

# The Good Neighbor

By  
Julie Gray & J.P. Smith

Story by  
Julie Gray

FADE IN:

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - SOMEWHERE IN OREGON - DUSK

The western horizon is bruised and purple, punctuated by distant lightning. Rain is coming. The last hint of sun fades into darkness as cars swish by the tall pines and thick brush along the interstate...

The rain starts. Sixteen-wheelers zoom by. Cars turn on their headlights, one by one.

INT/EXT. A VOLVO WAGON - LATER

The rain's coming harder now. And it's gotten dark.

Headlights blind the driver, CHRISTINE BECK (30's): long brunette hair, freckles, a pretty face lined with fatigue and worry. Wipers work overtime.

ELIJAH (O.S.)

Doing okay, mom?

ELIJAH BECK (16), is awake beside her. She glances at him and smiles tiredly.

ELIJAH

Want me to take over?

Christine laughs softly.

CHRISTINE

Nice try.

ELIJAH

I'm gonna get my permit in a few months, you know.

CHRISTINE

(looking in the rearview)

Uh-huh.

Three kids fast asleep in the back: in her carseat, redheaded JOURNIE (18 mos.), and beside her SIERRA (14), tousled blond hair matted with sleep, and DYLAN (6), his sweet face rosy with sleep as he clutches a red remote control car.

ELIJAH (O.S.)

Mom! Look out!

Brakes squeal as Christine swerves. On the shoulder, an ACCIDENT SCENE: flashing lights, ambulances, a fire-engine.

ELIJAH  
 (craning his neck)  
 Whoa...

Christine allows her eyes to flicker to the horrible wreck. Mangled cars, and two bodies lie under a sheet in the road.

Blurred by the rain, the pale face of a LITTLE BOY as he peers out the back window of one of the cars. They pass as he tracks them in SLO-MO. He lifts a hand... Then he's gone.

EXT. SEATTLE - GREEN LAKE NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

The sun shines down on beautiful gardens and lovingly-restored old houses. It's early morning. The streets are deserted and damp, after a late-night rain.

The Volvo comes down the street and pulls into the gravel driveway of a two-storey white clapboard in need of a paint job. Wide porch, brick pathway. A SOLD sign in the lawn.

The Beck family wearily gets out of the car. Rumpled and groggy, the kids stretch and grouse.

An exhausted Christine brightens as she looks at her new home just as a truck - DELANCEY STREET MOVING, BERKELEY - noisily pulls up to the house. Two DRIVERS hop out.

DRIVER 1  
 (to Christine)  
 Get here okay?

CHRISTINE  
 Perfect.

With a noisy clatter the movers slide open the back of the truck and start shifting furniture and boxes to the house. Christine walks toward the porch.

A BLACK CAT hops out of the Volvo. Sierra gives chase.

SIERRA  
 Mr. Baggins!

Dylan has wandered unnoticed to the house next door. A large picture window is just his height. He shades his eyes, gets on his toes...

ELIJAH (O.S.)  
 I'm claiming my room first!

SIERRA (O.S.)  
 No way!

Dylan's face reflects on the glass, and all he can see is himself. Closer. Closer...

Suddenly - ANOTHER FACE is superimposed on his--that of a pale boy about his age. Dylan gasps and stumbles back. He runs toward his family. He looks back. The window is empty.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The family sits on boxes and eats greasy pizza. Exhausted and dirty.

SIERRA

Really great dinner, mom. Super nutritious.

ELIJAH

(under his breath)

Shut. Up. Sierra.

SIERRA

I'm just saying.

CHRISTINE

Listen to your brother, Sierra.

She wipes her mouth with a napkin.

CHRISTINE

Oh geez. Where's Dylan?

She rises, glances up the stairs.

SIERRA

You lost a whole kid?

Christine turns sharply. She's so exhausted.

CHRISTINE

Stop it, okay Sierra?

Sierra mimics her under her breath. But Christine's already looking for her youngest son.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Dyl?

SIERRA

(to nobody in particular)

How do you lose a whole kid?

Elijah elbows her. She rubs her side.

SIERRA

Ow.

Christine heads up the stairs. She reaches the -

LANDING

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Hey, Dyl?

A small red REMOTE-CONTROLLED CAR zips out of one of the rooms, and as if seeing her, stops, turns, speeds back in.

Christine looks into a room.

BEDROOM

Standing by the window is DYLAN, a radio-control box in his hands. He seems so small in the empty room.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Hey, buddy. Why aren't you downstairs with us?

DYLAN

I want daddy.

Thundering silence. Christine gets down on her haunches.

CHRISTINE

(softly)

We all miss daddy, honey.

DYLAN

Then why did we gotta move?

CHRISTINE

Baby. Mommy needs some help right now. Things without daddy are kind of tough. Aunt Susan lives here and she's gonna be back next month.

DYLAN

Why didn't we stay at the old house and wait for Daddy?

He tears up. Christine holds him tight.

CHRISTINE

Shhhhhh. We gotta stick together, Dyl. We're a family.

Christine gently wipes away his tears. The phone rings downstairs.

DOWNSTAIRS - MINUTES LATER

Elijah and Sierra bicker over the last pizza slices.  
Christine is on the phone.

CHRISTINE

I miss you too, Peg. I suppose it's nice  
and sunny in Berkeley, right?

She laughs.

SIERRA (O.S.)

(accusingly)

Mom! Where'd you put the blankets!?

Christine glances toward the other room.

CHRISTINE

That girl's working my last nerve.

Peggy laughs.

PEGGY

(filtered)

So did you find the box?

CHRISTINE

What box?

Christine looks around at the stacked boxes.

PEGGY

(filtered)

I marked it. With a -

Christine finds it. A small moving box with a heart on it.

CHRISTINE

- heart? What is this?

PEGGY

(filtered)

Open it.

Christine grabs a knife and opens the box. She lifts out a  
blue ceramic pie pan.

PEGGY

(filtered)

Well... The pie pan I borrowed  
about...three years ago?

Christine smiles. Reaches in the box again. A framed photo.  
She gazes at it...

PEGGY

(filtered)

And I had that picture framed. The one  
Steve took of us last summer.

Christine and PEGGY (30's), arms around each other, as they  
stand in front of Christine's house. A cute Berkeley home,  
nice garden. A golden afternoon.

SIERRA (O.S.)

Mom! Can you help us, please?!

CHRISTINE

I have to go. But thank you, Peggy.

PEGGY

(filtered)

I'm proud of you, Chris. Talk to you  
soon, okay?

CHRISTINE

You better.

She clicks off and props up the picture. A longing look.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - DAY

CHRISTINE (V.O.)

(from inside)

You guys! Come on, we're gonna be late!

Sierra and Elijah come down the front steps toward the car.  
Dylan's behind them, his remote-control car in his hand. He  
glances at the neighbor's house nervously.

SIERRA

You know, we could just show up and  
they'd still have to teach us.

Christine, Journie on her hip, steps out and locks the door.

CHRISTINE

Sierra, I have to fill out all those  
forms and you have to meet your teachers.

SIERRA

I don't see why we have to go to Dylan's  
school too.

CHRISTINE

(getting cranky now)

Because I'm not making two trips, Sierra!

SIERRA

It's no big deal, mom. Geez...

Christine glares at her daughter.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Sierra. Enough. Okay?

Christine hands Journie to Sierra.

SIERRA

Now what?

CHRISTINE

I left the forms in the house.

SIERRA

Oh, great.

Sierra jogs Journie on her hip.

SIERRA

There once was a lady from France. Who never ever wore pants. She sat down to pee, and -

ELIJAH

Oh shut up, you freak.

SIERRA

You shut up, butt-face.

Sierra secures Journie in her car seat. Elijah fiddles with his iPod.

Forms in hand, Christine peers in to see if all are buckled.

INSIDE THE CAR

Dylan can't take his eyes off the neighboring house.

ELIJAH

(to Dylan)

What're you looking at?

DYLAN

Nothing.

But his eyes dart back to the house.

OUTSIDE THE CAR

Christine grabs her coffee off the hood.

SIERRA (O.S.)

Mom!

CHRISTINE

(exasperated)

What now, Sierra?

She turns and GASPS -

A grizzled, weatherbeaten MAN (60's), in ragged clothes, a John Deere cap, right behind her.

JENKINS

Didn't mean to startle you.

He grins. It takes her a beat to calm down.

CHRISTINE

Can I help you?

JENKINS

Hundred and twenty-five bucks should do it.

Christine takes a step back. Sour whiskey breath.

CHRISTINE

I don't know what you're talking about.

JOAN (O.S.)

Jack? Jack, why don't you leave her alone?

JOAN HARTFORD (30's) crisp, blond, waspish to a fault, comes down the steps of the house next door, a NY Times tucked under one arm, a coffee in hand.

Jack takes a deferential step back as Joan approaches.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(gently but firmly)

That's enough, Jack. Okay?

Jack stares at Joan suspiciously.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Jack?

Reluctantly, he gets on a rusty bike and rides off, pulling a cart of gardening tools. Christine watches him pedal away. Joan's friendly gaze stays on Christine.

One of the forms slips from Christine's hand, flutters away. Joan quickly fetches it.

JOAN

Ah, yes. The dreaded school medical form.

She hands it over.

CHRISTINE

Thanks so much.

Joan bends slightly so she can see in the car...

JOAN (CONT'D)

Hey - how many kids have you got in there?

CHRISTINE

Four. There's Elijah...

(she points)

...Journie...Sierra, and Dylan.

JOAN

Four! I'm impressed!

She takes Christine's hand warmly.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Joan Hartford. I live right next door.

CHRISTINE

(relieved)

So nice to meet you. I'm Christine Beck.

JOAN

Great to meet you, finally. Jack gardens for a lot of people in the neighborhood. He worked for the Vincents for over ten years. They had to let him go.

CHRISTINE

Ah, that accounts for last month's pay.

JOAN

They didn't pay him?

CHRISTINE

That's what he said.

Joan leans closer, confidentially.

JOAN

(just for Christine)

He's not quite...right. He was around all the time, borrowing tools without asking, poking around the yards...

CHRISTINE

Terrific.

Joan touches Christine's hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Listen, I need to get to work. You guys seem like a great family. I'm so glad you moved in.

Christine smiles.

CHRISTINE

Me too.

Joan walks toward her white Lexus coupe. Poise and elegance drift off her in waves. Christine glances down at her sweats, suddenly self-conscious.

Joan starts up the Lexus, waves merrily and drives away. Christine gets in the Volvo.

It won't turn over. Now it does. She puts it in gear and backs out.

INT. GREENLAKE ELEMENTARY - ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE - DAY

THROUGH THE WINDOW Christine views the busy PLAYGROUND. Dylan is on the swing set. Another boy is on the swing beside him.

JOSH (O.S.)

The block party is a great way for you to get to know all the neighbors.

INSIDE THE OFFICE

A busy SECRETARY fields PARENTS and phone calls. Everybody holds forms. KIDS shriek.

Christine waits in line, Journie on her hip. JOSH HARMON (30's) stands behind her with his son, PETER (6).

CHRISTINE

Sounds fun.

Christine glances outside. The swing is still moving...but it's empty.

JOSH

And believe me, the ladies in the neighborhood will remind you. Over. And over. And over.

Christine's distracted as she continues to look outside at the crowded playground. The empty swing slows down and stops.

JOSH

Christine?

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry - what?

Elijah leans into the office.

ELIJAH

Mom? We can't find Dylan.

EXT. GREENLAKE ELEMENTARY - PLAYGROUND - MOMENTS LATER

The playground is a whirling, chaotic scene of PARENTS and KIDS. The din is incredible.

CHRISTINE

Dylan?!

(cups her hands)

Dylan?!

Christine heads into the crowd, Sierra close on her heels.

ELIJAH

He was over by the swings and then -

CHRISTINE

Dylan!

People turn to look at her. Beyond the chainlink fence the street is busy with traffic as a MAN IN JEANS and a Seattle Seahawks cap lights a cigarette and pulls along a little boy...who looks exactly like Dylan, same shirt, same shoes...

Christine blanches. She races over to the fence.

CHRISTINE

DYLAN!!

The man turns around. As does the boy. Not Dylan. Christine whirls around. The playground is a sea of faces. Suddenly - *WHUMP* - Dylan races right into her.

DYLAN

I'm right here, mom!

A relieved beat. Then the anger comes.

CHRISTINE

Don't you ever run off like that again!

SIERRA (O.S.)

He was over by the slide. I was with him.  
God. Chill out, mom.

Christine whirls on her daughter. Elijah looks at the ground.  
Here it comes...

CHRISTINE

(furious)

Did you just tell me to chill?

Sierra rolls her eyes and looks away. That's it. Christine hands Journie to Elijah and closes in on her daughter. Eye to eye. Her voice shakes with fury.

CHRISTINE

(pure ice)

Don't you dare talk to me that way.

People are looking.

SIERRA

(under her breath)

Bitch.

Christine's face is flushed. She's jaw-dropped.

CHRISTINE

Say that again?

Sierra narrows her eyes.

SIERRA

I wish it had been you, not dad.

Christine grabs Sierra's shoulders.

CHRISTINE

What? What did you just say?

ELIJAH

Mom -

Christine grips those shoulders and shakes Sierra - hard.

CHRISTINE

(yelling)

What did you say to me?!

The playground has ground to a halt.

ELIJAH

Mom. Mom, let's go.

All eyes are on Christine. Sierra wrenches out of her grasp and runs toward the car. In the horrible silence, Christine gathers up Journie, takes Dylan's hand and tries to walk away with a shred of dignity.

A WOMAN, dark glasses, coiffed blond hair, sits on a bench beyond the fence. Motionless. Watching. A FATHER steps in front of the blond woman and...she's vanished.

People turn back. The playground comes back to life and the event is swallowed by the crowd.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - EVENING

The family eats McDonalds off of paper plates; boxes are open and scattered. The TV drones in the living room, the screen visible in the dining area.

NEWS-HOUR MUSIC plays on the TV.

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
(faintly)  
Now at six...

The family is deadly silent. The TV drones on...

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
Weather with Dick Cayman! Sports with  
Lisa Granby!

CHRISTINE  
You guys. Can we turn off the TV?

TV ANNOUNCER (V.O.)  
And all the news with Seattle's own  
Newscaster of the Year, Joan Hartford!

FULL FACE on Joan as she snaps into newscaster mode. Sierra puts down her burger, transfixed. Her arm has a bruise from earlier. Dylan stretches across the table for the ketchup.

SIERRA  
Hey, can't you ask, Dyl?

JOAN  
Still no leads on the disappearance of  
six-year-old Billy Winbrook, abducted  
from his home in Tacoma six days ago.

INSERT PHOTO: BILLY WINBROOK (6), in a Spongebob t-shirt. A bright gap-toothed smile, big brown eyes.

Back on Joan.

JOAN (CONT'D)

The police and his parents remain optimistic that he'll be found alive and well. Reporting from the Winbrook house in Tacoma is...

IN THE DINING NOOK

The Beck kids stare at the TV as the show segues from Joan to a REPORTER in front of a house, microphone in hand.

DYLAN

Is someone gonna take me?

CHRISTINE

Turn it off, Elijah.

ELIJAH

Aw, mom - !

CHRISTINE

Take Dylan upstairs and run the bath, okay?

Elijah gets it. He pushes back his chair.

ELIJAH

Dyl? Let's go IM. I'll show you how.

CHRISTINE

Eli, I said a bath.

ELIJAH

After.

Christine sighs. Sierra won't look at her mom.

IN THE UPSTAIRS BATHROOM - LATER

Sierra brushes her hair before the mirror, her eyes are puffy. Christine comes in behind her. Puts a hand on her shoulder.

CHRISTINE

Honey. I'm so sorry.

Sierra turns. A long beat. The tears well up. Christine takes her daughter into her arms as Sierra lets out heaving sobs.

SIERRA

I miss...dad.

CHRISTINE

I know. Shhhhhh. I know. I didn't mean to yell today. I miss him, too...

Sierra lets out months of grief as she holds her mother tight. Her words are hard to understand...

SIERRA

I love you, mom. I'm...sorry.

INT. CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ready for bed, Christine sits on the edge of her bed and takes her hair down. Eli pokes his head in the door.

ELIJAH

You okay, mom?

She smiles at him wanly. He's a good boy.

CHRISTINE

Except that I'm a horrible mother.

He sits down next to his mom.

ELIJAH

Nah. You just flipped out a little bit.

Christine laughs weakly.

CHRISTINE

You think?

ELIJAH

Yeah. Just a little.

Christine hugs her son.

ELIJAH

You nervous about starting classes?

A deep, tired sigh.

CHRISTINE

I can't believe I'm going back to school.

ELIJAH

I can pack your lunch if you want.

Christine laughs.

CHRISTINE

Goodnight, Eli.

He heads out of the room when - the phone rings shrilly, breaking the silence. Christine picks up.

CHRISTINE

Hello?

Absolute silence on the other end. Eli waits expectantly.

CHRISTINE

Hello?

Dial tone. She hangs up, slowly.

ELIJAH

What was that?

CHRISTINE

(beat)

I don't know.

They stare at each other for a long moment when suddenly -

*KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK*

It's the door downstairs. Eli and Christine jump, startled.

ELIJAH

Who's knocking on the door at this time of night?

He starts downstairs.

CHRISTINE

Eli! Don't answer it.

ELIJAH

But mom -

CHRISTINE

Nobody has any business knocking on our door so late. Forget it.

*KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK*

CHRISTINE

(whispers)

Just be quiet. They'll go away.

She smiles at her son to hide her nerves. Silence. Then, from outside -

*THUNK.*

Christine peers out her window. Joan's porch light turns off.

INT./EXT. VOLVO - DAY

Christine drives through Seattle when her cell rings.

CHRISTINE

Hello?

(beat)

I'm - not sure I understand.

(beat)

I'm on my way to class right now and I  
can't be late -

(beat)

Do I have a choice?

She listens. Then puts on her turn signal. A deep frown on her face.

INT. GREENLAKE ELEMENTARY - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - LATER

Christine looks shocked. Truly shocked. Across from her, MRS. HOWARD (50s) sits behind her desk, a file open before her.

MRS. HOWARD

Any accusation must be investigated. It's  
the law in this state.

Christine can't believe what she's hearing.

CHRISTINE

But I didn't abuse my daughter! I was  
upset and I yelled and...

Mrs. Howard looks at her notes.

MRS. HOWARD

...and shook her by the shoulders leaving  
a bruise.

Christine just stares. The humiliation.

CHRISTINE

(furious)

Who reported this?

MRS. HOWARD

Mrs. Beck, there's no need to raise your  
voice.

CHRISTINE

I'm not raising my voice! I want to know  
who reported this!

Mrs. Howard smiles a kindly, understanding smile.

MRS. HOWARD

I understand your family's been through a lot in the past few months...with your husband...and -

Christine picks up her purse.

CHRISTINE

This is ludicrous.

MRS. HOWARD

No, it's procedure. My hands are tied. The Child Protective Services will be paying you a visit sometime in the next week or so to follow up.

CHRISTINE

The Child Protective - ?!

MRS. HOWARD

If all seems well - as I hope it is - there'll be no problem.

Christine waits for the other shoe to drop...

MRS. HOWARD

And if the reports are inconclusive... Your children will be put under state care.

Christine just stares.

INT. LECTURE HALL - UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON - LATER

PROFESSOR SPENCER (50s) slim, a white beard, lectures a room full of STUDENTS.

PROFESSOR SPENCER

...in the stages of grief. We've all lost someone important to us, and if we haven't, we will. A relative, a friend, a lover, a spouse. Maybe even, as in my case, a child.

Everyone looks up from their notebook. Whoa...

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)

Understanding that people don't just "get over it" is fundamental to becoming the professionals you're studying to be. Thus we begin our work this semester by grasping the concept of...

He writes the word on the board...

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)  
...empathy.

...and turns back, making sure they're paying attention.

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)  
But it's not that simple. Empathy is one thing. But to be a professional, you need something else.

STUDENT (O.S.)  
A BMW?

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
(laughing)  
I drive a Prius, just so you know.

He turns back toward the board. Writes...

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)  
Professional objectivity.

AT THE DOORWAY

Christine slips into class, the door closing noisily behind, all eyes on her as she slides into a row and sits down, embarrassed.

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)  
And - big one, here - understanding that only when a client faces the truth of a situation can he or she then move on. My daughter died, yes. I can say that now. But there was a time when I couldn't even acknowledge it.

A few students stare at him. He doesn't notice Christine.

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
Death is an uncomfortable topic for most people. As you can see.

The classroom is silent. Spencer smiles.

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
All right, then. Let's turn to page thirty-six in the case studies and pick up from there.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - LATER

The Volvo pulls into the driveway. Christine gets out, opens the back door, takes out a UW BOOKSTORE bag, heavy with books, and her shoulder-bag.

JOAN

U-Dub? You're ambitious.

Christine turns. Joan has an expensive purse slung over her shoulder and a PINOCCHIO'S TOYS bag in hand. She smiles.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You're studying for your...?

CHRISTINE

Masters. Psychology. I'm going to set up a private practice soon as I'm done.

JOAN

How great! Your own office and everything.

CHRISTINE

Yeah, well, either that or a stand on the sidewalk. Ten cents apiece.

Christine smiles, hoists her book bag and starts to head in.

JOAN

Hey, Chris? You have a sec?

CHRISTINE

I've had - a pretty rough day. Is later okay?

JOAN

(smiles)

It'll only take a minute.

Christine glances at her house and reluctantly follows Joan.

INT. JOAN'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Christine takes in the immaculate, spacious kitchen. Wolf range, stainless refrigerator with a TV screen in the door.

JOAN

It's in the other room. Now don't move. I'll be right back.

Joan leaves. Christine looks around. From above she hears the sound of a child running. She looks up. Checks her watch. Still no Joan. She wanders into the

LIVING ROOM

Deserted. Immaculate. No photos, oddly bare walls. News magazines neatly arrayed on the coffee-table.

Someone knocks on an upstairs wall. Curious, Christine goes to the bottom of the stairs, looks up.

CHRISTINE

Joan...? You okay?

Nothing. Silence. Then -

JOAN (O.S.)

I'm right here.

Christine whirls around. Spooked. Joan holds a lavish DEAN & DELUCA GIFT BASKET stuffed with wine, cheese, crackers.

JOAN

Now it's official. Welcome to the neighborhood.

CHRISTINE

Oh - Joan...this is...too generous.

JOAN

I tried to drop it off last night

A thumping from upstairs. Both women glance up.

JOAN

(smiling)

That's Ryan. He's six.

CHRISTINE

Yes, Dylan said he'd seen your son.

JOAN

He did?

CHRISTINE

He's been dying to have a friend his own age.

JOAN

(calling)

Honey! Did you hear that? You're gonna have a new friend! And he lives just next door!

Joan looks up the stairs. RYAN, pale, light brown hair, fathomless dark eyes, peers curiously between the banister rails. Christine can't see him from where she stands.

CHRISTINE

When can we get them together to play?

Joan's mood downshifts.

JOAN

Actually... Right now Ryan's pretty sick. I can't even send him to school.

CHRISTINE

Oh Joan, I'm sorry...

Christine notices a shadow cross Joan's face.

JOAN

It's pretty serious. He was in-vitro and I guess they didn't properly screen the donor. He has congenital heart disease.

CHRISTINE

I'm so sorry.

JOAN

And he needs a new heart. We've been on the list for eighteen months. But I just keep hoping, you know?

CHRISTINE

If there's anything I can do, please just ask.

JOAN

You are so sweet. Thank you. And - hey. What do you say I show you a little of Seattle tomorrow? I'll get a sitter.

EXT. PIKE PLACE MARKET - DAY

The sun peeks out from stacked white clouds. Seagulls wheel near the fishing boats as TOURISTS pack this lively market.

Christine pushes Journie in a stroller. Joan carries a mesh bag filled with vegetables. Passersby occasionally recognize her and point or stare. Joan pauses at a rack of sunglasses. Tries a pair on and looks at Christine.

CHRISTINE

Nice.

Joan examines her reflection in the mirror on the rack.

JOAN

I heard about your husband. I'm so sorry.

She turns. Christine sees herself reflected in the dark lenses. Joan pulls the sunglasses off slowly.

JOAN

With all those kids... What happened?

CHRISTINE

(beat)

I don't really like to talk about it very much.

JOAN

The realtor said something about Iraq.

Christine fingers a flower; she can't look at Joan.

CHRISTINE

Steve was a...field surgeon. And...six months ago he was on his way to the airport. To come home. A suicide bomber took out a checkpoint.

Christine meets Joan's eyes. The sun clouds over and it begins to drizzle. The moment is like a lead apron.

JOAN

Well. We got that out of the way.

...and she hugs her. Christine laughs a little, relieved.

CHRISTINE

You know, you're right. I hate this. Having to explain all the time.

JOAN

But I'm glad you confided in me.

Joan pulls out a bouquet of roses and gives them to Christine. She breathes in the scent deeply.

CHRISTINE

We moved here to be closer to my sister. She travels a lot on business. But she'll be a big help with the kids once she's back.

JOAN

When do you expect her?

CHRISTINE

Not for another month or so. But it's gonna be great. We're really close.

JOAN

Until then...I'm here, okay? Anything you need, Christine, you just call.

Suddenly - *SLAP!* A huge silver SALMON is thrown between vendors as the fish mongers throw them from ice to booth. Tourists snap pictures.

Christine smiles.

CHRISTINE

(re the roses)

You know. I'm going to treat myself.

JOAN

Let me.

CHRISTINE

(laughs)

Oh Joan - you can't...!

JOAN

I can. And I will.

She takes the roses and hands them to the vendor for wrapping. Smiles at Christine widely as she takes out her wallet. Christine is moved by the gesture.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - LATER

Elijah's lounging on the front step, sunglasses on, leafing through a magazine.

Joan's Lexus pulls into her driveway. Elijah watches as Christine takes Journie, her roses and bags of groceries from the back seat. Joan pops the trunk to get her things.

CHRISTINE

Thank you so much, Joan. I really enjoyed that. And remember what I said? I'm here. Anytime.

Joan pauses and smiles warmly.

JOAN

Me too.

She enters her house. Christine's still in the driveway.

CHRISTINE

(to Elijah)

You want to give me a hand or are you  
just going to wait for me to grow  
gracefully old?

Elijah takes his sweet time coming to help. Then, he's  
distracted...

A shapely STEPHANIE (16) shuts Joan's front door behind her.  
Did she just smile at him?

ELIJAH

Hey.

Christine smiles to herself and heads in the house with some  
groceries. Let the kid have a go at this teenage thing.

Stephanie takes the bait and nears Elijah. Unnoticed by them,  
Jenkins the gardener cycles by, his eye caught by Stephanie.  
He rides on. Whistles "Danny Boy".

STEPHANIE

Hey.

ELIJAH

So... You live there?

STEPHANIE

I'm her babysitter.

ELIJAH

Oh, that's cool.

STEPHANIE

It's kind of an easy job. Her kid's  
really sick, so I just sit downstairs and  
do my homework while he sleeps. So, like,  
what grade are you in?

ELIJAH

Junior. How 'bout you?

STEPHANIE

Cool. We're in the same class.

He's caught in her glow. She laughs. Hormones are sparking.

ELIJAH

So, see you around?

Stephanie smiles.

STEPHANIE

Maybe.

Elijah's eyes follow her as she walks away. She looks back once. He shoves his hands in his pockets and grins.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - EVENING

Sierra sets the dinner table while Christine plates spaghetti. Journie bangs a pot with a spoon. Christine notices that Dylan's glued to the window facing Joan's house.

CHRISTINE

What's so interesting, huh?

Dylan waves at something. Christine comes over to see. A PAPER AIRPLANE circles gently on the breeze between the houses.

DYLAN

The boy. In that house.

She looks across at Joan's house. A light in the attic window shuts off.

CHRISTINE

Don't snoop, sweetheart.

ELIJAH (O.S.)

Hey mom?

Elijah struts in. Christine looks up.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

(grinning broadly)

I think I'm gonna like it here after all.

SIERRA

(with a smile)

Girl.

Christine laughs.

CHRISTINE

Figures.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - PORCH - LATE AFTERNOON

A glorious and rare sunny day in Seattle. On her hands and knees, a kerchief on her head, Christine plants a bed of pansies.

Dylan plays with his remote-control car on the front walk. Sierra's stretched out on a lounge, trying vainly to look glamorous as she sunbathes.

SIERRA  
(without looking up)  
I gotta get a tan before school starts Monday.

CHRISTINE  
Honey, you're already beautiful. Skin cancer won't help.

Elijah trots up and pulls a quart of milk out of a paper bag.

ELIJAH  
Got it, mom.

CHRISTINE  
Thanks. Put it in the fridge, okay?

Christine goes back to her flowers.

ELIJAH (O.S.)  
Mom. Hey mom.

Christine turns.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)  
Key. Door's locked.

CHRISTINE  
Try the back door.

Elijah trots around the corner when -

JOURNIE (V.O.)  
(from within)  
Mama...? MAMA?!

A Saturn station-wagon pulls up and parks unnoticed in front of the house.

Christine shoots to her feet, wipes the dirt off her hands and runs to the porch. She shades her eyes and peers through the small window in the door. She gasps -

At the top of the hardwood stairs, Journie has a chubby hand on the railing. She sees her mom and stretches out her arms.

JOURNIE (CONT'D)  
Mama...!

The tears come. She's vainly reaching out for a hand-hold.

CHRISTINE  
Stay there, baby! Mommy's coming!

Journie takes a wobbly step.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
JOURNIE - NO!

The yell jolts Journie and her tears flow afresh.

ELIJAH (O.S.)  
It's also locked.

Journie stumbles a little. Plops down on her diaper. Wobbles back to her feet.

CHRISTINE  
Break a window!

ELIJAH  
Which one!

CHRISTINE  
Just do it!

Joan runs across her lawn, having overheard...

JOAN  
Christine? Can I help?

Journie's cries get louder when, suddenly, Joan parts Christine and Elijah with her body, rock in hand.

*SHATTER!!* Joan shatters the window.

TWO MEN in shirtsleeves and ties get out of the Saturn, folders in hand.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - FRONT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Christine scoops Journie up, holds her tight. Sinks down on a step.

CHRISTINE  
Shhhhhh. Mommy's so sorry, sweetie.  
Shhhhhh.

She turns Journie to face her and smiles.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
Can you say - mommy's an idiot?

JOURNIE

Mama eedit?

Christine laughs.

CHRISTINE

That's right.

She looks down to the bottom of the stairs where Joan is waiting. A big smile. A MAN steps into the open doorway.

MAN 1

Mrs. Beck?

They all turn to look at him.

CHRISTINE

Yes?

Journie on her hip, Christine slowly descends the stairs.

MAN 1

Lock your baby inside?

CHRISTINE

What do you want here?

He pulls out an ID card.

MAN 1

Seattle Child Protective Services. This is our first of a series of random visits. My partner's talking to your older children outside.

CHRISTINE

You can't do that -

MAN 1

What happened at Greenlake Elementary was witnessed by a lot of people, Mrs. Beck.

CHRISTINE

My children are perfectly safe and happy -

MAN 2 joins him. Shuts his folder.

MAN 2

And locked inside while you garden.

Sierra and Elijah and Dylan all stand in the doorway, watching this.

ELIJAH

I told you, it was an accident. Stuff happens.

The guy makes a note in his folder.

JOAN

Excuse me? May I - ? You know who I am?

They obviously do.

JOAN

There've been two complaints about your department in the last eighteen months. I know, because I reported it.

MAN 1

We're just doing our -

JOAN

Mrs. Beck is my friend. I know she would never purposely harm any of her kids.

MAN 2

I don't really think this is any of your business, Ms. Hartford -

JOAN

You're right. It's Seattle's business. Now either you leave these people alone or I bring it to the attention of a few million taxpayers later this week.

The men back off after a beat. Joan shuts the door.

ELIJAH

Wow.

CHRISTINE

I think you're my new hero, Joan.

Christine plops down on the bottom step.

CHRISTINE

What's gonna happen now?

JOAN

As long as no one calls them, you should be okay. But if someone does, you know the risks. I can't help you then.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S FRONT DOOR - SHORT TIME LATER

Journie on her hip, Christine holds a key out to Joan.

CHRISTINE

Thanks again, Joan. I feel like the worst mother in the world sometimes.

JOAN

Hey. It can happen to the best of us, right? And you've been through a lot.

CHRISTINE

I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. Seriously.

Joan slides the key into her pocket.

JOAN

Well. That's one less thing to worry about.

Joan turns to go.

CHRISTINE

Would you like a glass of wine or something? I have some chardonnay in the fridge.

Joan looks at her watch.

JOAN

Can't. Gotta head to the studio to do some pick-up work. How about next time?

Christine embraces Joan.

CHRISTINE

Thank you for everything today. I owe you big-time.

Joan smiles.

INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - DUSK

Christine's unpacking boxes of books when -

SIERRA (O.S.)

(freaked)

Mom!!!

LIVING ROOM

Christine races in. Elijah POUNDS down the stairs, curious. Sierra is pale and shaken. She points to the dark window.

SIERRA (CONT'D)

There was someone right there!

CHRISTINE

Where, what?!

SIERRA

In the window. Outside.

CHRISTINE

Honey, don't be ridiculous.

SIERRA

Will you check? Please?

With a sigh, Christine goes to the window. Looks out. Black night. Christine snaps down the blinds with a CLATTER. Twirls them closed.

CHRISTINE

There's no one out there, Sierra. Now come on. It's almost dinner time.

The kids head into the dining area.

Christine starts away from the door, then returns to it. Flips on the porch light. Slowly opens the door. Darkness. Wider. She looks up and down the street. Wider. *MEOW!* Mr. Baggins streaks inside the house. Christine puts her hand over her heart.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Freaking cat. Jesus.

A clattering noise from the backyard. Cautiously she steps out.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She listens. The clatter of tools and rakes coming from deep in the backyard.

She approaches a small wooden shed with no door. It's impossible to see inside it from there.

CHRISTINE

Hello...?

Silence. She steps cautiously toward it. Suddenly, out of the darkness, Jenkins steps into the doorway. Face to face with her. Freaks her out.

JENKINS

Saw you planted pansies. This ain't a pansy climate. Ruin a perfectly good bed for them.

CHRISTINE

What're you doing here?

JENKINS

They won't last the winter. Not even the first frost. Might as well just throw 'em away.

CHRISTINE

You're on my property.

JENKINS

I planted, fed, tended every plant and shrub in this yard. And this -

He holds out a pair of long shears.

JENKINS

These're mine. Left 'em here last spring.

CHRISTINE

Take them and leave. Now.

Jenkins takes his hat off, looks at it thoughtfully, puts it back on.

JENKINS

So...you're saying what? You don't want me around here anymore? I don't think we've finished our business yet.

CHRISTINE

Tell you what. You wait here and I'll get my checkbook. I'll pay you whatever the Vincents owed you, all right?

Jenkins stares as Joan turns on her porch light and steps out, arms crossed over her chest. Christine turns back to Jenkins. His eyes are still on Joan.

JENKINS

You got a basement too?

CHRISTINE

Basement? No. Just a crawl -

She sighs in frustration.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Mr. Jenkins. If you just wait on the driveway, I'll get my checkbook. I really want to be done with this.

Jenkins stares at Joan as Christine walks away.

JENKINS

(to Christine)

I'll be right here.

MOMENTS LATER

Christine, holding the folded check, looks around curiously. Silence. Jenkins is gone. Joan is gone.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - MORNING

Dylan watches cartoons. Christine sets down her empty coffee-mug, scoops up Journie and steps to the front door.

CHRISTINE

Let's see how our garden grows, shall we?

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Christine steps out and walks toward her garden, plucks some lemon balm, breaks a leaf, inhales its scent deeply. She shares it with Journie. Then she freezes in her tracks.

CHRISTINE'S GARDEN

The flower bed she planted is turned over, the flowers uprooted. Clods of dirt are scattered.

JOAN (O.S.)

Christine? Everything okay?

Joan comes alongside her, holding a small red ball.

CHRISTINE

That guy... That gardener...

Christine looks around, paranoid.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

He must have come back last night.

JOAN

You think Jack did this?

CHRISTINE

He killed them. They're all dead. My flowers...

DYLAN (O.S.)

Mom! Sierra won't let me watch the gorilla show!

Dylan trots up, out of breath.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Mom! I said Sierra won't let me -

CHRISTINE

(snaps)

Dylan! Not now!

He's hurt. But Joan smiles. Gets down on her haunches. Beckons Dylan closer.

JOAN

Hey, Dyl. Know what?

She holds out the red ball. He stares at it.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I found this way deep in my garden and I have a funny feeling I know who it belongs to.

He reaches out. Joan looks into his blue eyes.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(softly)

Here you are, little guy.

Joan tousles Dylan's hair, then looks up.

Framed by his second floor window, Ryan gazes down at the scene. Joan waves. He hesitates. Then waves back.

Dylan follows Joan's gaze. But Ryan's gone.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I've got a blueberry pie baking for Ryan. That's his favorite.

DYLAN

I like apple.

JOAN

Oh, that's my favorite, too!

Dylan runs off with the red ball. Christine nears Joan again. Grateful. At wit's end.

CHRISTINE

So do you think I should call the cops?

Joan sighs deeply and looks over the damage.

JOAN

It could have been kids. The cops can't do anything about this. Let's just keep an eye on it.

Christine nods in agreement.

CHRISTINE

Okay. You're right. But I've got to do something about that gardener.

INT. CHRISTINE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Phone cradled on her shoulder, Christine reaches into a box and takes out a stack of recipe books. Slides them on a metal rack in the kitchen. Bowls and other implements are on other shelves.

CHRISTINE

Yeah, hi Louise. Thanks for calling me back.

(beat)

No, it's not too late.

Christine rolls her eyes conspiratorially at Sierra, who sets the table.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

No, no, it's great. Everything is great. But we seem to have inherited some weird gardener. And I think he vandalized my garden. Did the Vincents say anything about that money?

Done, Sierra goes to the living room.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Oh, they didn't? Well, okay. He seems convinced otherwise.

(beat)

You're right. Hang on -

She grabs a pen, writes a number on her palm.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Thanks, Louise.

INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - DAY

Textbooks open, Christine types rapidly. Through her window she can see Joan's house and front porch. Joan steps out, picks up her newspaper, glances at Christine's house and returns inside.

Christine keeps typing. Stops to read what she's written.

CHRISTINE

Well that makes absolutely no sense.

She sighs. Picks up a large framed photograph. It's the Beck family on the Golden Gate Bridge. And dead center is STEVE BECK. It's obvious where the kids got their strawberry-blond hair.

Steve grins into the camera as he holds his family tight. Christine runs a finger over his face - caught in such a happy moment.

A knock at the front door throws her out of her reverie.

FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Christine opens the door. A fit COUPLE in their late sixties stand on the doorstep.

OLDER MAN

Mrs. Beck?

Confused silence.

MRS. VINCENT

The Vincents...?

Christine laughs.

CHRISTINE

Oh! Of course, I'm sorry. So nice to meet you.

MR. VINCENT

We got your phone message and we were in the neighborhood and thought we'd come by and meet you in person.

CHRISTINE

Come in, come in!

She leads them into the house. Picks up a sock, shoves aside a frisbee with one foot. Self-conscious. House is a mess.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
(over her shoulder)  
Good timing. The kids are all at school  
and my little one's down for a nap.

Christine heads to the kitchen.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
I'll put some coffee on.

The Vincents look around the house, curiously judgmental.

CHRISTINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Place probably looks a lot different.  
It's still a work-in-progress, though.

MRS. VINCENT  
(calls to the kitchen)  
We're so sorry to hear of your husband,  
dear.

Christine re-emerges from the kitchen. We hear water coming to a boil.

CHRISTINE  
Oh. Yes. Well. Thank you.

An awkward silence.

MR. VINCENT  
(saving the moment)  
Garden looks nice. We took a little walk  
around the yard.

CHRISTINE  
That's what I wanted to ask you about.  
Jenkins. He was your gardener, right?

The Vincents share a look.

MR. VINCENT  
For many years, yes. Toward the end, we  
let him go.

MRS. VINCENT  
(beat)  
He seemed...

She looks at her husband.

MRS. VINCENT (CONT'D)

...unwell. He lost his wife a couple of years ago and he'd been drinking. He started talking about strange things. Something about a kid. He never made much sense, anyway.

CHRISTINE

Well, speaking of strange things, he says I owe him money.

MR. VINCENT

Don't know what to tell you about that.

CHRISTINE

I tried to pay him yesterday. Just to go away, you know? But he took off.

Joan's front door thunks shut. The Vincents glance out the window.

MR. VINCENT

Tragedy everywhere these days.

MRS. VINCENT

Ever since her son...

CHRISTINE

Yes. She told me.

MRS. VINCENT

Poor thing. She's really suffered.

Mr. Vincent glances at his wife.

CHRISTINE

Well. You know, it's a very tough situation.

Another knock on the door.

JOAN (O.S.)

Christine?

CHRISTINE

Oh, here she is now.

The Vincents exchange another look. Mrs. Vincent picks up her purse to go. Christine opens the door, grinning at Joan.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Hey, Joan! Look who's here!

JOAN  
(thin smile)  
Sally. Paul. How nice.

The silence grows heavy with discomfort.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry to interrupt. I just came over  
to see if I could borrow some eggs,  
Christine. I can come back -

She turns.

CHRISTINE  
No problem, Joan, come on in.

Joan comes in. Christine steps toward the kitchen when -

MRS. VINCENT  
We should go.

CHRISTINE  
Oh - already? I wanted to show you the  
house...

MR. VINCENT  
Sorry, but...we're due over at our son's  
place -

He looks at his watch.

MR. VINCENT (CONT'D)  
Quite soon, actually.

CHRISTINE  
Oh. All right. Well, it was nice meeting  
you.

They head out the door, eager to get away. Mrs. Vincent casts  
a backward look at Joan. Christine shuts the door firmly.  
Looks at Joan.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
I see what you mean about them. Weird.

Joan breaks into an easy smile.

JOAN  
Well, they don't live here anymore.  
That's the main thing.

CHRISTINE  
So how many eggs do you need?

JOAN

Eggs?

She catches herself and laughs.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I need sugar. I must be losing brain cells.

CHRISTINE

Join the club.

Christine grins and heads into the kitchen.

Joan looks around the living room curiously. Picks up a picture of the kids, grouped at a picnic. Looks like a year ago or so. They look so happy as they smile to a parent just out of frame.

CHRISTINE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

So...a cup or so?

JOAN

(without looking up)

Um - yeah. Sure. A cup.

She puts the picture back down.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Christine's dressed and ready for class. She's hustling around, getting her notebooks and textbooks together. Beyond, Dylan plays with Journie.

JOURNIE

I wan aplah...

Dylan looks at his mother. Christine doesn't even have to look up.

CHRISTINE

Apple. She wants some apple. There's some slices in the fridge.

She finds that last book when Sierra comes through the front door, slams it shut.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Didn't I tell you not to slam the door?

SIERRA

First day of school and I get homework. That sound fair to you?

CHRISTINE  
Yes, and I'm late and where's Elijah?

SIERRA  
Probably with her.

CHRISTINE  
Who her?

SIERRA  
Stephanie. The babysitter from next door.  
She's a total slut. I mean, her mother's  
a...waitress?

CHRISTINE  
Sierra. Just -

She grabs a book she missed.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
- be nice. Okay? I know it's hard right  
now.

SIERRA  
I'm just saying.

CHRISTINE  
Look - listen to me. Elijah's supposed to  
be home keeping an eye on things. Until  
he gets in you're in charge.

SIERRA  
No way -

CHRISTINE  
Way, way and more way. There's no  
argument. I cannot be late.

She slams the door shut as she leaves.

INT. UNSPECIFIED SPACE - DAY

Christine's face: a look of extreme concentration as she  
listens...Then...

CHRISTINE  
I understand exactly how you're feeling.

WOMAN (O.S.)  
(bitterly)  
Do you? How can you? You with your happy  
family and perfect life. You have no idea  
what this feels like.

Christine smiles a broken smile.

CHRISTINE

I'm here to help you. Tell me more about what's making you hurt.

Now we see the other woman, SANDY, sitting tensely, legs crossed, her face mottled with overwrought emotion.

SANDY

(accusingly)

My *mother* died. I told you. Don't you listen to me? Nobody listens to me!

CHRISTINE

(damn it)

That - that's right. Your mother died -

SANDY

You don't get it. You don't get anything. I can't talk to you. What do you know about how I feel, you overpaid shrink?

Taken aback, Christine's losing ground fast -

CHRISTINE

You're grieving. I understand. Or - I can try to understand. When my husband -

PROFESSOR SPENCER (O.S.)

Congratulations, Christine...

Christine turns. Now it's obvious this is the LECTURE HALL. Christine, Sandy and Spencer are on the platform.

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)

Your client just stabbed you, then took her own life.

(to the class)

What did Christine fail to do here?

A FEW STUDENTS

Maintain distance?

PROFESSOR SPENCER

Exactly. She allowed herself to be manipulated. She tried to identify with her client by bringing up her husband and in doing so gave over all authority in the situation.

Students rustle, jot down last notes. Stung, Christine stands. Sandy smiles and shrugs apologetically. She's back to her normal, sunny self. Good actress.

SANDY  
 Sorry I killed you.

Students start to file out or go up to talk to Spencer.  
 Christine shoves her books back in her bag when Sandy leans  
 over to talk to her.

SANDY (CONT'D)  
 Seriously. That wasn't really fair.

CHRISTINE  
 (shaken)  
 No. It was. I blew it.

JENNIFER (24), Sandy's pal, joins them.

JENNIFER  
 You guys want to grab some coffee?

CHRISTINE  
 Um...

She looks at her watch.

SANDY  
 Come on, Christine.

Christine gives in. She's wrung out.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S STREET - SIMULTANEOUS

A Saturn station-wagon pulls slowly up and parks across the  
 street from Christine's house. The DRIVER, in dark suit and  
 sunglasses, looks at each house in turn. He opens the door.

INT. COFFEE HOUSE - LATER

SANDY  
 We've only been in class for what? Two  
 weeks? I think he was a little rough.

CHRISTINE  
 Maybe I'm just not cut out for this.  
 Maybe it's too soon.

The girls do not take in that last bit -

JENNIFER  
 I mean, seriously, like our first client  
 is going to be on a window ledge with a  
 knife?

Sandy breaks into caffeine-fueled laughter.

SANDY

Seriously!

CHRISTINE

Hey. Guys. I gotta run.

Jennifer puts a hand on Christine's arm as she rises.

JENNIFER

For real, Chris. Don't be so hard on yourself. Life is good, right? You'll do better next time.

Christine smiles appreciatively at these young kids who are also her classmates. They do try.

CHRISTINE

Thanks, guys.

INT. VOLVO - NIGHT

She pulls into her driveway. The Saturn is still parked across the street. The music on her radio ends abruptly as Christine turns off the engine.

INT. CHRISTINE'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Christine opens the door, pries the key out of the lock...

CHRISTINE

(tired)

Hey everyone, sorry about that.

The sound of cartoons from the other room. She drops off her bag and books on the sofa.

KITCHEN

Where Sierra's pouring Mountain Dew into a plastic cup.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Sierra - how much soda have you had today?

SIERRA

It's not for me.

The toilet off the kitchen flushes, the bathroom door swings open and a MAN (28) in shirt and tie enters the kitchen.

MAN

Mrs. Beck?

CHRISTINE

Who is this - ?

SIERRA

Mom, it's -

CHRISTINE

Who are you? What're you doing in my house?

In one deft, scary Bruce Willis move, Christine grabs a butcher knife and levels it at the man.

He holds up a fleshy hand.

MAN

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Phil Stafford. With Seattle social services? I'm just going to show you my I.D. Okay?

With his free hand, he takes his wallet out, flips it open. Christine glances at it.

STAFFORD

Ma'am? Can I have you put that knife down?

She doesn't move.

CHRISTINE

What's the problem?

STAFFORD

Jack Jenkins?

It doesn't register with her.

STAFFORD (CONT'D)

Your gardener?

CHRISTINE

(as it dawns on her)  
For the last time, he's *not* my gardener.

STAFFORD

He was supposed to check in with me a day ago and he didn't. I wondered if you have any idea where he is?

CHRISTINE

No, and I don't want to know.

Her curiosity gets the better of her. She lowers the knife.

CHRISTINE

Why, what's wrong?

STAFFORD

There have been some complaints from other people he's been working for. Things missing, stuff like that. It seems you were the last person he dealt with before he disappeared.

Christine opens a kitchen drawer. Takes out a check.

CHRISTINE

I was going to give him this but he didn't stick around to take it. That was the last time I saw him. Can you give it to him?

STAFFORD

That's the point. I don't know where he is. He hasn't been seen for several days.

CHRISTINE

You know, I wish I could help. But I really haven't seen him.

She stares at Stafford. He gets the hint.

STAFFORD

Well. All right then. If you hear from him, please let me know. Here's my card.

He hands Christine his card. She stares at it as he lets himself out. She whirls on Sierra.

CHRISTINE

(furious)

You let a total stranger into our house?! Where is your judgment?

SIERRA

Mom. Chill. He had an ID.

Christine goes nuclear.

CHRISTINE

And that makes him official? Think, Sierra! People forge IDs all the time. My God!

SIERRA

Mom, I could tell he was a nice guy.  
You're the one who pulled a knife on him.

CHRISTINE

Enough. I don't want to hear another  
word. Not one. There is no excuse for  
doing something so -

She stops herself. Looks up the stairs.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

*Elijah?! Get your butt down here!*

SIERRA

He's not here.

Christine whips her head back toward Sierra.

CHRISTINE

What? Where is he?

SIERRA

I don't know. He never came home.

INT. ELIJAH'S ROOM - EVENING

Elijah sits on his bed, hands between his knees, listening to  
the barrage. Ashamed guilt hidden by a look of boredom. He  
has a prominent hickey on his neck.

On his desk, a framed photo of Steve Beck, in his army  
scrubs, with the rest of his medical unit in Baghdad. Big  
smiles, arms around each other, deep tans and sunlight.

CHRISTINE

Harsh? There are people on death row  
who'd be thrilled to have me for a  
warden. You were an hour late, Eli!  
You've got little brothers and sisters  
here, anything could've happened, and  
you're off with -

ELIJAH

(vehemently)

I'm sick of being the baby sitter! I  
gotta like, make friends and I have  
school and stuff!

CHRISTINE

Stuff being what - Stephanie?

ELIJAH

(furious)

I wish dad was here! He never freaked out about stupid stuff like this! I hate Seattle, I hate you!

His face crumples. So does Christine's. She kneels at the bedside and holds her eldest son. She rocks him as he sobs.

CHRISTINE

I'm sorry, Eli. Shhhh.

A long beat. Eli's cries slow then a timid knock on the door.

DYLAN (O.S.)

Mommy? Can I have chocolate milk?

Christine takes Eli's chin and smiles into his teary eyes.

CHRISTINE

Hey. We're all doing our best here. Just keep hanging on, all right?

ELIJAH

(nods)

I know. I'm sorry, mom.

CHRISTINE

(softly)

Me too.

Christine opens the door. Dylan, in his Batman pajamas, holds a plastic cup, at the ready for a "yes". Christine smiles.

THE STAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

Christine goes down the stairs with Dylan's plastic cup when a knock on the front door quickens her pace.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Joan awkwardly holds something behind her back. Then she notices Christine's damp red eyes.

JOAN

Oh sweetie, what happened?

CHRISTINE

You know - it's not really the best time, Joan.

JOAN

(beat)

Do you need to talk about it?

Christine relaxes slightly.

CHRISTINE

It was just a social worker.

She laughs at the inadvertently funny moment. Then her laughter turns to tears. Joan puts a hand on her arm.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry...I was a little late and Elijah...he didn't come home. There was somebody here, a social worker, and I got scared. Then Eli got upset and...

Christine wipes a tear with her sleeve.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, Joan. Not your problem. It was just a mix-up, anyway. The social worker was looking for that gardener.

JOAN

Jack?

CHRISTINE

I guess he's gone missing or something. Maybe he got a life for once.

Joan chuckles.

JOAN

Well, guess what? I have a surprise. Food therapy.

Joan produces a freshly-baked pie from behind her back.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Apple. Dylan said it was his favorite.

CHRISTINE

(how sweet)

Oh, Joan -

Joan sees Christine's eyes focus on the pan. The same one Peggy had returned to her.

JOAN

Oh, the pan...?! I came over earlier and asked Sierra if I could borrow one.

(MORE)

JOAN (CONT'D)

She didn't know where it was but we finally dug it up. And she gave me a tour. She's a cutie.

CHRISTINE

I don't know what to say...

JOAN

Say thank you.

CHRISTINE

Thank you.

And they hug.

INT. KIDS' BATHROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

A mouthful of foam, Sierra brushes her teeth. She spits.

SIERRA

Mom. It's totally bizarre. And you know what else is bizarre? Your double standard.

Christine picks up a pair of socks.

CHRISTINE

Sierra. It's what neighbors and friends do. It's no big deal. If I were here, I would have offered a tour too.

SIERRA

I didn't offer, mom. You're not listening!

CHRISTINE

Well. Whatever. Let's just practice your stranger-to-friend differentiation skill set for next time. Okay?

SIERRA

What's that, psych speak from class?

CHRISTINE

Yes. Now you are under my total control. Listen to me carefully: stranger, bad. Joan, good. Got it?

Sierra has to laugh at that one.

SIERRA

I'm adopted, right? Please?

Christine pulls Sierra to her. Kisses the top of her precious head. Mother and daughter hold each other for a moment.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM - LATER

Dylan sleeps. In the deep blue glow of the nightlight Christine plucks up socks, pajamas and tee-shirts. Then she notices an empty picture-hook on the wall, and the space where a photograph once hung. She touches the spot. Frowns.

She gets down on her knees and peers under Dylan's bed. Dust bunnies, more socks. A torn book. No photo.

INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - MIDNIGHT

Christine thunks a textbook shut and rubs her weary eyes. Then she hears it. Very faint - almost as if carried on the wind...

CHILD (O.S.)

Mom-my...?

Christine freezes.

CHILD (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Ma-ma...!

A child quietly sobs. Christine sighs and pads out of her office.

DYLAN'S ROOM

She peeks in on Dylan. He's out cold.

SIERRA'S ROOM

The nightlight in the bedroom shows Journie sleeping with her behind in the air, sucking her thumb in her crib.

Sierra snores fitfully.

ELIJAH'S ROOM

Elijah quickly clicks off his flashlight and shoves a magazine under the covers.

INT. CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - LATER

In the darkness, Christine lies in bed. She's just drifted off, her breathing slow and regular.

The eerie voice again, drifting over the night breeze....

CHILD (O.S.)

Mom-my?

Christine stirs. The curtains above her head billow slightly in the breeze. A shadow flits across a wall. Silence.

...as through the window Joan's bedroom window can be seen. The lights of a passing car pick her out, standing there in the darkness, looking across to Christine's room. Christine's breathing is rhythmic, steady, getting faster...

EXT. CHRISTINE'S NEIGHBORHOOD - MORNING

Christine, in t-shirt, running shorts and water bottle, is red-faced with effort. But she's keeping pace. She checks her watch. Rounds a corner, waves to a passing CYCLIST. Swerves around a barking beagle.

On almost every telephone pole, bright flyers announce the upcoming BLOCK PARTY in cute lettering with home-grown graphics of balloons and pumpkins.

Christine rips one off to hang on to as she heads home when she notices, just out of her periphery, a car pacing her. Christine quickens her pace. The car speeds up too.

Then the car HONKS. Startled, Christine turns - A Jeep Grand Cherokee has pulled up in front of her house. It's Josh Harmon, from school.

JOSH

Hey, Christine!

CHRISTINE

Jesus, you scared me!

The family inside the car laughs. Christine nears the window. Josh's wife RITA, all curls and J. Crew, waves. Peter's in the back.

JOSH

Hi Christine. This is my wife Rita, I don't think you've met.

Rita leans over.

RITA

Nice to meet you, Christine. Just a reminder that we're having a block-party planning meeting next Thursday at our house.

CHRISTINE

Okay. Sounds good.

Josh playfully rolls his eyes at Christine while Rita goes on-

RITA

You're in charge of the fruit - how about some apples, grapes, maybe some melon? Enough for about fifteen people?

CHRISTINE

Got it. Fruit for fifteen.

JOSH

It's going to be fun. You'll meet some really great people in the neighborhood.

Josh's eyes flicker toward Joan's house. She watches from her porch, arms crossed over her chest like a sentinel.

JOSH

(quietly)

How do you like your neighbor?

Christine turns to see Joan.

CHRISTINE

Joan? She's great. I don't know what I'd do without her.

JOSH

It's gotta be a little awkward...

RITA

Josh. Anyway, so see you there. Seventy-thirty.

The Harmon family waves and drives away. Christine turns back to Joan. She's staring vengefully after the Jeep. Christine approaches her.

ON JOAN'S PORCH

JOAN

What was that all about?

Christine holds out the flyer.

CHRISTINE

Block party. I've been officially recruited. Fruit for fifteen.

(laughs)

What'd they put you in charge of?

JOAN

(beat)

Oh...I think everybody realizes Ryan is sick, so I'm getting off easy this year.

CHRISTINE

Oh -

JOAN

Okay. I better check on Ryan.

And Joan heads inside abruptly.

CHRISTINE'S PORCH

Christine puts her hand on the front door knob when -

*SHATTER!!*

Christine turns. That came from inside Joan's house. Christine starts back up the stairs. This is none of her -

JOAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

For God's sake, Ryan. Look at me. Calm down, will you?

Christine stares, alarmed.

JOAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

(voice desperate)

Ryan, you're too sick to go and that's final. You have to get better first.

A door slams.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - LATER

Christine relaxes in a bubble bath, eyes closed. Steam rises around her. Hair up, she is beautiful. She sighs.

IN THE KITCHEN

Sierra reads the back of a microwave popcorn bag.

The din of the TV in the other room. Sierra thrusts the bag into Dylan's hands.

SIERRA

'Kay. Put it on for three minutes.

And she's outta there - back to the TV. Dylan puts the bag in. Stares at the mysterious buttons.

## IN THE BATHROOM

Christine uses a washcloth on her face. Leaves it on for a few seconds before wringing it out. The bathroom is so quiet.

Until...downstairs, muffled, kids' voices rise in anger. Another fight.

CHRISTINE

(to herself)

Damn it, you guys.

She pulls the plug. Stands. Bubbles slide off. A door slams. Shouts. Something is wrong downstairs.

SIERRA (O.S.)

MOM!!

## THE STAIRS

Wrapped in a towel, Christine heads down, still wet.

CHRISTINE

Hey you guys! What's wrong! Is that smoke?

Smoke drifts up the stairs from the kitchen.

## KITCHEN

Christine skids to a stop. Joan aims the fire extinguisher at something burning inside the microwave. The kids stand back, wide-eyed. All the windows are open.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

What happened?

Joan stops the extinguisher.

JOAN

I saw smoke and I came right over.

SIERRA

I was taking care of it, mom.

CHRISTINE

It's okay, Sierra.

JOAN

I think we got it.

She turns off the fire extinguisher.

CHRISTINE  
Well - thanks, Joan.

JOAN  
That was a close call.

Christine reviews the damage. No it wasn't. But she may need a new microwave.

DYLAN  
(looking to Christine)  
I didn't know how to do the buttons, mom.

JOAN  
It's okay, sweetie. It's no big deal.

Christine looks from Joan to Dylan and back.

CHRISTINE  
I think everything's okay now, Joan. I was right upstairs.

JOAN  
Have you checked the batteries on your smoke alarms lately? I change them twice a year.

Elijah glances at his mom looking for danger.

CHRISTINE  
You know, I think things are under control now, Joan. But I appreciate your concern. I really do.

JOAN  
Well. I'm just glad I was home.

CHRISTINE  
Okay.

JOAN  
All right.

The kids stare at their feet.

CHRISTINE  
Okay, Joan. See you later.

Joan snaps out of her Rescue Ranger mode.

JOAN  
Oh. Okay. See you later.

INT. CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Christine folds one more piece of laundry, puts it in her dresser, then turns off the light.

The sound of a child's laughter is carried on the wind from Joan's house.

CHILD (V.O.)  
Mommy! Mom-my....

A soft sobbing sound... Christine puts a hand over her heart.

CHRISTINE  
(softly)  
Poor thing.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S PORCH - AFTERNOON

Sun's out. Mostly. But it's nice and warm.

Christine sits with an open textbook: Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy. Nearby Journie builds with blocks. Sierra's rock CD drifts from an open window upstairs.

Elijah comes out the front door.

ELIJAH  
Going to the library.

CHRISTINE  
You better get that grade up in English, mister. And be home before dark.

Elijah lopes across the lawn with an armload of books. Christine smiles after him when -

JOAN (O.S.)  
Christine?

Christine closes her book.

CHRISTINE  
Hi, Joan.

Slightly awkward moment.

JOAN  
I was thinking. How about I take Dylan and Ryan out for ice-cream?

CHRISTINE

That's sweet, Joan. But Dylan doesn't need any more sugar today.

Joan's face crumples just a little. Christine notices and -

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Hey, why don't you just bring Ryan over and they can play here? I'll make sure it stays mellow.

Joan takes a step back.

JOAN

Oh no. Thank you, though. Ryan's kind of shy. He likes to have friends over to his house first.

CHRISTINE

Oh. Okay.

JOAN

And he's not doing so well lately. Going a bit downhill. The doctors are a little worried. They say we need a donor soon or...

Joan chokes up a bit, starts back toward her big house when -

CHRISTINE

Joan?

Joan turns.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Will you tell Ryan hello for me? And that I'm looking forward to meeting him soon?

Joan smiles and with that smile, her body relaxes....

JOAN

I'll tell him. Believe me, that's all he thinks about.

The *BLING* sound of an arriving INSTANT MESSAGE...

INT. ELIJAH'S ROOM - EVENING

...as Dylan sits at his brother's laptop playing a dated video-game, when up pops on his screen:

*RYANSMOM: Hi Dylan!*

Dylan jumps out of his skin.

*RYANSMOM: I know you're there.*

He swallows. Stares at the IM box. Looks over his shoulder. No one there.

*RYANSMOM: I know because your smiley face is lit up.*

Awkwardly, he starts typing.

*DYLBECK: My brother let's me use hs computer. Sumtimes.*

*RYANSMOM: I know, you told me! Isn't it fun we can talk this way?*

*DYLBECK: Guess so.*

*RYANSMOM: Well, I think it's fun and I want to talk to you all the time.*

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

Dylan?

Dylan slaps the laptop shut and whirls around. Christine picks him up.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

What are you up to in here, you goof?

She carries him away. Dylan stares back at the computer.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Christine shuts down the house for the night. As she goes to lock the front door, something catches her eye.

Mr. Baggins sits, staring intently at Joan's outside cellar door.

Christine opens her door -

CHRISTINE

(softly)

Mr. Baggins! Hey! Psst!

Mr. Baggins turns to Christine. Then back at the door.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

(slightly louder)

Hey. C'mere, you bag of bones.

Baggins gives up and trots back home. Christine scoops him up and closes the door. Locks it.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

It's late. Everyone's asleep.

The staircase. The hallway. The kitchen. A clock ticks in one of the rooms. The deep blue of 4 A.M.

DYLAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

He sleeps sprawled out on his bed.

The low sound of a cat growling.

In shadow, a WOMAN strokes his forehead. He makes a little noise in his sleep. Her hand stretches out and gently pulls the covers down. She stoops to scoop him up when -

YOWL!!! A cat shrieks, shrieks again and then...abruptly stops as...

INT. CHRISTINE'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Christine jerks awake, gulping for air. Soaked with sweat. It's grey and drizzly outside. Chilly too. The clock reads 4:18. Christine listens. Goes straight for

DYLAN'S ROOM

He sleeps heavily.

KITCHEN - SHORT TIME LATER

Christine, wrapped in a robe, puts up a kettle of water to boil when she hears it. *Creeeeak-thud. Creeeeak-thud.*

She looks up. The backdoor is just slightly ajar. The wind moves it back and forth. What the hell...?

She runs her finger along the lock. Tries the deadbolt. All seems normal. Christine shuts it firmly. Locks it.

Her kettle whistles. She opens the pantry door closest to the back door - *thud* - and staggers back, hand over her mouth.

INT. ELIJAH'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Eli sleeps with his mouth open when Christine shakes him.

CHRISTINE

Eli! Eli come quick, I need you!

The sound of a shovel breaking into dirt.

EXT. THE GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

It's just getting a lighter shade of grey. The drizzle has slowed. Judging from the tangerine eastern horizon, the sun might actually make an appearance.

The shoveling stops.

Elijah gently picks up the limp body of Mr. Baggins. His head lolls grotesquely; his neck's been broken. Eli lays him in his freshly dug grave.

ELIJAH

(upset)

I don't understand - what happened to him, mom?

Christine wraps her robe tightly around herself. Her face is drawn, scared.

CHRISTINE

I don't know, sweetie. I don't know.

INT. THE BREAKFAST NOOK - LATER THAT MORNING

Loud rock music faintly thrums from upstairs.

A red-eyed Sierra pokes listlessly at her cereal. Dylan's head is bowed. Christine sits with her children, Journie on her lap. The silence weighs a ton.

CHRISTINE

(softly)

I'm so sorry, guys.

Sierra scrapes her chair back loudly. Walks away. Christine watches after her. She turns back to Dylan. He's still crying. Then, through the window, Christine sees Joan.

EXT. JOAN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Christine walks through the grass towards Joan's house just as Joan steps out onto her porch.

JOAN

Chris, everything okay? You look awful!

CHRISTINE

Our cat. Someone broke his neck and got into our house. They left him inside the pantry.

JOAN

(horrified)

Oh my God. Someone broke in? You think it was Jenkins?

CHRISTINE

I dunno. Last I heard from his social worker, he'd gone missing. I was hoping that maybe you'd seen something last night? Anything?

JOAN

N-n-n-o. Uh-uh. I went to bed early.

Christine scans the empty street. Then she looks at Joan.

CHRISTINE

I think I better call the cops.

Joan stands.

JOAN

Tell you what. You have to get the kids to school, right?

Christine nods.

JOAN (CONT'D)

How about I call the police and report this? I know most of them through my work, I can get the process moving faster.

CHRISTINE

Oh, would you, Joan?

JOAN

(smiles)

Of course. I'd be happy to.

Joan goes back into her house. Christine heads back to her house when she sees something glint in the sunlight. It's the spare key she'd given Joan. She plucks it out of the grass and peers at it. Christine turns -

CHRISTINE

Joan?

But the door has just clicked shut.

INT. VOLVO - MORNING

Christine, Dylan beside her, drives to school. School buses, KIDS waiting for buses. Dylan looks out the window. Journie's strapped into the car-seat in the back, half-asleep, her chubby hands clutching a tippee cup.

Christine's distracted, a slight frown.

DYLAN

Hey mom? How come cats don't live really old?

CHRISTINE

Huh?

She changes lanes.

DYLAN

How come cats don't live really old?

CHRISTINE

Honey, they just get older quicker. And sometimes bad things happen.

DYLAN

Like to Daddy.

Christine glances in the rearview.

CHRISTINE

Something like that.

DYLAN

Hey mom? Can we get another kitty?

Christine smiles thinly. Of course that was going to come.

CHRISTINE

One thing at a time. Okay, honey?

NEARING THE SCHOOL

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Here we are...

She looks for a place to stop.

DYLAN

Joan invited me to ice-cream with Ryan.

CHRISTINE

Okay, well, we'll see.

DYLAN

I had strawberry. It was great. Ryan didn't feel well. So he didn't have any.

Christine pulls into a space, abruptly puts the car in park and turns to Dylan.

CHRISTINE

What'd you say - ?

Dylan knows he's done something wrong.

DYLAN

(small voice)

I said I had strawberry?

CHRISTINE

At Joan's house?

DYLAN

Yeah. Yesterday or a couple days ago. I can't remember. Ryan was too sick so he couldn't have any.

Christine stares at her son when -

*TINK TINK TINK*

Christine jumps. Rita, dressed to the nines on this drizzly morning grins on other side of the window. Christine rolls it down.

RITA

Want me to take the boys in?

Dylan rockets out of his seat.

DYLAN

Peter! Hi Peter!

CHRISTINE

(tiredly)

Sure. Thanks Rita. We've had a rough morning.

Christine watches Dylan take Rita's hand and walk away with Peter. Christine taps the steering wheel as she thinks. She starts the car up decisively. Puts the car in reverse when - HONK!

Another PARENT angrily gestures. Christine pulls out.

EXT. JOAN'S HOUSE - SHORT TIME LATER

Journie asleep on her shoulder, Christine knocks again. Glances at the driveway. The Lexus is there. Silence.

Christine peers into the beveled glass window. The contents of Joan's living room are distorted through it. But the television is on, she can see that much. And the back of a woman's head is in a wingback chair facing it.

Christine steps back from the window and knocks again.

Nothing. Silence. Except for the faint drone of the TV.

Christine rearranges Journie and heads back to her Volvo.

INT. SEATTLE POLICE - DAY

Christine sits in a crowded office, piles of papers stacked on the desk of LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD (52), overweight, tired. He gazes at Christine with scorn mixed with pity.

CRAWFORD

Lady, I've heard a lot of things but I gotta tell ya, that's pretty much the lowest. I mean, after what that poor lady's been through and you're accusing her of giving your son ice-cream?

He chuckles.

CHRISTINE

It's not that, it's that she didn't ask me and -

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

Oh, so that's pretty bad.

He pretends to write on paper.

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

Gave son ice-cream. Without permission.

He looks up at Christine who is crimson with humiliation and anger.

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

She's gonna go to the big house for ten to twenty for that one.

Christine stands.

CHRISTINE

Look. I found this -

She produces the spare key.

CHRISTINE

- on my lawn. This morning. I gave it to her as a spare. And last night someone broke in to my house.

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa. Someone broke in?

Christine stares, puzzled.

CHRISTINE

Yeah. Didn't she call that in? She said she was going to. Early this morning.

He sips his coffee and winces.

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD (CONT'D)

God, I hate that fake sugar. Gimme the real stuff. I just wanna be fat and happy. And retired.

Christine's at the end of her tether with this fat bastard.

CHRISTINE

You got a report, right? Of a break-in?

Crawford picks up the phone, hits an extension, rocks a little in his chair.

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

Stan? Did Joan Hartford call in a report -

CHRISTINE

This morning -

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

You sure of that? Nothing at all?

He hangs up. Stares at Christine. Poor lady is nuts.

LIEUTENANT CRAWFORD

You want to file it now?

CHRISTINE

I - no. I've gotta go.

The police department activity and noises are a confusing blur to Christine as she clutches her baby close and threads her way through it.

INT. CHRISTINE'S OFFICE - LATER

Journie on her lap, Christine intently focuses on her computer screen. She's Googling. Types "JOAN HARTFORD".

A full page of photos of Joan at various times in her career appear. A few show her at charity functions.

Christine clicks on the NEWS SEARCH...

A PRESS RELEASE dated March 2001:

*Joan Hartford, evening anchor for KBVC in Seattle, gave birth to a 7-pound, 2-ounce boy at Memorial Hospital Tuesday morning.*

Christine pulls her lip in concentration. There's another page. She clicks it. There's another item, dated October 2006:

*It was reported today that Joan Hartford, KBVC's evening anchor, was taking a one-month leave of absence due to a family tragedy. No further details have been released.*

Christine furrows her brow and sits back.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF SEATTLE - LIBRARY - LATER

Christine walks between the stacks, books in hand.

PROFESSOR SPENCER (O.S.)

Christine - ?

She turns and smiles as he joins her. They continue to walk.

PROFESSOR SPENCER

You leaving?

(she nods)

Me, too. I'm glad I caught you. That last paper you wrote...

He opens the door to the stairwell.

STAIRWELL

As they go down...

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)

I was impressed by your investment in the topic. Your passion was compelling. But the process you described was maybe a little imprecise. Unfocused?

Christine's shoulders drop.

CHRISTINE  
Professor Spencer - ?

A kindly smile.

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
You can call me Malcolm.

CHRISTINE  
To tell you the truth, I'm barely  
treading water here. Maybe I should quit.

He opens the door to the outside.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF SEATTLE - CONTINUOUS

A lush green campus is filled with STUDENTS.

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
If I had a penny for every time I heard  
that I'd be rich.

Spencer pauses in front of the Student Union. Inside, the  
clatter of plates, glasses.

PROFESSOR SPENCER (CONT'D)  
You can dig deeper and do better. I know  
you have it in you.

Christine sighs deeply.

CHRISTINE  
I've - a few months ago my husband...

She shakes her head, frustrated.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
No. I don't want to do that.

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
Do what?

CHRISTINE  
Be the widow. You know, like that's my  
story everywhere I go?

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
But is it?

Christine smiles awkwardly.

CHRISTINE

I - I'm not sure what the right answer is...

She blinks back tears. He puts a friendly hand on her shoulder.

PROFESSOR SPENCER

What do you want your story to be?

CHRISTINE

Do I have a choice?

PROFESSOR SPENCER

Actually you do.

(beat)

Loss shapes a person, Christine. But it doesn't have to define them. You can be more than your loss. Just like a home is more than just four walls and a roof. Do you see what I'm saying?

Christine smiles a grateful smile.

CHRISTINE

(softly)

Thanks. I'm trying. But there is something that is bothering me.

PROFESSOR SPENCER

Yes?

CHRISTINE

I have this neighbor. And she seems really great but I'm beginning to worry that -

Spencer holds up his hand.

PROFESSOR SPENCER

Whoa. Don't tell me about your personal life, remember? Right?

He laughs but Christine is frustrated.

PROFESSOR SPENCER

Decide what your story is, Christine. Is it about you and what your goals are, or is it worrying about your neighbor?

CHRISTINE

It's just that she -

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
 You can't control anyone else,  
 Christine, only yourself. Maintain that  
 distance.

CHRISTINE  
 But -

PROFESSOR SPENCER  
 Now. I need some coffee before I  
 collapse. See you in class next time?

Christine looks after him, frustrated.

INT. DYLAN'S ROOM - LATER

Dylan plays with the controls for his remote-control car. The light's on, but he can't find the car. He looks all over the floor and under his bed when

*Bling!* - the sound of an incoming IM.

*RYANSMOM: Hey Dylan!*

LIVING ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Christine enters, drops off her shoulder-bag.

CHRISTINE  
 Hey, I'm home.

KITCHEN

Elijah's at the table, doing homework. Sierra's getting a soda from the fridge.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
 Just pretend I'm not here, okay?

ELIJAH  
 No problem, mom.

She leaves the room.

DYLAN'S ROOM

*RYANSMOM: I'm so sorry your cat died.*

Dylan looks over his shoulder. Then back to the screen.

*DYLBECK: Me to.*

*RYANSMOM: Maybe you can get a new kitty.*

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

What's going on here, Dyl?

Dylan jumps. Christine lowers her head to look at the screen. The IM blings again. The letters slowly spell out...

*RYANSMOM: Want to come over and play a game with Ryan?*

Outside, the sun has sunk beneath purple clouds.

The sound of thunderous knocking.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Joan opens her door to find Christine, stone-faced.

DINING ROOM - SHORT TIME LATER

Joan sits at her heavy oak dining table. She looks down the table at a seething Christine.

JOAN

Well, you've been through hell,  
Christine. Losing your husband like that.  
Don't you think you might be  
overreacting?

CHRISTINE

Joan, this isn't about that.

Joan smiles and tilts her head. She's looking beyond Christine into the silence.

JOAN

(sing-songy)  
I see youuuuu!

Ryan peers out from the other side of a door. Smiles at his mommy. He hasn't much time in the sunlight. His pale face and dark eyes are striking.

Christine turns to look. A mirror on the wall reflects only an empty room. She looks back at Joan. Who is now gazing at her intently.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I just want us to be friends, Christine.  
You know? And the kids too. I love the  
kids. You guys need me right now.

CHRISTINE

We need to have some ground-rules, Joan.  
Let's start with no IMing.

JOAN

(beat)

Oh. Really?

Christine gets up and heads toward the door. Ryan whizzes by the archway between kitchen and dining-room, unnoticed by her.

JOAN

We had some good news today, Chris.

Joan follows Christine to the front door. Christine really wants to get out of there.

JOAN

We're number one on the donor list. It's finally going to happen. Any day now.

CHRISTINE

And Joan - ? I'm going to have the locks changed on the house. Could I have the key I gave you back, please?

Pause. Joan's discomfort is palpable. Christine waits.

JOAN

Oh - I, it must be...

The doorbell rings.

JOAN (CONT'D)

(calls out)

Sitter's here, sweetie!

Joan opens the door to Stephanie, schoolbooks in hand.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Hi, Steph.

STEPHANIE

Hi, Ms. Hartford.

JOAN

I think you know Mrs. Beck? Aren't you and Elijah special friends?

Stephanie blushes, smiles, steps in. Christine looks at Stephanie briefly but her eyes bore into Joan.

CHRISTINE

Hi, Stephanie.

Stephanie's cellphone rings - a distinctive tune. Steph picks up, turns away from the two women and giggles.

STEPHANIE  
 (whispers into phone)  
 Elijah. I can't talk. Yeah. Later.

CHRISTINE  
 Joan, the key?

Joan smiles as she holds the door for Christine.

JOAN  
 If you're changing the locks it won't matter anyway. I'll toss that one out when I come across it. Just get me a new one, okay?

CHRISTINE  
 Joan -

JOAN  
 Okay. Gotta run, Chris.

And Joan slowly closes the door. Behind her, Ryan sits silently at the top of the stairs, in his hands Dylan's remote control car. But then...the door closes. *Click*. He's gone.

EXT. JOAN'S PORCH - SIMULTANEOUS

Christine stands stock still where the door just more or less closed on her face. She reaches into a pocket and pulls out the key in question. Flips it over and over in her hands.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

House has lights on, but no one seems home.

LIVING ROOM

Stephanie and Elijah making out on the sofa, kissing, his hand sliding up under her shirt.

A *THUMP* from upstairs. She stops. Pulls away. They're both out of breath.

STEPHANIE  
 You hear that?

ELIJAH  
 Yeah.

And he's already on her.

STEPHANIE

Stop. Shhh. I gotta see if he's okay.

*THUMP THUMP BANG.*

She gets up, goes to the bottom of the stairs. Looks up.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

She's gonna be home any minute. You better get outta here.

ELIJAH

C'mon, Steph, can't we just -

STEPHANIE

Totally no. I don't want to lose this job, Eli.

ELIJAH

All right. Call me?

He goes to the door.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Hey. Love me much?

She looks at him. Smiles.

STEPHANIE

I'll let you know later.

He leaves.

At the bottom of the stairs, Stephanie hears a BUZZING SOUND. Something's rolling around on the floor above.

And the kid's supposed to be sleeping. She looks guiltily behind her as she heads slowly up.

LANDING

It's dim. Ryan's door is shut. Joan's is open. A small lamp on her dresser is on.

JOAN'S BEDROOM

Stephanie picks up an amber bottle of French perfume. Smells it. Runs her fingers over a mother-of-pearl letter opener.

She finds a small framed photo of Dylan and Christine at Muir Woods. Picks it up. Hmm.

Another thump. The buzzing sound. Stephanie jumps.

EXT. JOAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Her Lexus quietly pulls into the driveway. Joan gets out, opens the back door and takes out her briefcase/shoulder-bag.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Stephanie puts her ear to Ryan's door. *Buzzzzzz*. She puts a hand on the doorknob. Quietly, cautiously, she turns it... Dylan's remote control car ZIPS out of the room between her feet, a little light flashing red.

Stephanie peers into the room. Eyes widen.

STEPHANIE  
(whispers)  
Holy shit...

DOWNSTAIRS

Joan steps quietly in, kicks off her shoes and walks into the kitchen, dropping off her bags and keys.

JOAN  
(calling out to Stephanie)  
Hope he wasn't any trouble.

HALLWAY

Stephanie backs out of Ryan's room, terrified.

LIVING ROOM

JOAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Steph - ?

Joan comes in. No one there. She heads up the stairs.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Steph - ?

HALLWAY

Stephanie closes Ryan's door quietly, gently - quickly. Looks up. Joan stares at her, arms crossed.

STEPHANIE  
Oh. Ms. Hartford. I heard something. I just wanted to see if he was all right.

JOAN  
And is he?

Stephanie gulps.

STEPHANIE  
Yeah... He's fine.

A weighty silence.

JOAN  
I'll tell him I'm home. Why don't you  
meet me downstairs?

RYAN (O.S.)  
Mommy?

Joan puts her hand on the door knob.

JOAN  
Coming, sweetie.

Stephanie stares at Joan oddly.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
Steph? Downstairs?

STEPHANIE  
Okay.

And Stephanie retreats down the stairs, glancing back toward Joan. Scared. Confused.

INT. RYAN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Joan opens the door and enters. Ryan sits in the middle of his bed, covers up to his chin.

RYAN  
Mommy! That girl was in my room.

Joan smiles.

JOAN  
It's okay, you silly.

RYAN  
She came in and played with my new car.

Joan bends to pick up Dylan's car.

JOAN  
That won't happen again, sweetie. I  
promise.

Joan bends down and gently lays Ryan back down on the bed. She buries her head in his neck and breathes his boy-scent in deeply. He puts a pale arm around her neck and pulls her tight. Joan leans back up and gazes at her sweet boy.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
'Night, sweetie.

RYAN  
Mommy - ?

Joan turns back to him.

RYAN (CONT'D)  
I don't think she should come back anymore. I don't like her now.

JOAN  
You go to sleep now, okay?

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Eli walks up the front walk, backpack slung over his shoulder, cellphone to his ear.

ELIJAH  
(to himself)  
C'mon, Steph, answer already...

Faintly, the distinctive tune of Stephanie's cellphone. Eli stops.

It seems to be coming from somewhere nearby. He listens, waiting for Stephanie to pick up. He stares at his phone, keeps listening when -

JOAN  
(filtered)  
Hello?

Eli looks up. Joan stands in her doorway, Stephanie's cellphone to her ear. She smiles and walks toward Eli. Extends the phone.

JOAN (CONT'D)  
She left it here last night. Can you give it to her when you see her?

ELIJAH  
(hesitates)  
Yeah - sure.

Joan shuts her door.

INT. CHRISTINE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Christine rinses and hands a plate to Sierra, who loads it into the dishwasher. From the other room, the sounds of "Animal Planet" on TV. Journie is sprawled on the floor as she eats a Jello cup with a plastic spoon.

Christine scrapes dinner scraps into the garbage can. It's full to overflowing.

CHRISTINE

Eli, take out the garbage, would you please?

Eli lopes into the room. He seems distracted.

ELIJAH

Sorry.

He gathers up the garbage.

CHRISTINE

Hey. You okay?

ELIJAH

Yeah, I guess.

CHRISTINE

You didn't tell me how that test went today.

ELIJAH

Good.

Something has caught Eli's eye. The faint squawk of a police radio outside.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Mom! Check it out!

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

A CROWN VICTORIA is parked in front of Joan's house. A DETECTIVE in a suit gets out, takes out his ID as he walks up to Joan's front door.

A SECOND DETECTIVE gets out, cellphone to ear, and waits by the car.

INT. CHRISTINE'S KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Christine, Sierra and Eli all peer out the window.

Joan opens her front door. Glances at the Beck house. Lets the cop in. Christine drops the curtain.

ELIJAH

Drug-bust.

Christine laughs.

CHRISTINE

Yeah, right, eagle-eye.

She returns to the dishes. But she's troubled.

SIERRA

Hey, Janie Stammers told me Stephanie wasn't in school today. You guys weren't making out behind the gym as usual at lunch. God, you're so embarrassing, Eli.

Then it dawns on Eli.

ELIJAH

Okay, this is totally weird!

He peeks back through the curtains. Christine waits.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Steph left her cellphone over there.  
(shows it to her)  
Joan told me to give it to her.

Knock on the front door. Eli and Christine exchange a frightened glance.

AT THE FRONT DOOR

Christine opens it. The detective holds up his badge-wallet. The second detective lingers by the car, looks around.

DETECTIVE

Mrs. Beck...? Elijah Beck's mother?

CHRISTINE

Yes...?

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The Detective sits on the couch and sips coffee. Elijah and Christine face him, nervously.

DETECTIVE

(to Elijah)  
So the last time you heard from her -

ELIJAH  
Just like I said. Yesterday.

DETECTIVE  
At school.

Eli nods. Then -

ELIJAH  
No. She called me from next door.

The detective, pen at the ready, waits for more.

ELIJAH  
She was babysitting for Joan.

DETECTIVE  
And this was...when? Approximately?

ELIJAH  
Like...maybe seven-thirty?

Detective makes a note in his pad.

DETECTIVE  
She sound all right?

ELIJAH  
Yeah. The usual. You know.

Detective smiles briefly to himself.

DETECTIVE  
And you didn't see her anytime after  
that? Say at Ms. Hartford's house?

CHRISTINE  
My son was home doing his homework. I was  
here, studying the whole time. I know  
where my kids are, Mr...

DETECTIVE  
Of course you do.

He directs his gaze to Elijah.

DETECTIVE  
Listen, I hate to do this, but -

Detective reaches into his pocket, pulls out a wallet. Eli  
stares at it.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

We found this between the sofa cushions.  
Has your name in it. And a grand total of  
three dollars.

He hands it over. Christine glares at Eli, open-mouthed.

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

So when you were there everything was  
good, I guess? No arguments or - ?

ELIJAH

Uh, no. We were just...talking.

He can't meet anybody's eyes.

CHRISTINE

Okay. You got us. He snuck over there and  
they made out. Now if you don't mind...

The detective smiles. He knows she's telling the truth.

DETECTIVE

Just doing my job, Mrs. Beck. If this was  
one of your kids, you'd want me to do the  
same. We turn over every rock in this  
business.

She nods. The detective rises to leave. Hands Christine the  
coffee cup.

ELIJAH

So... You think she's okay?

DETECTIVE

Until we hear otherwise. That's all I can  
tell you.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Christine's about to shut the door -

CHRISTINE

(to Elijah)

Ready to be grounded all over again,  
mister - ?

- when the second detective bends down and aims his Maglight  
under a shrub by Joan's driveway. He pulls something out with  
the end of his pencil.

DETECTIVE

Whatcha got?

DETECTIVE 2  
 (to Christine)  
 This yours?

In the beam of the flashlight - Jenkin's worn John Deere cap.  
 Christine's words die in her throat.

ELIJAH (O.S.)  
 Mom? What's that?

Christine stares as the detectives put the hat in an evidence  
 bag. Their radio squawks. Christine's door shuts. And locks.

IN THE KITCHEN - LATER

Dishes are done. Kids are in bed. The phone rings. Christine  
 comes into the kitchen, picks up.

CHRISTINE  
 Hello?

SUSAN  
 (filtered)  
 Wassup big sister?

CHRISTINE  
 Oh, Susan. Jesus.

She plunks down in a kitchen chair and runs her hand through  
 her hair. Laughs a little.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
 Oh, the usual. Missing teenager, stuff  
 like that.

SUSAN  
 (filtered)  
 What?

CHRISTINE  
 Nobody you know. But I'm worried about  
 Eli. She's a friend of his.

She glances up. Eli watches TV stonily.

SUSAN  
 (filtered)  
 Listen, I'll be home the day after  
 tomorrow. I'm spending the night in New  
 York. I can't wait to see you guys.

Christine smiles, tiredly.

CHRISTINE

Us too.

SIERRA (O.S.)

Mom! Journie made a mess!

Christine hangs up tiredly.

SIERRA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And I think we're out of diapers.

Christine puts a cup in the sink.

SIERRA (O.S.)

Mom? She feels hot.

CHRISTINE

What?

And she jogs into the living room to see what's up.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

Indeed, Journie's face is flushed. Her lip juts out and she reaches for her mommy.

INT. ELIJAH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Elijah sits at his desk, on his computer.

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

Eli - ?

ELIJAH

(doesn't turn)

Hmm.

Christine steps in. She looks tired. Like she's been up all night with a cranky baby.

CHRISTINE

I'm going to take Journie to the pediatrician. I gave her some Tylenol but she's still a couple degrees too high. I've been up with her all night.

Elijah looks up from a sandwich only a teenager would love.

ELIJAH

(mouth full)

'Kay.

Christine looks pointedly out the window. Joan's driveway is empty.

CHRISTINE

Keep an eye on Sierra, all right? And make sure Dylan stays off the computer.

ELIJAH

Mmmph.

Christine walks up behind him. Puts her arms around his neck.

CHRISTINE

Hey. Everything's going to be okay, all right, Eli?

He nods. She turns to leave.

ELIJAH

Mom?

CHRISTINE

Yes, honey?

ELIJAH

Is Journie going to be okay?

She smiles despite herself.

CHRISTINE

Yeah. She's probably teething. I'm just being careful.

EXT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - LATER

Late summer. It's muggy. Bruised clouds in the distance look heavy with rain as they make their way slowly toward Seattle.

Eli sits on the porch steps doing homework. Joan's Lexus pulls into her driveway.

Dylan and Sierra play a rousing game of lawn-hockey with croquet mallets. Until Dylan makes off with the ball.

SIERRA

Dylan!

DYLAN

You can't get it!

Eli's cellphone rings.

ELIJAH

Hello? Oh, Mrs. Hudson. No, I still haven't heard from Steph.

He gets up and walks inside.

ELIJAH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

No, she didn't say anything to me.

Dylan chucks the ball back to Sierra. It curves wildly and hits the house with a THUD. Sierra rushes him when her cell phone rings.

SIERRA

Hey, Janie!

And that's the end of that. Sierra heads in to the house. Her music comes blasting out of her upstairs bedroom window.

Dylan stoops over to pick up the ball when he sees grown-up shoes. He looks up. At his remote control car. In Joan's hand.

INT. THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

Journie grouses on Christine's lap when the RECEPTIONIST slides open the glass partition.

RECEPTIONIST

Mrs. Beck? The doctor can see you now.

Christine rises and heads toward the kindly NURSE who holds the door open. The door shuts behind them.

The other PARENTS tiredly read tattered magazines and keep waiting for their turn.

INSIDE THE DOCTOR'S HALLWAY

Christine follows the nurse past examination rooms with toys, bright posters and stuffed animals...

A *click*, and then a CD comes on. It's Mr. Rogers:

MR. ROGERS (V.O.)

*"...I've always wanted to have a neighbor just like you, I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you..."*

...and examination tables and swabs...

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Different views: empty rooms, deserted staircases. All is perfectly still. We hear Mr. Rogers.

Move up the stairs...

MR. ROGERS (V.O.)

*"So, let's make the most of this beautiful day... Since we're together we might as well say... Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor...?"*

The music continues and we are in...

UPSTAIRS HALLWAY LOOKING INTO RYAN'S ROOM.

Dylan stands and stares at all the stuff that other kids can only dream of...

MR. ROGERS (CONT'D)

*"Won't you please, won't you please, please won't you be my - "*

Joan switches the boom box off.

JOAN (O.S.)

Ryan has some nice toys, doesn't he? Maybe he'll let you borrow one to bring home with you.

DYLAN

Where is he?

JOAN

(playful voice)  
Ex-act-ly.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - SIMULTANEOUS

The youngish PEDIATRICIAN sits back on his stool.

PEDIATRICIAN

I think you're right. It's teething. Just keep up with the Tylenol and watch her behavior closely. It's not uncommon for an ear infection to develop on top of all this.

Christine nods, relieved.

CHRISTINE

Thanks so much, doctor.

She slings her purse over her shoulder. The doctor hands Journie a small plastic toy.

PEDIATRICIAN

That's for you, sweetie.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - OUTSIDE RYAN'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUS

Dylan looks at Joan inquisitively.

JOAN

You know what Ryan's favorite game is?

He shakes his head.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Hide-and-seeK.

DYLAN

I like that game too!

JOAN

You do? Good! Now. Do you know where Ryan's favorite hiding place is?

INT/EXT. VOLVO - LATER

A steady light rain starts to fall as afternoon gives way to evening. Christine listens to music on the radio. Switches on the wipers. In the backseat, rosy-cheeked Journie is fast asleep, in the grip of her low-fever.

A long line of traffic ahead: brake-lights, and just over the crest of a hill the telltale blue and red lights of police activity.

Christine sips a coffee and sighs.

CHRISTINE

Oh great...

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Dylan races up the stairs to the landing outside Joan's room. Panting, excited. *Thumpa. Thump. Thump.* He hears it again. He looks up, excitedly. Where's it coming from?

JOAN (O.S.)  
You're getting warm, Dyl!

Joan's steps coming up the stairs.

INT./EXT. VOLVO - SIMULTANEOUS

Christine's inched her way up to the police cars, by a WOODED AREA: lots of POLICE ACTIVITY: yellow tape, uniformed officers, people in suits and latex gloves. A NEWS 'COPTER hovers overhead.

DETECTIVES and FORENSICS surround something lit up by ARCLIGHTS.

She cranes her neck to see, when suddenly -

COP (O.S.)  
Didn't you hear me?!

She looks up. A COP comes angrily around to her window.

COP (CONT'D)  
Pay attention, okay?

CHRISTINE  
Sorry, sorry.

He remains there, watching as something's lifted up and taken slowly, almost reverently, to a waiting AMBULANCE.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)  
Accident?

COP  
They found that missing kid -

CHRISTINE  
(shocked)  
The little boy?

COP  
Girl. Teenager.

CHRISTINE  
Oh my God. Is it...?

She throws open her car door. Reaches in the back, unbuckles a sleepy Journie.

COP (CONT'D)  
Hey! Hey! Hey lady!

Christine runs toward the yellow tape, holding Journie closely.

EXT. WOODED AREA - CONTINUOUS

The cop grabs for Christine. She's moving too fast.

COP  
You can't enter a crime-scene -

CHRISTINE  
(hysterical)  
What's her name?!

The BODY-BAG is slid into the ambulance.

DETECTIVE  
Hey! Who's this? She know her?

Christine is up to the body bag.

COP  
You don't want to see this.

CHRISTINE  
Just. Let me see.

Nobody moves. PARAMEDICS look to the detective and the cop for cues. The detective holds out his arms for Journie.

DETECTIVE  
Just let me hold her, ma'am.

Grudgingly, Christine lets him take Journie. He takes a couple of steps back while Christine steps forward. The detective nods to a paramedic. Slowly, he unzips the bag. Christine looks, then staggers back, doubles over and wretches.

The battered bloody face of Stephanie slowly disappears as the body bag is zipped up again.

CHRISTINE (V.O.)  
Susan? It's Christine.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Elijah takes off his iPod. Pads down the stairs. Sierra is watching TV.

ELIJAH  
Sierra. Where's Dylan?

EXT. VOLVO - SIMULTANEOUS

Christine pulls into her driveway with a spray of gravel.

CHRISTINE  
(on cell phone)  
That missing girl...! It was Eli's  
girlfriend!

SUSAN  
(filtered)  
Oh my God -

CHRISTINE  
And my neighbor's babysitter! Joan  
Hartford's.

SUSAN  
(filtered)  
The newscaster? Chris, she doesn't have a  
babysitter. That's just not possible.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Dylan throws open the door to Ryan's room.

DYLAN  
(whispers)  
Hey - you in here?

JOAN  
(right behind him)  
Now you're really cold, Dylan.

INT/EXT. VOLVO - SIMULTANEOUS

Christine switches off the engine.

CHRISTINE  
What?

A pause.

SUSAN (V.O.)  
(filtered)  
Joan's son died a year ago, Christine. It  
was all over the news. Big tragedy.

ELIJAH (O.S.)  
Mom? Mom? I can't find Dylan.

Christine looks up to see Elijah approaching the car. In her eyes, a dawning...

She tosses down the cell and opens the car door.

CHRISTINE

Take Journie in the house. And call the police.

INT. JOAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - SIMULTANEOUS

Dylan races to another door. Opens it. Dimly lit stairs lead upward. He starts up. Joan's right behind him.

JOAN

Warmer, warmer, warmer....

He opens the door and his eyes go wide.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Hot!

EXT. JOAN'S HOUSE - SIMULTANEOUS

Christine tries Joan's front door. Locked. Heads around the side for the back door. Locked.

The sound of SHATTERING GLASS.

INT. JOAN'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Christine steps cautiously in.

CHRISTINE

(tentatively)

Dylan...?

She goes to the

FOYER

Looks up the stairs. The house is gloomy in the fading evening light. A clock ticks in one of the rooms. She goes back to the

KITCHEN

And finds the door to the basement. Presses her ear against it. Tries the doorknob. It opens. And creaks. And she winces at the noise.

INT. BASEMENT STAIRS - EVENING

Christine reaches in, finds a light switch. Click. Looks down into the basement. Cautiously heads down the narrow stairs, all shadows and skewed perspective.

CHRISTINE

Dylan...?

A stench repels Christine. She covers her mouth and nose with her arm and continues down.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Dyl...?

She steps into the windowless room. She feels for a light switch. Click.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

A dim bulb hangs naked from a ceiling fixture. Rusted metal shelves hold old paint cans, boxes of nails, household tools. Cardboard boxes are stacked here and there.

An old broken rocking-horse in one corner. A baby's wheeled stroller covered in an elaborate spiderweb, a large brown spider in its center.

An old couch, brown stains on its cover. On it a blanket covers what could be someone sleeping.

Christine approaches the sofa. It's obvious someone small - a child, perhaps? - is asleep there.

CHRISTINE

Hey - you okay? You awake?

She goes to touch his shoulder... The blanket slides off, the body shifts and rolls to face her -

Eyeless, his mouth open in a silent scream: it's the DECOMPOSING BODY OF A LITTLE BOY! Remnants of clothes cling to what remains of his skin. His light-up sneakers start flashing.

Christine staggers backward, regains her balance, puts her fist to her mouth.

She hears a faint noise from a room above. Footsteps. A thump. Her body heaves with panicked breaths.

THE KITCHEN



INT. ATTIC STAIRS - EVENING

The door opens, slicing into the darkness. Christine starts up the stairs, fast and quiet as she can. She's shaking, her breathing is ragged.

INT. THE ATTIC - SECONDS LATER

The door swings open, slowly. A typical attic from this angle. Clothes, boxes, stacks of photograph albums, a single bare bulb, very dusty. It's a store-house of antiques, junk, and discarded furniture.

Two cracked full-length mirrors lean up against the wall. The mirrors catch and reflect disjointed images of the attic. And Dylan. Sprawled. Unconscious.

Christine cries out -

CHRISTINE

Dylan!

- when suddenly her words are choked by a ROPE ACROSS HER THROAT, pulled tight. She chokes, grasps at it, eyes bulging.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

(gasping to speak)

What...what did you -

JOAN

Don't be rude, Billy. Say hello to Mrs. Beck.

A frightened little BOY, same age as Dylan, appears in Christine's line of view. He's a bit rumpled and pale around the gills.

BILLY WINBROOK

(softly)

Hello.

Christine's eyes bulge in recognition.

CHRISTINE

(panting, gasping)

Billy - Winbrook?

JOAN

I told him his mommy said he could stay with me for a while. Kid couldn't get enough ice-cream. And it's amazing how much he slept.

BILLY WINBROOK

(softly)

Can I... Please can I go now?

Christine claws and scrapes to get free.

JOAN

Sure. Go ahead. You can't help Ryan,  
Billy. But it's okay. I'm not  
disappointed, are you, Ryan?

Reflected in both mirrors, disjointed, Ryan stands in a  
corner, his dark eyes wide. He shakes his head.

JOAN (CONT'D)

But Dylan here.

(beat)

Now he's...the perfect donor.

Billy takes an awkward step, then another. He's weak,  
terrified. Then he races toward the door to the attic -

BILLY WINBROOK

Mommy! MOM!

*KISH* - shattering the mirrors on his way out. He THUNDERS  
down the stairs and it is then - just then - that Christine  
gathers her strength and ELBOWS Joan in the stomach. OOF!

Joan stumbles back. Christine scuttles to the broken mirror,  
grabs a shard and holds it out in front of her. Edges toward  
Dylan. Reaches out for him.

CHRISTINE

What did you do to him, Joan?

JOAN

Jenkins? I have no patience for people  
who get out of line. I took care of him.

Christine doesn't have time to take that in for more than a  
nanosecond -

CHRISTINE

*Dylan*. What did you do to Dylan?

Eyes still on Joan, Christine feels Dylan's forehead. Joan  
touches her ribs; that hurt.

JOAN

Oh Christine, don't overreact. He won't  
feel a thing.

CHRISTINE

C'mon baby. Wake up. Wake. UP.

Joan smiles and moves closer to Christine. The shard of mirror doesn't seem so effective, suddenly.

CHRISTINE

Joan...we're friends, right?

JOAN

You know how much I like you, Christine.  
And your whole family.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

So - what are you planning to do, Joan?

JOAN

What am I planning to...?

Joan stares at this utterly stupid human being before her.

JOAN (CONT'D)

I told you. We moved up on the donor  
list. That means Ryan is number one.

A look of horrified realization sweeps over Christine's face. Joan keeps moving toward her, slowly.

JOAN (CONT'D)

Billy had the wrong blood type... But he  
made a nice little playmate for Ryan.

CHRISTINE

How do you know Dylan has the right one?

JOAN

(smiles)

I saw his school medical form when you  
dropped it. O-negative. Exactly the same.

CHRISTINE

Joan, you can't be serious about this.

JOAN

Do you know what a special hell those  
waiting lists are? God. You do  
everything. You beg your doctor, you  
offer money, but no, no, no. Rules.  
Doesn't matter who you are.

Dylan is breathing, shallowly. Christine thinks. Thinks.  
Thinks. And fast - because Joan is moving toward her  
inexorably. And she's picked up a crowbar.

CHRISTINE  
Oh, Joan. I can't imagine.

JOAN  
Stupid fucking doctors.

CHRISTINE  
Yes -

JOAN  
They don't care. He's just a number to them.

CHRISTINE  
But he was your baby.

JOAN  
Yes.  
(beat)  
He was my baby. My son.

CHRISTINE  
Not a number.

JOAN  
No. And my doctor says I can never have another. Did you know that, Christine? Did I tell you that? Not that you can replace a child.

CHRISTINE  
No, Joan. You can't.

Christine takes a step forward to get between Dylan and Joan. The crowbar is raised now. Joan looks down.

JOAN  
I know, sweetie. Mommy's trying.

Christine looks. Nothing there. But Joan looks down at Ryan, clinging to her leg.

CHRISTINE  
Joan. I - I know how you feel. When Steve died, I felt like I was buried under an avalanche. Like the world just went white. Like the world stopped. Like I stopped.

JOAN  
Yes...

CHRISTINE

I understand that kind of pain. It's the worst thing in the world. But you have to believe me. It gets better.

JOAN

Bullshit.

CHRISTINE

No - it does. I mean, it's not easy. The kids and I, we...

Christine eyes the crowbar.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

...fight a lot. And. I don't always know what to say but you know, we're better today than we were a few months ago. It takes time.

JOAN

Oh, Christine... You're right.

Joan puts down the crowbar, slowly. Next to Dylan. Because that's how close she is. Christine's eyes widen, her breathing is fast and shallow.

CHRISTINE

(panicked)

Yes... Time... And - and I can help you, Joan.

Almost sensuously, Joan moves into Christine's arms...

JOAN

Oh, Christine... You're so right.

CHRISTINE

(relieved)

It's okay, Joan. It's okay now.

We can't see Joan's face.

JOAN

(limply)

Yes...

CHRISTINE

You can get through this. I know you can. Just like I did... Like I am.

JOAN

You really think I can?

Behind Christine's back, Joan looks down at the glass in Christine's hand.

CHRISTINE

I know you can. And I know what it's like. To walk around with everyone looking at you. Pitying you. And you start to be that person.

Joan moves a hand toward the glass shard.

CHRISTINE

That people pity. But you don't have to, Joan. Screw them. You can be happy -

Christine stiffens in Joan's arms.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Oh God -

Joan lets Christine slide to the floor. The mirror shard sticks out of her back. Her blouse darkens with blood.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

(in pain)

No -

Joan looks down at her with contempt.

JOAN

Spare me your psych-class bullshit.

She turns.

JOAN (CONT'D)

It's time, Ryan. We have to hurry to the hospital so the doctors can get right to work.

Joan stoops and picks up Dylan in her arms. Christine watches, not able to move -

Joan turns and heads for the attic door, Ryan in one hand, clutching Dylan with the other when - she stumbles and cries out. Joan looks down.

A sharp shard of mirror protrudes from her calf; Christine lies at her feet, breathing shallowly, the glass still stuck in her own back.

CHRISTINE

(with difficulty)

Give me my son, you bitch.

Joan tries to manoeuver Dylan so she can limp out the attic door but...

JOAN

Oh my God!

...another shard is planted in her leg. Christine's strength is waning fast...

Joan staggers and Dylan slips from her arms with a *WHUMP*.

CHRISTINE

(in pain)

Dylan!

Dylan moans, starts to come to slightly. Joan bends over and *WRENCHES* the glass out of her calf with a wet sound. She stands over Christine, holds the glass like a dagger.

JOAN

I will not lose my child, Christine. You of all people should understand that.

CHRISTINE

Joan -

She's dizzy - losing blood...Joan kneels down next to Christine, the glass at her throat.

JOAN

What, sweetie? Come on.

Christine can barely form words.

CHRISTINE

Ryan...

Joan presses the glass to Christine's throat. A thin line of blood forms.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

He's dead, Joan. He's dead.

Joan stares at Christine with venom. A long moment.

JOAN

Don't you ever say that! *Don't you ever say that!*

Ryan looks up at his mommy, imploringly, but his image flickers, weakens...

CHRISTINE (O.S.)

(suddenly)

You aren't listening to me, Joan. Your son is dead.

*CRACK!!* the crowbar SMASHES across Joan's face. Sends her staggering, blood flying from her mouth. Christine's on her feet and in no mood for any more bullshit.

JOAN (CONT'D)

You - !

And she stumbles...trips over Dylan and...disappears from sight. Just like that. The sickening, disjointed sound of a body crashing down the stairs.

Weakly, Christine drops to her knees, nears her son. Checks his pulse. He's gonna be bruised, but he seems okay.

Holding the door frame, Christine stands, reaches - yanks the glass out of her back. Stoops over Dylan - God, the pain - puts a limp arm over her shoulder and weakly shuffles toward the attic door.

Outside, the sound of sirens. Christine looks down the stairs. Joan is sprawled out at the bottom like a rag doll.

Christine picks her way down the stairs with Dylan. Pounding on the front door.

POLICE (V.O.)

Open up! Police!

Christine fights to keep her balance, perilously, as she tries to step over Joan. Just as she does - Joan grabs her wrist. Christine gasps and stumbles.

With an amazingly strong grasp, Joan pulls Christine down to her. And closer. Until her lips are in Christine's ear. The skin on Christine's neck rises and falls.

JOAN

(a whisper)

I'm looking for my son. Have you...seen him?

Christine lays Dylan down gently and sinks down beside Joan. She puts Joan's head in her lap. Blood comes out of Joan's nose, ears.

CHRISTINE

Oh, Joan.

Joan shifts and moans, slightly. Downstairs, more pounding. The sound of wood breaking.

JOAN

...Ryan...

CHRISTINE

Shhhhh. Ryan's with you now, Joan.

JOAN

Oh, hi, baby...

Joan smiles, ever so slightly. It's a beautiful smile.

And her last breath escapes her. An avalanche of silence.

POLICEMAN (O.S.)

Ma'am? Ma'am, we don't have a pulse here.

Christine's eyes go wide with shock. Because they can't be talking about Joan. She looks up. The cop has Dylan in his arms.

CHRISTINE

Dylan - ?!

As the cop rushes the boy's body down the stairs, Christine tries to follow, leaving a bloody smear on the wall.

INT. JOAN'S LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

CHRISTINE

Dylan?!

PARAMEDIC

Ma'am? Ma'am, I need you to sit down right over there.

And she passes out - into his arms.

INT. NEWS STUDIO - EVENING

FOOTAGE of the same News at Six lead-in as before, though with CYNTHIA MORGAN, another blond anchor, seated alone. This is a special bulletin. The words BREAKING NEWS appear.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

...and breaking news with our new News at Six anchor, Cynthia Morgan.

CYNTHIA MORGAN

A shocking turn of events took place just a few short hours ago.

EXT. JOAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Arclights on Joan's house, police cars everywhere. A body is taken away on a stretcher. An ambulance pulls away, lights flashing as the stretcher is loaded into another.

CYNTHIA MORGAN (V.O.)

(slowly fading to silence)

Award-winning anchor Joan Hartford died in a tragic fall in her home earlier this evening. And in a stunning turn of events, six-year-old Billy Winbrook, missing for nearly a month, has turned up alive and in good health. Also on this busy night, the remains of a man identified as Jack Jenkins were found at Gasworks Park earlier today. A familiar face in suburban Seattle, Jenkins was the apparent victim of a hit-and-run near the park...

Cynthia's voice fades out as we...

EXT. SEATTLE SKYLINE - NIGHT

...go up over Seattle, Puget Sound, the blinking Space Needle and then down, into the trees as leaves are falling, streets are filled with trick-or-treaters with flashlights and glow-sticks. It's Halloween on Christine's street.

Houses are decorated for the holiday. Laughter fills the air. On Joan's house, a FOR SALE sign. All the windows are dark.

INT. CHRISTINE'S HOUSE - EVENING

Christine, her arm in a sling, her back bandaged, dispenses treats to trick-or-treaters at the door.

CHRISTINE

Here you go. Okay, okay. And you too.

She reaches down and grabs a KITTEN just before it darts out.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Whoops, we don't want to lose this one, do we?

She shuts the door. Immediately the bell rings. Not again...

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

(to Journie)

I'm telling you, this is hard work,  
Journie. You gotta do this one okay?

JOURNIE

(tiny voice)

Okay mama.

Christine opens up. It's Josh, Rita and Peter, dressed as a vampire.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

(to Peter)

Now *that's* a scary costume.

JOSH

Dylan ready to go?

CHRISTINE

I think so. I haven't seen him for a few minutes.

RITA

All set for the face-paint booth tomorrow?

CHRISTINE

Absolutely.

RITA

And don't forget -

JOSH

She's got it, Rita.

He grins at Christine. Christine turns, shouts up the stairs.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

Dylan! Peter is here!

SUSAN (O.S.)

(from upstairs)

We're coming! Just a sec!

Elijah comes in from the kitchen, not in costume. Sierra dressed in all black, white makeup and kohl eyes, slouches out behind him.

ELIJAH

Okay, I'm going to Amy's party.

CHRISTINE

Who's Amy?

SIERRA

Your new cat took a bite out of my beret.  
Just for your information.

ELIJAH

(to Sierra)

What are you supposed to be, a vampire?

SIERRA

An existentialist, idiot.

Suddenly - a horrible groan from upstairs. Their eyes shift upwards. Dylan's in costume: the MUMMY.

He lumbers monstrosly down the stairs, wrapped in stained rags, groaning. And right behind him, AUNT SUSAN (30), blond, athletic.

SUSAN

You're coming unwound here, Dyl.

DYLAN

(mummy-talk)

Uh-huh...

Elijah rolls his eyes. But he smiles. Sierra cracks up. Journie claps. Christine grins.

CHRISTINE

(to Josh and Rita)

Crazy family, huh?

Elijah laughs.

ELIJAH

Speak for yourself, mom. Bye, Aunt Susan.

Susan puts her arm around his neck. Tickles him a little.

SUSAN

Awww...ticklish?

JOSH

Okay, Dyl, ready to go?

Dylan snaps out of mummy-moves.

DYLAN

You going too, mom?

CHRISTINE

Nah. You're in good hands.

He looks at her uncertainly. Maybe a little scared.

CHRISTINE (CONT'D)

I'll be here when you get back, Dylan.

He smiles, reassured. Takes Rita's hand.

CHRISTINE

Promise.

FADE OUT.