

LITTLE GIRL LOST

written by
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Based on the best-selling book,
Little Girl Lost from the
Detective Robyn Carter Crime Thriller Series

by Carol Wyr

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TEASER

FADE IN

INT. PAUL MATTHEW'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

ALICE (9) sits in the living. On the television, Wile E. Coyote tries to catch the Road Runner.

She clutches a stuffed rabbit named MR. BIG EARS.

Her MOTHER bursts into the room. Dressed in a long gown. Beautiful.

MOTHER

See you in the morning sweetie.
Sleep well.

She bends over to kiss Alice on the cheek. Brushes away a lock of Alice's hair.

She strokes Alice's forehead.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Night night sweetheart.

She rises to leave the room.

ALICE

Do you have to go out?

MOTHER

Of course I do. Paul is up for best actor. You know how important tonight is. Not just for him. But for all of us.

Her Mother sighs.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

I know things have felt different since we moved here but you'll get used to it. You'll have to get used to it.

Alice replies with a mournful sigh.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

It's only been three weeks. I know it feels... odd. But that's okay.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Please just stop being difficult.
And make an effort.

ALICE

But --

MOTHER

-- This is going to be our new
home. Like it or not.

She leans in.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I know Natasha looks a little
strange, but she really likes you.
She's not one to show her emotions.
Paul told me she likes you a lot.
She's going to be your new big
sister when Paul and I get married.

Tears form in Alice's eyes.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

I know this is hard for you. But it
has been dreadful for me too. I
miss your father. I miss him so
much, but I can't carry on living
alone. Trying to make ends meet.
Paul is kind. He's a good man. And
he wants to look after us both.
He's very wealthy. He has a
beautiful house by the lake. He
even has ponies. What little girl
wouldn't want to live in a big
house with ponies.

Her Mother stands. Collects her things.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now, you'll be a good girl for
Natasha, won't you? She's in the
front room watching a film if you
need her.

ALICE

Lucas?

MOTHER

Lucas is in the village staying the
night with his friend, Dan. Did you
want him to be here too?

Alice shakes her head "no".

ALICE
Don't go yet Mommy.

Just before she exits the kitchen door, her Mother turns.

MOTHER
Don't be silly. You're a big girl now. You'll have to get accustomed to me leaving you from time to time. We'll be here when you wake up. Now, no more of this nonsense. Go straight up to bed when you've finished watching your cartoon and don't play up for Natasha. Show her what a good girl you can be.

Her Mother smiles, then walks out the door.

On the other side of the room, PAUL MATTHEWS (40) speaks to his daughter NATASHA (14) --

PAUL
Give me a call if you need anything, okay.

NATASHA
Yeah okay.

Paul smiles at his daughter, then walks out the door behind Alice's mom.

LATER

The cartoon ends. Alice turns off the television.

INT. ALICE'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Alice enters her bedroom. Mr. Big Ears pressed against her chest.

She crawls into bed.

LATER

Alice is fast asleep.

A noise from outside of her room wakes her.

She sits up. Alert. Worried. She starts to tremble.

Her door creaks open. In steps --

LUCAS (15). Acne scars. Lanky.

He quietly closes the door behind him.

LUCAS

Hello little sister. It's time to
play our secret game.

Alice tries to hide under the covers.

Lucas makes his way to the edge of the bed. Pulls the sheet
back.

He pulls her nightdress above her hips.

Tears well up in her eyes as she tries to wriggle free.

He slaps her on the butt.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Shush! No one can hear you.

He tugs at her legs. He flips her around so that she's
looking up at him.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

That's better. Time to play nicely.

He strokes her face.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

You're so pretty. You're perfect.
I'll like having such a pretty
sister.

He presses himself against her.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

You know what you have to do, don't
you? If you don't, I'll tear off
your rabbit's head and pull out all
his stuffing. I'll make you watch
while I do it.

He smiles.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

You wouldn't want to be without
rabbit, would you?

He drops his hand to the waistband on his tracksuit trousers.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Ready little sister?

He lowers his pants and underwear in one movement. He's totally exposed.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Go on. Touch it.

He grabs her wrist and forces her hand towards it.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

Hold it.

He opens her hand and grabs it.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

That's it. Rub it like I told you last time.

She does as instructed.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

No. That's not right.

He grabs her by the waist. Rolls over onto his back. Pulls her onto his lap. Holds her there.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

It won't hurt. It'll be our special bond. Our brother and sister secret.

He slides his finger inside her.

She squirms and tries to wriggle away.

Lucas starts to moan.

BIG EARS

Ready!

Alice reaches over to the night stand. Grabs a sharpened red pencil.

She jabs the pencil into Lucas' eye.

He screams.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

I/E. ROBYN'S CAR - RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

ROBYN CARTER sits in the driver's seat. Waiting. In the passenger seat lays her video camera.

There's an empty fruit and nut wrapper next to the camera.

TERENCE SMITH (50's) exits a house. He whistles as he walks to the driver's side door of his Ford Mondeo.

Just as he attempts to unlock the car with his keys, he drops them. He bends over to pick them up --

-- Robyn films the entire thing.

ROBYN

Gotcha.

She puts the camera aside. Watches as Terence uses his keys to unlock the door and step inside.

The Ford Mondeo pulls off. She puts her car into drive and follows it.

EXT. CITY ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Robyn drives her Polo some distance behind the Ford Mondeo.

I/E. ROBYN'S CAR - CITY STREET

The dashboard of her car lights up. She has an incoming call.

She answers it.

ROBYN

(into phone)

Hey Ross.

ROSS (V.O.)

Looks like you win again. I'm going back to the office and will let you deal with this.

ROBYN

(into phone)

No problem. I'll catch up with you later.

ROSS (V.O.)

No can do. I'm going to check out Robert Brannigan tonight.

(MORE)

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

His wife phoned the office earlier and said he was going out with friends, but she thinks he's going to see the new mistress. Said something about telltale signs of new jeans and aftershave. It's happened before. She's highly suspicious.

ROBYN

(into phone)

Good luck with that. Not my favorite job.

ROSS (V.O.)

A job's a job. You become hardened to this sort of thing. I'd be very surprised if he's having an affair. He's got to be one of the ugliest guys on the planet. Who'd want to shag him?

ROBYN

(into phone)

Women are attracted to power. Maybe that's the reason. Think of all those ugly pop stars and politicians with stunning girlfriends. He's a local councillor. Bet someone got all heated up at the prospect of him making decisions about speed bumps and rubbish recycling.

ROSS (V.O.)

That'll be it. Or some old dear wants him to get her a disabled badge so she can park closer to the shops.

He laughs.

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

Okay, I'll catch you tomorrow. Hope you have a barrel of laughs at the pub.

He disconnects.

INT. MUCKY DUCK PUB - LATER

A true pub. People come here to yell at their favorite football club and drink pints.

Robyn sits at the end of the bar.

Terence is behind the bar. He chats up a WOMAN IN HER TWENTIES.

Finally, Terence approaches Robyn.

TERENCE

What can I get you love?

ROBYN

Orange juice.

Terence pours the drink. The Young Woman leaves the bar.

He brings the orange juice back to Robyn. Sets it in front of her.

TERENCE

Two pounds fifty, love.

Robyn puts the money on the bar. He collects them.

TWO CUSTOMERS sit at the opposite side of the bar.

CUSTOMER

All right, Smithy. You still on for the match on Saturday?

TERENCE

Yeah, reckon. It's gonna be a right ol' game. Those boys from Sandtown are reckless bastards. Reckon they'll try and mince us good n' proper. More likely want to give us a good kicking than play friendly footie. I've been in training though.

He grins. Flexes his biceps.

TERENCE (CONT'D)

Lifted thirty kilos today. I'll be ready to punch the livin' daylights out that clever twat of a midfielder. I'll smack him on the nose if he tries anything this week.

TERENCE (CONT'D)

He sliced through Gazza deliberately last time and it's about time we evened with him.

Robyn scribbles something into her notebook. Closes it. Then leaves the bar.

I/E. ROBYN'S CAR - PUB PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Robyn sits behind the wheel. The car hasn't been started yet.

She takes out a recording device and presses play.

Terence can be heard bragging about working out and playing in the football match.

Robyn smiles.

She dials a number.

Ross answers on the other end.

ROBYN

I got him. He was in the pub
bragging about his workout routine
and how he's going to dominate in
his next footie match.

ROSS

(through dashboard phone)
I think that's all we'll need to
nail him for insurance fraud.

INT. GYM - LATER

PATRONS OF ALL SIZES AND GENDERS work out.

Robyn jogs on a treadmill at a leisurely pace. Barely breaks a sweat.

She hits a few buttons and her pace quickens. She starts to sweat.

INT. THORNE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Beautiful middle-class home. Modern but not gaudy.

ABIGAIL THORNE (30's) wipes the face of her infant daughter IZZY.

ABIGAIL

That's better you little monkey.

She tickles Izzy's toes. Izzy giggles.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

No more breakfast or snacks for you, young lady. Not until everyone has seen how pretty you look in your new dress.

JACKSON THORNE(30's) enters the room. Wraps his arms around Abigail. Kisses her neck.

JACKSON

How's our little angel today?

ABIGAIL

She's great. She doesn't seem to be bothered any more by the second tooth and she ate all her breakfast.

Abigail goes to the sink. Izzy giggles at the sight of her father. She raises her arms.

Jackson picks her up.

JACKSON

Hello little Splodge. Do you want to be an aeroplane?

He spins her around while making airplane noises.

ABIGAIL

Please don't spin her around too much. She just ate.

JACKSON

She'll be fine. Takes after the old man. Constitution of an ox.

He continues to "fly" her around.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

Okay. That's enough Splodge. Don't want puree surprise in my face.

He settles her down in her playpen. He turns to Abigail.

JACKSON (CONT'D)

How's my big angel, then?

He starts to make himself a cup of coffee.

ABIGAIL

Fine.

JACKSON

You sure? You've been a bit quiet the last few weeks. I know I've been getting in at "all" odd hours, and I expect that doesn't help.

ABIGAIL

It's not that. I've been a bit under the weather. Izzy has been grumbling at nights thanks to teething and I've not been getting enough sleep. And when she is awake, she's full on. Never seems to need a nap. Unlike her mom.

She smiles.

ABIGAIL (CONT'D)

I'm just lacking energy is all.

JACKSON

Well, I have the day off. Fancy taking Izzy to see the animals at the petting zoo?

ABIGAIL

I'm meeting the girls for coffee this morning. I haven't seen them for ages. What with Izzy and all. I didn't expect you to get a day off.

Jackson can't hide his disappointment. He takes a sip of his coffee.

JACKSON

You could cancel. Tell them I'm home.

He gives her his sexiest smile.

ABIGAIL

Sorry. It's too last minute to cancel. Zoe has used a day off especially. It's a lot harder for her now that she works in London.

JACKSON

Well --

Izzy burps and regurgitates her breakfast.

Abigail sighs and goes to the playpen.

ABIGAIL

Maybe she hasn't got her daddy's
constitution.

Abigail lifts Izzy and heads past Jackson. He grabs her arm.

JACKSON

Sorry babe.

ABIGAIL

It's okay.

JACKSON

Is it?

ABIGAIL

Of course, it is. Now I'd better
get this little lady cleaned up.

JACKSON

I'll clean her up. It was my fault.

ABIGAIL

It's fine. I'll sort her out.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Izzy, now clean, plays on the carpet.

Abigail searches through the closet. She pulls out an Armani
T-shirt. Tight jeans.

She goes into the mirror. Applies mascara. Bronzer. Deep red
lipstick.

She pulls out her phone. Reads a text:

You are not the only one keeping secrets. Ask Jackson what
his are?

She deletes the text. Stuffs the phone into her pocket. Turns
to Izzy.

ABIGAIL

Come on little Miss Mischief. Let's
go show daddy how pretty we both
are.

EXT. PARK - MORNING

Paul Matthews (60's) jogs through the park. He's in shape and
he runs at a decent pace.

It's eerily silent as he passes through the sycamore trees.

It's autumn and the leaves are turning.

From the corner of his eye, something in the woods catches his eye. He loses his concentration and falls to the ground.

He lays on the ground. Winded. He sits up right. His hands are bleeding. He touches his face. It's already swollen.

Blood trickles down his cheek.

Pain shoots through his leg. He checks his ankle. It's already swollen. Black and Blue.

He grimaces in pain.

He scans the area.

He's alone.

PAUL

Hello? Is there anyone there? Could you give me a hand? I've had a fall.

No reply.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Please.

He looks down at his shoes. Something else catches his eye.

There's a thick plastic rope attached to the tree. It's the size of a washing line.

A FIGURE appears from behind a tree.

It catches Paul's attention.

PAUL (CONT'D)

We need to talk. This is getting out of hand. We can sort it out.

The figure closes in on him.

FIGURE

Too late. You had your chance.

The Figure dives at him.

Paul tries to scream, but he is quickly silenced.

INT. DETECTIVE AGENCY - ROBYN'S OFFICE - DAY

Robyn types into her computer.

ROSS (50's) enters her office with a loud cough.

ROSS

I hate these bloody e-cigarette things. I look such a twit smoking them. They just aren't really that cool.

ROBYN

Unlike other cigarettes that make you look really cool, especially when you hack your lungs up. And don't get me started on how they lead to potential life-threatening illnesses. Get over it. You know we only make you smoke those things because we care about you and you refuse to go cold turkey. You'll feel much healthier once you get some of that tar out of your system.

ROSS

I should know better than to expect any sympathy from you. You're one of those health nuts. Eating muesli for breakfast.

He laughs.

ROSS (CONT'D)

You sorted the Terence Smith case?

ROBYN

Just a matter of time. Once he admitted to playing football, I knew I didn't need much more. Everything is ready to be sent to the insurance company. Just need some photographs of him playing football this weekend and it's all set to go. How did things go last night?

Ross scratched an itch on his ear.

ROSS

A giant waste. I tailed Robert to the pub.

(MORE)

ROSS (CONT'D)

Figured he was meeting his woman there, but it turned out he was involved in a card game with his mates and they had a lock-in. Sat in the car in case he went on to his mistress afterwards, but he didn't. He rolled out of the pub and went home like a good boy. I didn't get home till after two o'clock. Woke up Jeanette. You can imagine how that went down. She's got an important meeting this morning.

ROBYN

I don't suppose Jeanette was that annoyed. It's not in her nature to get cross with you over work. More likely annoyed you had been scoffing large bags of crisps while on watch.

She smiles.

Ross laughs. He knows he's guilty.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

You really are going to have to get on board with these lifestyle changes or you won't see sixty.

Ross groans.

ROSS

I'll go to the football match on Saturday. Take some photographs. There's a new case if you want to take it. I know you're headed back to Staffordshire, but it looks like I'm stuck with Robert Brannigan for some time and can't get started on this new one. Trailing this guy is a dull job, especially if he isn't having an affair. I'll have to follow him around all the pubs in the area. Still, I suppose it's more interesting than being an accountant. Or window cleaner.

ROBYN

I get the idea. So what's this case. Will I have time to see it through before I start work again for the police.

He drops a piece of paper onto her desk.

ROSS

Maybe. It's a missing husband. Lucas Matthews. Aged thirty. Wife says he's been gone almost two weeks. She's not keen to contact the police. Seems curious. Told her you were a DI who is only doing this temporarily. After a bit she said she'd talk to you first. She doesn't want to officially report him missing until after she's spoken to you.

ROBYN

Interesting.

ROSS

Apparently, he goes away but this time it's different. He's not been in contact. Could be something fresh for you to sink your teeth into. A little better than chasing around insurance scammers. If you could get started on it while I handle our buddy Bob, then I'll just take it over when you leave. You got a few days. She sounded desperate.

ROBYN

You knew I was going to take this didn't you?

Ross grins.

ROSS

I thought it would pique your interest.

Ross clears his throat. Robyn leans back in her chair.

ROSS (CONT'D)

On another matter, Jeanette is a little concerned about you. We both are.

ROBYN

No reason for you to be worried.

ROSS

She thinks you're losing weight again. Not eating properly.

(MORE)

ROSS (CONT'D)

She's blaming me for putting you on those long hours. Sure you're ready to return to the force?

Robyn studies her fingernails.

ROBYN

I'm ready. I've really enjoyed working here with you, but I'm ready to get back. No offense. Just been training harder than usual. Helps to numb the pain.

ROSS

That's what I told her. She still wants you to come over for dinner.

Robyn smiles.

ROSS (CONT'D)

It'd make her happy.

ROBYN

I'd love to.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. MARY AND LUCAS' HOUSE - DAY

MARY MATTHEWS (50's) cleans up the living room. Blonde. Homely.

Her dog ARCHIE lays on the floor. Watches her.

There's a knock at the door.

She answers it. On the other side is --

-- Robyn.

ROBYN

I've come about your missing husband.

Robyn hands her a business card.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

I understand you spoke to my partner Ross.

MARY

That's right. He's missing.

She leads her into the house. Robyn closes the door behind her as she enters.

Mary rummages through stacks of papers until she finds a photograph. She hands it to Robyn.

MARY (CONT'D)

That's him. You probably think I should contact the police, and I wanted to. But... but it's delicate. Your partner told me you are a policewoman. You'll understand my predicament when I explain it to you.

She sighs.

MARY (CONT'D)

I don't really know where to begin. Would you like a cup of tea officer?

ROBYN

Thanks. That would be lovely. I'm here in my capacity as a private investigator today. I don't return to the force until next week. Just call me Robyn.

Mary smiles.

Archie starts to bark.

Mary walks into the kitchen.

Robyn takes a seat on the couch.

MARY

I hope you don't mind Archie.

Archie bounds into the room. Heads straight for Robyn.

Robyn greets it with a pat on the head.

Mary enters the room with a pot of tea.

ROBYN

How long have you been married?

Mary pours tea for both of them. When she's done, she passes a cup of tea to Robyn.

Mary sits back and gets comfortable. Takes a sip of her own tea.

MARY

You may have noticed I'm a little older than my husband.

She snickers.

MARY (CONT'D)

Actually, I'm fifty. Twenty years older than him and, for the record, he's my second husband. In a fortnight, we'll have been married two years.

She takes a deep breath.

Robyn takes a sip of her tea.

ROBYN

This is delicious. Thank you.

Mary smiles. Takes a sip of her tea. Adds a lump of sugar.

MARY

I met Lucas at a school event. My nephew was playing in the orchestra. Lucas was his music teacher. After the event, we started to chat.

She smiles at the memory.

MARY (CONT'D)

We discovered we both had a love for classical music. He lent me a CD of John Williams playing a piece I truly love. Rodrigo's Concierto de Aranjuez. One thing led to another. Before I knew it, we were going to concerts together. I asked him to teach me how to play classical guitar.

She laughs.

MARY (CONT'D)

I had always wanted to learn. Lucas is an accomplished guitar player. He gave me private lessons. It was all very intimate. You sit so close to each other. You feel the other person's body heat. Their hands.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

Guiding yours on this beautiful instrument.

She takes another sip of her tea. Sighs.

MARY (CONT'D)

Lucas isn't like other men. He's quiet. He's not a man's man. He doesn't hang out at pubs. He doesn't watch football.

She laughs again.

MARY (CONT'D)

He doesn't like sports at all. He's much more into arts and music. He hung around after the lessons. We talk all night. Soon he was staying over for the odd night. He was charming. Good company. I fell for him. I didn't hold anything back. The lessons were coming to an end and I didn't want to be without him. I asked him to marry me.

She laughs again. Sips her tea.

MARY (CONT'D)

My friends thought he was marrying me for my money. They thought he'd marry me and then race off into the sunset with my savings. I knew differently. Lucas is not motivated by money. He doesn't need a rich woman. What he needs is someone that can understand him.

ROBYN

Understand him? What do you mean?

MARY

He's what you may consider... damaged goods. I suppose he was looking for a maternal figure as opposed to a lover and wife. He lost his mother when he was very young. Breast cancer.

She takes another sip of her tea.

MARY (CONT'D)

He was only eleven when she passed. He told me he was a mommy's boy.

Robyn sips her tea.

MARY (CONT'D)

That goes some way to explaining why he didn't get on so well with his father. After her death, his father became even more distant. I don't know if he had trouble grieving for his wife or being a single father. But he sent Lucas away to boarding school.

ROBYN

Was there a particular incident that lead to this? Or --

MARY

-- No. Just sent him away. I don't know too much about this time. Lucas refuses to talk about it. He has a lot of sorrow buried deep inside and I don't push him. He tells me things when he wants to.

She looks at the photograph of them. Smiles.

MARY (CONT'D)

I saw the ache in his eyes when he talked about losing his mother. He became that little boy again. Still needing and craving that love. I think that's why I fell for him. I wanted to care for him. Mend him. Help him. And in a way I filled the role that his mother had left.

Robyn nods.

Mary stands, walks across the room, and grabs another photograph.

She hands it to Robyn.

The picture is of them dressed for a night out.

MARY (CONT'D)

I've put on weight since that photo. It happens when you're complacent. Besides, I like baking. And what can you do when there's a batch of cherry scones fresh out of the oven. I can't resist. Lucas hasn't changed. He's always been lean.

She studies the picture again.

MARY (CONT'D)

He sometimes takes trips away during school holidays. He has friends from the school where he works who now live in Thailand and well, to be honest, it's a destination that doesn't appeal to me. I have a fear of flying and I'd never manage on a long-haul flight even if you knock me out for hours. So he goes on his own.

She lifts her cup. Balances it on her knee.

MARY (CONT'D)

He arranged to go away last Monday. The twenty fifth of July. I had no reason to suspect he was doing anything different to normal. He packed his case, told me he loved me and set off to the airport in his car. I didn't think anything of it.

MARY (CONT'D)

I knew he was ready for a holiday. Although he's a master at masking his emotions, he's seemed low the last few weeks but refused to discuss what's been bothering him. I thought going to Thailand would help give him time to reflect and heal.

ROBYN

So, you were used to him taking trips to Thailand?

MARY

Very much so. But this time, he didn't phone on arrival. And when I rang him the mobile went to voice mail. He's lost his signal over there before, so I wasn't too anxious, but I had one of those niggling doubts. I don't have the phone number of the couple he was staying with.

ROBYN

Do you have their name?

MARY

The Devlins. They're parents of one of the boys he used to teach at Blinkley Manor. I really should have asked for the number, but I always talk to him on his mobile or Skype. I was going to ask Nick Pearson-Firth. But --

ROBYN

-- Who is that?

MARY

He's the head of Lucas' department at the school.

ROBYN

But you didn't ask him?

Mary sighs. Sets her tea on the table.

MARY

I was cleaning in Lucas' study. I was turfing out the drawers of his desk and stumbled across his passport in the bottom drawer of his desk. He couldn't possibly have flown to Thailand without it.

She gnaws at the bottom of her lip.

MARY (CONT'D)

Discovering that passport got me fired up. I'm a patient woman. I don't mind that he keeps secrets about his past from me, but I will not be lied to. I hate being lied to.

Tries to calm her nerves.

MARY (CONT'D)

I was furious. Still am. I had no idea what he was up to and I couldn't work out why he hadn't spoken to me about it, or why he hadn't phoned me. I tried his mobile again, and again it went to voice mail. I left another message. I left several more, and by night-time I was furious with him. Then I tried to rationalise what had happened. I guess that's the next step.

She can't hide her embarrassment.

MARY (CONT'D)

I thought maybe he had upped and left me for someone else. But that made no sense. We've not had any arguments or disagreements. There's been no indications that he's fed up with me. If you know what I mean.

She blushes.

Robyn smiles back.

MARY (CONT'D)

There would have been some signs if he had intended to leave me. Then I wondered if he had money troubles. You know?

MARY (CONT'D)

Maybe he hadn't wanted to discuss them with me. I even had the crazy idea he might have got into trouble with online gambling. I don't know. My mind was racing. Still is. I had read about a husband who was addicted to poker, so I searched his computer for anything to give me a hint as to where he was or why he had gone. That's when I knew he might be in trouble.

She licks her lips. Sighs. Looks away.

ROBYN

There was something on his computer, wasn't there?

MARY

His browsing history. There was also a file titled Sugar and Spice. I opened it. It took me a few minutes. I looked at it for, gosh. It must have been five minutes.

She cast her eyes downward.

MARY (CONT'D)

I wish I had left it closed. The file was full of images of children. Various poses. All of them half dressed.

(MORE)

MARY (CONT'D)

It appears my husband has another secret. He has a thing for young girls. And I mean very young girls.

FLASHBACK

INT. ALICE'S GRANDPARENTS HOUSE - NIGHT

Alice sits at the top of the stairs. She clutches Mr. Big Ears.

She listens to the argument from the kitchen.

GRANDMA (O.S.)

I know you've been through a lot. We all have. Losing Josh was dreadful. It affected us all. You hardly had a chance to grieve. Then there was the unfortunate episode with Paul and his son.

MOTHER (O.S.)

You don't know what it's been like for me. She ruined everything for me.

GRANDMA (O.S.)

She's a child. She was probably frightened or half asleep or who knows what. But you can't keep reading more into it. It was an unfortunate accident. Leave it at that.

MOTHER (O.S.)

It ruined my relationship with Paul. He was going to look after me and help me live again. You can't understand that. I needed him. I had a second chance at happiness and it was snatched away before it even began. You can only think about losing Josh. You have no idea what it was like for me trying to cope all alone without him. You have each other. I had no one. Then I found Paul, and then suddenly, I had no one again.

Mr. Big Ears turns to Alice.

BIG EARS

It'll be okay.

GRANDPA (O.S.)

Of course we can understand. That's why we're only too happy to help out and have her over whenever you want. You need to move on and start your life again. Except, and I say this with great affection, we think you need some assistance. We want to help you. You can't keep struggling as you are. Alice's shoes are way too tight. She needs new ones. And when was the last time she had a haircut?

MOTHER (O.S.)

How dare you! How dare you look down your nose at me. Don't you think I haven't noticed the little looks that pass between the two of you when I drop her off? You think I'm a rubbish mother.

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

You've always thought that. You never made me feel welcome here. It was always "Josh this" and "Josh that" and you never really wanted to know about me. It was like I was just someone you had to put up with. I was never good enough for your precious son. Admit it.

GRANDPA (O.S.)

Not at all. We just don't want to see you struggle. Alice is our granddaughter. And you don't have any other family. We can loan you the money if you'd rather.

MOTHER (O.S.)

I may not have any other family, and thanks for bringing that up. But I can manage perfectly well, thank you very much. I might not have a fancy job, but pulling pints brings in money. She doesn't go without. Okay, so she doesn't wear the latest fashion or have a shed load of toys, but she's fine. She gets fed and looked after.

GRANDMA (O.S.)

That's not what we mean. We know how difficult it's been for you. The struggles after the death of your parents and then Josh. You've had a lot to cope with. We understand that. We're merely concerned that Alice is becoming increasingly withdrawn. She never talks about her friends. She's lost weight and she has those large dark bags under her eyes all the time.

GRANDPA (O.S.)

She's always cuddling that rabbit Josh gave her. Maybe if you could afford to move closer to us. It would help. Give her some, I don't know. Stability.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Stability?

GRANDMA (O.S.)

We're concerned damn it. You shouldn't leave Alice alone at night. She's far too young. What if there's a fire or something. It's illegal. And it's not right. She's only ten. We could report you. We could tell the authorities.

Alice's Mother appears. She grabs Alice by the hand and drags her away.

As they head out the front door.

GRANDPA (O.S.)

Please! There's no need for this. Don't go.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. BLINKLEY MANOR PREP SCHOOL - DAY

Robyn gets out of her car and approaches the entrance to the school.

INT. BLINKLEY MANOR PREP SCHOOL - MOMENTS LATER

Robyn makes her way down the empty hallway.

Trophy cabinets line the walls. Full of trophies.

She arrives to at the front door to the Music Department. She steps in.

INT. MUSIC DEPARTMENT

As she enters she is greeted by the sight of --

-- NICK PEARSON FIRTH (early forties). He extends a manicured hand.

Un bel di vedremo from Puccini's Madame Butterfly plays in the background.

They shake hands.

NICK

Miss Carter. I'm Nick Pearson -
Firth. But please. Call me Nick.

Robyn enters, and Nick closes the door behind her.

NICK (CONT'D)

So how can I help you?

ROBYN

Is that a CD?

NICK

Ah. Yes. That's my daughter,
Sophia. She's practising with her
mother. My wife is a singer too and
an accomplished pianist. You may
have heard of her. Katarina
Pearson.

ROBYN

I have her album. Greatest Arias. I
should have put two and two
together. Of course, Pearson -
Firth.

NICK

Katarina always wanted to keep her
maiden and professional name. And
firth on its own sounded boring. We
decided to put them together when
we got married.

ROBYN

Do you sing too?

NICK

I'm more of a brass man. I play trumpet and tuba but can also play piano and violin. I'm not a great singer. Sometimes I accompany my wife of Sophia. You like classical music.

ROBYN

Some. I like opera. Madame Butterfly is one of my favorites.

NICK

One of the most enduring tales of unrequited love. So, what can I tell you about Lucas?

ROBYN

How well do you know him?

NICK

Well enough. As well as one know's one's colleagues. He's worked here for nine years. All the time I've been head of the department. He's a peripatetic tutor rather than full time. He comes in four times a week and teaches at homes as well as at school. He doesn't hang about after lessons in the common room with any of the staff. He's an excellent musician. He always gets involved in school musical performances. He's also in charge of the school musical performances. He's also in charge of the school orchestra.

ROBYN

Is he popular? Amongst the students I mean.

NICK

Very much so. He has a successful rate. And there's not much else I can add other than he sent me his resignation last week and I'm now looking for a replacement for him.

ROBYN

He gave you his resignation?

NICK

Yeah. I've got my work cut out trying to find a replacement substitute teacher with similar qualification at such short notice. He really dropped me in it.

ROBYN

I'm confused. So, he resigned?

NICK

I was as surprised as you. I thought he'd stay here for life. He's never given me reason to think he'd leave. He gets on with all the kids too. I don't know if his leaving is anything to do with his dad passing away. I have a feeling Lucas might have come into some serious money. His father was an actor, Paul Matthews. In his heyday Paul was as popular and talented as Leonardo DiCaprio or Tom Cruise and was headed for the big time.

ROBYN

So, what happened to him? I mean, his career?

NICK

I'm not sure. There were a lot of rumors circulating at the time in the press, but he just gave it all up and dropped out of the scene. He became a recluse. Hid in his massive house in Staffordshire. I believe he lived off investments he'd made when he was doing well with his acting.

NICK (CONT'D)

He was heavily into fitness and ran around the reservoir near his home.

ROBYN

And you said he recently died?

NICK

Heart attack. While he was running. There was a piece in the paper about it. Otherwise I wouldn't have known. I suppose Lucas no longer needs to work. His resignation was very brief.

ROBYN

It's my understanding that you went with Lucas to Thailand on one of his trips.

Nick shift in his chair. Uncomfortable with the question.

NICK

That was a while ago. We were invited by the parents of one of the lads in his final year.

ROBYN

Is that normal? For parents to invite you on holiday.

NICK

Miss Carter. This is a private school. The pupils live here during term time and we are in loco parentis. We think of ourselves as one gigantic family. It is not unusual for us to develop healthy relationships our pupils and their parents. Especially when we have taught them over several years. Max Devlin was one such pupil. He was head boy and a fine music scholar. We had watched him grow from an immature boy into a confident young man and attain a music scholarship to a prestigious senior school.

ROBYN

And you said his name was Max Devlin?

NICK

That's correct. Although his parents lived in Thailand, they attended as many end-of-term performances as possible and came to all the major school calendar events. As a result, we got to know them quite well. When Max left the school, Jo and Stuart Devlin invited both Lucas and me to their home in Thailand on a holiday as a thank you. Katarina was too busy to come and Mary, Lucas' wife, apparently hates flying so it was just us chaps. I haven't been since though. Too humid and noisy for me.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

I believe Lucas has been a few times as he worked with Max far more than I did. He was Max's personal tutor.

ROBYN

Have you heard from Lucas this holiday?

NICK

No. But I wouldn't expect to. The staff here usually can't wait to get away from this place and we don't tend to stay in touch until the new term. We see enough of each other during term.

ROBYN

So, no texts or emails?

He shakes his head "no".

ROBYN (CONT'D)

Is there any way I can get in contact with Jo and Stuart Devlin?

NICK

I can't give out that confidential information. I'd need some identification.

Robyn pulls out her private investigators license. She passes it to him.

ROBYN

This isn't an official inquiry yet. But it soon will be. If you could get those details to me as soon as possible it would help enormously.

NICK

I'll get the school secretary to contact you. The information will be on the school database.

Robyn jots down her phone number.

ROBYN

This is my personal number, but you'll also be able to get me at Staffordshire Police headquarters next week.

She passes the paper with the number on it to Nick. He takes it and gives it a once over.

NICK

Can I ask why you are asking about him? Is it to do with Thailand?

ROBYN

Do you think it's to do with Thailand?

She sits back in her seat.

Nick shifts in his chair. Avoids her gaze.

NICK

Well, I don't think he's up to anything over there, if that's what you're suggesting.

ROBYN

I'm not suggesting anything. I'm merely trying to build up a picture of a man who has suddenly given up a job he seemed to like. I'm looking for any leads that might help me work out why and where he's gone.

NICK

So, he has gone.

He leans in. As if he's about to share a secret.

NICK (CONT'D)

Look. I've never been close with the man. I was simply his head of department. I didn't even like him that much. He was far too reserved for my liking and never integrated with the rest of us. That time we went to Thailand, it was embarrassing. I don't like to discuss it.

ROBYN

Tell me what happened.

Nick leans back in his chair. Uneasy.

NICK

Like I said. I don't like discussing it.

ROBYN

If it helps me understand who this man is, then I need you to tell me.

Nick remains silent.

ROBYN (CONT'D)

His wife is confused. She's worried sick about him. He just left her. And now I see that he's left his job also. If you have any information. Please. Share it with me.

NICK

We went out for a meal with the Devlins on the first night. Lucas claimed he was a bit jet lagged. Said he had a headache. He left early. I stayed on and went back to their house for a nightcap, so I didn't return to the hotel until one o'clock in the morning. I was waiting for the lift when a couple came through the hotel doors, arms wrapped around each other. Clearly no eyes for anyone else. She was stunning. Long sleek dark hair with orange streaks. It struck me she was quite tall for a Thai girl and dressed in a short skirt, thigh-length boots and a glittery feather boa. She also seemed very young to me.

NICK (CONT'D)

When I looked more closely I realized she was a katoey. A ladyboy. Her voice was not quite the right pitch, and she had an Adam's apple. That didn't surprise me as much as the man necking her.

ROBYN

Lucas.

He nods his head "affirmative".

ROBYN (CONT'D)

Did he see you?

NICK

Luckily, I ducked into the lift and hit the button before he made it across the foyer and spotted me. I didn't say anything to him about it, but the next day, instead of going on a tour around Bangkok with the Devlins he cried off saying he felt sick. And I have a feeling he spent the day with the same ladyboy. It's not that I'm a prude or anything. I know these girls are exciting and different. But it was the look on his face. I can't describe it. It wasn't like the Lucas I knew at all. It was lust and cruelty mixed together. Primeval and it changed my opinion of him.

ROBYN

Did you not say anything to him about it. Ever?

NICK

It was none of my business. Exotic countries can encourage odd behavior. People feel less inhibited when they are away. Like holidaymakers who start drinking alcohol at eleven in the morning in Spain or young people who behave wildly in places like Ayia Napa or Ibiza. I figured it was one of those "What happens in Thailand, stays in Thailand" moments.

NICK

Lucas has never given me reason to doubt his integrity at this school, so why question what he does when he is not here?

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

PATRONS sip coffee.

Abigail enters with Izzy. She sees her friends and heads to their table.

Seated at the table are ZOE and CLAIRE. A child's high chair is next to Claire.

As Abigail arrives at the table --

ZOE

Hasn't she grown. I can't believe it's been two months since we saw you last. Glad you've finally made it out. Did you get lost under an enormous pile of nappies?

She laughs at her own joke.

ZOE (CONT'D)

It's great to see you. I know I've been a terrible friend, but the new job has been so demanding, and travelling up and down to London every day really takes it out of me after all those classes.

ABIGAIL

It's okay. I kind of lost track of time. Izzy's been grumpy with her teeth coming through. And before that she had a cold, so I was frightened to take her out in case it got worse. And I'm so tired I can hardly do anything some days. I don't know where all the time has gone. I seem to drift from one day to the next and never have time for anything.

CLAIRE

I told you she needs a nanny.

She plays with Izzy. Bouncing her up and down.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Then we could go out like we used to.

ABIGAIL

I couldn't get a nanny for her. She's so little. She needs me.

ZOE

What about a babysitter?

ABIGAIL

No. Not a babysitter. I'd prefer to look after her myself. There'll be plenty of chances to go out again when she's older and Jackson can have her for a few hours.

CLAIRE

You are so lucky. She's a poppet.

ABIGAIL

She has her moments.

ZOE

You looked fabulous. You're looking much less mumsy today. Love the outfit. Is it new? Where did you get it? And how's the gorgeous Jackson? Is he flying today?

ABIGAIL

Uh, not --

ZOE

-- By the way. Rachel is getting drinks. She insisted. Even though money is a bit tight for her. Wasn't that sweet of her? She's been struggling to make ends meet since the divorce and she doesn't earn a fortune. She's only part-time at the dentist's surgery and I certainly wouldn't want her job. Peering into people's mouths and cleaning between their teeth no matter what it paid. Imagine cleaning out bits of decaying food. Yuck. Rachel's amazing.

ALICE

That's really nice of her to buy the drinks.

ZOE

Poor Rachel. She's really going through it at the moment. She was so pleased when I invited her to join us today.

CLAIRE

Why exactly did you invite Rachel today? It's not like she knows us very well. We only met her once when you brought her to the last meet up.

ZOE

My bad. I felt sorry for her. She's been struggling to make new friends. I think I'm the only person she knows in the area. She's been through a horrible time with the divorce. It's been very acrimonious. And I thought it would be okay if she came along. It'll do her good to get out. Besides, she didn't stop talking about you after the last meeting. She really like you both. Obviously, you didn't feel the same. You're okay with it, aren't you Abby?

ABIGAIL

Yes. It's fine. I'm cool with it. It's hard to make new friends.

RACHEL arrives with a tray full of coffee.

RACHEL

I got you a latte, Abigail. Hope that was okay. I got them to put some caramel syrup in it as a treat. You probably need the energy after running around looking after Izzy.

ABIGAIL

Great. Thanks!

RACHEL

I love Izzy's dress. It's very pretty. You're very pretty. There are times when I wish we'd had children. I'd have loved to. Still, it would have been a horrible experience to put them through. What with the whole divorce thing.

She stops herself. Notices that she's about to bring everyone down. She smiles.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

I happened to be passing a toy shop on the way here and I saw this.

She dives into her bag. After a moment of rummaging, she pulls out a rainbow-colored teddy bear.

She holds it up in front of Izzy.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

It's okay, isn't it? You don't mind me buying her a present.

ABIGAIL

Of course. It was a lovely thing to do. Thank you.

RACHEL

She seems to like it. I still have my teddy from when I was a girl. You can never have too many soft toys. I have a collection of thirty now.

ZOE

Thirty?

RACHEL

I'm a bit soft like that. I see them in shops and they seem to be begging me to take them home.

Izzy burps.

They all laugh.

AN HOUR LATER

CLAIRE

I ought to take some more photos of Izzy. She's changing all the time. She's so photogenic. I could do a mother child shoot for you.

RACHEL

Do you prefer photographing people or nature?

CLAIRE

Nature. I always feel I'm taking false images of people. They fake their smiles and hide behind masks.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'd rather take photographs of wild horses galloping about a field on a winter's day. Frosted clods of earth flying from their hooves and clouds of steam pouring from their nostrils and freedom in their eyes. Nature doesn't disappoint. People do.

RACHEL

But you shoot lots of people. Surely, they're not all like that.

CLAIRE

No. Children are nearly always natural. Especially babies.

She smiles at Izzy.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

See. Natural.

ZOE

She took some fantastic photographs of Abigail when she was pregnant. Abby looked so serene and beautiful.

ABIGAIL

Less so not the little monkey is out.

RACHEL

Really? How lovely. I admire women that make the most of their bodies and show them off. I'd love to see the photos sometime. I bet you look beautiful.

She turns to Claire.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

So, tell me Claire, is there anyone special in your life? You haven't mentioned anyone.

CLAIRE

Once upon a time but it didn't work out. I'm a bit busy for relationships at the moment and I'm happy on my own. I'm not old enough to be left on the shelf yet and I want to become a successful photographer.

(MORE)

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Have a career before I tie myself down. There's plenty of time for relationships.

ZOE

You'd soon fall into one if you met a bloke like Jackson.

She turns to Rachel with a smile.

ZOE (CONT'D)

That's Abigail's husband. He's totally gorgeous.

CLAIRE

No. We split up last month. The relationship had been going downhill for a while. He got into all the muscle-building stuff and I sort of went off him. I preferred it when he looked less like a Neanderthal. Besides. I'm with someone else.

ZOE

Really? Another guy from the gym?

CLAIRE

No. It's early days though. I'm keeping this on quiet for the moment and seeing how it goes.

RACHEL

Good for you. I hope you have more luck than me. Too much coffee.

She stands.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

I need the loo.

As soon as she's out of earshot.

CLAIRE

Is she for real?

ZOE

She's nervous. That's all. Hardly surprising since you've been glaring at her almost non-stop since she sat down. What's the matter with you?

CLAIRE

I don't much like her. She's a bit blunt with her question. Like she's interviewing us or interrogating us.

Zoe sits up straight.

ZOE

For goodness sake. She doesn't know much about you and she's trying hard. At least she's making an effort to be friendly. Honestly, Claire sometimes you can be so frustrating. Ease up, will you? She's just a lonely woman.

CLAIRE

Okay. But I'm not feeling any affection for her. She's a bit of a whiner. Don't bring her along next time.

ZOE

Don't be such a cow. I don't see why you have a problem. It's no big deal. Rachel is a nice woman who could do with a friend or two. I thought you would understand that. You're hardly Miss Popular yourself.

ABIGAIL

Stop it, you two. You're upsetting Izzy.

On cue, Izzy starts to cry.

Claire hands her car keys to play with.

CLAIRE

There there. We were just having a little row. It was my fault. I was being silly. Sorry Zoe. I didn't get much sleep last night and I'm out of sorts.

Zoe gives her a slight nod.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

I'm going to take this one out for some fresh air.

Claire lifts Izzy and takes her outside.

ZOE

I'm going to get a glass of water.
Want anything?

ABIGAIL

No thanks. I'm fine.

Zoe gets up and heads to the cashier.

Abigail leans back. Sighs.

Her phone buzzes. She answers it without checking who the caller is.

VOICE

(From her phone)

Hello Abigail. What a perfect little family you have. Sadly, it won't be perfect for much longer. You can't trust anyone. You think you can, but you can't. So many secrets being kept. Not just you. Ask Jackson about his new lover. That is, if you dare. You might lose him. Poor Abigail. What would you do then.

ABIGAIL

(into phone)

Who is this? What do you want?

VOICE

(from her phone)

Never mind who I am. Who are you?
I'm watching your every move and
I'm going to destroy your life.

The voice on the other end hangs up the phone.

Dial tone.

Abigail stares at the phone.

FADE OUT.