
didn't.

Pastor Boyd approaches them.

PASTOR BOYD  
Paulie, you want to introduce your  
guests?

PAUL  
Pastor, this is Karen, uh...

KAREN  
Karen Cunningham. I work for the  
Messenger. It's a news company.

PASTOR BOYD  
Well now! We don't get visitors  
from the news too often round these  
parts. Dr. Isiah Boyd, nice to meet  
you. You gonna put Paulie on TV?

KAREN  
Yes, sir. I'd like to show how Paul  
always does the right thing, on and  
off the field, thanks to his faith.

Pastor Boyd cracks a wide smile, warms up to Karen.

Karen glances at Paul, squirming at the sound of her words.

PASTOR BOYD  
Now, say, that sounds mighty nice.

KAREN  
We could feature you too, Pastor.  
I'm sure you could vouch for him.

PASTOR BOYD  
That I could. Paulie's one of the  
role models at this here church.  
Always settin' an example for the  
youngins.

Karen watches Paul's eyes dart around nervously.

PAUL  
Dunno if I got time to talk, Ms.  
Cunningham.

PASTOR BOYD  
Aww, now that's a shame.

PAUL  
Got finals comin' up. Playoff game  
too. Busy preppin'.

Pastor Boyd beams as though Paul's his own son.

PASTOR BOYD  
Ain't he diligent?

KAREN  
We can work around your schedule.

Paul hesitates, clearly in turmoil. He shakes his head.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Just one question then. How long  
have you known Leah Anderson?

PAUL  
Since August.

Paul doesn't say anything else.

Karen looks in his eyes, searching for the truth.

PAUL (CONT'D)  
If that's it, I gotta get goin'.

Paul heads off.

He walks away. Pastor Boyd watches him a moment.

PASTOR BOYD  
Times I do worry about him.  
(off Karen)  
He been comin' to church a lot  
lately. Came to me and said he had  
to atone for somethin'.

KAREN  
When was that?

PASTOR BOYD  
Oh, round February maybe?

KAREN  
February? Did he tell you what  
happened?

Pastor Boyd shakes his head.

PASTOR BOYD

I don't make it a practice to pry  
when folks ask me for advice. Else  
they stop askin'.

**INT. MUSKOGEE DINER - DAY**

Karen and Dana sip sodas at the diner attached to their  
motel. Dana uses her phone.

DANA

The school must've got Whittaker on  
a really short leash.

KAREN

Yeah, because he's the only one who  
can save Carver if they end up  
finding his DNA in that rape kit.  
Can you imagine if he flipped?

Karen shakes her head: that would be insane.

DANA

You think he's gonna?

Karen shrugs.

Dana waits for her phone to load something.

DANA (CONT'D)

Ok, so the pastor said Paul started  
going to church in February a lot,  
right? Well, according to the local  
papers, in January and February,  
there was a beauty pageant, the  
church put on a play, a couple old  
folks passed away, a few noise  
complaints, some drunk and  
disorderlies, um... nothing much  
really.

KAREN

What was it that put the fear of  
god in him?

Dana shrugs.

The Toothless Landlady brings them their hamburgers, slams  
the plates down in front of them.

Karen and Dana are suddenly aware of the ugly looks they're  
attracting from the **THREE OTHER DINERS.**

KAREN (CONT'D)  
 Uh, maybe we should get these to go.

**INT. MUSKOGEE INN - LAUNDRY ROOM - EVENING**

While munching on her hamburger and waiting for a laundry machine to free up, Karen watches a small wall-mounted CRT TV:

ESPN Sports Center reports on Gilead.

SPORTS CENTER ANCHOR (ON TV)  
 The Grey Wolves play the Tigers tomorrow, but Gilead's final test comes a week later --

Karen finds the remote and flips to NBC.

LOCAL NBC REPORTER (ON TV)  
 -- music superstar's third album has already broken first-week sales records in the United States and the U.K.

**EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - EVENING**

One of the news vans extricates itself from the line of others and drives off.

**INTERCUT ANDERSON'S STREET AND THE LAUNDRY ROOM**

Karen changes the channel on the TV:

LOCAL ABC ANCHOR (ON TV)  
 -- video was released today of a 2014 police shooting of a black teenager in Chicago...

KAREN  
 Uh oh.

Karen pulls out her phone, opens Twitter.

Another news van pulls away from Anderson's house.

And another after it.

Karen scrolls through Twitter, changes the channel again:

LOCAL CBS ANCHOR (ON TV)  
 -- Hollande said today that investigations into the attacks were making progress and...

The last couple of news vans drive away from the Anderson house, leaving the street empty.

Karen keeps scrolling through Twitter, brow furrowed. Is the story dead?

She doesn't have too long to worry, however, because another story grab her attention:

LOCAL CBS ANCHOR (ON TV) (CONT'D)  
 A White House report released today  
 proves that the heads of the FBI  
 and the CIA knew about the Russian  
 leaks at least three weeks before  
 they surfaced.

KAREN  
 God damn it. I knew it. I told you,  
 Gary.

Chastity walks in the room and starts fishing her clothes out of the occupied laundry machines.

CHASTITY  
 Afternoon, neighbor. You been  
 waitin' long?

She sniffs her clothes, doesn't notice Karen's disgust.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
 Prob'ly clean enough, right?

Karen picks up her stuff and heads for the door.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
 I'll just be a minute!

KAREN  
 Take your time, I'll come back.

Chastity shrugs, returns to her clothes.

PRELAP: The sounds of a crowd, swelling, in waves, louder,  
 louder, louder --

**INT. GILEAD FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY**

The crowd swells to its loudest as a football sails through the air, past a sea of grey in the stands, and a Gilead receiver catches it.

He runs the ball back, trying to follow his teammates' blocks. He's brought down at the thirty-yard line.

The scoreboard reads: "GILEAD: 0    LSU: 0"

Zeke Carver jogs onto the field with his offense amid cheers.

He readies his offense, calls out some audibles.

Takes the snap.

### **IN THE STANDS**

Karen and Dana sit in the visitors' section, a narrow stripe of purple jerseys in the mostly grey stadium.

Karen grabs her phone, reads the screen: "GARY CHOI."

KAREN  
I'll be back.

Karen heads for an exit and takes the call:

KAREN (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
Gary! I was wondering when I'd hear  
from you.

### **EXT. GILEAD FOOTBALL STADIUM - CONCESSIONS AREA - DAY**

Karen continues speaking on the phone in the fairly empty concessions area behind the bleachers. The sound of the game is muffled, but not a whole lot.

GARY (V.O.)  
(over phone)  
So, those Russian leaks --

KAREN  
(into phone)  
I told you. I told you they would  
blow up.

A loud cheer erupts from the stadium.

GARY (V.O.)  
How long are you thinking on the  
Carver thing?

KAREN  
I know, it's kind of starting to  
lose traction, even locally.

GARY (V.O.)  
What do you have left?

KAREN

I still want to speak to some  
medical and administrative  
professionals if I can --

GARY (V.O.)

Talk to one and attribute them with  
'experts say.'

Karen hesitates, doesn't like the sound of that.

GARY (V.O.)

Do you want the Russian leaks or  
not?

KAREN

Ok, alright. Fine. The interview  
with the victim is on Friday. You  
think we can publish Monday  
morning?

GARY (V.O.)

Can you get it done any sooner?

KAREN

Sooner than Monday? Yeah alright.

Another loud cheer drowns Karen out.

GARY (V.O.)

What was that?

KAREN

I said ok! Don't give that story to  
anyone else.

GARY (V.O.)

Give it to Tom?

KAREN

Oh go to hell.

She hangs up with a grin.

Yet another huge cheer makes the stadium rumble.

**EXT. GILEAD FOOTBALL STADIUM - DAY**

As Karen returns to the stands, she looks at the scoreboard,  
mouth agape:

"GILEAD: 14    LSU: 0"

**ON THE FIELD**

Zeke makes an insane play, dodging tackles left and right, nailing a backwards pass to extend the play -- showmanship combined with godlike physical prowess.

The crowd is loving every second of it.

**IN THE STANDS**

Karen rejoins Dana.

DANA

Check it out. Paul's on the bench.

**ON THE FIELD**

Sure enough, Paul's sitting on the sidelines in Gilead sweats. No pads, no helmet, no jersey.

KAREN (O.S.)

And he's not injured or ineligible or anything?

**IN THE STANDS**

Dana shakes her head at Karen.

KAREN (CONT'D)

His GPA's fine?

DANA

There's nothing wrong with him. I checked.

She holds up her phone as proof.

KAREN

Wonder what they're punishing him for.

DANA

You think he blabbed to anybody about Carver?

KAREN

If he did, I wish he'd blabbed to us.

**ON THE FIELD**

Paul glares at Zeke and his coaches. Doesn't talk to anybody.

**EXT. MONROE COUNTY HOSPITAL - DAY**

A decaying, single-story brick building practically in the middle of nowhere. Just a small liquor store nearby and a handful of homes scattered around.

Karen's Civic parks in front of the hospital. Karen and Dana emerge, head inside.

KAREN (V.O.)  
(prelap)  
Thanks for meeting with us, Ms.  
Garland.

**INT. MONROE COUNTY HOSPITAL - CAFETERIA - DAY**

Karen and Dana sit across a table from **AUGUSTA GARLAND**, the S.A.N.E. Nurse who examined Leah on the night of the assault.

The dining hall is modestly sized, so the tables are packed tightly together. Karen tries to keep her voice down.

KAREN  
What does a sexual assault exam  
consist of?

S.A.N.E. NURSE / GARLAND  
I collect clothing, bodily  
evidence, and take photographs of  
the survivor's body. I conduct the  
first round of questioning with the  
survivor, before law enforcement --

KAREN  
So you actually heard Leah's story?

Garland glances around, takes a moment before she nods. She doesn't elaborate, however.

Karen notices a few men in doctors' coats glancing at them. Realizes that Garland's conscious of them.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Is that too specific to talk about?

GARLAND  
I'm afraid it is, unfortunately.

Garland grabs a napkin and a pen, starts scribbling on it.

GARLAND (CONT'D)  
Any other questions I can answer?

Garland finishes scribbling and slides the napkin to Karen.  
It reads: "COUNTY LAKE @ 4:30"

KAREN

I think that's all I need. Thanks.

GARLAND

You know, not many people around  
here read The Messenger.

DANA

Do you read it?

GARLAND

Sometimes.

**EXT. MONROE COUNTY LAKE - EVENING**

Karen and Dana join Garland at the edge of a swampy lake  
nestled among the trees. She's still wearing her scrubs.  
Garland offers Karen and Dana a cigarette, but they refuse.

GARLAND

Don't let that charmin' bastard  
fool you. This ain't his first time  
at the rodeo.

She hands Karen a pink folder. Karen opens it up, finds  
photocopied documents detailing a sexual assault.  
Descriptions of evidence, measurements, even photographs of a  
girl's nude, bruised-up body.

KAREN

This is from Leah's rape kit?

GARLAND

Nah uh. That's somebody else's.

KAREN

Somebody else accused Carver of  
rape?

Garland nods. Karen's jaw drops.

Karen starts reading the report. Most identifying information  
has been blacked out.

GARLAND

She came in too late for us to get  
any evidence off o' her. She'd  
already showered.

DANA

Did any other girls accuse him?

GARLAND

None that I know about, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were others. Guys like Zeke Carver do this over and over.

DANA

Really? Why? He could probably get any girl he wants.

GARLAND

He is getting any girl he wants, because guys like him know that date rape's impossible to prosecute. The guy always claims it was consensual, and how are you gonna prove otherwise, beyond a reasonable doubt, unless he said so in a text message or something?

DANA

Then what's the solution?

Garland shrugs.

GARLAND

Either we make rape a lower standard of proof, which means anybody you ever had sex with could ruin your life if they wanted, or we accept that rapists are gonna walk unless a lot of survivors come forward. And even then, it takes years, it takes a critical mass of accusers and media attention and the entire fuckin' zeitgeist to put some of these guys away.

Dana stares at her feet. Bleak.

Karen's still engrossed in the report. Every picture of the girl's body is cut off at the neck. No face.

KAREN

Who filed this report? Who was the victim?

Garland shakes her head.

GARLAND

I actually don't know. Another nurse did this report.

Karen continues reading, a little peeved.

Garland lights up, takes a long drag.

DANA

Aren't guys like Carver a risk for the school?

GARLAND

Not as risky as it'd be to get rid of 'em. They lose Carver and they start losin' games. Ticket sales go down, ad revenue, donations -- and this year? Boy, there's even more at stake.

DANA

Like what?

KAREN

An invite to the SEC.

GARLAND

Bingo. You get it. I mean that kind of money? I got friends on the city council, there's talk of buildin' a big ol' solar plant down here. If people got jobs again, soon all the shops'll come back, all the restaurants, and the movie theaters, and the bars. I mean we could finally be a real town again.

That old paper mill groans on the horizon.

DANA

Is that worth all this?

GARLAND

'Course not. But that's how people think. They don't see what I see, all these broken folks.

Karen continues reading. Her eyes go wide. She shows Dana the report, points to:

"AFRICAN AMERICAN, GILEAD FOOTBALL PLAYER. WITNESS."

She points to the date on the report: "FEBRUARY 26."

Dana's eyes go wide, too.

KAREN  
Does Anderson know about this?

Garland nods.

Karen and Dana share an even more significant look.

GARLAND  
Can I just say -- this might be too  
much -- but whatever you've heard  
about her, don't listen to it.

KAREN  
What should we have heard about her?

**EXT. BEATRICE - DAY**

Karen raises her fist to knock on the door of a ramshackle little house. But she hesitates. Worried.

Eventually, she RAPS on the door.

After a moment, it opens a crack. A single eye stares out. Children scream inside the house.

KAREN  
What can you tell me about Leah  
Anderson?

A long beat, while that single eye sizes Karen and Dana up.

Finally, the door opens wider. An **OVERWEIGHT MOM**, 20s, stands there, the sounds of her children no bother to her.

OVERWEIGHT MOM  
Y'all are them reporters, right?  
From The Messenger?

KAREN  
Yeah, that's right.

OVERWEIGHT MOM  
Well, the first thing you oughta  
know about Leah Anderson? She kinda  
gets around.

Dana rolls her eyes.

**MONTAGE: KAREN AND DANA CANVASS BEATRICE**

- A **BURLY CONSTRUCTION WORKER** speaks to them over a bag lunch.

BURLY CONSTRUCTION WORKER  
 Around here, everybody's kinda got  
 a label, like it or not.

- A **FRAT BRO** talks to them on campus.

FRAT BRO  
 Oh yeah, she's the uh...  
 (lower voice)  
 School slut.  
 (normal voice)  
 At least in high school she was.

- The **GENERAL STORE OWNER** speaks to them over the counter.

GENERAL STORE OWNER  
 Town slut now, I guess.

Dana's jaw locks at the sound of that word.

- In an empty lecture hall, a **YOUNG ADJUNCT** talks to them.

YOUNG ADJUNCT  
 Rumor has it she was even foolin'  
 around with one of her high school  
 teachers a few years back.

Dana sighs.

KAREN  
 While she was in high school?

YOUNG ADJUNCT  
 Yep. And one day, this guy just  
 quits teachin'. Moves outta town.

The young adjunct looks like he's just dropped the mic.

Karen looks skeptical. Dana could punch this guy.

**EXT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY**

Karen and Dana emerge from the Civic in the parking lot of a decrepit high school. A marquee reads: "BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL."

A single central building is surrounded by a handful of portables that have been in use far longer than intended.

Karen heads toward the school, but Dana hangs back.

DANA  
 Wait.

Karen turns around.

DANA (CONT'D)

Are we really doing this? Shouldn't we be checking on that other accusation against Carver instead of some old rumor about Anderson?

KAREN

Anderson's hiding something about this case too.

DANA

It just doesn't seem related to me.

Karen studies her. Empathizes.

KAREN

It was always going to be ugly here.

DANA

Yeah, I know. I should have told you this was gonna be hard for me, but just, I dunno, I didn't want you to bring one of the other interns.

Karen grasps Dana's shoulder warmly.

KAREN

Take the rest of the day off. Clear your head. I need you back at it tomorrow, ok?

Dana nods, begrudgingly accepting the compromise. Karen gives her the car keys and heads into the school alone.

**INT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY**

A **SCHOOL COUNSELOR** shows Karen a yearbook headshot of a handsome but boyish man, rolled-up sleeves on his crisp white button-up: **JAMES HAYWOOD**, late 20s.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Jimmy Haywood. He was a good guy. Still lives around here somewhere I think.

KAREN

So this really happened? Anderson got him fired?

Karen snaps a cell phone photo of the yearbook picture.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR  
Technically he resigned, but  
everybody knew why.

KAREN  
Is there any proof?

**INT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - DAY**

A **CHUNKY P.E. TEACHER** speaks to Karen in an echoing gym.

CHUNKY P.E. TEACHER  
No, I don't think so.

KAREN  
But they were romantically  
involved?

CHUNKY P.E. TEACHER  
Oh yeah, they were real close.

KAREN  
And there's proof of their romantic  
relations?

CHUNKY P.E. TEACHER  
Well, no, not specifically that. But,  
I mean, she was all over him a lot.

Karen frowns.

KAREN  
You know anything about this Carver  
case?

**INT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - DAY**

Karen speaks to a **SPACY DRAMA TEACHER** in the back of the  
auditorium while her students rehearse on stage.

SPACY DRAMA TEACHER  
I definitely don't think he did it.  
I mean, look at all the charity  
work he does, and the volunteering  
and everything. He doesn't seem  
like the kind of guy who turns out  
to be a rapist, y'know?

Karen shakes her head.

**INT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - COUNSELING OFFICE - DAY**

The counselor continues speaking to Karen.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Carver becomes the starting  
quarterback in September, and then a  
month later, Anderson says he raped  
her? Timing's awful convenient.

KAREN

The rape actually happened almost a  
month before he became the starter.

The counselor looks confused by this new information.

**INT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - GYM - DAY**

The P.E. teacher questions Karen:

CHUNKY P.E. TEACHER

Why'd she only start talkin' about  
it after he became the first-string  
QB?

KAREN

She reported to police the same  
night she was raped. But the press  
only broke the story later.

**INT. BEATRICE HIGH SCHOOL - PERFORMING ARTS CENTER - DAY**

The drama teacher questions Karen too.

SPACY DRAMA TEACHER

How come there wasn't a DNA match  
then?

KAREN

Because they're still testing  
Carver's DNA right now.

That comes as news to the teacher.

ABBY (V.O.)

(prelap)

No way! It's all just rumors.

**INT. FITTS DORMITORY - LEAH AND ABBY'S DORM ROOM - DAY**

Abby looks scandalized at Karen. She's busy tidying up her dorm room. She's expanded to Leah's empty side of the room, which contains a lot of her textbooks and papers.

Dana's still out for the day.

ABBY

I mean, Mr. H. was her favorite teacher. Mine too, a lot of people's. But she wasn't havin' sex with him. She wasn't havin' much sex, period. She was a flirt, sure. But she wasn't a slut.

Karen makes a note of that.

KAREN

She must have known people were calling her that behind her back.

ABBY

Yeah but she liked it. I mean, who wants to be known as a virgin in high school if they can help it?

Abby re-organizes a drawer.

ABBY (CONT'D)

But like, even if she was having sex a lot, so what? How come a guy who likes sex is normal, but a girl who likes sex is a slut?

Karen considers. She thinks of something else.

KAREN

Abby, I know I asked you this already, but are you sure Leah didn't know Paul Whittaker from before college?

ABBY

Why do you ask that?

KAREN

It seems like they might have met before that night.

Abby shakes her head, frowning.

ABBY

If that's true, it's news to me.

KAREN

I'd have to ask her about it, huh?

Abby shrugs.

ABBY

I'm gonna have to ask her about it.

Karen nods, satisfied. Puts that question to bed in her mind.

BZZ BZZ.

Abby's phone vibrates on the table. Karen sees the text message pop up on the lock screen:

"JUST MET PAUL"

Karen tries to hand Abby the phone casually, but BZZ BZZ:

"HE FUCKING SHOWED CHAPPELL"

Karen hands the phone to Abby. Says nothing.

The moment Abby checks her texts, she knows Karen saw.

A long, silent moment. A million thoughts run through both Abby and Karen's minds.

Karen plays dumb.

Another notification interrupts them.

Abby checks her phone. Karen sees a brief flash of terror on her face.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Hey, so actually I forgot about  
somethin' I gotta go do. Sorry. You  
can let yourself out.

Abby grabs her things and SLAMS the door on her way out.

Karen stands there in shock for a moment. Then follows her:

**EXT. FITTS DORMITORY - DAY**

Karen walks out of the building, looks around.

She spots Abby heading into a parking garage.

Karen stares after her, her mind racing.

She follows Abby into the garage.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - DAY**

Karen follows Abby's station wagon on the freeway.

KAREN

Where are you going?

The station wagon exits: "KOLB CITY ROAD."

Karen follows, puts some distance between herself and Abby so she won't be spotted.

**EXT. KOLB CITY ROAD - EVENING**

The two lane road cuts through a dense wood. There are no other cars apart from Abby's and Karen's.

After about a mile, Abby pulls over right behind Leah's SUV on the side of the road.

Karen rounds a bend and parks her Civic out of sight. She gets out of her car, sneaks toward the station wagon.

But Abby's not inside it. Leah's SUV's empty too.

Karen hears twigs snapping in the woods:

It's Abby, stalking into the forest, already deep inside and going further, unaware of Karen's presence.

KAREN

Down the rabbit hole, I guess.

**EXT. WOODS - EVENING**

Karen follows Abby's silhouette on foot, nearly a football-field's length behind her.

After a few moments, Abby enters a clearing.

As Karen gets closer, she spots Leah in the clearing as well. Abby tugs on Leah's arm, trying to pull her away.

Karen continues toward the two of them more quietly.

A TRAIN RUMBLES IN THE DISTANCE.

When Karen gets close enough, she realizes that Leah's standing on a set of train tracks that cut through the clearing, her back turned to the approaching locomotive.

Abby's trying to pull her off the tracks.

**FLASHBACK: blood oozes out from under a bathroom door in a sparse apartment with stacks of dusty unpacked boxes.**

The train gets closer. Its din mutes the rest of the world.

Karen inches forward, adrenaline entering her bloodstream. She gets ready to run in and save Leah herself.

**FLASHBACK: a young woman's hair hangs off the edge of a bathtub. She lies still. The running faucet causes an overflow.**

But Karen never has to move. Leah eventually succumbs and lets Abby pull her off the tracks and into a tearful embrace.

The train roars past them ten seconds later, its horn blaring.

After a few moments, Abby leads Leah back into the woods, toward the road.

Karen keeps herself hidden, makes sure Abby and Leah are none the wiser about her presence there.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - NIGHT**

Karen drives through Beatrice, trying to process everything.

KAREN (V.O.)  
(prelap)  
I think Leah's trying to get  
Whittaker to come out against Carver.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Karen and Dana speak over Chastity's moans from next door.

KAREN  
Abby got a text from Leah that said  
Whittaker 'showed Chappell.'

DANA  
You went to see Abby? How long were  
you talking to her?

KAREN  
Not long. It got awkward after I  
saw that text, and she ended the  
interview pretty fast.

DANA  
Took you a while to get back.

Karen glances at her watch.

KAREN

Yeah, you're right. I guess I must've been talking to her longer than I thought.

Dana frowns, knows something's up.

Karen heads for the bathroom, escaping Dana's piercing gaze.

Dana shakes her head as the sound of the shower starts up, barely drowning out Chastity's sex noises.

FADE TO BLACK.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - MORNING**

Karen blinks awake, stretches.

She turns the TV onto the news, low volume. She watches for a minute, but doesn't quite register what's onscreen:

"VIDEO SURFACES OF RAPE COMMITTED BY HEISMAN FRONTRUNNER, ZEKE CARVER"

Karen shuffles off into the bathroom.

Beat.

Karen runs back to the TV, staring at the screen.

KAREN

Dana, wake up. Wake up!

Dana awakens, sits bolt upright.

DANA

What? What's happening?

KAREN

There's a video.

DANA

What?

KAREN

Somebody leaked a video of the rape.

Dana claps a hand over her mouth.

Karen rushes to pull up the video on YouTube. Dana joins her as she clicks play on her laptop:

**INT. ZEKE AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT**

Paul looks straight into the camera, grinning nervously. A girl's voice off screen is unintelligible, muffled.

PAUL  
(whispering)  
So Zeke got a girl in there. We gon  
prank him.

The camera shakes for a few seconds before it settles on a mirror where Paul checks out his reflection. His phone sits in his breast pocket, his camera facing outward.

He takes a deep breath. His grin is gone.

We burst into the bedroom. It's dark, grainy, shaky.

PAUL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Eyy, somebody left the door  
unlocked.

The camera focuses on Leah and Zeke on the bed. Zeke's trying to pin her down so he can get down to business, but she's pushing him away as best she can.

LEAH  
No... stop... I don't wanna...

PAUL  
Dude. She tellin' you to stop.

But Zeke doesn't pay any attention to him, finally pins Leah's arms down.

Paul finally steps in, tries to pull Zeke off Leah. But in the struggle, the camera shakes violently, making it impossible to see what's happening.

ZEKE  
Get the fuck outta here!

Suddenly we're in bright light, back in the living room --

Leah's cries escalate into wild, unabashed screams. Sheer terror in her voice.

LEAH (O.S.)  
NO! HELP! PLEASE!

Her wailing continues over:

The camera settles. It's fallen onto the ground, looking up at Zeke and Paul struggling in the doorway.

*Zeke pushes Paul out, slams the door. It bounces open again.*

*Paul tries to get back into the bedroom, keeps fighting Zeke.*

*But Zeke throws Paul to the ground and finally manages to shut the door.*

*LEAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)*  
*(inside bedroom)*  
 NOOOO! PLEASE! STOP! ZEKE!

*Paul tries the doorknob, but it's locked. He bangs on the door in hopeless desperation.*

*PAUL*  
 Stop! Dude! This ain't right! Don't do this!

*He slams his shoulder into the door, tries to break it down. It doesn't give. He tries again. And again. And again. It's a miracle that the door doesn't splinter or split.*

*Paul doubles over, breathing hard, his ashen face staring straight into the camera.*

*Inside Leah's screams suddenly become muffled. Unintelligible.*

*Paul finally picks his phone up and stops recording, cutting Leah off.*

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - MORNING**

*Karen and Dana stare at each other in silence for what seems like forever.*

*They turn on the TV, flip to the news.*

**NEWS MONTAGE - CASE CLOSED:**

*- A handheld shot of officers leading Zeke and Paul across a parking lot in front of the County Jail. Zeke wears a suit and tie, Paul an orange jumpsuit.*

*NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT (V.O.)*  
 A stunning development today in the Zeke Carver sexual assault case. A cell phone video filmed by a witness to the assault was anonymously leaked --

*- Sheriff Chappell holds a press conference. The news graphic at the bottom reads: "DNA TESTS MATCH CARVER."*

ABC NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 -- DNA results followed almost  
 immediately after, corroborating  
 the victim --

- **HEAD COACH BEN GIBSON** addresses media at football practice.

COACH GIBSON  
 -- both been suspended from the  
 team pending legal proceedings --

- A massive crowd of protesters, news vans, and news crews crowded outside the Anderson house, more than ever before. A fresh coat of toilet paper, eggs, and vegetables covers the house and front lawn.

CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT (V.O.)  
 -- backlash has only intensified in  
 the hours since the leak --

- A protester in a Gilead jersey screams into the camera:

JERSEY-CLAD PROTESTER  
 -- why the fuck did she go home  
 with him if she didn't know what to  
 expect?

- Protesters start pushing reporters around, start tearing cameras out of peoples' hands.

PRO-ZEKE PROTESTERS  
 (chanting)  
 Fuck the media! Fuck the media!

- Leah's SUV emerges from the Anderson garage and maneuvers through the crowd, all the while being pelted with eggs and vegetables by angry protesters.

NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT (V.O.)  
 The victim's family has evacuated  
 their residence for fear of --

- Zeke and his attorney stand in front of a judge in a courtroom, who bangs his gavel.

CBS NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 -- both posted bail earlier today --

- A massive crowd of jersey-clad football fans and reporters outside the lime-green Verona Apartments burst into applause when Zeke and his attorney emerge from a car. Zeke waves to the crowd as he heads back into his apartment.

ABC NEWS ANCHOR  
 -- Whittaker also faces a great  
 deal of backlash --

- A series of protesters and college students being  
 interviewed:

DRUNK PROTESTER  
 What kinda pervert films that shit?

BESPECTACLED COLLEGE STUDENT  
 He's a fuckin' snitch. His ass  
 ain't lastin' two minutes in  
 prison. Literally.

MUSCULAR COLLEGE STUDENT  
 He better get the fuck outta here  
 if he knows what's good for him.

- The chanting of the crowd grows into a crescendo:

PRO-ZEKE PROTESTERS  
 Fuck the media! Fuck the media!

**END MONTAGE**

**INT. MUSKOGEE INN - DAY**

Karen furiously types away on her laptop, finally writing her  
 article. Half a dozen coffee cups sit nearby, and the trash  
 is full of sandwich wrappers.

Dana sits at her own laptop, reading Karen's article as she  
 writes it in realtime, correcting typos whenever they pop up.

Karen rests for a minute, stands up, stretches.

DANA  
 You need any coffee? A red bull?

KAREN  
 Nah, just some fresh air.

DANA  
 You should prep for Leah's  
 interview when you get back.

Karen flashes Dana a thumbs up as she heads out.

**EXT. MUSKOGEE INN - DAY**

Karen walks around the edge of the parking lot, trying not to fall asleep standing up.

Her phone rings.

KAREN

(into phone)

Hey Bill, how are you?

(beat)

Yeah, we're all set for Wednesday. The camera crew's going to arrive at one, and I'll be there at one thirty. We should be able to knock everything out by five or six.

(beat)

Ok, see you tomorrow.

CHASTITY (O.S.)

Hey, how's that story o' yours comin' along.

Karen turns, sees Chastity heading out of the laundry room with a bundle of clothes.

KAREN

It's coming along.

Karen keeps walking.

CHASTITY

Somethin' mighty strange 'bout that sex tape video, am I right?

KAREN

You mean the rape?

CHASTITY

Why was they facin' the door with they asses pointin' at the pillows?

Karen slows down.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

An' why'd that girl only start hootin' an' hollerin' halfway through?

KAREN

Seems like you're victim-blaming.

CHASTITY

An' how come the bedroom door was unlocked if he was tryna fuck somebody in there?

Karen doesn't have an answer. Chastity shrugs.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Like I said, it probably don't mean nothin'. Just thought it was strange is all.

Chastity walks away. But the seed of doubt stays with Karen.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - DAY**

Karen and Dana watch the rape video on the laptop again.

ON SCREEN: Leah and Zeke are indeed facing towards the door, even though the pillows are on the other side of the bed. As Leah resists, she pushes Zeke's chin up.

KAREN

Look, she's making sure the camera can see his face.

ON SCREEN: Leah turns her head toward the camera, too.

PAUL (V.O.)

(in video)

Dude, she tellin' you to stop.

ON SCREEN: As Zeke pushes Paul out of the room, Leah's screams suddenly become insanely loud.

LEAH (V.O.)

(in video)

NO! HELP! PLEASE!

ON SCREEN: Zeke tries to slam the door shut, but it bounces back open. He shoves Paul out again and finally manages to get the door closed. Paul tries the doorknob, but it's locked.

DANA

Whoa, did you see that? How'd that door bounce open like that?

Dana rewinds, plays that part back again.

ON SCREEN: The door slams shut, but bounces open again. How?

Karen rewinds, steps through the video frame-by-frame.

ON SCREEN: As the door slams shut and opens again, there's a brief white flash on the door lock. A reflection.

KAREN  
Somebody taped over the lock.

DANA  
It was Paul. It had to have been.

Karen continues stepping through the video, frame-by-frame.

ON SCREEN: Just before Zeke manages to get the door shut and locked, he brushes the door lock.

DANA (CONT'D)  
Right there, he ripped off the tape.

Karen and Dana stare at each other, a chill running down their spines. Case not closed.

DANA (CONT'D)  
What do we do?

KAREN  
Leah and Abby will deny everything.  
Whittaker probably won't talk either.

DANA  
He's probably the one who leaked it.

Karen paces around, racking her brains. Click. She's got it.

**INT. MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT OFFICE - DAY**

Karen slides a cell phone across the desk.

ON SCREEN: the Beatrice High School yearbook headshot of James Haywood, the teacher that Leah supposedly got fired.

The receptionist who takes the phone sits at the edge of a generic office floor, filled with low-walled cubicles.

RECEPTIONIST  
Never knew his name was James. Hang on one sec.

She picks up the phone, dials.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)  
(into phone)  
Hey John, I got a couple o' journalists here who wanna --

As Karen looks around, she spots Haywood staring at her over his cubicle wall. He ducks out of sight.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)  
He's real busy today. But maybe try callin' him an' see if you can schedule somethin'?

She hands Karen a business card.

KAREN  
You know, I think I saw him over there. Could we just...

RECEPTIONIST  
I can't let you see him without an appointment, unfortunately.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - DAY**

Karen and Dana sit in the parking lot of the office building, watching the front doors, munching on chips.

KAREN  
Maybe we should talk to Leah's therapist, see if Leah's faking her PTSD or something.

Dana takes a long time to respond through her frown.

DANA  
It's still a rape though. You get that, right?

Karen takes a second too long to respond.

DANA (CONT'D)  
Whoa, no no no --

KAREN  
What?

DANA  
Carver still forced himself on somebody who's saying 'no.' He didn't know she was pretending. It's still a rape.

KAREN  
It won't read that way to people.

Dana's about to let it rip --

KAREN (CONT'D)

But Dana listen, ok, just hold on.  
Our job is to investigate every  
lead until we find the truth.

DANA

That's a cop out. You --

Karen spots Haywood emerging from the building. She jumps out of the car. Dana watches her from inside.

Karen tries to speak to Haywood. He ignores her, gets in his car. She tries to block him. But he gets around her.

But then Karen shouts, loud enough for Dana to hear too:

KAREN

(muffled)

Did Leah Anderson get you fired?

Haywood's car screeches to a halt at the edge of the lot.

**EXT. MONROE COUNTY LAKE - DAY**

Karen, Dana, and Haywood sit on a park bench by the lake where they spoke to Garland.

HAYWOOD

I don't want you recordin' this,  
takin' notes, nothin'. None of this  
goes in your article.

Karen hesitates to grant him that. But eventually she nods.

KAREN

Did she cost you your job?

HAYWOOD

I resigned, technically. Made a  
difference. 'Bout two and a half  
years ago.

KAREN

She blackmailed you?

HAYWOOD

I deserved it. Somebody would've  
caught us eventually, and not  
everybody would have given me a  
choice.

DANA

So you guys really were...?

HAYWOOD

What, me and her? No, god no.

Karen and Dana both breathe a sigh of relief.

HAYWOOD (CONT'D)

No, it was another student.

Karen and Dana's jaws both drop.

HAYWOOD (CONT'D)

None of this gets published, you understand? And it wasn't statch rape, 'cause he was -- I mean she was eighteen. And it was consensual, ok?

KAREN

Ok, alright. Nobody's gonna know about this.

Haywood finally calms down.

HAYWOOD

I taught Leah for two years, so I know her pretty well. She's real... how do I put it nicely? Leah's got a real strong sense of right and wrong, and sometimes she takes that into her own hands, even if it's wrong of her to do that.

KAREN

How would she do that?

HAYWOOD

In my case, she got pictures of me foolin' around with uh, you know.

Dana squirms, uncomfortable with all this. Karen ignores her.

KAREN

And she threatened to publish them?

HAYWOOD

No, she'd have gone to the administration. She wouldn't have published them.

KAREN

You sure about that?

HAYWOOD

She could've told everybody what I did, she could've told everybody which student --

A jogger passes. Haywood shuts up until they're alone again.

HAYWOOD (CONT'D)

She let me leave with my reputation intact. That's more'n I deserved. And she never outed that student.

KAREN

Why are you defending her?

Haywood shakes his head.

HAYWOOD

I'm just sayin' she's not just some crazy psycho. She's got this weird code of principles.

Karen processes all this for a moment.

KAREN

If I promise never to ask that student about this, or tell anyone else about it, could you tell me who it was?

**EXT. GILEAD PRACTICE FIELD - DAY**

Paul Whittaker sits in the stands, longingly watching his team practice without him and without Zeke.

Coach Gibson spots Paul watching, walks over to Paul while the team runs drills.

COACH GIBSON

Get the fuck outta here.

PAUL

Coach, I just wanna watch --

COACH GIBSON

I'm not your coach anymore. Get your ass out.

Paul hangs his head and walks out.

**INT. KAREN'S CIVIC - EVENING**

Karen drives back to Beatrice while Dana argues with her from the passenger seat.

DANA  
You'd love for this whole thing to be some big hoax.

KAREN  
Why would I want that?

DANA  
Because it'd make for a better story than --

KAREN  
No, this is about the truth.

Dana laughs dryly.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
If Anderson really is trying to frame Carver, then people deserve to know.

DANA  
This is a rape apologist's wet dream. Every time a --

KAREN  
That's a little hyperbolic --

DANA  
No, every time a girl is raped, the Zeke Carvers of the world will hold Leah Anderson up as an example --

KAREN  
No they won't --

DANA  
-- of how girls are just sluts, trying to get innocent guys --

KAREN  
And even if they did, that shouldn't censor us from telling the truth --

DANA  
The truth? Really? Is that why you took this story? Or was it to literally destroy lives?

Karen doesn't say anything.

**FLASHBACK: a gavel bangs on a pedestal in slow motion, each impact an explosion of noise.**

She shakes it off.

**EXT. MUSKOGEE INN - NIGHT**

Karen parks outside the diner and she and Dana emerge.

DANA  
Can I get the car keys?

KAREN  
Where are you going?

DANA  
Dinner. I need some space.

Karen tosses her the keys and heads inside.

**INT. OL' CREOLE GRILL - NIGHT**

Dana sips a mint julep and reads a novel in a dark sports bar decked out in Gilead gear, colors, sports photos. Just a couple college-aged patrons at this hour.

LEAH (O.S.)  
Where's Karen?

Dana turns to see Leah sitting down next to her.

DANA  
She's back at the motel. I needed a drink. What are you doing here?

LEAH  
You're not the only one who needed a drink.

The **BARTENDER** -- late 20s, tattoos cover both her arms -- approaches and hands Leah a beer.

LEAH (CONT'D)  
Saidy! Shit, I was hopin' to see you.

BARTENDER  
Long time no see, girl. How you doin'?

Leah chuckles and takes a big swig of her beer.

LEAH  
Transferred to Auburn.

BARTENDER  
Congrats, girl!

LEAH  
Shoulda gone there in the first  
place, but uh...

BARTENDER  
You're not still goin' down to  
them, you know...?

Leah doesn't say anything.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)  
Leah, come on. No. Things are  
gettin' better. You're back in  
school. Don't throw that away.

Leah glances over at Dana and the Bartender shuts up, a  
little self-conscious.

BARTENDER (CONT'D)  
I'm off at eleven.  
(to Dana)  
You doin' ok, hon?

Dana nods, and the Bartender walks away.

Leah tries to stall the question on Dana's lips:

LEAH  
(re. the bartender)  
She's smart as fuck. Dropped outta  
college, opened up this place 'bout  
five, six years ago. Made enough  
money to start her own tattoo parlor  
in June, too. She makes bank.

DANA  
What was she asking you about?

LEAH  
Oh, Auburn? Yeah, I transferred --

DANA  
No, the other thing.

Leah feigns confusion. But Dana won't let it rest.

Leah sighs, shakes her head.

LEAH

There's a couple train tracks  
runnin' through the woods around  
here. Sometimes I go an' check 'em  
out.

DANA

What do you mean? At the train  
station?

LEAH

Nah, just wherever the trains are  
passin' through.

DANA

And where do you watch these trains  
from?

Leah doesn't respond right away. She takes a drink.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Dana unlocks the door and enters to find Karen watching the  
news from her bed.

DANA

Saw Leah at the bar.

KAREN

Oh yeah?

DANA

I think she's... tried to take her  
own life.

Karen's face darkens. She looks at her feet. Not the reaction  
Dana was expecting.

DANA (CONT'D)

Wait, did you know about this?

KAREN

No, no no no. No. I just, uh, I  
just remembered, you know I had a  
friend who --

DANA

You knew about this, didn't you?

Karen knows she's caught.

DANA (CONT'D)  
And you still think she's faking  
this?

Karen hesitates a moment too long to answer.

DANA (CONT'D)  
It's a rape! She's telling him to  
stop --

KAREN  
But she might not mean it --

DANA  
But he doesn't know that --

KAREN  
But we do --

DANA  
No we don't! That's your incorrect  
guess! This suicide thing proves  
she's for real.

KAREN  
Not necessarily.

DANA  
Why else would she be suicidal?

KAREN  
Maybe because of the media scrutiny,  
or maybe the vandalism or the death  
threats. Which only happened after  
the story went public.

DANA  
You're just looking for the kind of  
sensationalized headline you like to  
complain about.

KAREN  
Whoa, calm down. My job is to  
report the truth, no matter how  
ugly it is --

DANA  
No matter who dies?

Karen says nothing.

Dana starts opening drawers, pulling her clothes out.

KAREN

What are you doing?

DANA

See, you always say you have to report the truth and everything, but I can tell you don't really believe that. It's just a lie you tell yourself so you can sleep at night after one of your stories fucks somebody over.

KAREN

Hey, watch it. Don't talk to me like that.

Dana shrugs. She pulls out her luggage bag and starts throwing her clothes inside.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Dana, stop. Just stop for a second. Where are you going?

DANA

A part of you knows I'm right. That's what's so weird. You know this story's over and you're just grasping at straws. But you're doing it anyway. And I just don't get why.

Karen shakes her head, stubbornly clinging to denial.

DANA (CONT'D)

Can I ask you a question? When you found out she was walking in front of trains, did you tell anybody? Her parents, or her psychiatrist or anybody?

KAREN

Abby already knew about it. I thought it was under control. I didn't want to cause anymore drama for her.

Karen knows how bad it sounds as she's saying it.

DANA

You're not a truth nazi. You just like being thought of as one.

Karen can't hide the sting there.

Dana heads for the door.

KAREN

Dana, where are you going?

DANA

New York. Hopefully Tom still needs interns for his next thing.

Dana exits, knowing how much she's hurt Karen.

KAREN

Dana, come on.

But Dana's gone. Karen runs after her:

**EXT. MUSKOGEE INN - NIGHT**

Karen does everything but physically hold Dana back as she heads for the stairs:

KAREN

Dana, don't do this. Please, we can talk this out.

But Dana heads all the way to the street corner, where she gets into one of the taxis sitting outside the diner.

The driver loads up her bag in the trunk and drives off.

Karen hangs her head, all alone on the walkway of the motel.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Karen heads back into the room, deathly quiet.

She takes a few steps around, trying to figure out what to do with herself. She opens a couple drawers, closes them.

She happens upon the Gideon's Bible in the nightstand. She sits down on the bed, tries to read.

No sooner has she gotten into the text do Chastity's sex moans start up from next door.

Karen throws the Bible at the wall. But the noises don't stop.

Karen storms into the bathroom:

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT**

She turns on the shower, finally drowning out the moans.

As she waits for the water to warm up, she looks at herself in the mirror. But the glass fogs up, hiding her reflection.

She pulls off her clothes and steps into the steaming hot shower. She puts her face right up to the showerhead.

Karen's sopping wet hair match cuts:

**FLASHBACK: the girl in the bathtub. Water from the faucet flowing down her hair and her face.**

Karen stares at her own feet, where blood pools. But when she blinks it's gone.

**FLASHBACK: water overflows from the bathtub, but when it hits the ground, it suddenly turns into blood.**

Karen stares at her hands, bloodied.

BANG BANG BANG. Someone's pounding on the bathroom door.

Karen jumps into the corner of the shower, terrified at the sounds, unable to speak.

She's got a very hazy view of the door through the sheer shower curtain.

BANG BANG BANG

The door blasts off its hinges and Karen SCREAMS.

The intruder yanks the shower curtain aside -- it's Chastity.

CHASTITY

Come on! We gotta get outta here!

The walls of Karen's motel room are ablaze, but the fire hasn't spread into the bathroom yet.

Chastity yanks Karen out of the shower. Karen quickly snatches a towel to cover herself up.

**INT. KAREN AND DANA'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Chastity pulls Karen across a narrow pathway that's still clear of the flames.

Karen's suitcase, her laptop, her legal pads -- all of it is already a smoldering mess.

But the PINK FOLDER Garland gave her lies just outside the reach of the flames.

KAREN

Wait!

Karen lunges for it, grabs it, YELPS in pain.

Her towel's ablaze -- the cost of that one possession.

Chastity yanks her back to the door. Karen loses the towel.

**EXT. MUSKOGEE INN - NIGHT**

Chastity pulls a completely nude Karen out to the parking lot. A crowd's already formed, watching the fire spreading outward from Karen's room.

Karen tries in vain to cover herself up.

Chastity strips down to her bra and panties, hands her clothes to Karen.

Karen's lost the luxury of pinching her nose at them, and scrambles gratefully into Chastity's shirt and pants.

KAREN

What are you gonna --

CHASTITY

Don't worry 'bout me, honey. I got some spare clothes outta my room 'fore the fire got too big.

Chastity heads over to a pile of clothes and other personal effects in the middle of the parking lot, dresses herself.

Wailing sirens precede the ambulance and fire truck that pull into the parking lot.

Karen watches the firemen work for a moment.

But she's interrupted by the Toothless Landlady grabbing her and spinning her around.

TOOTHLESS LANDLADY

This is all your fault! If your bitch ass hadn't a been nosin' around 'bout this Carver thing, this wouldn't a happened!

But Chastity gets between the two of them.

CHASTITY

Maureen, calm your tits. This ain't nobody's fault but whoever caused the fire.

TOOTHLESS LANDLADY / MAUREEN

Bullshit! You seen any other rooms on fire? They's goin' after her.

Karen suddenly becomes aware of everyone watching her. She looks from face to face, trying to figure out who started the fire. It could be any of them. Or did the culprit escape?

CHASTITY

Maureen, I know you're mad, but this ain't her fault.

TOOTHLESS LANDLADY / MAUREEN

Fuck you, Chastity! You ain't welcome here no more!

CHASTITY

Yeah? Fuck you too, then!

As the Toothless Landlady walks away in a huff, Chastity returns to Karen.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Hey, don't worry 'bout her. She's always been a fuckin' bitch. You need any money or anythin'?

Tears well up in Karen's eyes. She tries to remain stoic.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Say, where'd your friend go?

KAREN

She left.

Without another word, Chastity pulls a wad of cash out of her pocket and starts counting out a bunch of twenties.

KAREN (CONT'D)

No, I just need some money to call my boss, I'll use the payphone.

CHASTITY

Listen to me. You ain't safe here tonight. You best take a taxi out to Montgomery, put up there for a while.

She shoves a couple hundred bucks into Karen's hands.

KAREN

A taxi?

Chastity nods to Karen's Civic. It's been beaten to a pulp. Broken glass, slashed tires.

CHASTITY

Come to think of it, I might need to come too, seein' as how Maureen told me to fuck off an' all.

Sheriff Jim Chappell approaches them.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL

Ms. Cunningham? Were you stayin' in room 209?

When Karen sees him, her jaw drops. This man is going to be the one taking her testimony?

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to see you under these kinda circumstances. Mind if I ask you a few questions?

Karen gives Chastity a wordless look of gratitude, and then heads off with Chappell.

Chappell leads Karen to the edge of the parking lot where it's a little more private. He sets his clipboard on the trunk of an unmanned police cruiser.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL (CONT'D)

So, tough night, huh?

KAREN

Yeah, I was in the shower. My assistant had just stepped out. Next thing I know, Chastity -- she's in the room next door --

Karen suddenly notices Chappell's just watching her talk, an odd look on his face.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Are you gonna write any of this down?

SHERIFF CHAPPELL

Real pity, losin' the QB right before the playoffs.

KAREN

Excuse me?

SHERIFF CHAPPELL

I think they woulda won, too.  
Everything. The whole championship.  
Lotta money woulda flowed into this  
town.

He whistles.

KAREN

Real pity the girl he sexually  
assaulted is suffering depression  
and PTSD and a total violation of  
her personhood.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL

Oh absolutely. It breaks my heart.  
Truly it does. You've got to  
understand me on that. But what  
about all the other people who are  
suffering here 'cause jobs are  
dried up, business is gone, hopin'  
the team could give 'em a new  
start? Destroyed their future --

KAREN

Yeah, Zeke sure did.

Chappell hardens. Stares Karen down. But before he responds:

DEPUTY (O.S.)

Jim! You got a sec?

Under the Deputy's gaze, Chappell finally walks away.

DISSOLVE TO:

**EXT. MONTGOMERY MARRIOT - DAWN**

The sun rises over a twelve story hotel and city that's more  
modern than any building in Beatrice. The streets are just  
starting to fill with early morning activity.

**INT. MONTGOMERY MARRIOT - KAREN'S ROOM - DAY**

Late afternoon sun spills through the windows when Karen  
finally stirs. Chastity's on the balcony, smoking.

Karen notices a tray of breakfast pastries, fruit and coffee  
nearby. Chastity must have brought it.

**EXT. MONTGOMERY MARRIOT BALCONY - DAY**

Karen joins Chastity on the balcony, still wearing her clothes from the previous night.

CHASTITY

Oh, good. You're eatin' somethin'.

Karen holds up an orange she grabbed from the tray.

They stand in awkward silence for a beat. Chastity smokes.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Say, how's that story o' yours comin' along?

KAREN

One version might be the biggest story I've ever written. The other version might be forgotten in a month.

CHASTITY

Well shit. You should write the first one.

Chastity can't quite figure out why Karen's so unhappy.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Bein' raped sucks.

Karen chuckles, nods.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)

Why you laughin'? You ever been raped?

KAREN

No, I'm sorry. I agree. Just the way you --

CHASTITY

Just 'cause I like fuckin' people don't mean it can't happen to me.

Karen gets serious again.

KAREN

No, I'm sorry. I've never been able to, uh, talk about it honestly.

(beat)

A friend of mine was raped. Long time ago. I was there when it happened.

**FLASHBACK: from inside the bathroom, something bangs onto the door from outside. BANG. BANG. BANG. An anguished moan --**

KAREN (CONT'D)

When they asked me if I saw him, in my apartment, that night...

**FLASHBACK: the gavel bangs on the pedestal in slow motion once again, each strike a thunderous boom.**

KAREN (CONT'D)

I should have said I saw him. I knew it was him in there.

CHASTITY

He walked, didn't he?

KAREN

It was just a little white lie. Might have saved her life.

**FLASHBACK: water and blood flow out from under the door.**

CHASTITY

Aw, don't blame yourself, babe. They always go free.

**FLASHBACK: a girl lies in an overflowing bathtub, the faucet running down her hair and her unmoving face.**

Karen's eyes well up with tears at the memory.

KAREN

In my head, I don't know... I thought maybe if Leah was lying about this, then my friend lied too...

Chastity puts an arm on Karen's shoulder.

KAREN (CONT'D)

I've been telling the truth ever since. Trying to, anyway. Failing at it, lately. Telling the truth is always better than lying, right?

Chastity bursts out laughing.

CHASTITY

Oh lord help me! Oh sweet Jesus!

KAREN

What's so funny?

CHASTITY

Truth-tellin' ain't always better than lyin'. That's some first-grade bullshit. If you saw a midget, you wouldn't say 'hey, you're short.'

KAREN

Well, no, but you can't call him a midget either. That's just common courtesy.

CHASTITY

Exactly. There's all kinds o' reasons to tell lies. You can't go 'round makin' absolutist statements like 'the truth is always right' when somethin' as basic as common courtesy proves you wrong.

Karen is taken aback at Chastity's sudden eloquence.

**INT. MONTGOMERY MARRIOT - FRONT DESK - DAY**

The **RECEPTIONIST** hands Karen a brown box. The return label has the name "GARY CHOI" on it, with a New York address.

Karen rips it open on the spot: a new company cell phone, laptop, and credit card.

**INT. MONTGOMERY MARRIOT - GIFT SHOP - DAY**

Karen drops a big pile of stuff in front of the cashier: t-shirts, shorts, a toothbrush, toothpaste, tampons -- every basic necessity she can think of.

**INT. MONTGOMERY MARRIOT - KAREN'S ROOM - DAY**

Karen sits on the bed, setting up her phone. Once the welcome screen goes away, her phone buzzes with a handful of notifications. Emails, texts, missed calls.

The last one lingers onscreen a second, a text from Bill Anderson: "HEARD WHAT HAPPENED. YOU OK? NEED TO POSTPONE?"

Karen stares at her phone a long time, not sure how to respond. After a long beat, she taps out a response:

"I'M STILL ON IF YOU GUYS ARE"

Chastity comes in from the balcony, starts gathering her things up, packing them away.

KAREN  
You heading out?

CHASTITY  
Yeah, figger I'll find a motel  
round the edge of the city that'll  
have me. Gotta get back to work.

KAREN  
Really? You have to?

CHASTITY  
Why would I wanna stop? Gettin' to  
fuck and take off my clothes for  
money --

Karen shakes her head, can't help but laugh.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
Oh, right, I forgot. Y'all think  
it's immoral.

Karen did not expect to hear some cold reality from Chastity.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
Just 'cause I admit I like to fuck,  
unlike the rest o' y'all.

KAREN  
I didn't mean to judge --

CHASTITY  
Just 'cause I ask men to pay for it  
upfront instead of in drinks,  
meals, and movie tickets.

KAREN  
I'm really sorry.

Chastity shakes her head at Karen. She grabs her bags,  
clothes, and a few coat hangers stolen from the hotel and  
heads for the door.

CHASTITY  
Wanna know where rapists come from?  
Not from folks who's sexually  
satisfied.

Karen stops her from leaving.

KAREN  
Chastity, I'm sorry. Please. I  
should be thanking you. You saved  
my life.

CHASTITY  
It's human decency. Even us whores  
got it.

And with that last chastisement, Chastity leaves.

**EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - DAY**

A film crew stands idly outside a grip truck.

A Camry pulls up outside the house and Karen emerges from it.  
A new rental car.

But as she walks up to the house, her phone rings.

KAREN  
(into phone)  
Bill, look outside.

Bill emerges from the house and meets Karen on the lawn.

BILL  
Karen, I think we might need to  
reschedule.

KAREN  
What? Why?

BILL  
You must've been on the road. News  
just came in. Judge ruled the video  
inadmissible.

KAREN  
What? The one of Carver...

BILL  
Yeah, that one. Said the Sheriff  
found it on Whittaker's phone  
without probable cause to search  
it.

KAREN  
You're kidding me.

Bill shakes his head.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
But that's bullshit. They got the  
video from the leak online, they  
never...

Karen scrambles to find her notepad -- wait, it got destroyed in the fire.

BILL

What?

KAREN

Whittaker took that video to the Sheriff voluntarily, the day before it leaked online. He tried to get Carver arrested.

BILL

Are you serious?

KAREN

That's why they benched him that one game. That's gotta be why. It's in my notebook... which I lost in the fire.

She deflates.

BILL

But that'd mean we could still use the video in court? Right?

Karen nods.

BILL (CONT'D)

Well come on then, we gotta tell Leah 'bout it!

He rushes inside the house, and Karen follows him.

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

A couple crew members stand by half-set up equipment, the work on hold for the moment, in case of a cancellation.

Bill rushes into the room and hollers to Iris and Abby.

BILL

Karen can prove Whittaker showed the Sheriff the video all by himself!

IRIS

Oh lord, Karen, is that true?

Iris envelops her in a tearful embrace.

BILL  
I'm gonna go tell Leah.

He rushes off into the house and Iris follows him.  
Karen's left alone with Abby and a few crew members.  
She gestures for Abby to follow her to:

**EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - BACKYARD - DAY**

Karen and Abby step outside, slide the glass door closed.

KAREN  
You already knew Whittaker showed  
Chappell the video, didn't you?  
Leah texted you about it.

Abby stares at the ground. Karen waits for an explanation.

ABBY  
Leah was tryin' to get him to leak  
the video.

KAREN  
Yeah, I got that much. When did  
that start?

ABBY  
'Bout a month after she an' Zeke...

KAREN  
She just suddenly remembered that  
Whittaker had his phone out?

Bill and Iris slide open the glass door, emerge.

IRIS  
We can't find her.

They head over to a tree fort built around an oak tree in the  
backyard, look through it quickly.

BILL  
Leah! Where are you, babe?

Abby joins them when they head inside to keep searching, only  
too glad to be shot of Karen.

Karen approaches the tree fort, a gorgeously-constructed oak  
castle with battlements, towers, and passageways inside,  
navigable only by a small child.

She hears a car revving up.

Karen glances around the side of the house, notices Abby's station wagon pulling out of the driveway and roaring off down the road.

Karen tries to understand. And then it clicks. She runs.

**EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY**

Karen's Camry blazes onto the highway, easily doing eighty as it swerves around other cars that almost seem like they're standing still in comparison.

Karen's phone rings. "BILL ANDERSON." She hesitates to answer. At long last:

KAREN  
(into speakerphone)  
I'm sorry I left. No time to explain. I know where Leah went.

BILL (V.O.)  
(from speakerphone)  
Where?

KAREN  
Train tracks off Kolb City Road.  
Couple miles out of town.

A SIREN WAILS.

Karen sees a cop in the rearview, speeding up to catch her.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Follow the sirens.

She hits the gas.

A welcome exit approaches: "KOLB CITY ROAD."

She barrels down the exit ramp.

**EXT. KOLB CITY ROAD - DAY**

The cop car starts catching up to her on a long straightaway.

It just barely pulls up along side her --

Karen SLAMS the brakes, pulls over next to the woods.

The cop car whizzes past her, too slow to react.

Karen parks next to Leah's SUV. Abby's station wagon is nowhere to be found.

Karen gets out and runs into the trees, while the cop doubles back to find her.

**EXT. WOODS - DAY**

Karen leaps over boulders and roots.

The steady chugging of an APPROACHING TRAIN.

Karen's foot gets stuck in the mud and she falls.

She hears the terrifying SCREECH of the train's brakes.

Karen gets back to her feet, pushes herself forward as fast as she possibly can.

There's the clearing up ahead. Leah's standing on the tracks.

KAREN  
LEAH! GET AWAY! GET OFF!

Leah's eyes snap open.

Karen waves her arms.

But Leah looks away, to the other side of the tracks.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
OVER HERE!

Karen runs toward the tracks, ready to leap toward Leah.

But someone else runs up on the other side of the tracks:

Abby.

She pushes Leah off the tracks --

Straight into Karen's arms --

And then she's gone.

The train barrels through the clearing.

Karen and Leah are frozen for a moment.

There's blood on the train tracks.

And then Leah starts kicking and struggling to get away from Karen, screaming. Tears welling up.

But Karen holds onto her tightly, doesn't let her run back to her best friend.

LEAH  
ABBY! ABBY!

Karen's ears RING, and all other sounds fall away.

**FLASHBACK: Younger Karen struggles with the locked bathroom door, panicking at the water seeping out from underneath it.**

Growing pale, Karen drags Leah away from the train.

**FLASHBACK: Younger Karen kicks at the door, once. Twice. Thrice. Finally gets into the room.**

As Karen pulls Leah toward the trees, they're greeted by cops with guns drawn.

**FLASHBACK: Younger Karen discovers the girl in the overflowing bathtub. Her wrists drain blood into the warm water.**

Karen releases Leah to the cops, staggers away.

**FLASHBACK: Younger Karen rushes to her, screaming M.O.S. The ringing in Karen's ears becomes deafening.**

Bile rushes up Karen's throat. She keels over and throws up.

CUT TO BLACK.

**NEWS MONTAGE:**

Cut between various news clips, headlines, and images, while various reporters' voices overlap, reporting on the latest developments out of Alabama:

NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT  
It's being called the greatest transgression of justice in recent memory.

ABC NEWS ANCHOR  
A judge ruled inadmissible an incriminating video depicting a sexual assault --

CBS NEWS ANCHOR  
-- led to the victim's attempted suicide and her best friend's sacrifice --

SPORTS CENTER ANCHOR  
 -- in the path of a speeding train.

**EXT. WOODS - DAY**

Handheld news footage of a huge pile of flowers, cards, photos and other mementos of sympathy at the base of a tree. The train tracks are in the background.

NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT (V.O.)  
 Advocacy groups across the country  
 have unanimously decried Judge  
 Percy's decision --

FOX NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)  
 -- though legal experts believe  
 that the publicity of the case  
 rendered the idea of an unbiased  
 jury impossible, regardless of the  
 video's --

**INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY**

Sheriff Jim Chappell addresses a press conference.

SHERIFF CHAPPELL  
 I made a grave error investigatin'  
 this case, I admit it. And it cost  
 the state a conviction. I'll never  
 forget that. Keeps me up at night,  
 it truly does.

**EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX STADIUM - DAY**

Sheriff Chappell, dressed in Gilead colors and looking well-rested enough, waves to tailgaters.

He heads toward a football stadium about five times the size of Gilead's, and passes under a large banner that reads:

"2016 COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP"

"GILEAD GREY WOLVES VS. CLEMSON TIGERS"

**EXT. GILEAD PRACTICE FIELD - DAY**

Coach Gibson addresses reporters at the end of team practice.

COACH GIBSON

We reinstated Zeke to the team when  
it became clear the state had no  
case against him.

**EXT. GILEAD COURTYARD - DAY**

Zeke Carver, wearing a suit and tie, emerges from a building  
and into the campus courtyard with his lawyer behind him.

Carver raises his arms in victory as he approaches a large  
group of friends and family members waiting for him. They  
applaud him, hug him, pat him on the back.

LOCAL ABC ANCHOR (V.O.)

-- university also found Carver not  
guilty of any violations of the  
student code of conduct --

LOCAL NBC REPORTER (V.O.)

-- has called on the department of  
education to invoke Title 9 and  
launch a federal investigation of  
Gilead --

FOX NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

-- sources in the West Wing said  
there were no such plans for a  
Title 9 investigation --

On the other side of the courtyard, in full view of Zeke, a  
small group of students protest against him.

NERDY STUDENT PROTESTER

(addressing a news camera)

We're out here because in America,  
it's become normal for rapists to  
get away with it. Not anymore.

HIPSTER STUDENT PROTESTER

We know for a fact that this guy is  
a rapist. It's on camera. So why's  
he still out there in the world?  
Why's he still playing football?  
Why's he still winning awards?

**INT. SONY THEATER - NIGHT**

Zeke sits in the audience with other college football stars,  
their parents, coaches, and football VIPs.

At the podium, a **HEISMAN TRUSTEE**, 60s, opens an envelope:

## HEISMAN TRUSTEE

The winner of this year's Heisman Trophy is Zeke Carver.

The theater bursts into applause, and Zeke stands up in the front row. He hugs the runners-up, his parents, and his coaches before heading up to the stage.

## CBS NEWS CORRESPONDENT (V.O.)

Reactions in the small Alabama suburb surrounding Gilead University have been mixed.

**EXT. BEATRICE - DAY**

Cut between some familiar faces around Beatrice speaking into the camera for impromptu news interviews:

## GENERAL STORE OWNER

Listen, the kid made a mistake. I'm sure he regrets doin' that.

## BURLY CONSTRUCTION WORKER

I don't think the Sheriff did anything wrong, honestly. I think it's our laws that are screwed up.

## FRAT BRO

At the end o' the day, the fact's still the same: that girl shouldn't have been dressed like that, out that late, drinkin' so much.

## MUSIC MAJOR

What about that guy who videotaped 'em, huh? That's a violation of privacy.

**INT. ZEKE AND PAUL'S APARTMENT - DAY**

Paul watches TV in his apartment alone.

ON SCREEN: football. Gilead leads by double-digits.

A flashy graphic at the bottom reads: "COLLEGE FOOTBALL NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP."

Paul cracks open a beer, takes a long swig.

He tosses the bottle cap into a trash bin nearby, which already has a few dozen others, as well as his crucifix necklace.

**EXT. BEATRICE CEMETERY - DAY**

A small crowd, all clad in black, stand around a coffin and an empty grave in solemn, tearful remembrance. A photo of Abby sits on an easel nearby. Leah gives the eulogy.

LEAH

Words can't even describe my guilt.  
I try to take strength from her  
sacrifice, like she woulda wanted  
me to, but not a moment goes by I  
don't wish she were speakin' at my  
funeral instead of this.

Karen watches from the edge of the cemetery.

She notices Paul Whittaker in the distance, watching as well.

Karen's phone rings. She attracts a couple dirty looks as she hurries to her car to take the call.

**INT. KAREN'S CAMRY - DAY**

Karen gets in and shuts the door.

KAREN

(into phone)  
Gary.

GARY (V.O.)

(over phone)  
Your intern walked out on you?

KAREN

She was just having some personal  
issues with the subject matter. She  
did a great job while she was --

GARY (V.O.)

She said you're chasing ghosts.

Karen glances back toward Abby's grave in the distance.

KAREN

I'm sorry. I didn't think it would  
take this long, but --

GARY (V.O.)

Oh, you don't need to apologize to  
me. I'm just glad you're enjoying  
this story.

Karen laughs dryly at that.

GARY (V.O.)  
 But I did plan on having you back  
 sooner to cover the Russia leaks.

KAREN  
 You gave it to Tom, I take it?

GARY (V.O.)  
 I'm about to. You want to convince  
 me why I shouldn't?

Karen thinks about this for a long time. Finally, she hangs  
 up the phone.

She stares at it for a long beat, and then dials a new call.  
 She starts driving. Eventually, Karen leaves a voicemail:

KAREN  
 (into phone)  
 Hey, Dana. It's Karen. Hope you're  
 doing well.

**EXT. CAUSEWAY MOTEL - DAY**

Karen's Civic pulls into a motel whose only improvement over  
 the Muskogee Inn is the eggshell white color of the building.

KAREN (V.O.)  
 Anderson's going on camera today.  
 We got delayed by, uh, well,  
 everything.

Karen parks and heads toward the stairs.

KAREN (V.O.)  
 If I could -- Just... I'm sorry.  
 I'd love to hear your voice. Please  
 call me back.

She puts her ear up to a door. Silence. Then she knocks.

After a moment, Chastity answers the door.

CHASTITY  
 Why howdy! Fancy seein' you here.

Karen hugs Chastity.

KAREN  
 I wanted to give you these back. I  
 washed them and everything.

Karen fishes and envelope and some clothes out of her purse, the ones Chastity lent her during the fire.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Thanks again.

CHASTITY  
What was I supposed to do? Let your naked ass freeze out there?

Karen laughs.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
Say, how's that story o' yours comin' along?

Karen shrugs.

CHASTITY (CONT'D)  
Think I mighta been wrong about the girl. Remember what I said about that video? I dunno. Ain't nobody gets suicidal without a damn good reason.

KAREN  
And nobody tries to frame somebody without a damn good reason either.

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - BILL AND IRIS'S BEDROOM - DAY**

A makeup artist works on a sharply-dressed Leah, while Karen and her parents sit nearby.

KAREN  
Now remember, if you stutter or you make a mistake or anything, just pause and restart your sentence. We can edit out anything we don't like.

Leah barely reacts. Dead in the eyes.

BILL  
How many questions you got?

KAREN  
A good number, but I probably won't ask all of them.

An **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR** sticks her head in the door.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Hi folks, how're we doing?

They give nonverbal responses: "ok, under the circumstances."

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
We're getting pretty close, so if  
you want to come on down in five  
minutes, that'd be perfect.

Everyone nods, and the Assistant Director exits.

Karen's PHONE RINGS. She checks it: "DANA REED."

KAREN  
Would you excuse me a moment?

Karen steps out of the room:

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - UPSTAIRS LANDING - DAY**

Karen closes the door behind her and takes the call.

KAREN  
(into phone)  
Hey.

DANA (V.O.)  
(over phone)  
Hi.

KAREN  
How's, uh... how's things with,  
uh...?

DANA  
Good. Busy.

A long pause.

DANA (CONT'D)  
I heard Zeke walked.

The crew's chatter from downstairs carries upstairs. Karen steps into another room to get some quiet:

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - LEAH'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Karen shuts the door behind her as she steps into the very pink girls' bedroom.

KAREN

Yeah, they can still sue him in civil court, but the D.A.'s probably going to drop criminal charges.

DANA

That's what you wanted, right?

There's a definite bite to Dana's words.

KAREN

Not anymore.

Dana doesn't say anything.

KAREN (CONT'D)

You hear about Abby?

DANA

Yeah. Damn. I mean a couple weeks ago, we were standing in her dorm room, talking to her... she had all those books... it's hard to believe.

Karen glances around the room. She pauses over a small stack of books on the desk with a bunch of pink post-its sticking out of the pages.

KAREN

All those books...

Karen's eyes de-focus.

ABBY (V.O.)

*(prelap flashback)*

*She was cryin', didn't want to be touched.*

**INT. DORM ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)**

*Karen glances at the bookcase, full of dogeared volumes overflowing with pink post-its.*

ABBY

*I mean Leah's still real tore up. I don't blame her. When somethin' like that happens to you, you start lookin' twice at everybody.*

*Karen watches Abby's dead eyes, like she's reliving a horrible memory of her own.*

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - LEAH'S BEDROOM - DAY (PRESENT)**

Karen pulls out the pink folder Garland gave her.

Karen's epiphany develops and crescendoes as we...

**INTERCUT VARIOUS FLASHBACKS WITH THE PRESENT:**

- *At the county lake, Garland hands Karen the pink folder with the other rape accusation against Zeke.*

GARLAND (V.O.)

*Don't let that charmin' bastard  
fool you. This ain't his first time  
at the rodeo.*

- Karen frantically scans the report in the pink folder.

KAREN (V.O.)

*(prelap)  
Leah's been living with her folks,  
I take it?*

- *Karen slides a finger across Leah's dusty unused dorm desk.*

KAREN

*You must be a fan of Woolf.*

- *Abby looks confused at Karen's words.*

KAREN (CONT'D)

*Virginia Woolf? She said a woman  
needs a room of her own to write.*

- *Karen notices something out of the corner of her eye. She turns around.*

HAYWOOD (V.O.)

*(prelap)  
Leah's got a real strong sense of  
right and wrong.*

- *Karen and Dana speak to Haywood at the county lake:*

HAYWOOD

*And sometimes she takes that into  
her own hands, even if it's wrong  
of her to do that.*

- *Karen stares with her mouth agape in realization...*

*At a huge bookshelf covering the length of a whole wall,  
filled with hundreds of books. Every single one of them has  
those pink post-its.*

DANA (V.O.)  
 (over phone)  
 Hello? Karen? Are you still there?

A KNOCK at the door, and the **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR** enters.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
 We doin' this or what?

KAREN  
 (into phone)  
 Dana, I gotta go.

She's about to join the Assistant Director, but:

KAREN (CONT'D)  
 Wait. Everybody signed the NDAs?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
 I think there's a couple people who  
 haven't. I'll get 'em when --

KAREN  
 Get them now.

The Assistant Director is a little spooked by that, but nods.

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - DAY**

Karen descends the stairs to find Leah already sitting in one of the armchairs. Karen takes the other one.

The few remaining crew are making some final adjustments. The Assistant Director collects a couple NDAs from crew members.

Bill and Iris stand nearby, not sure what to do.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
 Alright, we've got Karen now. Let's  
 settle down please.

The room quiets down.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
 Everybody ready?

Leah nods. But it takes Karen a moment to snap out of her stupor and nod as well.

Leah notices, knows something's up.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (CONT'D)  
 Ok, let's go ahead and get started.

LEAH

Wait.  
 (to her parents)  
 Can you guys step out?

Bill and Iris are surprised at the request.

Karen's not. She watches Leah like a hawk.

IRIS

Honey, we're on your side.

LEAH

I know, but just, it's really weird talkin' about this stuff with you guys listenin'. Is it ok if I do this myself?

They hesitate, but then:

BILL

Of course, babe. Whatever you need.

They each give her shoulder a squeeze as they head out.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Alright, we all good now?

Leah nods. Karen nods, not taking her eyes off Leah.

The Assistant Director motions to the camera and sound guys to start rolling, and then he nods at Karen.

KAREN

You've been through quite a lot in the past few months, and even just in the past few weeks. How are you handling everything?

LEAH

It's been real hard. Lots of ups and downs. I thought everything was over when the video got leaked. I thought it'd take a miracle for Zeke Carver to get away with this. But then all of a sudden --  
 (she snaps her fingers)  
 He's free.

KAREN

Free but not innocent.

LEAH

Free but not innocent.

KAREN

And losing your best friend on the same day, that must have been devastating.

Leah nods, tears well up in her eyes.

LEAH

Worst part is, it's my fault she died.

KAREN

Would you have done the same for her?

Leah nods. Karen gives her a moment to compose herself.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Let's talk about the video. Did you know Paul Whittaker was filming at the time?

LEAH

I guess I must've known in the moment, 'cause in the video, I'm screamin' for him to help. But I honestly forgot about it until I saw it online with everybody else. My therapist says my PTSD's makin' me suppress memories, so I think that's why.

Karen waits for a long time. Leah's not sure what's up.

At long last, Karen grabs the pink folder Garland gave her, its corner singed in the fire.

KAREN

This is a Sheriff's report accusing Zeke Carver of sexual assault, but it's not yours. It's from February.

A flicker of alarm in Leah's eyes.

KAREN (CONT'D)

This was filed by your best friend, Abby Green.

LEAH

What? Abby? Can I see that?

But Karen holds onto the report.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Abby was raped?

KAREN  
She never told you?

Leah shakes her head.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
You were best friends for how long?  
Nine years?

LEAH  
Yeah, that's why I'm so shocked she  
never told me.

KAREN  
Why did you go home with Zeke  
Carver if you knew he'd raped your  
best friend?

LEAH  
I'm telling you I didn't know that.  
If I did, I wouldn't have gone home  
with him.

KAREN  
Maybe that's the exact reason you  
went home with him.

LEAH  
What? No it ain't.

KAREN  
You wanted to get him for the same  
crime he committed against your  
best friend. You wanted him to pay.

LEAH  
Are you listenin' to yourself?

KAREN  
This was easy. You'd done stuff  
like this in high school.

LEAH  
I don't know what you're talking  
about.

Leah's sweating.

KAREN  
But you knew a rape accusation  
wouldn't hold water without proof.  
So you asked Whittaker to get it  
all on camera.

LEAH

I don't even remember him filming!

KAREN

You knew you could use his  
conscience against him. He saw what  
Zeke did to Abby back in February.

Karen holds up the pink folder.

Leah shakes her head.

KAREN (CONT'D)

But what I don't understand is why  
you didn't tell law enforcement  
that Whittaker had the video.

LEAH

If I knew he had a video like that,  
which I didn't, I'd've told him to  
go show the press, not those sexist  
wannabe football players in the  
Sheriff's Department.

KAREN

Ah, so that was the plan. To leak  
it to the press.

Leah knows she can keep running from this thing. But she  
finally stops. Puts her hands up, figuratively.

LEAH

Yeah. That was the plan.

Karen's tongue-tied, almost paralyzed by the adrenaline of  
getting a confession, of winning! And on camera no less! Keep  
it together, Karen. Say something!

KAREN

So you admit it? You pretended to  
get raped by Zeke Carver?

LEAH

Yeah, but he didn't know I was  
pretendin'. When I told him to  
stop, he thought I was for real and  
he did it anyway. Ain't that the  
definition of rape?

Karen shakes her head.

KAREN

I think a lot of people would disagree. Maybe not lawyers or judges, but --

LEAH

The Sheriff believed it. You think he would've tried to bury the video if he didn't?

KAREN

That doesn't mean --

LEAH

And why do you think he copped to finding it on Paul's phone without probable cause? He cratered his own case -- why?

Leah's shaking with fear and tears and pent-up rage. It feels good to finally get all this off her chest.

She stares straight into one of the cameras.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Did I commit a crime? Yeah. I lied for my friend, for justice. But everybody else in this town lied to protect a fuckin' rapist just cause he can throw a football real nice. And if you think this is the first or the last time that's happened, you're outta your god damn mind.

Karen remains silent for a moment, compelled by Leah's argument in spite of herself.

LEAH (CONT'D)

You got any idea what it's like, tellin' someone to stop hurtin' you, and they don't even hear you? I thought I could handle it at first, you know? And then it just got so real. He wasn't gonna put me down till he was done with me, and I had no say in the matter.

(beat)

Only reason I ain't walked into a train three months ago was cause I thought I could still nail that piece of shit.

KAREN

You'd have been caught eventually.  
If not by me, then somebody else.  
I'm surprised the Sheriff didn't  
put two and two together a while  
ago. He had the un-blacked out  
report.

Karen hands the pink folder to Leah, and she opens it to a heavily redacted report. Abby's name isn't visible.

Leah deflates. Karen bluffed her.

LEAH

The Sheriff can't prove I knew  
about Abby's rape though.

Leah glances at one of the cameras.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Well, now he can. Not like it  
matters no more. Abby's dead 'cause  
I tried to save her, and Zeke got  
off scot free, and nobody's lettin'  
me off myself. So do whatever you  
want. Can't get any worse than it  
already is.

Karen watches Leah cry, not sure what to think anymore.

**EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - FRONT YARD - DAY**

Bill and Iris sit on a couple of lawn chairs in the front yard, waiting for the interview to finish.

The front door opens and Leah and Karen emerge.

Bill and Iris embrace Leah in a tearful hug. After a moment, they pull Karen into the hug as well. Karen doesn't know what to do, but she bears it.

Meanwhile, the crew carry equipment past them, back into the truck, their lips contractually sealed.

**EXT. ANDERSON HOUSE - DAY**

The crew's just about finished packing up their truck when a **D.I.T.** emerges from the house and hands Karen three blue hard drive boxes.

D.I.T.  
Here's all the footage, double  
backed up.

KAREN  
Thanks.

**EXT. BEATRICE PAPER MILL - DAY**

Karen's Camry sits outside the shuttered paper mill. Karen  
and Paul sit inside.

KAREN (V.O.)  
(inside car)  
You were supposed to save her,  
weren't you?

**INT. KAREN'S CAMRY - DAY**

Paul nods at Karen.

PAUL  
We had it all planned out. I was  
supposed to pull her outta there  
before it got too...

KAREN  
But Zeke locked you out.

Paul stares off in horror, remembering.

KAREN (CONT'D)  
Why'd it take you so long to leak  
the video?

Paul looks at Karen like she's stupid.

PAUL  
I dunno, maybe 'cause I didn't want  
to get kicked off the team?

KAREN  
Then what changed your mind?

PAUL  
The mornin' after Zeke brought Leah  
home, he's all like 'Yo, what  
happened last night?'

KAREN  
He didn't remember it?

PAUL

Naw, he blacked out. That's how come I took the video to the Sheriff. Tryna do things the right way.

Karen laughs dryly.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Yeah, right? He took my phone, didn't do jack shit the right way. Good thing I had made a copy on my laptop.

KAREN

And that's when you leaked it?

PAUL

Naw, I tried one last thing. I told Zeke, I said, 'Yo man, you really did this, I saw you do it. She was sayin' no.' Guess what he does.

Karen shakes her head.

PAUL (CONT'D)

He straight up laughs. Says it's a girl's fault she don't know what to expect when she go home with a guy. 'Cept he said it different.

KAREN

How'd he say it?

Paul hesitates, speaks quietly.

PAUL

If a girl goes home with a guy, she oughta know it's to fuck.

KAREN

Wow.

PAUL

So, you gon blow this whole thing outta the water? 'Cause I ain't got nothin' to lose. They puttin' me away for a while, ain't nothin' I can do about that. Imma be doin' time 'cause I assisted a rapist. Oh but he walkin' scot fuckin' free.

Karen's not sure how to respond.

**EXT. BEATRICE CEMETERY - DAY**

Karen stands in front of Abby Green's grave, which is still decorated with flowers and wreaths.

**FLASHBACK: Karen hugs the dead girl in the bathtub, clings to her for dear life as policemen try to pry them apart.**

**EXT. FIRST CALVARY CEMETERY - DAY**

Karen stands in front of a different gravestone, with the New York skyline behind her. Presumably that of the girl who died in the bathtub.

KAREN

Forgive me.

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - BULLPEN - DAY**

Karen walks into the bullpen holding the hard drive boxes containing the footage of Leah's interview.

An **ASSISTANT EDITOR**, 40s, with thick glasses, approaches her.

ASSISTANT EDITOR

How'd it go?

Karen shrugs. She hands him the boxes.

ASSISTANT EDITOR (CONT'D)

Great. I'll start ingesting the footage into the Avid. Should be ready in a couple hours.

Karen nods. Watches the Assistant Editor walk away.

GARY (O.S.)

Karen.

Gary beckons her toward his office.

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - GARY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Karen takes a seat as Gary closes the office door.

GARY

You ok?

Karen shrugs.

GARY (CONT'D)  
Your intern had some choice words  
for you when she got back.

KAREN  
Yeah. I should take some time off.

GARY  
Oh, come on, don't be so hard on  
yourself. She was mostly projecting.

KAREN  
No, I lied to her, I lied to you.

Gary laughs at how seriously Karen's taking this.

GARY  
(mock shock)  
You lied? Where's the real Karen  
and what have you done with her?

**INT. KAREN'S CAMRY - DAY**

Karen sits in her car, parked outside the general store --  
back in Alabama.

In the passenger seat are the three hard drive boxes  
containing Leah's interview footage.

Gary and Karen's conversation continues:

GARY (V.O.)  
Karen, honestly, relax. I'm not mad.

KAREN (V.O.)  
You should be.

Karen stares at the boxes for a long time.

Finally, she pulls one of the hard drives out. It's a G-  
Drive, in a hard aluminum case.

She grabs a screwdriver, a price tag still stuck to the  
handle. She starts unscrewing the drive.

GARY (V.O.)  
Is there something else you want to  
tell me?

After several screws, she finally slides open the metal  
casing, revealing the innards of the hard drive: a silver  
platter, its actuated arm, and several components around it.

Karen stares at her reflection in the platter, clean as a mirror finish.

GARY (V.O.)

You know it doesn't matter how long  
it takes to tell the truth as long  
as you tell it in the end.

KAREN (V.O.)

I wish it worked that way.

After a long moment, Karen scratches the platter with the screwdriver, scribbles all over it, clouding the mirror finish, obscuring her reflection.

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - GARY'S OFFICE - DAY**

A KNOCK on the door before the Assistant Editor opens it, interrupting Karen and Gary's meeting.

ASSISTANT EDITOR

We've got a problem.

**INT. VIDEO EDITING BAY - DAY**

The Assistant editor drives the computer, while Gary and Karen stand behind him, watching.

ASSISTANT EDITOR

The hard drives are totally  
corrupted.

He plays back the interview footage, which skips and glitches constantly. No more than a few milliseconds here and there of usable footage.

ASSISTANT EDITOR (CONT'D)

At first I thought, 'no big deal,  
I'll try one of the backups.' Same  
problem.

GARY

Fuck. Get that D.I.T. on the phone.  
Last time we ever work with him.

ASSISTANT EDITOR

I did. He says the drives were  
working when he gave them to, uh...

He glances at Karen, not wanting to point fingers.

Gary turns to Karen, eyebrows raised.

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - GARY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Gary and Karen sit across the desk once again.

GARY

Karen, that interview cost us a pretty penny. We had to pay the crew twice after you canceled the first time.

KAREN

You could still run the story without the interview.

GARY

That's not the point, Karen.

He BANGS his fist on the table.

KAREN

I'm sorry.

GARY

I don't want an apology. I want to know why.

**INT. KAREN'S CAMRY - DAY**

Karen continues speaking with Paul at the paper mill.

PAUL

You know, nobody gon think Zeke's guilty after your story comes out.

KAREN

Why not? It's still legally a rape.

Paul laughs.

PAUL

They gon see Zeke as the innocent victim, not Leah. Hell, even liberals ain't gon get behind her.

KAREN

But if I explain why she did it -- I mean doesn't it prove how rampant this rape problem is if somebody had to become a vigilante to fix it?

The light changes as the sun sets behind the gleaming football stadium in the distance, casting a long shadow across the city.

PAUL

Nah-uh. You shine a light on a fake rape, that makes 'em all look like fakers. They probably gonna call you some kinda rape-lover for writin' this.

KAREN

Then what do I do? I can't just lie about what happened here.

PAUL

Why not? Just say it was a real rape. Leave Abby out of it.

KAREN

My career would be over if anyone discovered the truth.

PAUL

Here's some truth: you write this story an' Leah goes to jail. Even though her plan failed, even though her best friend's dead. And Zeke walks. She deserve that?

The paper mill groans, something giving way in its aged, dusty innards, like the sigh of death.

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - GARY'S OFFICE - DAY**

Gary glares at a passionless Karen.

GARY

Does this have anything to do with your intern? Dana?

KAREN

No.

GARY

We're going to finish this story. I'm going to find out what you're hiding.

KAREN

Have Dana do it. She knows the story, she's smart, give her a shot. You can publish on time, too.

Gary thinks about that.

Karen stands up.

GARY  
Where are you going?

KAREN  
You don't have to fire me.

Karen walks out:

**INT. MESSENGER HEADQUARTERS - BULLPEN - DAY**

A couple people smile and nod at Karen as she walks out of the office for the last time without so much as a goodbye.

**EXT. FIRST CALVARY CEMETERY - DAY**

Karen continues speaking with the gravestone in New York.

KAREN  
Did I do the right thing?

She places a clay ornament of a horse and chariot on the grave, similar to the one on her cell phone case.

FADE TO BLACK.

**INT. KAREN'S STUDIO APARTMENT - DAY**

Karen sits on her floor mattress, pulls up a news article on her laptop, titled: "THE RED ZONE."

Underneath it: "BY DANA REED."

DANA (V.O.)  
(reciting the article)  
The Red Zone is a football term that refers to the last twenty yards of the field that a team has to cross before they can score.

**INT. BEATRICE HOSPITAL - BREAK ROOM - DAY**

Augusta Garland reads the article on her phone in the break room, wearing her scrubs.

DANA (V.O.)  
It also refers to the first two weeks of classes on a university campus, when the majority of sexual assaults occur.

**INT. LEAH'S DORM ROOM - DAY**

Leah sits on the bed in a new dorm room, with a campus visible through the window that looks very different from Gilead. She reads the same article on her laptop.

DANA (V.O.)  
But before you read on about Leah  
Anderson --

**INT. ANDERSON HOUSE - DAY**

Bill and Iris read Dana's article, tears in their eyes.

DANA (V.O.)  
-- and all the adversity she and  
her family faced --

**INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY**

Sheriff Chappell skims the article and then closes it without reading too much. But Dana's voice continues over:

DANA (V.O.)  
-- or about the Sheriff who stood  
in the way of justice --

**INT. OL' CREOLE GRILL - DAY**

Most of the town's gathered in the dingy little bar to watch Gilead play in the National Championship. All eyes are glued to the TV. No time for news here.

DANA (V.O.)  
-- or the people of Beatrice,  
Alabama --

**INT. CAUSEWAY MOTEL - DAY**

Chastity reads the article on her phone, nodding.

DANA (V.O.)  
-- and their unshakable prejudice --

**INT. MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT OFFICE - DAY**

James Haywood, Leah's old high school teacher, reads the article on his computer.

DANA (V.O.)  
 -- and incessant rumor-mongering --

**EXT. UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX STADIUM - DAY**

Zeke runs onto the field with the rest of his team, to a deafening 'boo' from the crowd that drowns out whatever cheering the Gilead fans can manage.

DANA (V.O.)  
 -- or the quarterback who got away with sexual assault, I'd like to add a third definition to that term, The Red Zone.

**INT. MONROE COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY**

Paul, dressed in a crisply pressed suit and slacks, stands up with his attorney as a **JUDGE** enters the courtroom.

DANA (V.O.)  
 It's the danger we perpetuate when our heroes break the law and we look away, when we cling to comfortable lies in the face of hard truths, when we let powerful men get away with everything and scapegoat the weak.

The judge BANGS the gavel.

CUT TO:

**INT. IRISH PUB - NIGHT**

Karen and Dana drink together at a mellow pub, while Gilead's National Championship game plays on TV.

Karen stares into the distance, Dana's words clearly weighing on her mind.

DANA  
 You never finished telling me about your phone case.

Dana nods towards Karen's phone on the bar. It bears the image of a man in a horse-drawn chariot.

KAREN  
 Oh right. That's Yudhistir's chariot.

DANA

The one that floated because he was so honest, right?

KAREN

Yeah. Yudhistir's army killed an elephant called Aswatthama, who was named after the enemy prince. So when the news spread, nobody knew whether it was the elephant who'd died or if it was the prince.

DANA

So the enemy king asked Yudhistir about it?

KAREN

Exactly. If anyone could tell them the truth, it was him. But Lord Krishna told him to say the exact words, "Aswatthama is dead." Because that wasn't a lie, technically.

DANA

But the enemies thought their prince was dead instead of the elephant?

KAREN

Yeah. That was the turning point in the war.

ON THE TV: Zeke Carver does a post-game interview on the field. The score reads:

"FINAL -- GILEAD: 52    CLEMSON: 47."

DANA

But that's good, right? Yudhistir won the war, didn't he? Eventually?

KAREN

Yes. But from that day onward, his chariot never floated again.

Karen stares into the distance. She downs her drink in one.

FADE OUT.