

**ANOTHER HARPERSVILLE MASSACRE**

written by

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INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH LOBBY - NIGHT

A hand-painted BANNER full of cheer and clumsy penmanship hangs over a TICKET BOOTH made up to look like a RUBIK'S CUBE between two oversized VHS TAPES.

It reads, in blinding RED:

WELCOME TO YOUR TOTALLY AWESOME HOMECOMING, HARPERSVILLE HIGH!

And speckled around the banner, in smaller, bright BLUE:

80s IN '08!

The booth sits in humming light at the end of a dark, LOCKER-lined hallway. A nostalgic oasis.

All is quiet, save the distant muffle of Gloria Estefan and the Miami Sound Machine - "RHYTHM IS GONNA GET YOU."

And the almost-silent RUSTLE of EDDIE "THE PRUDE" PRUDEN, sophomore, peeking over a yellow square of the Rubik's cube.

His feathered hair gives him away before his petrified eyes.

Eddie keeps inching out, standing. His PIANO TIE flops onto the top of the cube, next to a reel of TICKETS and a CASH BOX.

But he never stops looking. Flinching. Jolting. Left, right, left. Stops left.

His jaw goes slack. His eyes couldn't open any wider.

EDDIE

Oh my God-

Eddie turns to bolt out the CURTAIN at the back, when-

The RUSH of something heavy thrown hard.

The TEAR of it splitting the Homecoming Committee's hard work.

The CRUNCH of a rusty MEATHOOK on a rustier CHAIN catching Eddie through the shoulder blade.

Eddie SCREAMS. The chain pulls taut. Eddie SCREAMS louder.

The chain goes slack. Yanks straight again.

Eddie SCREAMS again.

The chain plays tug-of-war with Eddie trapped against the Rubik's cube.

Pull. SCREAM. Pull. SCREAM. Pull. Weaker SCREAM. Pull.

Eddie bursts through the display, spraying paint chips and balsa splinters.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH HALLS - NIGHT

Cold FLUORESCENT LIGHTS split the ceiling like lines on a road. Colorful PAPER-LINK CHAINS connect lanes.

Eddie SCREAMS at the harsh light and the hook in his clavicle. He paws at it with fast-draining consciousness.

The gore-stained BASEBALL BUTCHER at the other end of the chain doesn't notice. He hauls him with one hand, a SPIKED BASEBALL BAT in the other.

The music gets louder, closer. Clearer.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

HALF-HEARTED STROBES throw color across every corner of the gym.

Across the BALLOONS taped to the bleachers. Across the empty DJ BOOTH and the DJ's set-and-forget playlist of 80s standards.

Across the scattered bodies of DEAD STUDENTS. A Civil War photo on a polished basketball court.

The butcher barges through one set of DOORS, bulky CATCHER'S MASK bobbing. Through the eye slits, he surveys his trophies, Eddie still flailing behind him like a stubborn dog.

He whips the chain sideways, rolling the poor bastard in a wide arc, over a few bodies, until he's face down in an open spot of the floor.

EDDIE  
Please...please!

Across the hardwood battlefield, a body cautiously lifts its head.

LESLIE GANTNER, senior, peeks over the corpse of MR. WEBBER, dead Don Johnson. Terror scars her face, but doesn't rule it.

Even as she watches the butcher set his bloody boot into Eddie's back and yank out the hook.

Eddie YELPS.

The butcher swings the hook around his shoulder and reels back with his bat.

Leslie's eyes widen as the butcher raises it over his head.

Leslie drops her head again as the butcher drives it into the back of Eddie's skull.

THWACK. Eddie stops screaming.

The butcher jerks toward Leslie's subtle movement.

Leslie pinches her eyes shut against the floor.

The butcher watches long enough to GRUNT. Walks back out.

Leslie kicks off her HIGH HEELS, scrambles to her bare feet and runs for the opposite end.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH HALLS - NIGHT

Leslie hurries on her toes, almost silent, into a hallway split between BRICK and GLASS BLOCK.

RED-AND-BLUE POLICE LIGHTS smudge the glass from outside.

Leslie stops when the colors sweep, lunges at the blocks.

She waves, pounds, tries everything but a scream for help. Panic infects her resolve.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

THREE POLICE CARS form makeshift cover against HARPERSVILLE HIGH, a squat expanse of red brick and dead leaves.

Three DEPUTIES in fur-collared COATS hide behind trunks and hoods, REVOLVERS at the ready.

All watching the entrance. All more scared than they'd admit.

Only RACHEL SVEDLIK, 32, notices the blurry HANDS pawing at the glass block along the gym. Her focus locks on and she's a tightly coiled spring - stone-still, but ready.

The hot-and-cold waves down her face don't even earn a blink.

The blurry hands disappear, the owner gone.

RACHEL  
That's it - I'm going in.

She runs out from around her cruiser, ducked low.

The other deputies watch her in dull shock.

DEPUTY CYPHERS - looks 19, acts 45, is 26 - leans his scarecrow frame around a fender.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
(teacher's pet)  
Sheriff said to hold the perimeter  
until he gets here!

Rachel doesn't even look back.

RACHEL  
Well when he shows up, tell him he  
can hold this-

She flips the bird over her shoulder and disappears inside.

Cyphers shakes his head until he spots DEPUTY WISE, 46 and rotund, following Rachel.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
Now where the hell are you going?

Wise shoots him a wary glance.

DEPUTY WISE  
She scares me more than the  
Sheriff.

Cyphers scowls, goes back to hiding.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
Well it's not gonna be *my* ass when  
he gets here.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH LOBBY - NIGHT

Rachel pulls a FLASHLIGHT off her belt. Shines on the wrecked ticket booth. The trail of BLOOD.

Faint synth breaks the silence. Flock of Seagulls. "I RAN."

Rachel holds her flashlight under her revolver and moves in.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH HALLS - NIGHT

Leslie pads quietly down an empty row of classrooms, checking each door in succession.

Locked. Locked. Locked.

A shadowy FACE fills an inlaid window.

Leslie jumps, steadies and cups her hands over the glass.

LESLIE

Andrew?

ANDREW BURNS, senior, aspiring drop-out, smiles like it hurts and tells her to cut it out with a hand across his neck.

She grabs the DOORKNOB. Still locked.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

What are you doing? Open the door!

Andrew leans against the glass, peeking down the hall.

ANDREW

(muffled by the door)

Um. Babe. You're drawing a lot of attention.

LESLIE

Are you kidding? Let me in.

Andrew grits his teeth, leans back.

ANDREW

I mean I want to, hon', but he's gonna know we're *both* in here if you keep making all this noise-

Leslie murders him with a look.

LESLIE

You didn't even buy me a corsage and now you're going to let me *die*?

SKIDDING FEET make them both jolt. Andrew retreats.

ANDREW

(trailing)

I'll text you.

Leslie watches the source of the sound, down the hall.

MELISSA KASPRAK, sophomore, hurtles around a corner, dressed like a thrift store Madonna out of "Like A Virgin."

MELISSA  
Leslie?

LESLIE  
(quietly)  
Melissa, lose the shoes!

MELISSA  
Wha-?

LESLIE  
(a little louder)  
The shoes! If I heard them coming,  
so can-

WHIP. The chain flails around the corner, wraps around Melissa's neck once and hooks her throat.

Leslie swallows the rest of her thought.

For a moment, nobody moves. Then the chain yanks.

Melissa spirals to the floor, minus a trachea.

Leslie fights a scream, starts backing away slowly as the chain drags back around the corner.

Then she runs.

Directly into Deputy Wise, gun drawn.

DEPUTY WISE  
Slow down there, little lady-

Leslie does not slow down, runs past him. He reels.

DEPUTY WISE (CONT'D)  
Good idea, then. Find a safe place  
to hide-

The spiked bat splits the back of his skull.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Deputy Cyphers holds his CB RECEIVER through the window.

CYPHERS  
(into CB)  
Sheriff? Sheriff?

Glass SHATTERS. Wise's body hurtles out a classroom window.  
Cyphers flinches, watches the unmoving corpse.

CYPHERS (CONT'D)  
(weak, to himself)  
C'mon, Sheriff.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

TING-TA-TING. TA-TING-TING. The lopsided taunt of bent nails on dented lockers.

The butcher drags his bat along the aluminum.

LESLIE

Buries her face in her arms, contorted into a locker.

THE BUTCHER

Looms closer. The horrible melody gets louder.

LESLIE

Holds her breath as his SHADOW covers the slats in the door.

BANG. Leslie almost gasps.

THE BUTCHER

Turns to watch GREGORY ALGAR, senior, unfold himself from a locker across the room.

Greg SCREAMS as his CHESSBOARD SLIP-ONS hit the floor.

The butcher whips his chain across the room, missing Gregory by design, latching onto the slats of another locker door.

Gregory is crying too hard to notice. He clotheslines himself on the chain.

The butcher lumbers over to the limp form.

Gregory is out cold.

The butcher shrugs, raises his spiked bat.

BANG. Leslie bursts out of hiding, headed for the door.

The butcher pulls at his chain - it's still caught on the locker.



She hurries for the door as the butcher frees his hook.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH HALLS - NIGHT

Leslie starts breathing like a freight train. Arms pumping. Feet slapping the linoleum like frantic applause.

She takes the first turn. Towards a FIRE EXIT.

A hand reaches for her shoulder.

LESLIE

Sh-!

Rachel puts her finger to her lips, pulls Leslie aside.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH BOILER ROOM - NIGHT

Rachel herds Leslie into a rusty jungle of pipes and tanks. They duck behind an accidental barricade of OLD TEXTBOOKS.

RACHEL

(quiet)

The fire doors are locked.

Leslie can't even blink.

LESLIE

(quiet, too fast)

Cool. He's right behind me.

RACHEL

Okay. You're safe now. Just stay here and hide; the boiler room's the last place he's going to look.

The dragging DIRGE of chains echoes through the door.

Rachel and Leslie turn slowly, almost in unison.

The SCRAPING sharpens, intensifies. Closer.

Rachel pulls back the hammer on her revolver, steadies her aim on a stack of CHEMISTRY 101 by Bernard Garnell.

Two SHADOWS invade the strip of light beneath the door.

Leslie ducks until only her eyes sneak out over the books.

The dragging stops.

All eyes on the door. Rachel holds her breath. Leslie peeks.

The moment passes. Nothing happens.

LESLIE  
(quietly)  
Is he-

The butcher kicks the handle off the door.

BANG. BANG. BANG. Rachel squints over her roaring muzzle.

The butcher staggers, stumbles. Flailing back with each shot.

BANG. BANG. Leslie covers her ears.

The butcher falls into the hallway, dead on the linoleum.

Rachel watches the body through the swinging door. She waits until it swings open.

BANG. The butcher twitches. The door settles shut.

Rachel turns to Leslie, wide-eyed.

RACHEL  
For luck.

Leslie hops up and hugs Rachel, who holds her for a moment, then walks the two of them to the door.

Rachel pushes open the door like she expects resistance.

IN THE HALLWAY,

only the chain remains.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
(quietly)  
What the hell?

EXT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Surviving STUDENTS hurry out into the night in half-assed 80s costumes, making tearful calls on FLIP PHONES.

Cyphers tries to look heroic as he nods at passing survivors.

Rachel puts her coat around Leslie's shoulders and leads her out.

RACHEL  
You gonna be alright?

Leslie answers her with a frustrated stare.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
Right. Sorry.

GANTNER (O.S.)  
I should have your badge for hard  
tack, Svedlik.

SHERIFF JOSEPH "GRAVEYARD" GANTNER, 47, wears his uniform and coat like a second skin. The lights, the cries, the blood don't faze him, even if they've left stressed canyons in his face. He wears a constant look of dull warmth, a pleasant blank.

It only takes his fit-enough frame a few strides to get in Rachel's face.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
(without raising his  
voice)  
Might go good with a coffee from  
the One-Cup.

Rachel boils over.

RACHEL  
Sir, I had him- her- it- *that*  
*thing*. Dead to rights-

GANTNER  
I thought I gave you orders to stay  
outside until I got here.

Rachel catches her breath.

RACHEL  
And I thought I just saved your  
daughter's life.

Leslie, stuck uncomfortably between the two, raises a hand.

LESLIE  
She did, for the record-

GANTNER  
Not now, Leslie.

RACHEL  
Let her talk, Sheriff. She had a  
pretty good seat to the show.

Andrew stumbles past, acting cool.

ANDREW

Les, I knew you'd make it! I'll text you as soon as I get home.

Leslie doesn't look at him.

GANTNER

(flat)

Oh good. Your boyfriend survived.

RACHEL

(hard)

Six rounds, Sheriff. Straight to the chest. It was on the floor, sir. Out. And then...somehow...

Gantner looks at her with tired eyes.

GANTNER

(to RACHEL)

It was gone. Right?

Rachel puts her hands on her hips. Stares like he's crazy.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

You're still settling in around here, so I'll cut you some slack. This is not Pittsburgh or Monroeville or wherever you rolled in from. We haven't had a theft in fourteen years. Everyone sleeps in til ten. Most of us even leave our doors unlocked. The only problem with our little town is that once a year, something with a mask and machete pays a visit, thins the herd and disappears just as fast.

Rachel shakes her head, waves at the school.

RACHEL

But something like this can't just keep happening. This isn't... *normal*.

Gantner doesn't even register a hit.

GANTNER

The sooner you accept it, the easier life gets around here. It's always a different killer. People always die. The body's always gone.

(MORE)

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
 Deputy Svedlik, I'm assuming you  
 came out here for the same reason  
 all young deputies do. Well  
 congratulations - tonight you're a  
 hero. Next year, you might not be  
 so lucky.

Leslie looks up. Rachel bites her tongue before she can yell.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
 I know a chipped shoulder when I  
 see one, Deputy, so I'm only going  
 to warn you once - you can't fix  
 this place. What happened in there  
 is probably the single scariest  
 experience of your life.

Rachel gives him her full, frustrated attention.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
 But around here, it's just another  
 Harpersville massacre.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSES - DAY

BEGIN TITLES

Over STILLS of PORCHES and sleepy little HOUSES cluttered  
 with old, fading HALLOWEEN DECORATIONS.

A crepe paper GHOST hangs from a MAILBOX, cartoon mouth  
 forever wailing to no effect, fighting the breeze.

TWO JACK-O-LANTERNS, one smashed and one frowning with age  
 sit against a bottom step.

STYROFOAM GRAVESTONES with improbably silly names dot yards.

PLASTIC SKELETONS crawl out of flowerbed with goofy grins.

A PLYWOOD COFFIN leans propped against BUSHES, a big CROSS  
 sloppily painted on its face.

POLICE TAPE flaps against it lazily.

END TITLES

FREEZE FRAME.

A fat FINGER interrupts, pointing at it on a SCREEN, pointing  
 at the police tape.

EDITOR (O.S.)  
What's this?

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The EDITOR, a comb-over with legs, squints at his monitor.

EDITOR  
Is that a decoration?

He glares over top of his monitor like he already knows the answer and already hates it.

CLIFF BORCHARDT, 30, looks back like he already knows the editor hates his answer and he's used to it. Cliff wears ripped jeans and an elbow-padded sport coat, neither fashionably. A used car salesman with a camera who'd like to at least be hocking Caddies.

CLIFF  
(innocent)  
Is what a decoration?

The editor jabs his finger at the computer screen.

EDITOR  
This gravestone that says "Barry M. Deep." You know which fuckin' thing.

CLIFF  
(still innocent)  
The police tape?

EDITOR  
Ding-ding-ding. Give the kid a stuffed poodle and a gun-to-the-head so he'll answer the damn question.

Cliff looks around like a poet trying to capture the essence of the room. Stalling.

CLIFF  
I mean everything's a decoration on a grand enough scale-

EDITOR  
Did you put it there or did they?

CLIFF  
That would be me, sir.

The editor POUNDS the corner of his desk.

EDITOR

Goddammit, Cliff. You can't keep faking photographs like this.

CLIFF

But the story needed the pizzazz-

EDITOR

Cliff, a bunch of Methodists didn't want to see crosses on Halloween decorations, at least not on Sundays. The police aren't even involved.

CLIFF

But wouldn't it be a lot more interesting if they were-

The editor almost CHOKES on his COFFEE and hops to his feet.

EDITOR

Sure. And you know who else we oughta get involved? Santa. Santa and a full squadron of Playboy Bunnies. That'll really spice this shit up.

Cliff withers in the consuming shade of the editor.

CLIFF

You know, I've heard coffee can give people anger problems.

The editor GROANS and shuffles coffee-ringed PAPERS.

EDITOR

I'll buy the other shots, but I'm not touching that one with a Haz-mat suit. It's unethical, Cliff, and no way to earn a name for yourself.

CLIFF

Speaking of, sir, I think I've got a story that might just push me over the top.

EDITOR

Yeah, well get me the pictures and we'll talk.

CLIFF

No, no. For this one, I'd do it all. Photos, interviews, a full write-up in the font of your choice. Tip-to-tail, sir, Cliff's first story.

EDITOR

...Go 'head.

CLIFF

Alright, thank you. See, I heard someone mention this town on the radio today, where a bunch of people, teenagers mostly, just died.

The editor cracks a slow, cruel smile.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

But that's not all, sir - see, in this town, that happens like every year. With a different mass murderer almost every time. The place is called-

EDITOR

Harpersville.

Cliff comes down off his high.

CLIFF

Yeah. You know it?

INT. PITTSBURGH DISPATCH NEWSROOM - DAY

A bustling grid of DESKS and COMPUTERS, kept congested by the steady traffic of REPORTERS taking calls and writing notes.

The editor steps out into the maelstrom and slams his fist against his door-frame like a reflex.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

The traffic slows, stops. The phone calls quiet. Most eyes turn to the editor.

EDITOR

Our steadfast stringer Cliff here has a dynamite lead and I want you all to hear it and appreciate his investigative spirit.



The editor turns to Cliff, who almost flinches.

EDITOR (CONT'D)  
Go 'head, Mr. Borchardt. Impress  
'em.

Cliff faces the stony-to-irritated faces of the audience.

CLIFF  
Well, uh, I'd like to figure out  
what's going on in Harpersville.

A moment of silence as it sinks in.

LAUGHTER. Some bemused. Some cruel. Then the room reanimates.

Cliff withers like a starving plant robbed of sunlight.

EDITOR  
I haven't sent a man to  
Harpersville since '89.

CLIFF  
How can you pass up a story like  
that?

EDITOR  
Because there is no story, Cliff.  
Worst-case scenario, my reporter  
ends up dead. Best-case, they come  
back and write fifteen-hundred  
pretty words about what they saw  
and how little sense it made.

CLIFF  
I just don't get it-

EDITOR  
Nobody does, Cliff. Nobody bothers  
with it anymore because you can  
only be shocked by so much gun  
violence in Chicago, get me?

Cliff watches the floor, his ratty TENNIS SHOES.

EDITOR (CONT'D)  
Maybe something's in the water or  
maybe someone found hell at the  
bottom of a coal mine out there,  
but either way, Harpersville is a  
dinky, little dead-end, Cliff. Our  
readers want local football heroes  
and details about the latest puke-  
machine at Kennywood.

(MORE)

EDITOR (CONT'D)

They don't want a yearly ghost story that ends with a shrug and a carnival.

Cliff livens up again and squints at his boss.

CLIFF

There's a carnival?

EDITOR

Stop it. I want you to get that town out of your head. You want a big break? I hear the salamanders might be hibernating early or something. Run that down, play by the rules of journalistic decency and maybe we'll talk about using you for more than just pictures, alright?

The editor taps Cliff's shoulder without really meaning it and turns back to his office.

EDITOR (CONT'D)

They'll pay you downstairs.

SLAM. Cliff blinks at the shut door with "EDI OR" on it.

He exhales, peers down at his camera and turns to leave.

A PRESS PASS sitting on the corner of a DESK stops him.

A PICTURE of its owner smiles emptily in the middle of it, small enough to be covered by a thumb.

Cliff spots the magic words "REGISTERED JOURNALIST" along the side, just above "PITTSBURGH DISPATCH."

In one clumsy move, Cliff surveys the area, snatches the pass and walks out as fast as he casually can.

INT. CLIFF'S CAR - DAY

Green Appalachian FOOTHILLS smear past Cliff's window.

CLIFF

I can do this. Not can. I *am* doing this. Alright. Deep breath. Act professional. Eyes open.

Early signs of a town - MINIMART, GAS STATION - pass outside.

Cliff leans over the wheel. His jaw goes slack.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 (awe)  
 Eyes open, Cliff.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - DAY

The BANNER flutters in a mild wind:

24TH ANNUAL HARPERSVILLE "HERITAGE" FESTIVAL

SNAP. Cliff takes a picture and walks into the celebration.

TENTED BOOTHS manned by smiling LOCALS peddle the usual fare - KETTLE CORN, HOMEMADE CRAFTS and air-brushed T-SHIRTS of Harpersville's bargain-bin horror icons.

A little GIRL sits on her DAD's hip and decides between two designs - a Blackhawk-masked hulk or a space mime.

A CAROUSEL gently spins in the center of the carnival. The mounts have been lovingly turned into papier mache MONSTERS. Demons and dragons, crimson from fresh slaughter, parade in rotation. CHILDREN and their PARENTS ride and beam.

Cliff wanders toward a small STAGE, ringed by a thin crowd.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN, 67 and aged like a monument, presides over a TABLE of MEN with bowed heads. A quaint Last Supper.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN  
 But in this time of tragedy let us  
 recall Job 17:9, "The righteous  
 keep moving forward, and those with  
 clean hands become stronger and  
 stronger." We will move forwards,  
 and with our hands unstained we  
 will rebuild as we always have.  
 Amen-

A MURMUR that almost sounds like "AMEN" crosses the crowd.

CLIFF  
 (quietly)  
 A-Amen.

O'Hoolihan throws his arms out with almost too much verve.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN  
 And as always, the proceeds from  
 the competition go to the families  
 of the fallen and the survivor's  
 medical bills. We'll be taking up a  
 collection at the church.  
 (MORE)

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN (CONT'D)

But you've certainly had enough of  
me, so let the contest begin!

Father O'Hoolihan steps from the stage.

A starter bell RINGS. VOLUNTEERS hurry in carrying PLATES  
teetering with RIBS and place one in front of each man.

Thick fingers tear at meat. Hands stained with bloody sauce.

RACHEL

Watches from across the festival, shaking her head.

She notices Cliff SNAP a picture and wander off. She follows.

MONTAGE

-Cliff flashes his artfully obscured press pass at HUXLEY  
GRIFFITH, a 60-something yokel, who's handing out soft serve.

CLIFF

Excuse me, sir, I'm a reporter from  
the Dispatch. I'd like to ask a few  
questions-

HUXLEY

(tickled)

Oh I can tell you most anything  
about Harpersville. Lived here my  
whole life, give or take a few  
youthful wanderings. Lots of family  
in the area.

CLIFF

(quiet)

Have you, you know, lost anyone?

HUXLEY

(still tickled)

Oh, yep yep. Let's see... Mime in  
'98 got my wife Pauleen. Ghost-  
Truck in '03 ran down my boy...

CUT TO:

-SALLY LING, a floral pattern, rests her hands on a CASHBOX.

SALLY

I've lived on 12th Street for  
twenty years.

CLIFF

But nobody's ever, like, tried to stop...*this*?

SALLY

(almost offended)  
...Would you try to stop an earthquake?

-BRUCE GALLEY, 55, a wannabe survivalist, leans over his KNIFE STAND. Nothing but the finest mall-ninja weaponry.

BRUCE

Shit yeah I've been tryin'. Almost bagged the Zombie Postman in '02, but, uh, turned out I just shot the regular, non-zombie postman. Sheriff took my guns after that.

Galley CLEARS his throat.

BRUCE (CONT'D)

'course that was about ten years after he outlawed guns in the first place.

-Sally grimaces.

SALLY

Oh, I guess Bruce has tried a couple of times. That guy's a bit of a tweaker, real tightly-wound. He could really stand a hot shower and people skills.

-Huxley rubs his temples like it helps his memory.

HUXLEY

My mother was one of the original victims, back in the hockey mask massacre of '84. Got her with a kitchen knife.

Huxley opens his eyes, almost smiles.

HUXLEY (CONT'D)

It was a lot simpler back then.

Cliff stares.

CLIFF

Why don't you people just move?

CUT TO:

-TERRY, 23, joyously twirls COTTON CANDY without looking.

TERRY

Well, every town has its quirks. A couple murders now and then are a small price to pay for peace, quiet and dirt cheap rent.

-Sally shuffles a FIVE DOLLAR BILL into the cashbox.

SALLY

Business is great here. Plus, I used to live in Youngstown...so...

-Huxley wags his finger, on a roll.

HUXLEY

And in '99 my cousin got cut up by the space-mime...which kinda looked like the evil mime from the year before, but it had one-a them, uh, astronaut helmets on. Anyways, Phil recovered alright but-

CLIFF

(scarred)

Well, thanks for your time.

-Terry hands Father O'Hoolihan a BAG of cotton candy.

TERRY

No problem!

CLIFF

Seems like you've got everything but a circus here.

TERRY

(sober)

They, uh, don't allow clowns in town anymore. For obvious reasons, I guess.

It takes Cliff a second. He almost shivers.

-Sally hands a SPOOL of TICKETS to an ORGANIZER.

SALLY

But if you're looking for the whole experience, you gotta check out the Slayer's Stalk.

CLIFF

Come again?

Sally points at a modest jungle of CORNSTALKS at the far end of the festival.

EXT. SLAYER'S STALK - DAY

Browning stalks stretch overhead, breathing in the wind. Crude WAX DUMMIES, dressed like past killers, stand guard along the path.

Cliff warily enters, approaches the first dummy.

On it, a HOCKEY MASK, real KITCHEN KNIFE and PLACARD.

In word-processed TYPE:

1984 - HOCKEY MASK MASSACRE. IN LOVING MEMORY: FLORENTINE GRIFFITH, SARAH GALLEY, FRANK ISTEENFORD, MICHAEL P. CASTOR, NICK 'OZZY' OSBORNE, JACK BACON.

SNAP. Cliff checks the picture to make sure it's all real.

He wanders deeper into the maze, taking stock of each figure.

Not noticing the pursuing SHADOW at his heels.

Cliff takes aim at an UNCLE SAM dummy holding PRUNING SHEARS.

CLIFF

What the hell even is this?

A shadowed hand taps him on the shoulder.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Jesus-!

RACHEL

Reporter?

CLIFF

(recovering, proud)

Why yes, yes I am.

Cliff fumbles out his press pass, turns it right-side up.

RACHEL

I saw you taking pictures and bothering the townies. Now I've been told the only reporters that come to Harpersville just want a bucket of blood to splash on their front page. And that's not our best color.

CLIFF  
 (trying)  
 Hey now, I'm not after any cheap  
 thrills. I'd just like someone to  
 tell me what the hell's wrong with  
 this place.

She sizes him up with a squint.

RACHEL  
 (hard)  
 Then you should plead your case  
 with the Sheriff. He's probably at  
 the One-Cup across the street.  
 Should be a fun interview.

She turns to leave the maze.

CLIFF  
 And why's that?

RACHEL  
 He's the one that told me.

INT. ONE-CUP DINER - DAY

An untouched remnant of 1972. Wood paneling, a cracked-chrome  
 bar and stools in bad need of fresh stuffing.

Afternoon sun shows the TOWNSFOLK assembled around Gantner as  
 still as the hanging dust.

Cliff steps in to find everyone staring at him blankly.

CLIFF  
 Uh. Sorry.

He quickly takes a seat in one of the many empty BOOTHS.

Gantner keeps his eye on Cliff as he sips his COFFEE, then  
 turns to the collection of rapt faces.

GANTNER  
 Well shoot, where was I?

ALICE, 66, refills his MUG, misses a little and wipes it up.

ALICE  
 The miner. Old folks' home.

Gantner SNAPS his fingers.



GANTNER

Right. Thanks, Alice. Twenty-four years of these...*incidents* and they start to look the same. I'd be more than fine never seeing another mask in my life.

He LAUGHS gently, painfully.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

But that year, 1993 would've been, was particularly black. Best I can figure, our *visitors* have no predilection, no particular target. They kill. Period. But that year, no. Not that year. I got a call from Willow's Home-Away-From-Home, late on a...Monday? Tuesday. This was back when we had enough of an elderly population, hell - a *general* population to support an assisted living place. So when I answered that phone, I couldn't move. It must've been a resident. Can't say for sure because none of 'em walked out of Willow's that night. But her voice sounded like broken glass pieced back together, and I knew what it meant. Me and the boys hustled down there, probably triple the speed limit, not that any of you should copy that part.

A few polite smiles, but no laughs.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

From the outside, it was just Willow's. Quiet as it should be around that time of night. Then we opened the door. That smell. I've heard you remember smells better than anything else and I know it to be true, because it still smelled like an old folk's home, pardon the term. Sanitized. Clean, but a stagnant clean. Like fresh soap on old skin. But that night, the skin wasn't old. It was decaying. A medicated butcher shop. Looked like one, too. Bodies on the floor, bodies pinned to walls, pinned to wheelchairs...

He needs a moment.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

One rolled toward us when we walked in. Head back. Eyes empty but for the reflection. A gleam of light from the headlamp floating in the dark across the room. For a moment, we just looked at it, knew what it meant. I wish I could tell you what happened next. One of the boys panicked, got crazy with his gun, shot the other. Before he could apologize, a pickaxe caught him in the ear.

Gantner points at his earlobe.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Almost like a piercing. Two for one.

Gantner runs his finger across his face to his other earlobe.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

I couldn't pull the trigger fast enough, not like that slowed down the miner. I scrambled for whatever I could find. I'll never know how he didn't end me right then and there, but I picked up a fire extinguisher, swung it. He went down. I kept swinging. Screamed. Screamed like I was beating the devil's brains out.

Gantner sips. The crowd shakes their heads in awed disbelief.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Eventually, he dropped his pickaxe. I dragged myself outside, covered in someone else's blood, and waited for the ambulances. But I should've just called the coroner.

A KID nestled closely to his DAD raises his hand with doe-eyed fascination.

KID

So you- so you got 'im?

Gantner smiles without his eyes.

GANTNER

No, son. I knocked him down, I got away and when I finally made my legs carry me back in there, he was gone. Left his pickaxe as a souvenir. It sits in the Slayer's Stalk to this day.

KID

(mouthing)

Whoa.

His dad pats him proudly on the arm.

GANTNER

The Groundhog Day Slaughter. 1993.

Gentle, appreciative APPLAUSE.

CLIFF (O.S.)

Why'd you call it the Groundhog Day Slaughter?

The applause trickles out. Gantner bites his lip, turns to the almost-empty booth across the restaurant.

GANTNER

Because it happened on Groundhog Day.

Cliff scratches the back of his head.

CLIFF

So...what's a miner got to do with Groundhog Day?

Gantner lifts his eyebrows as far as they'll go.

GANTNER

You know, I couldn't tell ya.

CLIFF

Just seems weird for a miner to kill a bunch of people on Groundhog Day specifically, you know, for no reason.

Gantner lets the dust settle for a moment.

GANTNER

It's weird for a miner to kill a bunch of people on any day for no reason, holiday or not.

Cliff puts up his hands.

CLIFF  
Fair enough. Sorry. As you were.

The kid raises his hand for another question, but Gantner holds his gaze on Cliff, who's fiddling with his camera.

GANTNER  
(to his audience)  
I'll just be a second.

Gantner stands slowly and walks over to Cliff's booth.

He doesn't sit down. BLINDS cut his face to shadowy ribbons.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Where you from?

Cliff startles like he was stealing sugar packets.

CLIFF  
I'm sorry? Oh, uh, Dayton,  
originally-

GANTNER  
No, no. USA Today? Philly Enquirer?

Gantner sours a little.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Internet?

CLIFF  
Pittsburgh Dispatch.

He hastily produces his press pass, taking a moment to cover the photo with his thumb.

GANTNER  
(interrupting)  
Save it, son, and let me give you a  
little interview. I can't say it's  
an exclusive because I've said the  
same thing to every gorehound who's  
rolled into town over the past  
twenty-four years.

Cliff freezes.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Go home.

Cliff starts a few retorts he can't finish.

CLIFF

But I-

GANTNER

Despite what the carnival outside might've told you, we're not some kind of roadside gawk-show. And as the sheriff around here, I don't appreciate when professional snoops like yourself drive in to throw peanuts at the locals. We've got the cheapest housing in the country east of the Mississippi. We've got the best coffee north of Colombia. And we've got a little skeleton in the closet that peeks out once a year to keep us on our toes.

Cliff sits up, returns as stern a look as he can muster.

CLIFF

I just want to know why the closet won't stay shut.

Gantner smiles. Sips his coffee. SIGHS in satisfaction.

GANTNER

If we knew that, don't you think we'd have nailed it shut by now?

Cliff shrinks again.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

You don't know better than us, friend. You won't spend a lovely weekend in Harpersville and exorcise all its ghosts. Fact is, for all we know, our latest star attraction is still alive and looking for round two. So if I were you, I'd enjoy the festival, eat as much cotton candy as you can handle, and get the hell out of Harpersville.

He shrivels Cliff with a friendly glare.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

You have a nice day now.

Gantner walks back to his patiently waiting audience.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
 (to his audience)  
 Now who wants to hear another one?

The kid shoots his hand up and Cliff walks out, RATTLING the DOORBELLS.

Gantner barely notices. Barely.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL PARKING - DAY

CRASH. Cliff flinches at the sound of someone winning the milk-pail pitch and drags himself to his battered SEDAN.

He glances at his SLASHED TIRES, tosses his camera in the back seat and gets in himself.

He gets back out to fully absorb the tires, all flatter than pancakes.

CLIFF  
 Well I'd like to get the hell out  
 of Harpersville...

Cliff drags himself back into the festival.

ACROSS THE LOT,

Andrew snaps his SWITCHBLADE shut and laughs his head off from behind a beat-to-hell SEDAN.

His CRONIES, surviving students and near-carbon copies, join in.

Leslie does not.

ANDREW  
 Enjoy your stay, dickhead.

More indulgent LAUGHTER.

LESLIE  
 You don't even know him, Andrew.

ANDREW  
 I don't need to, babe. Just the latest hard-on reporter come to make fun of the townies.

Leslie looks at him sideways.

LESLIE

If you hate outsiders so much, why  
do you make them stay?

Andrew stops laughing long enough to attempt thought.

ANDREW

Because.

He LAUGHS again.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Fuck 'em.

The cronies LAUGH.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

If we're quick I bet we can steal  
his camera.

Leslie shakes her head, watches Cliff walk away.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - DAY

Bruce Galley lays a neon-green MACHETE across his arm like a  
Rolex, enticing an 80-year-old CUSTOMER.

BRUCE

Now this is the Zombie Edition -  
you won't find that color on the,  
uh, normal edition - so it does go  
for a premium. But it's more than a  
knife, it's a *collector's item*.  
Think of it as an investment.

Rachel observes from across the festival, something between  
disappointment and disdain on her face.

CLIFF (O.S.)

I'm sorry-

Rachel turns around to spot Cliff, hands up in apology.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

-you probably don't want anymore to  
do with me, but someone slashed my  
tires and the only other cop I've  
seen today hates me more than you.

RACHEL

Well that's not good.

Cliff frowns.

CLIFF  
(defeated)  
Thanks for all your help.

He turns to leave, but Rachel catches him by the shoulder.

RACHEL  
Oh no, I'm not making fun of you.  
It's just getting you new tires.

Cliff looks back, life returning to his eyes.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
Everything but the minimart is  
closed until Monday and from what I  
understand, tow trucks don't like  
coming out here. Something about  
hitchhikers.

The life leaves just as fast.

CLIFF  
So when do I move in?

RACHEL  
Well you could sell your car and  
buy a house in town or try the  
motel.

Cliff looks across the festival, at the dimming sky.

CLIFF  
I guess the journalism gods are  
trying to tell me something, then.

RACHEL  
Or the local punks just got bored  
and slashed your tires.

Cliff exhales.

CLIFF  
Yeah, that's probably it.

RACHEL  
C'mon, I'll drop you off.

Cliff almost startles.

CLIFF  
I'll take that deal. Just let me  
grab my camera.



INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Rachel watches the road. Cliff holds his head in his hands.

CLIFF  
(broken)  
Just give me a call if it turns up,  
because I had a lot of cool  
pictures on there.

RACHEL  
I'll keep my eyes open.

Cliff glances at her, then out the window.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
So what do you think of the place?

CLIFF  
I've been told I don't know.

He watches the town roll past them.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
So I guess I don't know.

Rachel grins.

RACHEL  
Just forget about Gantner. He's  
seen too many massacres. He forgets  
it doesn't feel like a state fair  
to most outsiders.

Cliff turns his attention to Rachel.

CLIFF  
Maybe I'm wrong, but you don't  
sound too used to it yourself.

Rachel shrugs, cuts the wheel into a PARKING LOT.

RACHEL  
This was my first.

CLIFF  
Really? How close did you get?

Rachel's eyes widen.

RACHEL  
Pretty close.

EXT. SLEEP-ON INN - NIGHT

A one-floor line-up of ROOMS with missing numbers and faux stone-work.

Three-foot-tall LETTERS stand along the roof, spelling out "SLEEP-ON NN."

A hand-painted SIGN sits over the OFFICE at the end of the row. It says "THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM!" in swooping cursive.

Rachel's cruiser parks out front, the only car in the lot.

INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Rachel points past Cliff out the window.

RACHEL  
Your palace.

CLIFF  
And it's all mine.

Cliff opens his door.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
Well thanks for the ride.

RACHEL  
No problem. I'll make sure nobody strips your car.

Cliff shuts the door behind him and leans on the open window.

CLIFF  
This is a long shot, but how about an interview?

RACHEL  
Is that a come-on?

Cliff catches himself.

CLIFF  
Not intentionally.

Rachel glances out her windshield for signs of life.

RACHEL  
You really want to figure out what's wrong with Harpersville?

CLIFF  
I don't have much else going this weekend.

Rachel shifts into reverse.

RACHEL  
Then lock your doors and I'll see you around.

EXT. SLEEP-ON INN - NIGHT

Cliff takes a few hasty steps back as Rachel backs out, drives away.

He holds his gaze on the taillights as they disappear around the nearest turn.

CLIFF  
Eyes open, Cliff.

Cliff turns toward the office.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
Eyes open, *doors locked.*

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - NIGHT

An ancient TV blearily broadcasts an almost-as-ancient HORROR MOVIE starring a rubber suit.

The MANAGER, 55, leans on his DESK, watching it with absolute investment. He plays with a branded MATCHBOOK absentmindedly.

Cliff steps in without ruining his focus. It takes a DING of the BELL to draw him out of it.

MANAGER  
Oh forgive me, sir. You ever seen this one?

Cliff tries to make out anything on the fuzzy screen.

CLIFF  
Sorry, I don't think so.

The manager shrugs.

MANAGER  
I like to keep the spooky stuff playing. Gets the tourists in the mood, you know?

Cliff nods, reaching for his wallet.

CLIFF  
Right. Right. I can feel it.

MANAGER  
A-ha! Another satisfied customer.

CLIFF  
Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

The manager LAUGHS. Cliff forces a LAUGH to match.

MANAGER  
So what'll it be? Room or suite?

CLIFF  
You guys have suites?

MANAGER  
Well no, not yet. But I'm thinking  
on expanding some ordinary rooms.  
Just testing the demand.

Cliff blinks.

MANAGER (CONT'D)  
So just a room, then?

CLIFF  
You read my mind.

The manager presents a wall of KEYS hanging behind him. All present and accounted for.

MANAGER  
Any preference, sir?

CLIFF  
A room nobody's died in, please.

Cliff LAUGHS genuinely.

The manager does not.

Cliff stops laughing.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
Then whatever works.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

A SHOWER HEAD drips lazily as Cliff cinches his BATHROBE.

He walks to the DOOR, checks the LOCK like he's done it before, and collapses on the bed.

Cliff shuts his eyes.

Something POUNDS the wall.

Cliff rolls off the bed.

Another POUND on the wall.

Cliff scurries to his feet, eyes fixed to the sound.

One last POUND as a fist-sized HOLE bursts through the wall in a shower of splintered drywall.

CLIFF

What the hell?

A SLEDGEHAMMER busts the plaster. Light spills in.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

What the hell?

Cliff goes breathless for a moment.

A wandering eye peers through the hole.

MANAGER

Oh! Christ! Did I put you in room one?

CLIFF

...Yeah

The manager swivels the hammer in his hands. Cliff fidgets.

MANAGER

Ha! Sorry 'bout that. Thought I'd get a jump on those suites, but I'll just hold off until tomorrow. Goodnight!

The manager starts to step away.

CLIFF

So you're just going to leave a hole in my wall? Isn't that unsafe?

MANAGER

Well. Yeah. Yeah it is. Sorry!

The manager disappears from the wounded wall.

Cliff SIGHS, picks a DOLLAR out of his WALLET and exits.

EXT. SLEEP-ON INN - NIGHT

The half-hallway of dark WINDOWS and thin DOORS ends at a lucent SODA MACHINE.

Cliff passes the closed blinds of the first window.

The second window - blinds open, the room empty.

Cliff spots a PICK-UP parked in front of the next room.

CLIFF

My God - civilization.

The third window - a spiked bat heaves and thuds onto a sleeping form. The baseball butcher rears up in silent silhouette.

Cliff is too busy with the truck to notice.

The fourth window - blinds open, a DISTRAUGHT WOMAN cries into the phone, recoiling from the adjoining wall.

Cliff, ignorant, passes more rooms and reaches the machine.

He inserts the bill with a WHIRR.

The bill WHIRRS back out.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Oh, come on. Worst night ever.

Cliff smooths the bill out on the side of the machine, slides it back in. Picks an option.

KA-CHUNK. He ducks down to grab the CAN, burying his face against the machine as RED AND BLUE LIGHTS sweep past.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

C'mon, you bastard.

He snags it and starts back to his room, eyes on the nutrition label.

He passes the same windows - the woman already gone from the fourth, the third already occupied by deputies.

Cliff swipes back into his room.

INT. CHEAP MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

CRACK. Cliff falls onto the bed, trying not to spill.

KNOCK-KNOCK. Cliff stands, trying not to spill.

He opens the door for DEPUTY GARLAND, mid 40's, built like a brick slaughterhouse and just as charming.

DEPUTY GARLAND

Ye-ah, good evening, sir. There's been a murder here at the motel.

CLIFF

What? When?

DEPUTY GARLAND

About two minutes ago. Room Four.

Deputy Garland takes a long look at the hole in the wall.

DEPUTY GARLAND (CONT'D)

So... I don't suppose you heard or saw anything? Or *did* anything?

CLIFF

No, it's been quiet as the grave-quiet- it's been quiet. Other than my new half-bath over there.

DEPUTY GARLAND

Uh-hm, right.

Garland scribbles something on a CLIPBOARD.

DEPUTY GARLAND (CONT'D)

Well, killer's still at large. Probably don't want to stick around here for long.

The deputy steps outside.

CLIFF

Hold on, I don't have a car.

DEPUTY GARLAND

No problem, sir.

Deputy Garland takes stock of the squad cars.

DEPUTY GARLAND (CONT'D)

We'll have someone drive you.

CLIFF

Thanks, just let me get decent.

Cliff shuts the door, grabs his pants off the floor and jumps up onto the bed, leaning toward the hole.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(loud)

Cancel my card, please.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - NIGHT

The manager fights a barely-functioning register.

MOTEL OWNER

Feh, they come for a murder festival and leave when there's a murder...Should charge 'em extra...

ON THE TV,

The rubber-suited monster moves too fast and shows its seams.

EXT. BED AND BREAKFAST - NIGHT

Rachel's cruiser sits before a quaint reminder of colonial life. Each WINDOW is occupied by frilled curtains over antique LAMPS.

Cliff leans against the open passenger window.

CLIFF

So thank you for driving me, uh, again.

RACHEL

That one was literally my job.

CLIFF

But that never stopped anybody.

He pats the window like he doesn't want to walk inside.

RACHEL

Um, tomorrow morning I'll be talking to survivors up at the high school, if you want to sit in.

CLIFF

What do you think they might tell you? That their class rankings just miraculously improved?



RACHEL

Eye-witness testimonies are just a formality in Harpersville, but you never know until you ask. Maybe one of 'em got a peek behind the mask.

CLIFF

So you think it's just a normal guy with a flair for dramatics?

Rachel looks at him.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Normal in a relative sense.

RACHEL

That's what I'd like to find out.

Cliff chews his lip.

CLIFF

Alright. I'll be there.

RACHEL

I'll pick you up. Seven. Sharp.

Cliff smiles, steps back. She drives away.

INT. HARPERSVILLE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

A blinking CURSOR under "CAUSE OF DEATH:"

Rachel stares at her COMPUTER SCREEN, then down at the KEYS as she types.

"HARPERSVILLE."

She breathes sharply through her nose and CLICKS over to the next box.

SNAP. Deputy Cyphers rolls the cylinder of his unloaded revolver shut with a flick of his wrist. He reclines at his desk, feet up, like he owns the place.

DEPUTY JAMESON, 25, slime, watches Cyphers's trick and tries not to fall asleep or drop his INHALER.

SNAP. Cyphers opens it back up, shuts it again.

Rachel still doesn't notice.

SNAP.

Rachel notices, glares, goes back to typing.

SNAP.

Rachel bites her tongue.

SNAP.

RACHEL

You know I really don't think  
that's good for the gun.

Cyphers leans forward, shit-eating grin at the ready.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

Then you can take that up with the  
Sheriff 'cause he's the one taught  
me how to do it.

SNAP. Cyphers aims his empty gun at Rachel and mouths a BANG.

RACHEL

Well could you please practice  
blowing your hand off somewhere  
else? I'm trying to work here.

Jameson rouses himself awake, smirking.

DEPUTY JAMESON

What's the matter? Can't stand the  
thought of some broken nails?

Jameson WHEEZES.

Cyphers LAUGHS, opens the revolver up again.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

Dang, Jameson. One shot, one kill.

SNAP.

Rachel seethes and continues filling out the form.

GANTNER (O.S.)

That's all, folks.

Rachel, Cyphers and Jameson turn to watch Gantner shut the  
FRONT DOOR behind him.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Festival's done for the night. Just  
locked up the generators. Garland's  
buttoning up the Sleep-On Inn.

(MORE)

GANTNER (CONT'D)

So you three can draw straws for  
the night shift.

Cyphers pokes his own nose. Jameson stumbles to catch up.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

Not it.

Gantner smiles as he walks with tired purpose between the  
desks.

GANTNER

That's hardly fair, boys, but I'll  
allow it.

RACHEL

(cold)

That's fine. I need to finish the  
paperwork for the motel.

Gantner reaches his office door, unlocks it and even turns  
the knob, but faces his deputies.

GANTNER

Also, I don't know if it came to  
either of your attentions, but  
seems we've got ourselves a  
troublemaker from over the  
mountains. Some kind of pissant  
with a press pass. So watch what  
you say to anybody you don't know.

Cyphers aims at an imaginary journalist across the room.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

Want me to kill him, Sheriff?

Gantner grins.

GANTNER

Would you mind?

Rachel leans back from her computer.

RACHEL

With all due respect, sir, he just  
wants to figure out how this town  
works. His head's in the right  
place.

Gantner stops grinning, swivels his head to Rachel.

DEPUTY JAMESON  
(to RACHEL)  
Sounds like somebody's got a  
boyfriend.

RACHEL  
(to JAMESON)  
Sure do, Jameson. That mean you'll  
stop calling me at two in the  
morning, drunk and crying?

Jameson glowers, puffs his inhaler.

Gantner rubs his temples and walks toward Rachel.

GANTNER  
It's policy, Deputy Svedlik, to  
greet wayward reporters with a hard  
handshake and swift kick in the  
ass.

RACHEL  
What policy?

GANTNER  
My policy, Rachel.

Gantner looms over her desk, eyes wild.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Last time I let a journalist have  
the run of Harpersville was the  
summer of '88. From June to August  
we had a loon with garden shears  
and an Uncle Sam get-up leaving a  
trail of bodies all over town. A  
hot-shot writer comes in to save  
the day. Seemed sharp enough, so we  
worked together until the dog days  
when he figured out where the  
killer was hiding - Camp Nescopeck,  
about five miles up the highway.  
But all my deputies were dead by  
July.

Cyphers takes his feet off his desk. Jameson frowns.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
So me and him armed ourselves and  
went to camp. Thank God the kids  
were gone, just some counselors had  
stayed behind. We damn-near ripped  
that place to the ground looking  
for Uncle Sam.

(MORE)

GANTNER (CONT'D)

End of the day, I was a ball of sweat with a badge and I lost my hankerchief. I asked him for his, and it was only after I wiped my forehead that I realized his was red-white-and-blue. Then came the scuffle. The camp burned down that day. I held him under the lake until he drowned.

Rachel leans back in her chair, incensed.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

When they dredged the lake, they found the body of every counselor lost, but not his. Back at whichever rag he came from, his buddies chalked it up to the ol' Harpersville curse, got some quality gore out of it and gave me a nickname just for fun. Sheriff Joe "Graveyard" Gantner.

Gantner leans over her desk.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

The Pruning Patriot Massacre. 1988.

Gantner cools.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

And that's why the next time you see that goddamn reporter in Harpersville, you tell him to take a goddamn hike.

Rachel looks away like she lost. Cyphers and Jameson nod like they won.

Gantner walks to his office.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

I'll see you folks in the morning, but don't sleep too hard; looks like this year's massacre isn't over yet.

INT. GANTNER HOUSE - NIGHT

A comfortably lived-in RANCH. MUDDY BOOTS sit next to the FRONT DOOR. A FAMILY PICTURE from the Wal-Mart photo center, of the Sheriff, an infant Leslie and her MOTHER, hangs on the other side.

Leslie appears fuzzy through the SMALL WINDOW in the door as she hurries inside and LOCKS it behind her.

INT. GANTNER HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

A model kitchen from 1982, sitting in the dark.

Leslie pulls open a DRAWER on the CENTER ISLAND.

KNIVES of every shape and size glint in the faint moonlight.

She pulls a mean BUTCHER KNIFE and shuts the drawer.

INT. GANTNER HOUSE HALLWAY - NIGHT

FOUR DOORS along a short hallway, two against the same wall and one at each end.

Leslie turns to the left end, opens the door a crack.

INSIDE

Her room, from the deep red walls to the BAND POSTERS hanging on them.

LESLIE

Hits the LIGHTSWITCH, shocking the room orange, and hurries to the other end of the hall.

INT. GANTNER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Orderly to the point of concern, like a museum display. A padlocked HOPE CHEST sits at the foot of a BIG BED.

Leslie leaves the lights off, the door open. Drops down.

With practiced ease she rolls under the bed until her view lines up between a leg of the bed and the chest.

DOWN THE HALL

She can see the glow from around her door and the darkness between.

LESLIE

Holds the knife, blade-down, and watches. Waits. Unmoving.

Stifling silence.

RATTLES. Distant. A locked door being tested.

THUD. THUD. THWACK. A locked door being forced open.

FOOTSTEPS. Across hard floor. Onto carpet. LOUDER.

Leslie tightens her grip on the knife. Her eyes can't help but widen.

BOOTS step out into the hall. Pause. Walk toward Leslie's lit, empty bedroom.

Leslie can't see more than the dark PANTS above the boots.

The door to her room CREAKS open a hair, then the boots retreat. Headed toward Gantner's room, her hiding place.

Leslie bites her lip as the boots stop at the edge of the bed.

One falls back as the intruder drops to a knee.

Leslie gets ready, blade out.

The other knee lands softly and Gantner lays his head against the floor.

GANTNER

Did you eat yet?

Leslie holds her gaze, knife.

LESLIE

I'm not hungry.

GANTNER

Okay.

He stays crouched.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

You don't usually lock the door.

LESLIE

Am I in trouble?

Gantner smiles a fatherly smile.

GANTNER

You want to talk about it?

Leslie nods slowly.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Well lay down your weapon and c'mon  
out with your hands up.

Leslie sets the knife in front of him and Gantner takes it,  
helping her up gingerly.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
That was a clever move with the  
light. Surprise 'em, then go for  
the throat.

Gantner pantomimes a few swipes of the knife.

Leslie smiles unconvincingly and sits on the hope chest.

Gantner stiffens. Leslie notices.

LESLIE  
Oh I'm sorry, dad. I wasn't  
thinking-

Gantner anxiously softens as Leslie gets up.

GANTNER  
It's okay, honey. Easy mistake.

Leslie sits on one side of the bed. Gantner sits on the  
other.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
I'm probably too attached to that  
thing anyways.

Leslie looks at the chest.

LESLIE  
Tell me a story about her.

GANTNER  
Is that what this is about?

Leslie looks away.

LESLIE  
Yeah. I mean I guess. It's just  
that I've never been that close  
to...

Gantner puts a comforting hand on her back.



LESLIE (CONT'D)  
...death, before. To...one of these  
things. And I know that's how  
mom...

Leslie gets lost in her pain.

GANTNER  
Hey. It's alright. We've never  
really talked about it before. I  
didn't think you were old enough to  
understand. But I guess you're old  
enough by default now.

Gantner rubs at his eyes.

LESLIE  
I don't have a single memory of  
her, dad, and somehow almost  
getting murdered at homecoming is  
the closest I've ever felt to her.

Leslie starts to cry.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
Do you know how fucked up that is?

She catches herself.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry about the f-bomb.

GANTNER  
It's okay, kid. Harpersville is  
fucked up in general.

Leslie loses it.

LESLIE  
Then why don't we get the hell out  
of here? At least move out to  
Monroeville or something.

Gantner squints out the window, catching a glint of moonlight  
in his eyes.

GANTNER  
It's quiet here. Nobody bothers us,  
save for the masked killers. The  
house is paid off and I don't know  
if they brew it with cocaine, but I  
cannot get enough of that One-Cup  
coffee.

Leslie looks at her father with a mix of amusement and grave concern.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

There she is. Your mom would look at me like that everyday.

Leslie manages a smile.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

And I'll never forget the last time I got that look.

Leslie sobers.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Our anniversary. 1990. I don't know if you could even balance on two feet yet. Your mother and I, we were going to paint this town red. Which, as you might expect, didn't take too much paint. Just a ten-dollar bottle of wine from the minimart and a prime picnic spot on the edge of Lake Zephaniah, and I shouldn't have to remind you-

LESLIE

(autopilot)

Don't swim in Lake Zephaniah and, more importantly, don't follow a boy to Lake Zephaniah.

Gantner smiles, pats her back.

GANTNER

Good job. But anyhow, it was...it was just the two of us on the shore. And I know you've never been there-

He shoots her a warning glance that's only half-serious.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

-but you have to park a good mile from the lake and walk down. It'd take a tank to survive that trail. But it's not so bad on-foot, especially when you're holding hands.

Leslie grins, almost self-consciously.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

And we were laying there, watching the water dance in the dark, when something happened in the woods. A sound. A scream, I thought. So of course I had to go check it out. It's my job, whether or not I'm in uniform. Your mother, she didn't want me to go... But I had to. Someone... someone could've been killed.

He looks at Leslie with eyes like broken headlights.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

I ran back up the trail, shouting for some sign of life. Knowing I could've been painting a target on my back. But then I heard another scream. Back toward the lake. I knew what it was before I started running. By the time I got there, she was gone. Left her body behind. I never saw the clown that killed her that day - I saw him enough the month after, when he killed six more with bowling pins, machetes and anything else that could be weaponized and juggled. But I saw the signs. Big footprints in the dirt. Almost funny. Almost. But you know what, Leslie?

Leslie shakes her head, terrified and rapt in equal measure.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

I could see in the sand where she fought. Where she dragged herself away. Where the blood ran thicker, darker. Where she wouldn't just roll over and...

Gantner stops.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Your mother didn't just roll over, Leslie. And neither did you.

He hugs his daughter, who's still almost frozen.

LESLIE

(lost)

You could tell all that from the dirt?

Gantner lets her go and she gets up.

GANTNER

You might not remember her, honey.  
But you're more like her than you  
could ever imagine.

Leslie leans against the open door, looking at her dad still sitting pleasantly on the bed.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Trust me.

Leslie turns to leave, stops short, turns back.

LESLIE

Dad, someday, can I have her hope  
chest? I know that probably sounds  
selfish or-

Gantner nods slowly.

GANTNER

Of course. When the time is right.

Leslie smiles. Gantner looks down at the chest, the padlock.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

I'm just not ready to give it up  
yet.

EXT. BED AND BREAKFAST - DAY

Rachel's cruiser rolls up against the swelling dawn.

Cliff lingers by the door, stretching. He waves and moves.

INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - DAY

Rachel at the wheel. Cliff enters the passenger side,  
scooping a THICK LEATHERBOUND BOOK from the seat.

CLIFF

What's this?

Embossed on the cover: HARPERSVILLE HISTORY 1750-1985. Post-  
it-notes and photographs threaten to break the book's spine.

RACHEL

I grabbed it from the library when I transferred, thought maybe there was some historical reason to the murders. Maybe it was ghosts.

Cliff cracks it open. NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS from a local paper.

CLIFF

So what's this place hiding?

RACHEL

Everything. Desecrated Native American burial mounds. Disappeared settlers. Mine collapses, witch-hunts; just about any catastrophe you could want.

Cliff thumbs through page after page of old PHOTOS of a much smaller, much grainier Harpersville.

CLIFF

Seems like some awful luck.

RACHEL

And if you believe Bruce Galley, the Army tested chemical weapons here just after World War 2... Plus there was a plane crash in '65, killed sixteen. Then nothing major for twenty years, until the massacres started. So add it all up, and you get...

Cliff strains at the thought.

CLIFF

Town's haunted by...coal-mining Native American pilots?

Rachel can't even look at him.

RACHEL

No. It adds up to nothing. All just random chance. I figure every town in America has history like this.

Cliff turns to the last page, dated somewhere in the 60s.

CLIFF

So why'd you show this to me?

RACHEL

Because doesn't that piss you off?

Cliff shuts the book. Nods.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
If you ask me, these murders are all, or at least mostly, down to one guy. Someone who moved into town in the 80s.

CLIFF  
So who's lived here since the '80s?

Rachel SIGHS.

RACHEL  
Almost everybody.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH CLASSROOM - DAY

The DESKS are half empty. PLYWOOD covers a broken WINDOW.  
Andrew dozes on his hand. MRS. WENDELL doesn't notice, care.

MRS. WENDELL  
I know homecoming might have cast a shadow on your weekend plans, but homework is homework, class.

KNOCK. KNOCK. Andrew blinks awake.

PRINCIPAL STEVENS, imposing but exhausted, looms in the door. He consciously conceals the GLEAMING HOOK where his right hand should be.

PRINCIPAL STEVENS  
(Mr. Rogers)  
I need to borrow Mr. Burns, please.

Burns smirks, stands. A few CLASSMATES "OOH" in rough unison.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH HALLS - DAY

Uniformed CLEANERS wipe up CAUTION-TAPED spots on the floor. Small MEMORIALS hang from dented lockers.

Andrew steps out of the classroom, toward a passing group of GIRLS.

ANDREW  
Ladies...

Principal Stevens catches up and claps his thick fingers around the back of Andrew's neck. Andrew sweats.

PRINCIPAL STEVENS

(acid)

I didn't excuse you to flirt, Mr. Burns. The police would like to have a word. You will be cooperative and charming or else I won't be as kind as our homecoming party crasher, understand?

ANDREW

Y-yessir.

INT. HARPERSVILLE HIGH OFFICE - DAY

Rachel and Cliff sit behind a cheap folding TABLE. A pair of NOTEBOOKS sprawled on the cheap wood.

Andrew enters, spots Cliff with a cop, quakes.

PRINCIPAL STEVENS

Good luck with this one, officer.

Stevens flashes a beleaguered smile as he exits the room.

Andrew sits rigidly across from Cliff and Rachel.

RACHEL

Good afternoon, Andrew.

ANDREW

I didn't do shit- I mean *anything*.

Andrew can't look at Cliff.

RACHEL

What? We don't think-

Cliff leans forward, asshole gleam in his eye.

CLIFF

We'll be the judge of that, son.

Andrew glistens with perspiration.

ANDREW

I wasn't even at the fair, man. Y-you know who was? Like everyone that's going to Feldman's party later. You should bust them.

RACHEL

We'll, uh, consider that. But we want to know what you saw at the dance.

Andrew eases, but only just. Trying a LAUGH. Failing.

ANDREW

Not drinking, I'll tell you that much.

Cliff marks a tally on his notebook under 'UNPROMPTED COMMENT ABOUT SOBRIETY'. The tally marks spill off the line.

RACHEL

Right, but did you see anything identifying or unique about the killer?

ANDREW

I mean he beat Tom Benton to death with a baseball bat, that's pretty fucking- *freaking* unique.

RACHEL

Right, right. So how'd you survive, running or hiding?

ANDREW

(puffs up)  
Fighting.

Rachel scribbles into her own notebook, SIGHS hard.

RACHEL

I suppose that's all, Andrew. Thank you for your cooperation. Oh! One last thing. Principal Stevens said Leslie wasn't in today - Do you know where we can find her?

ANDREW

Feldman's party. Definitely.

Rachel and Cliff exchange a glance.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Can I go now?

RACHEL

Yeah, sure.

Andrew leaves the room, peeks back in.



ANDREW  
 You're, like, not going to tell  
 anyone I told you about the party,  
 right?

Cliff leans over the table, loosens his tie.

CLIFF  
 (grave)  
 That all depends on what we find.

Andrew bolts, SLAMS the door. Cliff deflates.

RACHEL  
 So what did we get?

CLIFF  
 Well, they were all very serious  
 about dodging an underage. And we  
 now know it was Jacob Ryerson who  
 took down the monster with a wicked  
 suplex.

Rachel sighs, snapping shut her notebook.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 So what's next?

Rachel stands.

RACHEL  
 We give you a crash course in self-  
 defense and hope Leslie turns up,  
 wherever she is.

EXT. LAKE ZEPHANIAH - DAY

Jagged shoreline around glassy water. Leslie sits on a rock  
 and watches like it might break.

Andrew slips and almost falls down the trail.

ANDREW  
 Hey- Shit. Hey, where were you  
 today?

Leslie doesn't even look back at him.

LESLIE  
 I couldn't go back there yet.

Andrew recovers, sits on a rock next to her.

ANDREW  
Well good call 'cause a cop and  
that jackass we stranded were  
looking for you.

She faces him.

LESLIE  
What? Why?

Andrew shrugs like he's cool.

ANDREW  
I don't know, but I didn't tell 'em  
shit. It'll take more than a cop  
with an attitude to scare me.

Leslie glares at him with unblinking, unimpressed eyes.

Andrew nods until he gets an idea.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
I bet some skinny-dipping would get  
your mind off it. Just the sight of  
me naked, really.

Andrew hops up, starts to pull off his shirt.

LESLIE  
(unenthused)  
You can't swim in Lake Zephaniah.

ANDREW  
Jesus, Leslie. Parents only say  
that because they conceived us up  
here.

Leslie shakes her head.

LESLIE  
No, that's why my dad tells me not  
to bring you up here. You can't  
swim in it because it's not a real  
lake.

Andrew pulls off his sweater entirely, revealing a  
Harpersville High T-SHIRT.

ANDREW  
Is this like a riddle or something?

LESLIE

It's an old strip mine, Andy. The guy who owned it, Something-Zephaniah, he bled it dry fast. Not as much copper down there as he expected. Couldn't afford to try again anywhere else, so instead of declaring bankruptcy or facing the music, he shoved all the equipment into the pit and let it fill with groundwater.

Andrew cocks his head sideways.

ANDREW

How the hell do you know that?

LESLIE

Library. This place was a lot more interesting before the murderers.

Andrew holds his sweater, still debating about the swim.

ANDREW

Then why do you come out here all the time if you can't even swim in it?

Leslie stands up and shrugs.

LESLIE

There must be ten tons of jagged, rusty metal in that lake. But look at it. Look at that water. I mean it's...it's like a mirror. You'd never know what's down there. It's just...

She crosses her arms as the wind picks up.

LESLIE (CONT'D)

I like it.

Leslie turns and walks carefully toward the uneven trail.

Andrew stays near the water, unbuckling his belt.

ANDREW

Yeah well if you go now, you'll miss out on the show.

Leslie starts up the trail with careful ease.

Andrew looks at her, the water, then puts his shirt back on.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
But you are going to the Survivor  
Party, right?

Leslie keeps walking.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
Cool. So I'll see you there.

INT. HARPERSVILLE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY

The station is almost friendly in the daylight.

Deputy Garland reads the Pittsburgh Dispatch, a story about  
Halloween decorations. Deputy Jameson pokes at his COMPUTER.

Rachel leads Cliff through the offices.

DEPUTY JAMESON  
I knew you had a new boyfriend,  
Svedlik!

RACHEL  
Cram it, Jameson. Is Gantner  
around?

DEPUTY GARLAND  
He's showing a pair of new recruits  
around town. Should be back in  
twenty, though.

RACHEL  
Alright. His daughter wasn't in  
school today.

DEPUTY JAMESON  
He mentioned she was staying home  
for the day, y'know. Some women  
just don't have the nerve to deal  
with Harpersville.

Rachel burns Jameson with a look, takes Cliff downstairs.

Jameson waves them off, goes back to reading his paper

DEPUTY JAMESON (CONT'D)  
Psh, can't take a joke neither.

DEPUTY GARLAND  
Christ, Jameson. Ease up on the  
asshole schtick, would you?

INT. SHOOTING RANGE - DAY

A dusty slate-gray shooting gallery. Rachel fiddles with a GUN LOCKER. HALLOWEEN DECORATIONS and DUST cover the range.

Rachel retrieves her revolver.

CLIFF

Wait, you haven't been carrying a gun? I thought cops always carried guns.

RACHEL

Not in Harpersville. Sheriff keeps the guns locked up unless we're dealing with an incident or using the range, and as you can see, nobody uses the range.

CLIFF

That man does not like guns.

RACHEL

And you best believe he has a story about it, too. Can you shoot?

Cliff puffs out his chest, suddenly all bravado.

CLIFF

Well I mean, yeah. Of course. Just grab the, uh, the grip, point it at something, and squeeze.

Rachel stares at him.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

(quietly)

I've never actually used one, no.

RACHEL

Just watch me, then I'll explain.

A TARGET

Hangs, stone-still, at the end of Rachel's lane.

RACHEL

Slips on GLASSES and HEADPHONES, takes careful aim.

BANG.

THE TARGET

Doesn't even move. No bullet hole on it.

CLIFF

Leans around her, hands over his ears.

CLIFF

Alright, how do you explain that?

Rachel glares at her gun in frustration, hits a BUTTON that WHIZZES the target a few yards closer.

RACHEL

Keep your ears covered.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

The paper silhouette flaps gently, like a flag in the breeze.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

...What the hell?

Rachel spins open the cylinder, dumps the rounds out, picks one up and studies it.

The casing is crimped where the bullet should be. A BLANK.

CLIFF

I'm no expert, but that looks wrong.

RACHEL

It's a blank round. Why the hell are there blanks in my gun?

She leaves her revolver on the bench, moves to the locker and checks the load in the other GUNS.

Cliff picks up her mostly harmless sidearm.

CLIFF

You're telling me you don't even have working guns?

Cliff inspects the gun at arm's length, waving it past himself. Rachel notices.

RACHEL

Jesus! Don't do that!

Rachel approaches and snatches the gun from Cliff.

CLIFF  
I thought they weren't real  
bullets.

Rachel frowns, presses the handgun to a MINI PUMPKIN smiling on the ammo bench. Cliff throws his hands over his ears.

BANG.

The pumpkin splatters orange gore across the shooting booth.

RACHEL  
The force can still kill you, up  
close.

CLIFF  
Good to know, but why are you  
carrying blanks?

RACHEL  
I don't know, but the rest of the  
guns have 'em, too. Someone had to  
replace those bullets. Someone with  
access. Someone upstairs.

Cliff looks at the pumpkin viscera.

CLIFF  
So we're dealing with some kind of  
maniac cop?

RACHEL  
Might be.

CLIFF  
Well. If they have the real deal  
and think we don't, we've got the  
edge if we can find actual ammo.

RACHEL  
Nearest store that sells it is  
about an hour drive away. County  
banned firearm ownership after-

CLIFF  
Right, right, I get it. Let's go.

INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - DAY

Harpersville thins into Appalachia out the windows.

CLIFF  
Does every badge in Harpersville  
want me dead?

Rachel looks over.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
(distant)  
You know what I mean.

Rachel breathes hard.

RACHEL  
They're not big fans.

Cliff watches the passing trees.

CLIFF  
That's what I thought.

RACHEL  
Why do you ask?

Cliff tries a weak smile. Stops when he sees something ahead.

EXT. HIGHWAY OUTSIDE HARPERSVILLE - DAY

A POLICE CRUISER is parked across the lonely mountain road,  
blocking both lanes.

Cyphers is already approaching when they slow down.

INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - DAY

Cliff follows Cyphers with hopeless eyes.

RACHEL  
(to CLIFF)  
Don't say a word.

Rachel cracks the window.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
Turn around, Rachel.

RACHEL  
What's wrong, Cyphers? Car break  
down?

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
Sheriff called a town meeting for  
tonight. Wants everyone there.



RACHEL

Why?

DEPUTY CYPHERS

The killings started up again, and Sheriff's got a hunch the killer's still in town.

RACHEL

(venom)

So he made you drive out to the middle of nowhere to sit in your car and wait?

Cyphers grabs the edge of her door.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

(defensive)

No he did not. That was my idea.

RACHEL

That sounds about right.

Cyphers roils in his skin, veins choking. Rage.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

I did this because I've got a good goddamn idea who did all this in the first place.

Cyphers burrows into Cliff with a red stare.

DEPUTY CYPHERS (CONT'D)

And I knew they'd probably try to run like a coward.

Cliff doesn't look away. He just takes the acid.

DEPUTY CYPHERS (CONT'D)

I'll see you at the meeting.

He SMACKS the hood, walks away. Doing his revolver trick.

EXT. HIGHWAY OUTSIDE HARPERSVILLE - DAY

Rachel's cruiser turns around on the road, heads back towards Harpersville.

Cyphers watches and reaches for his radio.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
 (into radio)  
 Sheriff, Deputy Svedlik just tried  
 to skip town with the reporter, but  
 I turned them back.

GANTNER (O.S)  
 (over radio)  
 Copy. Good work. And just so you  
 know, might be a bit late to the  
 meeting. Gotta pick up my daughter.

INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - DAY

The cruiser is silent until Cliff starts to hyperventilate.

CLIFF  
 (strained)  
 Pull over.

Rachel jolts toward him.

RACHEL  
 What? Why?

Cliff's face flushes red.

CLIFF  
 (louder)  
 Just pull over.

EXT. CAMP NESCOPECK ENTRANCE - DAY

Rachel's cruiser pulls into a gravel drive.

Weeds crowd around a chained GATE. Behind, in the underbrush,  
 lurks a fallen sign for "CAMP NESCOPECK."

Cliff tears out of the car, staggers to some bushes. He  
 HEAVES like a dying animal.

Nothing comes out but the terrible noise.

Rachel jumps out of the car after him, her concern  
 dissolving into instinctual disgust.

RACHEL  
 Oh...I'm-...You alright?

CLIFF  
 (sputtering)  
 Peachy.

Cliff wipes his mouth with a sleeve.

RACHEL  
Is there anything I-

Cliff spins around, almost falling.

CLIFF  
What are we doing? I mean what the  
hell are we doing?

Rachel takes a few slow steps toward him.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
I didn't ask for this. I just  
didn't want to have to take fucking  
pictures of migrating lizards  
anymore.

RACHEL  
(genuine confusion)  
What?

CLIFF  
(loud)  
It's a metaphor!

Rachel flinches.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
(recovering)  
I just wanted to be a *real*  
reporter, with *real* stories and  
*real* paychecks and now I'm gonna  
get *real* murdered.

Rachel steps toward him.

RACHEL  
You *are* a real reporter, Cliff.

He LAUGHS madly, pulls out his press pass. Throws it at her.

CLIFF  
I stole it.

Rachel looks at someone else's face sitting in the gravel.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
And now I'm gonna die for it.

Cliff shakes his head. Rachel picks up the pass.

RACHEL

You know, your head isn't the only one on the chopping block.

Cliff looks at her with failing strength.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

I bounced around from Sheriff's office to Sheriff's office, and they were all the same. One deputy hits on you. The other hates you. The closest they let you get to crime scenes is the paperwork. I didn't take that. So they'd make it worse and I'd leave. Why give them a hobby, right?

Cliff stands carefully.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Even if I did get my chance, not to show them up but just to do my job, for what? Pulling over drunk hicks and shutting down noise complaints? If I was going to put up with the bullshit, I needed a good reason. I needed to protect people. Save lives. Solve something, for Christ's sake. Harpersville was the best way to prove myself. To prove I could do the job, because nobody here seems to want to.

She throws Cliff the pass.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

And you convinced me that was your job, too.

Cliff breathes harshly.

CLIFF

Don't you give us journalists too much credit.

He stands, brushes himself off, surveys the area. He stares down the long, overgrown path to the camp.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

So what do we do now?

Cliff turns back to Rachel. They just look at each other.

RACHEL  
 (raw)  
 I don't know.

CLIFF  
 Good. Me neither.

He walks over to the cruiser and leans against his door.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 We know one of your, uh, coworkers  
 had to be involved, right?

RACHEL  
 Yes. We've now successfully  
 reviewed everything we know.

Cliff looks up, no more fear in his face.

CLIFF  
 I've only met those guys once and I  
 could probably place any one of  
 'em. You only saw the thing long  
 enough to shoot it - but maybe one  
 of the kids got a better look.

RACHEL  
 We'll have to wait until Monday to  
 get them all together again.

CLIFF  
 I think I can do you one better.  
 Want to go to a party?

INT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

BEER sloppily gurgles into a FUNNEL, down a TUBE and over the  
 braces of TODD "ZIPPY" ZEPPINO, 16, sophomore, moron.

A dozen-or-so TEENAGERS litter the house.

BEER CANS blanket all. BAD TECHNO inspires worse dancing.

SMOKE snarls under a bathroom door. BUBBLING sounds within.

RORY FELDMAN, 15, dejectedly wipes beer off a FRAMED PICTURE  
 of him and his dad, JEFF FELDMAN, 47 and looking older.

A CRONY plays with Cliff's camera, FLASHING here and there.

Andrew has Leslie pent up in the corner of the kitchen.

ANDREW  
 (slurring)  
 God this whole thing just has me so stressed.

Leslie stares at him with vacant eyes.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
 So stressed. If only there was something we could do, y'know, to relieve some stress.

Leslie turns her head away from him, sipping her BEER.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
 Oh, great idea.

Andrew leans in to kiss her neck. Leslie slaps him away.

LESLIE  
 Jesus - just leave me alone!

ANDREW  
 What's your deal? You've been a real bitch since homecoming.

LESLIE  
 Well gee, I wonder, what happened at homecoming? Something that might upset me? Could it be my boyfriend leaving me to die? Or maybe, it's the day after, my shithead boyfriend decides to go slashing tires all day - because that's how you comfort a girlfriend. Or maybe it's something else that you don't even know about - because you never ask me how I'm feeling, just if I'm in the mood.

ANDREW  
 (indignant)  
 Well why don't you try to find another guy in Harpersville who'll put up with your shit?

Andrew turns towards the center of the room.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
 (loud)  
 Any takers!?

An awkward pause overtakes the room. Partygoers look to the pair in bewilderment.

LESLIE  
You're such a jackass.

Leslie pushes past him.

The party resumes.

EXT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

ALEX, DOM and AARON sit on the stoop passing a BOTTLE of whiskey. BASS RUMBLES the entire house.

Rachel's cruiser pulls up in front.

The teens hastily hide the bottle like a shell game.

DOM  
(whispered)  
Shit.

Cliff and Rachel get out and walk to the house. He kicks a stray BEER CAN in the yard.

CLIFF  
You think this is the place?

Rachel reaches the front door first and KNOCKS. Nothing.

RACHEL  
Oh hell-

Cliff stops her as she opens the door.

CLIFF  
You have a warrant?

RACHEL  
Of course not.

INT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The shaky dance continues. Nobody notices the cop or Cliff.

RACHEL  
Now the trick is finding someone  
sober enough to question.

Cliff picks up a CAN off the couch. He warily smells the top.

CLIFF  
Yup. High school standard swill.

He throws the can into the throng and nobody cares.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
They'll be feeling this shit til  
Thanksgiving.

Leslie pushes her way through the crowd, Andrew on her heels.

ANDREW  
You're gonna regret this.

Leslie flips him off over her shoulder.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
That, too.

Leslie squints across the dingy room, spots Rachel. Cuts a  
beeline towards her.

LESLIE  
Can you get me out of here? My ride  
turned into an ass.

RACHEL  
Sorry to hear that. How sober are  
you?

LESLIE  
Enough.

RACHEL  
It's a start.

Rachel leads Leslie out of the party.

ANDREW  
(to LESLIE)  
Oh, c'mon, don't leave!

Cliff catches Andrew mid-stride. Andrew loses all nerve.

CLIFF  
Slow down there, sport. We're  
taking her home. So why don't you  
just stay here and think about what  
you've done.

Cliff follows Rachel and Leslie.

ANDREW  
(quiet)  
Um. Yessir. I'll stay right here.

Andrew wallows in his weakness, then jumps to catch the door.



EXT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Andrew watches from the porch as Leslie drops into the cruiser's backseat and they drive off.

He starts breathing hard, building up steam. About to blow.

INT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

SLAM. The door almost falls off its hinges as Andrew barges back in.

He cuts a beeline for the kitchen, shotguns a BEER and turns to the crony with the camera, who's barely aloft.

ANDREW  
I'll be back.

CRONY  
Where you goin'?

Andrew heads back toward the main room and stops short.

ANDREW  
To see if my girlfriend's home.

EXT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The partiers on the porch just settle back into their drink as Andrew's exit startles them.

He hops down the steps, big and bad, struts to the sidewalk.

HEADLIGHTS spill down the road, blinding him, casting a long shadow.

He squints at the car they belong to, then hurries away from the house as fast as he can without drawing attention.

Gantner's SQUAD CAR rolls up to the curb and stops.

The partiers on the porch hide their bottle again.

Slowly, deliberately, Gantner opens his door and takes in the party from over his roof.

INT. RACHEL'S CRUISER - NIGHT

Leslie brings her knees up to her chin and wraps her arms around them.

Rachel peeks at the rear-view mirror. Cliff watches the road.

CLIFF  
You know I think I really put him  
in his place.

Leslie smiles, but only just.

LESLIE  
Thanks for this, Rachel.

CLIFF  
And Cliff. I'm Cliff, if  
gratitude's getting handed out.

Leslie looks at the back of his seat.

LESLIE  
Same to you, Cliff.

CLIFF  
So you must be Leslie Gantner, the  
girl we didn't interview this  
morning.

LESLIE  
Mhm.

CLIFF  
I know your dad. He hates me.

RACHEL  
We need to ask you a couple  
questions, Leslie.

She looks at Rachel defensively.

LESLIE  
What about?

RACHEL  
Homecoming.

CLIFF  
We talked to most of your friends  
earlier, but that's before we, uh-

Cliff looks at Rachel. She nods.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
-before we figured something out.

Leslie unfolds a little, leans toward the front seat.

LESLIE  
Did you find out who did it?

Rachel pulls up to a STOP SIGN.

RACHEL  
We're getting close. We know who  
could've.

Leslie watches, unblinking.

CLIFF  
We know it's a cop.

Leslie's eyes shatter in their sockets, but she doesn't move.

Rachel drives away from the stop sign.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
So if any of the survivors could  
place his height or weight, there  
are only so many options.

Leslie slumps back into the seat, turning to the window, the  
dark. She's quiet, for almost too long.

Rachel glances back, over at Cliff.

LESLIE  
I think I know who did it.

Rachel looks at the rear-view, Leslie framed in the corner.

Leslie makes eye contact in the reflection.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
I think it's my dad.

INT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK. Quiet and polite.

Zippy, sloshed, flings open the door.

ZIPPY  
Yessss-?

He catches himself when he sees Gantner standing outside.

ZIPPY (CONT'D)  
-shit!

GANTNER  
I'm here about a noise violation.

Zippy shrinks in his skin.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
I'm just pulling your leg, Todd. I  
came to pick up my daughter.

ZIPPY  
Oh, cool, man. Y'know, I go by  
Zippy, so you can call me that. But  
she, uh, just left.

Gantner's face doesn't change.

GANTNER  
(painful)  
With Andrew?

Zippy LAUGHS.

ZIPPY  
No, no. It was that new deputy, the  
chick, and some dude.

Gantner eases inside, shutting the door behind him.

GANTNER  
What did "some dude" look like?

Zippy tries to think through the haze.

ZIPPY  
Um. I don't know. He had, uh, a  
suit that had like elbow pads. And-  
and- and he shut *down* Andrew like a  
real asshole.

Gantner boils beneath his mask. He locks the door behind him,  
without looking.

GANTNER  
Where did they go?

ZIPPY  
(spaced)  
Beats me, man. But I gotta tell ya,  
you're a lot cooler than like any  
other cop in town. My cousin over  
in Monroeville-

Zippy's story goes FUZZY and QUIET.

Gantner watches him with dull eyes. Charcoal. The fire behind them rages calmly.

Until Gantner pulls his revolver and blows Zippy's head off.

BANG. Everyone's sober. Silent.

The crowd flails into chaos. Feet fly every direction as kids stampede en masse.

Gantner levels the gun at the crowd.

GANTNER

Stay.

They do. Gantner cuts a path like a shark through sardines.

He reaches the kitchen just as a panicked DALTON FRANCIS, 18, senior, runs out the BACK DOOR.

Gantner takes aim at the wood, about head level.

BANG.

A fist-sized hole blows through the door, knocking it open just enough to see Dalton hit grass.

EXT. FELDMAN'S BACKYARD - NIGHT

Gantner bumps the door open, grabs the dead Dalton by the Nike and drags him back to the house.

An ELECTRIC HEDGE TRIMMER, among other GARDENING SUPPLIES, sits on the patio furniture.

Gantner lays the body against the doorframe as Rory Feldman drops down from the second-floor balcony.

CRACK.

Rory crumples, YELPS until he spots Gantner and his dead classmate.

Gantner just looks at him.

RORY

Oh shi-

INT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The panicked crowd surges against the front door, a dozen drunken hands failing to work the locks.

GLASS pelts the room as Rory's body hurls through the back window.

Heads turn as Rory rolls. Some teens peel from the crowd.

Andrew's crony, at the head of the crowd, gets pulled under and trampled as the mass pushes harder against the door.

A MECHANICAL ROAR streaks through the window.

Sheriff Gantner steps through the broken glass, hedge trimmer in hand. The CORD trails out the window behind him.

SCREAMS, as TYLER FALLWELL, 15, freshman, steps forward, trying to look tough and failing.

TYLER

H-hey, man. What are you gonna do?  
The hedges?

Tyler forces a LAUGH.

Gantner forces the trimmer into Tyler's neck.

Gore and SCREAMING until it's only gore. Gantner rips the trimmer out and advances on the other kids.

He almost falls backwards as the cord pulls taut.

Some of the crowd scatters, headed for any exit.

Gantner pulls. No give. Pulls. No give. Pulls.

The cord goes slack and the trimmer stops.

AMY GALLUP, 17, junior, CHUCKLES despite herself.

Gantner faces her, swings the dormant trimmer and lodges it in her gut.

He lifts her with it and drops both.

As she hits the floor, the house descends into a bloodbath.

Gantner uses anything he can get his hands on - KITCHEN KNIVES, BEER BOTTLES, LAMPS, A SCREWDRIVER, SMALL FURNITURE, LARGE FURNITURE, DOORS, HIS BARE HANDS, MORE BULLETS, A BONG - and leaves no survivors.

SOUNDS of struggle in the kitchen draw him to the back door and STEPHANIE CRUMHOLTZ, 16, sophomore, trying to push it open.

STEPHANIE  
C'mon- c'mon- c'mon-

Gantner grabs the empty COFFEE POT from the counter. He slams it into the back of Stephanie's head, shattering the GLASS.

He crouches, keeps swinging until everything sounds SQUISHY.

Alone in the aftermath, Gantner takes a deep breath. Wipes down his forehead with his HANKERCHIEF.

He grabs a liquor bottle and spills the contents. He grabs another and repeats.

EXT. FELDMAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Gantner exits the house, pouring a trail of TEQUILA behind him. He pauses to admire his work. Sips the bottle.

Gantner sparks a match from his SLEEP-ON-INN MATCHBOOK. He throws it down and sets the house alight.

He looks over at Alex, Dom and Aaron, still hiding their bottle and absolutely paralyzed with shock.

GANTNER  
(genuine)  
Heck of a party, isn't it?

Dom drops his beer with a CLANG.

Casually, Gantner stuffs his handkerchief into his bottle. He upends it briefly, then rights it. Sparks another match.

Gantner holds the molotov alight for a moment, then throws it into the three teenagers.

They go up like boozy cardboard.

Gantner notices the blood smearing his coat and throws it into the fire. His SHIRT and PANTS took some damage, too.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Ah, I really liked this shirt...

He massages his sore shoulder as he walks back to his car.

INT. GANTNER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The slim window on the front door bursts open. A hand reaches through the break and snags on a sharp edge.

ANDREW  
 (muffled by the door)  
 Gah! Shit!

Andrew fiddles with the door and unlocks it, then steps inside.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
 Leslie! You better not have just  
 made me bust my hand open because  
 you wouldn't open the door!

The house is eerily silent, and Andrew starts looting.

He busts a lock on the LIQUOR CABINET, inspects some high-grade WHISKEYS and pulls a bottle of J&B.

He takes a swing, spits it out and puts it back.

ANDREW (CONT'D)  
 What kind of idiot drinks that?

INT. GANTNER'S BEDROOM - DAY

Andrew rifles for something good to break and rests his gaze on the hope chest.

He kicks until the lock breaks loose from the old wood.

He lifts the lid, and looks inside the chest-

Darkness and a LADDER down.

ANDREW  
 The fuck-?

Andrew leans, looks another minute. Swings his leg inside.

INT. GANTNER'S CELLAR - NIGHT

Andrew takes the first three rungs gracefully.

His bloodied HAND catches the top edge of the chest.

He SQUEALS, draws it back too fast and slips off the ladder.

Andrew hits the concrete and sprawls, GROANING.

He wobbles to his feet, dizzy from the fall, in the dark.

BARE BULBS flicker on in motion-activated unison, casting hard shadows on a small room packed with MEMORABILIA.



The COSTUMES of all past killers hang on a rolling coat RACK.

A WORKBENCH at the far end, holding PRUNING SHEARS, the baseball butcher's spiked BAT, a framed FAMILY PHOTO and a DUSTY BOOK - "THE IMBECILE'S GUIDE TO JUGGLING."

Behind it, HEADLINES hang like wallpaper. Every massacre is covered, with noticeably fewer recent samples.

Andrew takes a cautious step forward.

KER-CHUNK!

Andrew SQUEALS like a wounded animal and collapses.

BLOOD spills between the teeth of the BEARTRAP on his ankle.

Andrew WEEPS, alone.

Until a door CREAKS open upstairs. FOOTFALLS approach.

Andrew whimpers. Something blocks the light from the ladder.

Gantner's silhouette peers down for a moment.

Andrew squeezes his eyes shut.

The ladder SQUEAKS.

Andrew flicks his eyes back open to see Gantner towering over him.

ANDREW  
(weakly)  
Oh my God...

Gantner walks to the workbench, avoiding the blood.

GANTNER  
Y'know Andrew, I used to trap fur  
for spending money when I was your  
age. And my dad taught me, the  
trick to taking prey without  
getting all bloody is to use a  
hammer...

Gantner's hand drifts over the various WEAPONS as he speaks, before settling on a BALL-PEEN HAMMER.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Lemme tell you, though, it can get  
pretty ugly.  
(MORE)

GANTNER (CONT'D)

First hit usually knocks their eyes out of the sockets, but they'll keep kickin' for a while. You'd be surprised how much the little shits want to live.

Gantner gets close, lines his strike up.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

(somber)

You know, Leslie cried over you.

Gantner swings like an executioner.

He beats Andrew's brains out in the hazy reflection of the family photo. Of Leslie's infant smile.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Night curls through a BAY WINDOW and casts Leslie in shade as she watches TOWNSFOLK stream down the road.

CLIFF

Every year another colorful killer with a vaguely personal ax to grind comes to a sleepy little town in the middle of nowhere and lays waste to the place. Kills everyone they get can their hands on, usually stupid teenagers, until they either disappear or die in a grand, overwrought way and then disappear. Leaving the humble, dedicated sheriff to shake his head, apologize to the survivors and add the story to his personal collection.

Cliff looks from Leslie to the middle distance.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Of course it's the fucking sheriff; he always survives.

Rachel, pulling off her police shirt, leans out from a DOORWAY behind Cliff, who doesn't look back.

RACHEL

I talked to him on the radio while the killer was...uh, killing.

CLIFF

But you never saw the baseball  
baker-

LESLIE

*Butcher.*

CLIFF

-*Candlestick Maker* while the  
sheriff was talking, did you?

Rachel slips on a FESTIVAL T-SHIRT with the PHANTOM PICKER, a  
Harpersville favorite, styled like a movie poster.

RACHEL

I guess not. Could've just had his  
radio on. And he took his sweet  
time showing up when it was all  
over.

CLIFF

The supernatural stuff is what gets  
me. Like how the hell did he pull  
off the ghost truck?

Rachel peeks around the corner again, changing into jeans.

RACHEL

He probably ducked under the dash.

Cliff tries a number of retorts before slouching.

CLIFF

Yeah, that checks out.

Rachel belts her pants.

RACHEL

What about the explosion?

CLIFF

There was an explosion?

Rachel looks down at her shirt.

RACHEL

In '95, I think it was, the townies  
cornered the Phantom Picker at the  
old steel mill and blew him to  
pieces with dynamite. They told me  
Gantner led the charge. How'd he  
pull off that one?

Cliff starts to answer until Leslie faces him.

LESLIE  
Duct tape, probably.

Rachel steps out, dressed much less conspicuously now, and crosses her arms.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
Kidnapped some guy in town, taped his mouth shut, his hands to the banjo and set him loose. If you've got a town full of revenge-minded folks with dynamite on your tail, you're not going to fall at their feet to make your case.

Cliff and Rachel squint at Leslie, almost through her.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
I mean maybe. What do I know?

A churchbell CHIMES from outside.

CLIFF  
...You guys have a late service around here?

RACHEL  
That's the town meeting we've been so warmly invited to.

The trio watch out the window at the passing figures.

CLIFF  
Risky, I know, but should we go?

RACHEL  
Are they gonna trust an out-of-towner and a green deputy, or the only sheriff they've ever known?

CLIFF  
It's getting real old asking this, but what do we do?

RACHEL  
Well. Where can we shop for weapons at midnight on a Friday?

LESLIE  
I might have an idea.

EXT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

More like a one-room schoolhouse.

The last of the TOWNSFOLK file inside as Gantner's cruiser takes a prime spot out front.

He steps out in a fresh uniform, waits until no one else is around and rubs his eyes as hard as he can.

GANTNER

C'mon. C'mon tears. C'mon-

He stops rubbing, keeps blinking and pops the TRUNK.

INSIDE,

Two BOXES of BULLETS. One has a big X on it in black marker.

GANTNER,

Grabs six rounds from the box without the X. SLAMS the trunk.

He blinks again, eyes bleary.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Good enough.

He loads the fresh rounds, holsters his gun and walks in.

INT. TOWN HALL - NIGHT

Almost a full house, but in Harpersville that only means about 25 ATTENDEES. Some familiar faces dot the room, bored.

Gantner heaves open the DOORS with grim purpose. He beelines for Garland and the other deputies by a PODIUM at the front.

DEPUTY GARLAND

Everything square, Sheriff?

Gantner breaks his voice enough to be convincing.

GANTNER

Is the mayor here?

DEPUTY GARLAND

'Course not, you know he locks his doors and unplugs his phone for a month after every massacre.

GANTNER

Well I can't wait that long.

Gantner turns to the podium, grips it hard.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Hello, friends. I, uh...I called this meeting to warn you of suspicious characters...*outsiders* in town. That may or may not have been responsible for the incident at the high school and those following.

Glazed stares and lazy blinks in the audience.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
But tonight they have shown their hand. This isn't a warning. This is a request. Tonight, our own Rachel Svedlik and that reporter, to whom we've shown nothing but our widest smiles, have kidnapped my daughter, Leslie.

The audience wakes up.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
I also have reason to believe they set fire to the Feldman house.

Jeff Feldman, more frustrated than in his portrait, sits up.

JEFF  
(quietly)  
Shit.

GANTNER  
With the Survivor's Party inside.

JEFF  
(quieter)  
Shit.

Other townsfolk, PARENTS, sober in an instant. Stunned, but only as much as Harpersville allows.

GANTNER  
I can't prove they did it and I can't begin to estimate how many lives were lost. I've called the fire department over in Grover's Mill. They'll be here in about an hour. Meanwhile, I need all volunteer firefighters to keep it under control.

The VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS - two old men in the front row - creakily get up and shuffle out the back.

Father O'Hoolihan holds onto ROSARY BEADS and stands.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN  
What can we do, Sheriff?

Gantner shakes his head like a broken man.

GANTNER  
We don't often get to fight back in Harpersville. Not you folks, anyway. You're probably not used to it. But I need you to help me find them.

Gantner's eyes go convincingly hollow.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Help me save my daughter.

A MURMUR of support ripples through the room.

ALICE  
Looks like it's finally Galley's time to shine.

The murmur quiets. Everyone looks around.

GANTNER  
Is, uh, Galley in the room?

All eyes turn to an EMPTY CHAIR at the back by a CHALKBOARD.

ALICE  
Oh hell.

GANTNER  
That's alright. You all know my feelings about an armed citizenry. Vigilante justice. But like our run-in with the Phantom Picker, I need all the help I can get. I'll track down Mr. Galley and see if he can properly arm you all. In the mean time, I want you out on the streets, turning over every last rock in Harpersville to find those...monsters.

He leans forward as he finishes.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

They're cunning. They're ruthless.  
And they're hiding in the last  
place you'd ever expect.

INT. MINIMART - NIGHT

MUZAK lilts generically across over-lit AISLES of the barest necessities.

Cliff pulls a PLASTIC TEEBALL BAT from a BIN and takes a few practice swings with it.

Rachel hurries past, stops short and watches him.

CLIFF

What do you think?

RACHEL

Depends. How old's the other team?

Cliff tosses the bat back into the bin, hands already up and apologetic.

CLIFF

Alright, alright. What've you got?

RACHEL

A gun that's useless past a foot  
and I saw a cheap camping stove if  
Gantner doesn't mind sitting on it  
for a while.

Cliff SIGHS without hope, stalks off down the aisle. He leans against a tower of SIX-PACKS, same beer from the party.

CLIFF

That's *if* we have to fight the guy.  
Maybe we're overthinking this.

Rachel catches up to him as casually as she can.

RACHEL

Look, we're both gambling on this  
girl's hunch, but if it's even a  
little true, you know as well as I  
do that we can't just Scooby-Doo  
the son-of-a-bitch and pull his  
mask off in the center of town.

Cliff narrows his eyes. Picks up a BEER BOTTLE.



CLIFF  
 We can smash it over his head and  
 stab him with it.

Rachel blinks. Cliff gives up.

CLIFF (CONT'D)  
 I'm sorry. I don't even know if you  
 can really do that.

LESLIE (O.S.)  
 Hey guys.

Cliff and Rachel turn.

Leslie stands at the other end of the aisle, holding a sealed  
 pack of KITCHEN KNIVES.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
 Yea? Nay?

Cliff grimaces.

CLIFF  
 I mean...he's *your* dad.

Leslie darkens. Rachel can only take a step toward her.  
 SQUEALING. Electric. Outside. Like a tornado siren.

RACHEL  
 That's not good.

CLIFF  
 How not good?

LESLIE  
 That's the town emergency siren.

CLIFF  
*Another* massacre?

LESLIE  
 Dad told me they stopped using it  
 in the 90s. Everybody just  
 complained about the noise.

CLIFF  
 Jesus Christ.

Rachel moves for the exit.

RACHEL  
 Welcome to Harpersville.

EXT. MINIMART - NIGHT

The streets are empty. The squat MINIMART is the only light.

Rachel walks out into the street.

The siren keeps WAILING as Cliff and Leslie catch up.

RACHEL

I don't get it.

Cliff spots a LOCAL approaching from down a SIDE STREET.

Cliff waves. The local sees him. The local stops.

Behind the local, a CROWD OF LOCALS struggles against Rachel's cruiser and manage to flip it.

The local WHISTLES. The other locals swarm in behind him.

CLIFF

I do.

Cliff grabs Leslie's hand and hauls ass. Rachel stumbles and keeps the pace. The townsfolk pursue slowly. Steadily.

Leslie pulls free of Cliff's hand, speeds ahead of him.

LESLIE

Follow me.

Cliff looks at Rachel, back to Leslie, who's losing them.

CLIFF

Well shit.

He pushes himself as hard as he can. Rachel easily blows past him.

EXT. GALLEY'S COMPOUND - NIGHT

A bunker dropped into a hillside farm.

From the STORAGE BARN, the front of an ARMORED TRUCK peeks from under a lone light. A set of MINESWEEPING CHAINS is mounted to a spindle on the front like a snowplow.

Gantner's cruiser slows to a whisper some distance away from the front door.

INT. GALLEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Barely a sound as Gantner picks the lock.

Darkness.

He enters the house, gun drawn.

He CLICKS on a small FLASHLIGHT, beam lancing the gloom.

WEAPONS. All sorts, from all eras, all over the house. A MACUAHITIL, a fearsome obsidian-edged club, shares space with dime-store KATANA.

The furniture is, surprisingly, very nice.

GANTNER  
(mute surprise)  
Huh. I'm in the wrong business.

Light glints from many blades and spears. Stops on a SOLDIER ready to fight.

Gantner flinches, smiles at it and examines the DUMMY, outfitted in a Vietnam-era UNIFORM down to the GAS MASK.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Now that's a conversation piece.

He snags a DUFFEL BAG off its shoulder and starts stuffing in every weapon he can rip from the walls.

A CREAK upstairs makes him freeze. The GURGLE of a shower.

Gantner glances towards the stairwell, pulls a CHEF'S KNIFE from the bag. But something catches his eye across the room.

His grin is horrifying.

INT. GALLEY'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

A richly-appointed master bathroom.

Behind a PLASTIC SHOWER CURTAIN, Galley washes his hair.

The door glides open silently as a cumbrous SHADOW slips into the room.

Galley closes his eyes and rinses.

A floorboard WHINES.

Galley's eyes snap. Slow as he can, he lifts the SOAP DISH.

A curved KARAMBIT knife hides underneath.

Galley grips it tight, faces the curtain. Throws it open.

A torrent of FLAME erupts from the PVC pipe-based  
FLAMETHROWER in Gantner's hands.

Galley SCREAMS and writhes. Napalm fights the water and wins.

FIRE chases out the STEAM, angry and red.

EXT. LAKE ZEPHANIAH - NIGHT

TORCHES burn across the mob as it slowly, clumsily climbs  
down to the beach.

Cliff HEAVES in exhaustion as he catches up to the women.

CLIFF  
(breathless)  
So we swim it?

LESLIE  
Bad idea.

Cliff nods. Catches his breath. Looks at the mob, back at  
Leslie.

CLIFF  
So why did we come here exactly?

LESLIE  
I come here all the time and nobody  
ever bothers me!

CLIFF  
But I imagine nobody's chasing you  
in the first place.

Leslie gets in his face.

LESLIE  
This is a new experience for me!

CLIFF  
Really? Because I was under the  
impression this happened about as  
often as Arbor Day.

Rachel stops searching for an escape route and steps in.

RACHEL  
 Actually this is new. The townies  
 never do anything. It's usually  
 just the one guy with a big knife  
 you have to worry about.

Rachel looks at Cliff.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
 And that one time it was a truck.

LESLIE  
 Ghost truck-

RACHEL  
 Right, *ghost* truck.

Leslie turns to the lake.

LESLIE  
 I'm sorry, guys. Yesterday I was  
 just a high school student with a  
 stupid, terrible thought about her  
 dad. Now I dragged you two into  
 this and...I don't know what the  
 hell I'm doing.

Cliff calms as much as he can, puts his hand on her shoulder.

CLIFF  
 It's alright, kid; that's something  
 you never grow out of.

She trusts him with a glance. Smiles.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN (O.S.)  
 I should have known you would take  
 refuge at this lake of iniquity.

Cliff and Leslie whip around. Rachel's already aiming her  
 revolver at the wall of townsfolk, keeping them back.

In the crowd, Cyphers and Garland aim back.

CLIFF  
 (whispering, to LESLIE)  
 What the hell's he talking about?

LESLIE  
 (whispering, to CLIFF)  
 I'll tell you later.

Rachel aims at Father O'Hoolihan.

RACHEL

You mind telling us why we had to take refuge in the first place, Father?

O'Hoolihan steps forward as leader, chest full of hot air.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN

Please. You know what you've done, Deputy, to bring us all to this bleak confrontation.

RACHEL

We've got an idea, but no. We really don't know.

HUXLEY

You killed all them kids! And the guy at the hotel! ...Then the rest of them kids!

ALICE

And you kidnapped the sheriff's daughter!

Rachel swings her gun as the crowd bulges forward. The mob retreats a touch.

LESLIE

Nope! Not kidnapped. Completely free, here.

Leslie flails her arms in a demonstration of freedom.

DEPUTY CYPHERS

Yeah, well...you're still a couple of murderers!

CLIFF

No! Look, we think the killer is actual-

DEPUTY GARLAND

Save your breath, we called the Sheriff and he's already on his way - just don't do anything stupid, Rachel. Put down the gun.

Rachel rolls her eyes, aims at Garland.

RACHEL

Why don't you put down the gun, Garland?

DEPUTY GARLAND  
(shaken)  
Uhm, no, you.

BANG. All flinch.

BANG. Garland fires on reflex at Rachel. He stares at his gun in disbelief when he recovers.

Deputy Jameson approaches from the side, holding an old REVOLVER to the sky. SMOKE curls from the nose.

DEPUTY JAMESON  
Everybody just calm down!

Nobody calms down. He lowers his gun.

DEPUTY JAMESON (CONT'D)  
I really thought that would work.

A motor WHINES in the distance.

Cliff CLEARS his throat.

CLIFF  
Look! We know - we're pretty sure we know who the murderer is. It's the Sheriff. Just been dressing up in Halloween costumes and killing people.

The ROARING motor catches all attention as Galley's truck bobs down the hill to the edge of the crowd.

DEPUTY GARLAND  
...That's just *crazy*. Look, please, put down the gun - this doesn't have to end badly. We can still resolve this peacefully...

Garland turns towards the idling truck.

Everyone watches, waits for a sign of life inside.

The engine changes pitch, WHINES as the minesweeping chains start to flail. Jagged WHIPPING drowns out the crowd.

The nearest townsfolk take a step back as a figure in a gas mask leans out the window and scans them with a glance.

Everyone eases as the figure ducks back inside.

He leans back out with a FLARE GUN, aims fast and fires.

The blinding surge WHISTLES over the crowd, straight at Deputy Garland.

DEPUTY GARLAND (CONT'D)

Oh-

The flare hits Garland. His coat goes up like parched grass. Garland SCREAMS. So does the crowd.

The truck shifts into gear and ROARS into the mayhem like an industrial-sized lawnmower.

DEPUTY JAMESON

Oh God! It was all Galley!

RACHEL

(shouting)

No it wasn't!

Deputy Jameson flees towards town.

The truck grinds through the crowd.

Rachel winces, looks for Leslie in the mayhem.

Garland flings off his burning coat in time to see the heavy chains a foot away.

The truck mulches Garland and keeps going.

The crowd splits, roils, spreads as Cliff, Rachel and Leslie hurry back up the hill.

INT. GALLEY'S MURDERWAGON - NIGHT

Sheriff Gantner, hidden behind the gas mask, bounces in the driver's seat, duffel bag of pilfered weapons beside him.

The ancient RADIO belts out REO SPEEDWAGON. "ROLL WITH THE CHANGES."

Gantner's MUFFLED WHISTLING stops when the black reflection of his mask catches Cliff, Rachel and Leslie fleeing.

Gantner cuts the wheel, starts WHISTLING again.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE STREETS - NIGHT

Left at the library. Right at the high school. Right again.



Cliff, Rachel and Leslie cut a desperate, frantic path through town.

They huff past Principal Stevens as he leaves the minimart, a fresh BROWN LIQUOR BAG in-hand.

Stevens watches the group running and shakes his head. He pulls a BOTTLE of VODKA from the bag, unscrews it.

The murderwagon almost tips as it swings down the road behind Stevens.

He downs a swig of booze.

Stevens SIGHS in satisfaction as the ground RUMBLES.

He turns halfway-

PRINCIPAL STEVENS

Oh, ass.

Chains rip the principal apart.

UNDER THE TRUCK

Stevens's metal hand bounces, SPARKS and lodges into the engine. KEENING. CROAKING. Bad, black SMOKE.

THE CHAINS

Lock up. Stop spinning. The mechanical monster goes silent.

INT. GALLEY'S MURDERWAGON - NIGHT

DASHBOARD WARNING LIGHTS flicker erratically.

GANTNER

Son-of-a-bitch.

Gantner grabs the duffel by the strap.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE STREETS - NIGHT

The bag of weapons hits the street and almost spills open.

Gantner hops down after it, GROANS on the landing and scoops up the bag. He starts marching.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE SHERIFF DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

Far ahead of the others, Rachel desperately paws at the door.  
Locked.

Jameson peeks out through the GLASS VIEWING WINDOW.

DEPUTY JAMESON

Oh hey, sorry, nothing personal,  
but I really can't let you in.

RACHEL

Jameson, you piece of shit, let us  
in!

Jameson keeps anxiously peeking around her.

DEPUTY JAMESON

My hands are pretty tied here.  
Don't even have a key to this lock.  
Best just stop making a scene and  
hide somewhere else.

Jameson disappears from the window.

Rachel beats against the glass.

RACHEL

Jameson! Jameson! Asshole!

Cliff and Leslie catch up, panting. Rachel takes off down the  
street.

CLIFF

(exhausted)  
What? Oh, okay.

Cliff lurches to motion.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Powered down, the rides and vendors are a canyon in the dark.

Three shadows hurry out into the center between the booths  
and choose one as a hiding place.

INT. T-SHIRT STALL - NIGHT

Cliff, Rachel and Leslie GASP for breath.

RACHEL  
(quiet)  
I don't hear the truck anymore, but  
we should be safe here in the dark.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

A generator HUMS to life.

Lights FLICK on, one after the other, in neat rows.

The carousel starts up its cheery SONG. The only sound.

Gantner walks out in front of it, a silent soldier painted in neon. He waits.

INT. T-SHIRT STALL - NIGHT

Rachel looks up at the now-lit walls of their tent.

RACHEL  
Well. Damn.

Leslie peeks over the countertop.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

SURVIVORS with the same idea peek from other booths.

Gantner strolls down the aisle of games and vendors, waiting for movement.

A crying MAN jumps from a booth behind Gantner, tries to run.

Gantner whips a THROWING KNIFE free from his bag, hurls it.

It sinks into the man's neck. He crumples. Dead.

Gantner retrieves a PISTOL CROSSBOW.

A middle-aged WOMAN leaps into view - darts away.

Gantner squeezes the trigger.

Nothing happens. He fiddles with the pull. Squeezes the trigger. Still nothing.

Gantner GRUNTS, drops the crossbow, runs, trips her and pins her to the grass with a KATANA.

He SIGHS as he pulls out a CUTLASS and continues his patrol.

Approaching the nearest stall - COTTON CANDY - he stabs through the TARP covering the TABLE.

Empty.

Gantner tries the next booth. Something inside SHRIEKS.

He lets go of the sword and it hangs there.

INT. T-SHIRT STALL - NIGHT

Leslie withdraws back into the tent, wide-eyed.

CLIFF

Well? How fucked are we?

Leslie answers him with a look.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

That's what I thought.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Gantner grabs blindly behind a stall, catches a LONG-HAIRED MAN by the mane.

He hefts him up onto the countertop, pulls a weapon sight-unseen - the macuahuitl.

Gantner tests the weight of the weapon in a moment of brief confusion. Then swings.

The obsidian edge cuts clean through the long-haired man's neck and some of his hair. The body slumps off the table.

The weapon lodges in the countertop. The head stares, frozen.

Gantner continues down the row.

INT. T-SHIRT STALL - NIGHT

Cliff peeks over the counter, drops back down.

CLIFF

I have a plan.

RACHEL

You have a plan?

CLIFF

When he gets here he's gonna kill us.

Leslie looks down and a million miles away.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

He's still a ways out. I'll run for my life. It's my head he wants on his wall, so you've both got a shot of getting out of here.

RACHEL

You're literally the slowest out of the three of us.

CLIFF

(to RACHEL)

Thanks for the insult, but this town's going to need a half-way decent sheriff once this blows over, even if that's not a high bar to clear.

(to LESLIE)

And she's going to need you as insurance.

Leslie squints.

LESLIE

I'm blushing.

Rachel looks at Cliff, trying to start half a dozen arguments but abandoning them all.

RACHEL

Cliff, I just-

CLIFF

Save it. This is starting to feel like a eulogy.

Cliff kicks up the tarp behind him and rolls out under it.

The flap drifts shut. Rachel still watches where he left.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Cliff lights to his feet - looks both ways.

CLIFF

(quietly, to himself)

Eyes open.

GANTNER

Slams the FORTUNE TELLER's head into her own booth.

CLIFF

Sneaks toward the obsidian blade, still stuck in the table.

He grimaces at the bloody head, and pries the blade free with his eyes closed.

GANTNER

Keeps wailing as Cliff sneaks up behind him.

The fortune teller's head pops open. Blood pools over a card.  
DEATH.

Cliff winds up with the blade.

Gantner rolls a shoulder, then turns on Cliff.

Cliff goes pale and darts away.

A thrown MACHETE thuds into the ground next to him.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Oh damn.

Cliff tucks his head and runs hard.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

Oh hell. Oh damn.

Gantner pulls a mall-ninja FANTASY AX with sharp edges to spare. He advances.

EXT. CAROUSEL - NIGHT

Cliff jumps onto the spinning light show, hiding between the papier mache monsters. They swirl around in a mad dance.

Gantner approaches, mask reflecting the demented show.

Cliff walks against the rotation, keeping low.

Gantner steps up onto the carousel, steadying himself.

Cliff takes a deep breath and brandishes the obsidian club.

CLIFF

(uncertain)

Let's see what you got, sheriff.

Gantner drops his ax and draws his revolver.

BANG. It pokes a neat hole in Cliff's gut.

Cliff crumples. Spits blood. The demons dance and blur.

CLIFF (CONT'D)

C'mon...not man enough to face me?

BANG. Gantner puts a round through Cliff's skull.

He removes the gas-mask. His face is streaked with sweat.

GANTNER

Guess not.

Gantner exhales slowly, then pats every pocket for something.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Damn. I'm gonna need a new hankerchief.

CYPHERS (O.S.)

(shaken)

Sheriff?

Gantner turns in time to catch his remaining allied deputies, Cyphers and the two fresh-faced recruits, TANDY and DENBROUGH, before he revolves again.

Cyphers holds his gun at his side. The others keep shaky aim.

GANTNER

(shouting)

Boys, I can't hear a thing. You're going to have to hop on.

The replacements turn to Cyphers.

Cyphers nods.

Tandy and Denbrough approach.

The carousel spins Gantner out of view.

Cyphers hesitantly follows the replacements.

Gantner spins back around, hanging off the side, obsidian club held straight out.

DEPUTY TANDY

Oh shit-

Denbrough only has time to look at his colleague before the top half of his head is sheared off.

Blood ruins Tandy's coat. Gantner goes around again.

DEPUTY TANDY (CONT'D)  
Holy shit! What do we do?

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
(breaking)  
Um. Uh. I guess- go! Get on!

Tandy hops on and immediately trips from the speed.

Cyphers grabs the next pole and swings on.

Gantner ducks under a horse that's been turned into the Loch Ness monster and fishes into his bag.

He pulls out a HOOK SWORD and a GRAPPLING HOOK with ROPE.

Cyphers keeps his head down, watches for feet.

Tandy keeps his head high, panicking.

DEPUTY TANDY  
I d-don't see anything.

Gantner pops up behind the nearest horse, hooks him around the throat and drags him over the saddle.

Tandy lands hard.

Cyphers jumps.

Tandy's throat drips a thin line of blood. He's fading.

He opens his mouth to scream and Gantner plunges the grappling hook through his jaw.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
Deputy? Sheriff? What's going on here?

Cyphers advances down the aisle of mounts slowly, gun drawn.

A WHISTLE catches his attention.

Gantner stands on the grass, twenty feet from the carousel.

Cyphers fights tears as he steps off the ride.

DEPUTY CYPHERS (CONT'D)  
What's going on!?



Tandy's body whips across the grass, tethered to one of the outside poles.

It trips Cyphers and drags him a few feet.

He breaks free, army crawls away before it comes around again and peers up at Gantner from the ground.

DEPUTY CYPHERS (CONT'D)  
(panting)  
Sir...what the fuck?

Gantner smiles.

GANTNER  
I always liked you, Cyphers. That's why I showed you that trick with the gun.

Cyphers tries not to sob.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
I l-looked up to you.

GANTNER  
(ignoring)  
It's fun, isn't it?

Gantner turns, walks away.

DEPUTY CYPHERS  
The lumberjack killed my daddy.

Gantner stops.

DEPUTY CYPHERS (CONT'D)  
(raw)  
W-was that you?

Gantner turns back to Cyphers. Smiles.

GANTNER  
Well in a way, I do feel responsible.

Cyphers hastily aims his gun, pulls the trigger.

BANG. The revolver explodes in his hands, shredding both.

Cyphers WAILS as Gantner gets closer, looks down at him.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Most idiots would know that's a good way to ruin a revolver.

Gantner draws his own, checks for a round in the cylinder and aims it between Cyphers's bleary eyes.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
But for what it's worth, I'm  
impressed you've lasted this long.  
I'm almost proud.

BANG.

Cyphers goes limp. His stumps stain the grass.

Gantner SIGHS. Stretches. GROANS at the exertion.

He's alone in the carnival's candy-colored hell. He unzips his field jacket.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Jesus this thing's hot. Goddamn.

INT. GALLEY'S MURDERWAGON - NIGHT

The empty duffel bag hits the passenger seat as Gantner climbs aboard.

He tosses the gas mask, field jacket and the rest of his discarded disguise into the back.

Without looking, he pulls a WATER JUG from under his seat.

GANTNER  
Thanks, Galley, you paranoid,  
prepping moron.

Gantner tears off the cap and drinks until water rolls down his neck.

He pauses, breathes like he almost drowned. Stares out the windshield at something painful.

LESLIE

Stands in the middle of the empty street. Arms out, ready to move.

GANTNER

Looks at her like a mirage.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
(quietly)  
Honey?

LESLIE

Bolts back into the festival.

GANTNER

Pulls something from the glove compartment and jumps out.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

Leslie casts a long, sparkling shadow across the bodies.

Gantner tucks the weapon into his belt, tries to keep up.

GANTNER

(raw)  
Leslie!

She doesn't look back. Sprints straight for the black jungle of the corn maze.

EXT. SLAYER'S STALK - NIGHT

The wax dummies of killers past are ghosts in the dark, only the occasional KNIFE catching moonlight.

Leslie loses no speed until the first turn. Darts left.

Gantner arrives in time to catch her direction. He pursues.

GANTNER

(loud)  
Leslie, I think we need to talk  
about something.

Leslie winds a deliberate path deeper into the maze, past mannequins in more elaborate and less convincing costumes.

Gantner struggles to follow, but he does, breath running short.

He only sees feet, hair, arms before she disappears again.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

C'mon, honey. I won't hurt you.

Gantner rounds the next bend.

Leslie covers Rachel like a human shield.

Rachel rests the crossbow pistol on Leslie's shoulder. Bead on Gantner.

Gantner only has enough time to slow down.

GANTNER (CONT'D)

Oops-

THWIP.

The small ARROW gores his shoulder. He spins back and down.

Gantner lands on his side. Unmoving. Unblinking.

Rachel drops the spent crossbow, approaches.

RACHEL

Sheriff.

Gantner doesn't move. Blood runs down the arrow.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(fury)

Sheriff.

Gantner rolls over and draws the flare gun from his belt.

POP.

Rachel dives. Leslie ducks.

The angry fireball hurtles into the next wall of corn.

Flames scale the stalks and spread like a virus.

By the time Rachel gets to her feet, the maze is a claustrophobic inferno.

Gantner LAUGHS like he can't stop himself.

Leslie looks at him with eyes like cracked mirrors.

Rachel grabs her by the arm.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Leslie.

No response.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Leslie!

Leslie flinches.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

He's not going to kill us, too.

Leslie nods, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Rachel takes off, holding Leslie's hand.

Left. Right. Back, trying left.

Flames creep out along the grass. Dummies ooze into puddles.

Rachel checks on Leslie over her shoulder, keeps moving.

A burning figure bursts through the nearest wall, leaving a hole in its place.

Rachel skids, almost trips. Leslie bumps into her.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Don't look.

Leslie shuts her eyes.

Rachel approaches the body.

Close enough to see the wax bubbling.

Gantner lunges through the hole in the wall, taking Rachel to the ground.

Leslie opens her eyes. SCREAMS.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(struggling)

Leslie...run.

Gantner tries to choke Rachel.

She rolls him into the burning dummy.

He SHRIEKS, rolls off.

GANTNER

Son-of-a-bitch.

He stands, notices the end of the arrow in his shoulder caught fire and puts it out with licked thumbs.

Gantner looks up as Rachel tackles him.

He drops an elbow on her head. She twists the arrow.

The two fight like chained animals.

Leslie backs away, runs.

Gantner lands a flat kick to Rachel's back, sending her reeling.

She hits the ground by the dripping dummy of the Baseball Butcher. By a homemade replica of the SPIKED BAT.

Gantner takes the moment to gingerly inspect the arrow.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
(breathing hard)  
That's the first time I've ever  
been hit.

He looks up.

Rachel swings the spiked bat into his chest.

He HOWLS. It sticks.

RACHEL  
How's the second time feel?

Gantner drops to his knees before her, face tortured in pain.

Gantner's face straightens right up.

He draws the revolver off her belt, aims fast, point-blank at her shoulder.

BANG.

She SCREAMS and tumbles backward to the ground, trailing blood.

Gantner looks down at her as she claws at the scorched wound.

GANTNER  
Like that.

He LAUGHS. COUGHS. Spits red.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
(agony)  
Ouch.

Gantner drops to all-fours and crawls toward Rachel, teetering. Dripping.

Two legs cut him off.

Leslie towers overhead, a KITCHEN KNIFE in hand.

Gantner falls back to a sit and almost keeps falling.

LESLIE  
(crushed)  
Why, Dad?

Gantner's eyes go soft.

GANTNER  
You were probably too little to  
remember...

CHOKES.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
...when you were, when your mom and  
I potty-trained you.

The knife shakes in Leslie's hands.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
And you...you just weren't...you  
just kept making a mess.

Tears run down Leslie's chin.

LESLIE  
B-but I couldn't help it.

Gantner smiles a bloody smile.

GANTNER  
Yeah. It's a little like that.

Leslie doesn't move.

LESLIE  
W-were you going to kill me?

GANTNER  
I don't think so.

Gantner spits a mouthful of blood, shifts the bat in his  
sternum and spits again.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Your mom- your mother- I didn't  
want to do it. Kill her. I  
thought...maybe she'll shut that  
door.

Gantner shakes his head.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
And then I thought maybe...maybe  
you would.

He watches his daughter like she might change before his very eyes.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
Maybe you'd save me.

He watches her like she's already someone else.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
How could I be so blind?

LESLIE  
(defensive)  
What?

GANTNER  
You've always been so much like her...

Leslie raises the knife. An empty threat.

LESLIE  
I know. Just stop.

GANTNER  
...I just, I never noticed...I never...

Gantner falls back onto his elbows. His chest is stained red.

He looks at Leslie, smiles with fading pride.

GANTNER (CONT'D)  
...I never knew.

Leslie takes a step forward.

Gantner nods.

She raises the knife. It gleams in the inferno, the rage.

Gantner shuts his eyes.

Leslie stabs him in the throat and lets the knife go.

Gantner hits the grass. Dead. The fire creeps toward him.

EXT. HARPERSVILLE MURDER FESTIVAL - NIGHT

The hand-painted SIGN is the last thing to catch.

A gaggle of remaining TOWNSFOLK watch the blaze with morbid fascination.



The volunteer firefighters throw BUCKETS of water they can barely heft.

A GASP spreads across the audience as Leslie marches out of the fire, Rachel using her for support.

LESLIE  
Somebody get an ambulance.

The nearest survivors help Leslie lay Rachel on the ground, safely away from the fire.

TERRY  
Did you get him? Did you get the killer?

Leslie doesn't even look at him.

LESLIE  
Yeah. We got him.

Father O'Hoolihan stares wide-eyed at the blaze and shakes his head.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN  
My God.

The burning sign falls to the ground.

FATHER O'HOOLIHAN (CONT'D)  
How are they going to top this next year?

INT. HARPERSVILLE SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - DAY

A SHERIFF BADGE frozen with the reflection of falling snow.

Rachel spins away from the window in her chair, resting the CAST that covers her entire left arm on her desk and addressing her deputies.

Jameson can't look her in the eye. MACKLIN, 25 and born ready, stands at starchy attention.

RACHEL  
Besides running out of road salt,  
is that all you two've got for me?

Jameson smiles weakly, shrinks in his uniform.

JAMESON  
Uh, yes, ma'am.

Macklin clears her throat.

MACKLIN  
The Harpersville Volunteer Fire  
Department submitted their  
investigation results this morning.

Rachel blinks.

RACHEL  
And what do Ed and Norman think?

MACKLIN  
All three fires were the result of  
arson.

RACHEL  
(flat)  
They're really going out on a limb  
this time.

Macklin clears her throat again, falters a little.

MACKLIN  
Well, um, this part is not in their  
report, but they also believe Mr.  
Galley was the killer. That he  
burned his house down as cover and  
the Sheriff got caught in the  
blaze, because they found remains-

Rachel puts up her good hand.

RACHEL  
Save it, Deputy; I already got the  
gossip at the One-Cup. You're free  
to go for the day.

Jameson can't leave fast enough. Macklin salutes.

MACKLIN  
Thank you, ma'am.

Rachel half-heartedly salutes back.

Macklin just catches the door after Jameson lets it go.

RACHEL  
Actually, just one more thing.

Macklin stops almost too fast.

MACKLIN  
Ma'am?

Rachel pulls off her badge and looks at it in her hand.

RACHEL  
The corn maze. Did they find  
anything strange there?

Macklin looks down, pinches her eyes shut.

MACKLIN  
No, ma'am. Not that I recall.

Rachel sits board straight. The badge slips out of her hands and falls on the desk.

MACKLIN (CONT'D)  
Nothing except more remains.

Rachel breathes again. Color returns to her face.

RACHEL  
Thank you, Deputy. Just curious.

Macklin relaxes as much as she'll allow.

MACKLIN  
They told me they thought about  
getting the teeth tested, the DNA,  
but it would only spoil the  
mystery.

Rachel turns back to the window.

RACHEL  
(lost)  
And where's the fun in that?

INT. GANTNER HOUSE - DAY

Gantner has been ripped out of the family photo. CARDBOARD covers the broken window in the door.

Rachel walks in without needing to unlock anything.

RACHEL  
Are there any hungry dropouts in  
the house?

Leslie pokes her head out from the kitchen.

LESLIE  
(tired)  
I am not a dropout.

Rachel kicks off her shoes without using her arms. She grins.

RACHEL  
 Could've fooled me.

Leslie rolls her eyes, turns back to the kitchen.

Rachel drags herself to the family room and picks up a CAN of air freshener from the COFFEE TABLE.

She grimaces and floods the room with lemony mist.

RACHEL (CONT'D)  
 Any progress on the smell?

LESLIE (O.S.)  
 Not yet. I think there might be a  
 dead raccoon in the walls or  
 something.

Rachel slumps on the COUCH.

RACHEL  
 Well I don't know about you, but  
 that certainly makes me want some  
 pizza. You in?

LESLIE (O.S.)  
 Sure.

Rachel cautiously reclines, avoiding any weight on her cast.

RACHEL  
 I only ask because I don't want you  
 to fall behind, but are you  
 thinking about going back to school  
 on Monday?

INT. GANTNER HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

Leslie leans over an open drawer, gazing at her reflection in the array of knives.

LESLIE  
 (loud)  
 Maybe.

She picks up the butcher knife, examines it like she's never seen it before.

LESLIE (CONT'D)  
 (quietly)  
 I don't know if I'm ready yet.