

**OPEN HOUSE**

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - DAY

Parked cars are crammed in front and behind each other. A few people come and go, jogging, walking.

SALLY MORRIS, 38, and her eight-year-old daughter, NIKKI, exit out of a house. They walk down the porch stairs hand in hand.

Sally has a face that makes you want to pray for her. Life hasn't been easy and it shows. They stare at the house for a moment. Tears well in Sally's eyes.

They turn around, walk to a white minivan and climb in.

INT/EXT. MINIVAN - DAY

Sally and Nikki are looking out at the house. In the yard, there's a Real Estate sign with the word "SOLD" stripped diagonally across it.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

High trees hug the sky, outlining the road, making it clear, we're somewhere in the woods. The area is very rural. A perfect escape from every day life.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

The house is huge. It's a true country home, appearing like a massive version of a doll house.

In the large yard a "FOR SALE" sign is on display, hanging from a wooden stick. It rocks back and forth at a slow pace.

The white minivan stops in front of the house.

INT/EXT. MINIVAN - DAY

Sally and Nikki sit inside, staring out, taking in the house with curious eyes.

They stare for a long moment, then look at each other...  
Sally breaks a confident smile.

SALLY

Ready?

Nikki hesitantly nods "yes."

Sally goes to get out, but before she does, Nikki grabs her hand.

SALLY

Yes, sweetie. What is it?

NIKKI

Just want you to know. I'm proud  
of you, mommy.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

A few couples pass through the empty family room. Sally and Nikki enter. They make their way over to the huge windows that overlook a creek in the backyard. Nikki's face beams to life as she drinks in the gorgeous scenery of the backyard.

A rabbit hops into her view.

NIKKI

Mommy, look.

Sally looks out of the windows, spotting the rabbit.

NIKKI

You see it? The bunny rabbit over  
there?

SALLY

Yes, sweetie. It's adorable.

In the family room entranceway a man in a business suit is staring at them. The pinned on name tag tells us he's KARL JENKINS, the number one agent of "Home Source Real Estate."

Karl is tall, handsome, and has professionalism poured all over him. And as he continues staring at them, Sally

notices his staring and looks his way. Karl immediately snaps out of his fixed staring, and walks over toward them.

KARL

Hi. I'm Karl Jenkins. Welcome.

SALLY

Thank you.

KARL

Do you have any questions? Any concerns?

SALLY

Uh... No. Nothing I can think of.

KARL

Okay. Well, please take your time exploring the house. There's a lot to see. It's forty-eight-hundred square feet. Plenty of room to roam.

SALLY

Yeah. It's pretty big.

KARL

You have a big family?

Sally glances at Nikki, who looks up at her.

SALLY

No. It's just me and my daughter.

Karl catches Nikki's face. Sadness plays in her eyes.

KARL

You're not from around here, are you?

Sally shakes her head "no." Karl locks eyes with Nikki.

KARL

(to Nikki)

Now why are you looking so sad?

Nikki turns her head, staring back at the rabbit.

SALLY  
She's just a little shy.

KARL  
I understand. I know how kids can get.  
Not that I have kids of my own. My  
wife and I have yet to start our own  
family.  
(beat)  
Well enjoy the house, and please don't  
forget to sign the registry.

SALLY  
I won't. Thank you.

Karl nods and walks away.

Sally turns, stares out the window, locked on the rabbit in  
the backyard.

NIKKI  
Mommy.

SALLY  
Yes, dear.

NIKKI  
I miss, daddy.

Sally pulls Nikki into her arms.

SALLY  
I know, sweetie. I miss him too.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Sally and Nikki exit the house.

INT/EXT. MINIVAN - DAY

Sally and Nikki sit inside, staring out at the house. Nikki  
looks at her mother.

NIKKI  
What you think daddy is doing  
right now?

Sally breaks a slight smile.

SALLY  
Looking down on us from heaven.

Sally starts the car and drives off.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The front door opens. Karl steps onto the porch, staring at the minivan as it disappears down the road.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Nikki is fast asleep on the bed. Sally sits in a chair, locked on Nikki's face with her cell phone to her ear. And by the look on her face, she's not having a pleasant conversation.

Sally moves around in the chair, agitated. She lets out a sigh, rolls her eyes. Through the cell phone, all we hear is a female voice, nagging in a motherly way. The nagging continues for a long moment... That's it, Sally has had enough.

SALLY (INTO CELL)  
Mother, please! You're being  
insensitive.

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)  
Honey, I know what I'm talking about.

SALLY (INTO CELL)  
No, you think you do. But you don't  
understand how I feel.

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)  
How can you say that? I'm just trying  
to help... Dear, your husband was  
killed. You need to be around family.  
That's all I'm trying to say.

SALLY (INTO CELL)  
Well you have a bad way of saying  
it.

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)

Honey, forcing Nikki to make that move when she didn't want to is very selfish on your part. If you sit and think about it all, I'm sure you'd agree.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

No, I wouldn't, because I'm doing this for her.

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)

For her? Then why not move in with us? This is where she wants to be.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

After what happened to Henry, I don't wanna stay in the city. You knew that already. I want to raise Nikki in a safer place. Is there anything wrong with that?

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)

Of course not, dear... It's just, I'm going to miss the things we use to do together.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Mom, I understand. And you know, we're gonna miss you guys too. But this is what I feel is right. Sorry.

A moment of silence...

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)

Make sure you find yourself a good church around there.

Sally breaks a smile.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

So, you're okay with this now?

SALLY'S MOTHER (V.O)

No. I still think its wrong, but if you're really going to do this, you're going to need God more than

ever.

Sally rolls her eyes, shakes her head "I don't think so."

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sally sits in the same chair, staring at her sleeping daughter. And as she stares, she slips off into her MEMORY, finding herself standing in the kitchen of her previous home.

INT. PREVIOUS HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sally's preparing dinner. She turns around from the stove, and walks towards the refrigerator. She reaches for the handle. BOOM! A loud bang startles her.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sally walks into the hallway, catching Nikki, approaching the front door.

Nikki opens the door, looks outside, and falls to her knees, SCREAMING. Sally rushes to her side, falling, pulling Nikki into her arms.

Sally hesitantly turns her head to see what Nikki reacted to. Her face rapidly dissolves to pain... Whatever she's looking at is too much. She turns her head away, CRYING uncontrollably.

Outside of the door, several feet away, lays Sally's husband. He's not moving. Actually he's not breathing. Underneath him, a puddle of blood builds slowly.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Sally comes back to reality. She wipes her teary eyes, climbs into bed next to Nikki, wrapping her arms around her. She plants a kiss on her head.

SALLY

We're gonna be okay.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Nikki sits on the bed, watching her cartoons. Sally sits at the small table, scanning the local paper's want-ads.

Her cell phone goes off. She picks up the phone and answers.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Hello.

KARL (V.O)

Hello, Ms. Morris?

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Uh, yes.

KARL (V.O)

Hi, this is Karl Jenkins. The Realtor who held the open house?

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Oh, yes. Hi.

KARL (V.O)

How you're doing?

SALLY (INTO CELL)

I'm okay.

EXT. OFFICE PARKING LOT - DAY

KARL (V.O)

Ms. Morris, I just wanted to to let you know that I am willing to assist you in anyway I can. The fact of the matter is, I want you to have the house. Being a single parent, moving into a new area can't be easy... I just want to help.

SALLY (V.O)

Well, thank you... I really appreciate it.

KARL (V.O)

You're quite welcome. Listen, why

don't come to my office. Let me see what I can do for you. I'm free between eleven and one.

SALLY (V.O)

Uh... okay. Sure.

Sally's minivan pulls into the parking lot.

INT. HOME SOURCE REAL ESTATE - KARL'S OFFICE - DAY

Sally and Nikki sit in front of Karl's desk. Sally's eyes are scanning over documents. The door opens; Karl walks in and takes a seat behind his desk.

He wears a disappointed expression. Nikki connects eyes with him. Sally continues staring at the documents in her hands. It's obvious; she doesn't want to look up.

Karl stares at her for a moment. He takes a deep breath. He goes to speak, but --

SALLY

(interrupting)

You don't have good news. That's okay. I've prepared for the worse.

Sally raises her head, studies Karl's face.

SALLY

Thanks anyway.

Sally is about to stand. Karl reacts.

KARL

Wait, wait, wait... I know someone. A friend... He's a lender. Let me give him a call, and try to work out something. Okay?

She nods in agreement.

KARL

Give me till the end of the day. I'll call you before six.

Sally stares at Karl with peculiar eyes.

KARL

That is if you still want the house?

SALLY

I wouldn't be here if I didn't want it, but... I don't even have a job, and --

KARL

Ms. Morris, don't worry. Trust me. I can make it work.

SALLY

How?

Karl looks away, lost in serious thought. A moment passes as Sally and Nikki waits for an answer.

KARL

I don't know all of the details, but I know I can move some things around, so to speak.

(off Sally's face)

Legal of course.

Sally glances at her daughter, then stares back at Karl. The way her face looks, Karl knows a question is coming.

SALLY

Why you're doing this?

Karl leans forward with his arms resting on the desk. He looks at Nikki for a beat, then his eyes slide back on Sally's inquisitive face.

KARL

I just want to help. Most of the people who are interested in the house, only want it for a vacation spot. Selling it to one of them will be just another sale, but if I can get you into it, that would be different... It'll still be a sale, but a special one.

Karl's explanation sits well with Sally. She breaks a smile, glances at her daughter.

INT. HOME SOURCE REAL ESTATE - KARL'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Karl sits alone in his office with the phone glued to his ear.

KARL (INTO PHONE)  
I'm willing to do it... I don't care.  
Just make sure you come through.  
(listens)  
Don't worry about me. Believe me, I have what it takes. But are you sure you want this done? Okay, then so be it.  
We'll discuss the details later.

Karl sets the phone on its base. He reclines back in his seat, staring blankly at the ceiling. After a long moment, a smile comes forth on his face.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Sally sits at the table, reading a magazine. Nikki sits along side her, scribbling in a coloring book.

Sally's cell phone goes off... Sally's eyes hit the ringing cell on the table in front of her. She picks up the phone, steals a look at the caller id screen.

SALLY  
It's him.

NIKKI  
Who?

SALLY  
The real-estate man.

Sally takes a huge breath; flips open the phone and answers.

SALLY (INTO CELL)  
Hello.

KARL (V.O)

Hi, Ms. Morris?

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Yes.

KARL (V.O)

Hi. This is Karl Jenkins. I have great news. After speaking with the mortgage broker and reworking some data, he was able to get you approved for the loan. I'll be getting the paperwork within a couple of days. I'll call you when I have 'em.

Relief spreads across her face.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Oh, thank you. Thank you very much.

KARL (V.O)

No problem. Just happy I was able to help. I'll talk to you soon.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Yes. Definitely. You have a great day.

KARL (V.O)

I will, and you do the same. Bye now.

SALLY (INTO CELL)

Bye.

Sally disconnects and throws her arms around Nikki.

NIKKI

Is everything okay?

SALLY

Sweetie, everything's fine.

INT. SALLY'S HOUSE - FAMILY ROOM - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: FIVE WEEKS LATER

Sally and Nikki sit on the sofa in the spacious family room, along with Sally's dad, BILL WILSON, 50's. He's average height for a man, over weight with a reseeding hair line.

Bill is tickling Nikki, while Sally goes through some sales papers, scanning over furniture ads. Sally's mother, KATIE WILSON, 50's, walks in. She's thin, brown haired, appearing like an older version of Sally.

KATIE

Well the kitchen's clean.

SALLY

Mom, I told you not to.

KATIE

Honey, I couldn't help myself. You know how I get.

Katie sits on the chair. She smiles at the playing of Bill and Nikki.

KATIE

Let us take Nikki with us? Just for a couple of weeks.

SALLY

Mom, no. I want her to get used to being here first.

KATIE

Fine. Have it your way... So, any luck with finding a church?

SALLY

No. I haven't been looking.

KATIE

What're you saying, you haven't been looking?

SALLY

Sorry, but I haven't. I just have more important things to do.

KATIE

What can be more important than taking some time to spend with the Lord?

Sally ignores her question, returning all of her attention back to the sales papers. Katie just looks at her with a face of disappointment. She slowly shakes her head.

KATIE

What is happening with you?

Sally continues ignoring her.

KATIE

I'm talking to you. Sally?  
(louder)  
Sally?

Sally looks at her mother, irritated.

SALLY

I don't wanna talk about this.  
Not right now.

KATIE

No, we have to talk about it.

SALLY

For what?!

Bill has stopped his tickling. And all of the humor has stopped right along with him.

KATIE

Because I'm concerned. You've been out here almost two months, and you haven't been looking for a church? That's not like you. What's wrong?

SALLY

Nothing... It's just, I'm dealing with some things. That's all.

Katie stares at Sally for a long beat.

KATIE

I don't care what you're dealing with. You know God comes first.

SALLY

Mom, why you're making a big deal out of this? It's not that serious.

KATIE

To you it's not, but to me --

BILL

Katie, please. Let the child be.

Sally rises and walks out.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sally stands in front of the sink, staring out of the window. Her dad comes up and stands next to her. They both stare out, admiring the beauty of the backyard.

BILL

You have a great house here.

SALLY

Thanks.

Sally looks at Bill.

BILL

I know. You don't have to say it. She's a handful.

SALLY

Yeah. That she is.

BILL

But you know, she means well.

SALLY

I know dad.

Bill drinks in her glossy eyes.

BILL

Sweetie, talk to me... What's bothering you?

She wipes her eyes, takes her time to respond.

SALLY

I just miss Henry. He's been gone for almost three months, and it's still very hard for me. It feels like, like I'll never be the same again.

BILL

Of course you will, honey. Listen, what you're feeling is quite normal.  
(taking her into his arms)  
Just take your time, sweetie. Everything will work out. You'll be fine.

SALLY

Then can you do me a favor?

BILL

Sure, honey. What is it?

SALLY

Tell mom that.

INT. SALLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sally lies in darkness, staring blankly at the wall. She sits up, reaches over the nightstand and turns the lamp on.

Her face slowly dissolves into sadness. She stares at a framed photo on the nightstand of her and her late husband. She breaks down, crying, letting her face fall into the palm of her hands.

EXT. SALLY'S HOUSE - DAY

It's early in the morning, Bill and Katie are packing their car to return back home. Bill places the last bag in the trunk.

BILL

I guess that's everything.

Katie hugs Nikki, plants a kiss on her cheek.

KATIE  
Gotta a kiss for grandma?

Nikki kisses her grandmother on the cheek.

KATIE  
Oh, I'm gonna miss you, sweetie.

NIKKI  
I'm gonna miss you too.

BILL  
All right, it's my turn now.

Bill pulls Nikki into his arms, then starts tickling her. Nikki breaks loose, runs away. Bill follows in pursuit.

Katie and Sally watch the playfulness with all smiles, but the smiles come to an end as Katie turns her attention to Sally.

Sally reads Katie's face.

SALLY  
Mother, please don't start.

KATIE  
Honey, I just want you to know, I'm praying for you. You know God's words says it best. He will never leave you nor forsake you.

SALLY  
Mom, I know.

KATIE  
Then dear, start acting like it.

Katie smiles, opens her arms.

KATIE  
Come here.

Sally and Katie hug. And as they hug, Katie sees something over Sally's shoulders.

KATIE

Who is that?

Sally turns around and sees a BMW stopping in front of the house. The windows are tinted, so they can't make out who's the driver.

SALLY

I don't know.

The driver's door open and Karl Jenkins, the Realtor, steps out. And just like the business man that he is, he's dressed as if he's ready to make a deal. He beams a smile and walks over towards them.

KARL

Good morning.

SALLY/KATIE

Good morning.

KARL

Hope you don't mind? I just wanted to stop by to see how you're adjusting to the house.

SALLY

Uh... I'm adjusting fine.

(off Katie's face)

This is Karl Jenkins. He's the Realtor who helped me.

KATIE

Oh, hi.

(shaking Karl's hand)

It's a pleasure to meet you.

KARL

No, the pleasure's all mine. And you are?

SALLY

My mother.

Karl's smile suddenly EVAPORATES. He stares at Katie as if he's remembering something. Katie and Sally trade looks.

SALLY

Is everything all right?

Karl slightly nods, breaks a fake smile.

KARL

Sorry, I have to get going.

(to Katie)

It was nice meeting you, ma'am.

He heads back to his car, gets in and drives away.

KATIE

That was weird.

Nikki runs out from around the house with Bill following closely. He grabs her and starts tickling her.

BILL

You're all mine's now, missy.

She squirms to get away, laughing her head off. They make their way over towards Sally and Katie.

KATIE

That man was really weird. Did you see how his expression changed when you told him I was your mother?

BILL

What're you talking about?

KATIE

The Realtor who helped Sally stopped by.

Katie looks at Sally with a pleading face.

KATIE

Sure you don't wanna stay with us?

Sally hesitantly nods "yeah, I'm sure."

SALLY

We'll be fine.

KATIE

Okay... I guess you know what you're doing.

Sally hugs her mother and dad.

BILL

You all take care. And call us if you need any thing.

SALLY

We will.

Bill and Katie hug and kiss Nikki.

KATIE

Oh we're gonna miss you so. Stay a good girl for us.

NIKKI

Don't go.

BILL

Honey, we have to.

NIKKI

No. Stay.

Nikki's eyes get watery. Sally kneels down next to her.

SALLY

Nikki, you'll see them in a few weeks. I promise.

Nikki stares in her mother's eyes.

NIKKI

You're sure?

SALLY

I'm sure.

Nikki faces her grandparents and wraps her small arms around them.

KATIE

Who loves you more than we do?

NIKKI

Jesus.

KATIE

And always remember that.

NIKKI

I will, grandma.

INT. SALLY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sally lies in bed asleep. It appears she's having a restful night, that is until we --

SALLY'S DREAM

-- find ourselves in a park. Sally, her husband HENRY, and Nikki are sitting down on a blanket, enjoying a nice afternoon picnic. Henry leans over and goes to kiss Sally. And just as their lips connect, Sally finds herself at a FUNERAL. She's standing in front of a casket.

CRYING can be heard from the sea of mourners. She looks down to see who is in the casket, and it's her husband. Tear after tear fall from her eyes. She looks to her side, and Nikki is there. Sally wraps her arms around her.

SALLY

We're gonna be okay. Daddy's in  
a better place.

Sally looks back in the casket. She turns COLD. Henry's eyes are open, staring at her. She can't speak, nor make a sound. She turns her head, looking out at the crowd of mourners. Everyone is fixed on her, almost as if they know what just happened. The crying also has stopped, leaving utter silence in the air.

Sally slowly turns her head to gaze back into the casket. His eyes are still open. Sally's speechless with a face that asks, "How can this be happening?"

Nikki looks up at her.

NIKKI

Mommy...

Sally looks down at her.

NIKKI

...it's okay. Don't be afraid.

Sally's attention returns back to the casket. Henry's eyes are now closed. She leans over, kisses Henry's forehead.

SALLY

I won't be afraid.

END OF SALLY'S DREAM

Sally wakes up, wipes her head of cold sweat.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sally and Nikki sit at the table eating breakfast. They are quiet, lost in their own thoughts.

A LONG MOMENT...

Sally looks at Nikki.

SALLY

Sleep good last night?

Nikki shrugs her shoulders, looks down at her unfinished meal. Something's definitely is on her mind. Sally studies her for a moment.

SALLY

Sweetie, what's wrong?

Nikki doesn't respond. Sally gets up from the table, walks over and sits next to her.

SALLY

Nikki, what is it?

Nikki looks up at her mother, but remains quiet. Sally gazes deep into her eyes as if she's hoping to find an answer.

SALLY

Honey, you're scaring me. Talk to

me... Please.

Nikki swallows, preparing to speak.

NIKKI

...You still love, daddy?

Sally is taking back by her question. Confusion is thick on her face.

SALLY

Sweetie, of course I do.

NIKKI

Then why was there a man in here.

SALLY

What? When?

NIKKI

Last night. I heard him, mommy.

SALLY

Honey, there wasn't no --

NIKKI

Don't lie. God don't like liars.

Sally glances around the kitchen. "Where's the hidden camera?"

SALLY

Honey, I'm not lying. Wasn't no man in here. You must be dreaming. I had a strange dream last night too.

Nikki looks away, thinking. Sally guides her face back towards her.

SALLY

All it was, was a dream. That's it.

They stare into each other's eyes.

NIKKI

Sorry, mommy. I really thought I heard a man.

SALLY

It's okay. Don't worry about it.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sally is staring out of the window, watching as Nikki entertains herself, playing with a doll.

She lets out a sigh, scans the empty kitchen with lonely eyes.

THE DOORBELL RINGS...

She walks out of the kitchen.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Sally walks up to the door, looks out of the peephole and sees KARL. An unsure expression crawls over her face.

The doorbell sounds again. She goes to unlock the door, but stops herself. She looks back out of the peephole, waiting patiently as Karl disappears from off the porch.

INT SALLY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nikki sits on the bed, looking into the adjoined bathroom at her mother. Sally is dressed in business attire, preparing to go on a job interview. She's rushing, making sure her appearance is just right.

She turns, facing Nikki, looking for approval. Nikki gives her an once-over, then nods her head smiling "that's it!"

INT. MINIVAN - DAY

Sally checks her makeup in the vanity mirror. She looks at Nikki.

SALLY

Sure you'll be okay?

NIKKI

Mommy, I'm eight, not five.

Sally kisses her on the forehead.

SALLY

Okay, I'll be back shortly. Wish me luck.

NIKKI

You don't need luck. You have God.

Sally regards her for a few seconds, then shakes her head slowly. She exits the vehicle, looks back at Nikki.

SALLY

Like I said, wish me luck.

Sally closes the door, walks away. Nikki's face fills with confusion. She watches as Sally makes her way into the office building.

INT. INTERVIEWING OFFICE - DAY

Sally sits very relaxed, happy that her interview is coming to a close. Her interviewer, HARRIET, 40's, is glancing over her resume.

HARRIET

Well, like I said your skills are definitely a match for us. You should hear from us within a week or so.

Disappointment settles on Sally's face.

HARRIET

The controller is making the hiring decision. He'll call you in when he gets back in town.

Harriet stands. Sally rises slowly and shakes her hand.

SALLY

Thanks.

Sally heads for the door.

HARRIET

I'll personally recommend you.

Sally looks at her, nods "thank you."

INT. OFFICE HALLWAY - DAY

Sally walks down the hallway, defeated.

KATIE (V.O)  
How's the job hunt going?

SALLY (V.O)  
...It's all right.

KATIE (V.O)  
You don't sound too convincing.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sally sits at the table, slouched, talking on the phone to her mother.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
...Mom, I have to go.

KATIE (V.O)  
Okay, dear. You have a good night,  
and try not let everything get you  
down... You know, God only gives us  
what we can handle.

Sally's face shrivels as she digests her mother's statement.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
Well tell him I can't take no  
more.

KATIE (V.O)  
Honey, tell him yourself. Spend some  
time with him. He's your heavenly  
father too.

Sally rolls her eyes.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
Mom, I have to go. Talk to you later.

KATIE (V.O)

Okay, dear. I hope you feel better.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Yeah, me too.

Sally disconnects, drops her head.

After a long moment, she lifts her head, places the phone on the table.

She stares hard at the table, letting herself slip away in her memory. She finds herself inside of a --

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Sally sits with Nikki and her husband amongst a huge congregation. On the podium the PASTOR, 50'S, speak. Every word that flows out of his mouth, Sally catches with attentiveness.

PASTOR

There are mysteries of God. Mysteries we don't understand. Mysteries that can make us question the very existence of God...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Sally glances around the kitchen. She rises from the chair. Anger plays heavily on her face. She looks at the phone, picks it up and dials her mother's number.

KATIE (V.O)

Hello.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Hi, mom.

KATIE (V.O)

Sally?

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Yeah, it's me. Listen I have somethin' to tell ya.

KATIE (V.O)

Okay. I'm listening.

Sally hesitates to speak. She takes a deep breath, then let it rip.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
God doesn't care.

KATIE (V.O)  
What?

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
He doesn't. Look at what happened to Henry. He was murdered right outside of our house. How can a God that cares so much about me, allow something like that to happen?

KATIE (V.O)  
Sweetie, it wasn't God's fault. Don't blame him. He loves --

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
He loves me. I know. At least I'm supposed to believe that. That's what we're all taught, right?

KATIE (V.O)  
Honey, calm down.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)  
I don't need to calm down. I'm fine. I'm in my right state of mind. Sorry I ruined your night. Bye!

Sally goes to press the disconnect button.

KATIE (V.O)  
Sally, don't hang up. Don't --

CLICK! She hung up.

Sally stands with the phone in hand. She notices someone staring at her. She turns her head, connecting eyes with Nikki, who stands at the kitchen's entrance. A hint of shame moves across Sally's face. She looks away.

NIKKI

Mommy --

SALLY

Go to bed. I'll be up in a minute.

Nikki turns around, walks away.

Sally eyes the floor, concentrating... focusing. After a long moment, she glances around the kitchen and exits.

INT. SALLY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sally lies in bed asleep. She tosses and turns, obviously being bothered by a dream. She awakes suddenly, taking in Nikki peeping in her bedroom.

A surprised look is plastered across Nikki's face. Sally looks at her, confused. Neither one of them says anything. Sally sniffs at the air, climbs out of bed.

SALLY

Where's that smell coming from?

NIKKI

I thought it was you. I thought you was cooking.

Sally quickly slips on her robe.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Sally and Nikki make their way down the stairs. They walk into the hallway.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Sally and Nikki walk into the kitchen. On the table are three plate settings, filled with food. Sally and Nikki are perplexed. They make their way into the kitchen to get a closer look. And as soon as they reach the table, a noise resonates from behind them. They spin around to see --

KARL. HE'S HOLDING A JUG OF ORANGE JUICE, WEARING A HUGE SMILE.

KARL

Sorry. I wanted this to be a surprise. Well since you're here, go ahead and have a seat.

Sally and Nikki exchange looks. What is happening? Sally carefully speaks:

SALLY

...What are you doing in my house?

Karl raises the jug of orange juice.

KARL

Making breakfast, dear. What does it look like? Now come on. Have a seat. Don't want the food to get cold, do ya?

Karl walks over to the table, places the jug of orange juice on it. He pulls out two chairs for them. They hesitantly take their seats. Karl pours orange juice into the glasses.

KARL

Does everything look good?

Sally and Nikki slowly nod "yes."

KARL

Great.

He takes his seat, downs some of his drink. Sally and Nikki stare with STONED faces.

KARL

What are you all waiting for? Eat.

Karl takes in a fork full of scrambled eggs.

KARL

Mmmm, delicious.

Nikki places her hand into Sally's hand. Sally glances at her.

KARL

Honey, aren't you gonna eat? What's wrong?

Sally stares at Karl like he's flipped his lid.

SALLY  
Is this a joke?

KARL  
Excuse me? Is what a joke?

SALLY  
You being in my house? This breakfast? Everything?

Karl chuckles.

KARL  
Sweetie, I just wanted to make you happy. So no, this isn't a joke. It's for real.

Karl's explanation isn't enough. Sally shakes her head in confusion.

SALLY  
Maybe I'm not making myself clear. This is my house. Why are you here? How did you even get in here?

Karl leans towards her, gazing deeply into her eyes.

KARL  
Darling, don't be upset. I'm here to make you happy. So let me.

Sally moves her chair out from the table. She rises to her feet pulling Nikki up with her.

SALLY  
You have to leave.

Karl finishes off his drink. He looks at the untouched food.

KARL  
You're not hungry?

(to Nikki)  
What about you? The food is good.

Nikki hides her face behind her mother.

SALLY  
Please leave. You're scaring her.

Karl stares at a frightened Nikki. His smiling face fades, leaving a blank one.

KARL  
No, I don't wanna scare her. And  
I don't wanna scare you. I'm sorry.  
How can I make it up to you?

SALLY  
Just leave. Please.

Karl looks away, lets out a breath. There's no telling what he might do. He stands, walks next to Sally and whispers into her ear:

KARL  
Please see me out.

INT. FOYER - DAY

Karl walks towards the door, followed closely by Sally and Nikki. He stops at the door, places his hand on the door knob. He goes to unlock the door, but stops himself at the halfway mark.

SALLY  
Please. Just leave.

Karl continues motionless for several seconds. His face is as blank as a chalk board.

SALLY  
Get out of my house. Leave!

Karl starts MURMURING words under his breath. And as he murmurs, his voice gets louder and louder, until it's clear what he's saying...

KARL

It's not just your house. It's  
not just your house. It's not  
just your house. It's not just  
your house.

Karl's turns around with a calm look on his face.

SALLY

Whaddaya mean? I signed the contract.  
The paperwork had my name on it. This  
is my house... Now leave...

Karl simply shakes his head, breaks a smile.

KARL

Sally, this is our house.

Sally stares hard at him. A million thoughts run through  
her mind. She breaks eye contact, appearing like she's  
ready to faint.

SALLY

...It can't be.

Karl takes a step towards her.

KARL

But it is... We're a family now.

SALLY

What?

KARL

C'mon, Sally. Don't act like you  
didn't get butterflies in your  
stomach back at the open house.

(beat)

It's been a long time. I missed you  
so much. I've never thought I'd see  
you again, but I found you. It took  
some doing, but you're here. Right  
in front of me.

Sally gives him a strange look. He goes to touch her face.  
She quickly pulls back.

KARL

I understand. This is too weird for you. But you'll come around. After all we live together now.

Karl looks at Nikki, squats down and extends his hand.

KARL  
(to Nikki)  
Don't be afraid.

Nikki hides behind her mother.

KARL  
Come on now. I won't hurt you.

A look moves across Sally's face. She's plotting something.

KARL  
I want us to be friends.

Sally hesitantly steps aside. She looks into Nikki's eyes, nodding "it's okay." Nikki shakes her head in fear.

SALLY  
Don't worry, dear. He won't hurt you... Trust me.

Sally moves Nikki in front of her. Nikki momentarily makes her way towards Karl. As soon as she gets inches from him, SALLY MOVES AS FAST AS LIGHTNING, scooping Nikki up and trampling over him.

Sally hurriedly unlocks the door, swings it open. She bursts out, but Nikki's not so lucky. She gets pulled back by Karl.

Nikki SCREAMS, causing Sally to STOP in her tracks.

Sally glances around, taking in nothing but trees for days. There's not a single soul in sight. She knows she has no choice.

Karl smiles at his advantage.

KARL  
I'll see you inside, dear.

He turns, walks Nikki inside. Sally, defeated, gradually follows in after them.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - DAY

The room is small with brick exposed walls. It appears more like a jail cell than anything. The door opens. Sally and Nikki walk in, glancing around the empty room.

Karl appears in the doorway, scans the room over with sympathetic eyes.

KARL

Sorry, but you gave me no option.

Sally pulls Nikki into her arms.

NIKKI

Mommy, I'm scared.

SALLY

I know, dear. We'll be all right.

KARL

Sure you'll be all right. I'm no monster.

SALLY

What do you want from us?

Karl takes a step inside, smiling. Sally and Nikki moves further away, stopping at the wall on the opposite end.

KARL

You know what I want.

Karl approaches them, then suddenly stops as Sally's face drops to utter FEAR. He takes in her face with a realization that we already knew.

KARL

You're really afraid of me.

Nikki starts sobbing with her face pressed against her mother's side.

REMORSE grows on Karl's face.

KARL

I'm so sorry about all of this. This is not what I wanted... I don't want you guys to fear me.

Karl wipes at his eyes, turns away.

Sally looks at him, surprised by his display of emotion.

SALLY

I believe you're not a bad person, but this is...

He turns around quickly.

SALLY

...not normal.

Karl just stares at her, speechless. His eyes move down on Nikki. She looks up at him.

KARL

(to Nikki)

Don't cry little one.

Sally wipes Nikki's face free of tears.

KARL

Do you know who I am?

Sally looks at him, bewildered. She nods "of course I do." Karl gazes into her eyes, concentrating. He walks up to her, never breaking eye contact.

KARL

Then who am I?

Sally hesitates to answer, thinking of a way to dance around his question.

SALLY

Uh... Someone I knew from a long time ago.

KARL

Right, but what's my name?

SALLY  
Karl Jenkins.

KARL  
No. That's my changed name. What's  
the name I had when you knew me?

Sally's mind is racing a MILE-A-MINUTE. She's stuck with no response, and this causes Karl to grow angry.

KARL  
You don't remember me. Do you?

SALLY  
No, I do. It's just, I need to  
think about it.

Karl turns away, walks out of the room.

KARL  
Okay. I'll be back in a few.

SALLY  
A few what?

KARL  
Hours.

He SLAMS the door and locks it.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - DAY

Sally and Nikki sit on the floor in a corner. Everything about them says "misery."

NIKKI  
Mommy.

SALLY  
Yes.

NIKKI  
Can we pray?

Sally looks away. She's not interested. Nikki gets the picture. She turns away with her eyes closed, placing her hands in the praying position.

NIKKI

Lord save us from that man. We really need your help. I'm scared, and mommy's scared. We don't know what to do. So please, help us get through this... Thank you. Amen.

Nikki looks at her mother, nods.

SALLY

(re: Nikki's nod)  
What's that for?

NIKKI

It's gonna be okay.

SALLY

Why because you prayed?

NIKKI

Yeah.

Sally lets out a breath.

SALLY

I don't think God cares.

Nikki's face falls into confusion. Her expression screams "how could you say that?"

SALLY

Sorry.

A SOUND steals their attention. They look at the door. It opens. Karl walks inside. He just stands in place, locked on Sally's face with a blank stare.

A long moment passes without anything being said. It's clear; he wants Sally to say something, but she's not about to say a word. She's too scared.

Karl turns around and heads back out of the room.

KARL

You'll be in here all day till  
you remember.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Karl sits on the sofa, fixated on a shelf filled with pictures of Sally, Nikki and Sally's deceased husband. He stands and walks over to the shelf.

THE DOORBELL RINGS...

INT. FOYER - DAY

Karl looks out of the peephole, then opens the door.

On the porch stands GAYLE CLARKSON, late forties. She's holding a basket of fruit.

KARL

Yes.

GAYLE

Hi. I'm Gayle Clarkson. I live  
about a mile down the road. I just  
wanted to welcome you and your wife  
to the area.

(handing him the basket)  
Courtesy of me and my husband.

Karl looks at the basket with a smile.

KARL

Thank you.

Gayle concentrates briefly on his face.

GAYLE

You look very familiar.

KARL

Well I should. I'm the face of  
Home Source Real-Estate.

GAYLE

Yeah that's right. I see your ads in

the local trades all the time.

THE PHONE STARTS RINGING.

Karl looks back into the house.

KARL

I have to get going. It was nice meeting you. Thanks for the gift.

GAYLE

My pleasure.

Karl closes the door, locks it. He looks out of the peephole, watching as Gayle walks away.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - DAY

Karl picks up the portable phone, looks at the caller id screen. He presses a button revealing the last incoming call as:

"BILL WILSON  
773-555-3450"

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - DAY

Sally paces back and forth at a slow pace. Nikki lies across the floor.

NIKKI

Mommy, how long we been in here?

SALLY

I don't know. Three, maybe four hours.

The sound of the door unlocking catches their attention. Sally rushes over next to Nikki. The door opens, Karl walks in.

KARL

Honey, your parents called. I let the voice mail get it. And guess what, we had our first visitor. A neighbor. She left us a great basket

of fruit. Want some?

Sally and Nikki are at a lost for words.

KARL

If ya do, I'll bring the basket  
down.

(beat)

Do you remember me, yet?

Sally shakes her head "no." Karl closes the door, leans up  
against it. He stares at her like he's reading her mind.

KARL

Tell me, do you remember a kid  
from your childhood named Dexter  
Jones?

Sally thinks only for a few seconds, then nods "yes." Karl  
smiles in satisfaction.

KARL

He was your boyfriend. Right?

Again Sally nods in agreement.

KARL

What special promise did you  
two make?

Sally looks down at the floor, thinking. After a long  
moment, her eyes return back on him.

SALLY

...That one day we would get  
married.

Karl's smile grows bigger.

KARL

And that's the reason why I'm here.  
(off Sally's face)  
To collect on that promise. You  
see, it's fate. Don't you see that  
now?

Sally's face sinks deeper in confusion.

SALLY

So, you're trying to tell me... that  
you're Dexter?

KARL

Absolutely.

Sally turns pale. It's as if she seen a ghost. She looks  
away, not sure how to respond to this.

KARL

You're not smiling? Why not?  
I thought you'd be relieved.  
It's me. Dexter.

Karl walks directly in front of her, squats down, positions  
her face, making sure they're eye to eye.

KARL

Focus on my eyes. C'mon, I need  
you to remember. You've got to.

Sally starts CONCENTRATING on his eyes. And as she gazes  
into them, something happens. She gets lost in them,  
finding herself sitting on the porch of a --

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

An eight-year-old version of Sally, stares into the eyes of  
eight-year-old DEXTER JONES.

Dexter grabs her hands, smiles softly. Sally blushes, looks  
away.

DEXTER

You know how I feel. Don't you?

Sally nods, looks back at him.

DEXTER

You're the only one that treats me  
normal.

SALLY

That's because you are.

DEXTER

Only to you... And that's why I  
want you to do me a favor.

(beat)

Will ya?

SALLY

Sure... What?

DEXTER

You have to say yes.

SALLY

You know I will. Now ask me.

Dexter drops his head for a beat. He looks back into her eyes, and asks:

DEXTER

Will you marry me?

Sally chuckles, thinking he's playing. But his face remains serious, causing the moment to shift. Her smile is now gone.

She just stares at him, prepping her answer.

SALLY

We're just kids. We can't get  
married.

DEXTER

I'm talkin' when we grow up. Think  
about it. We'll always be together.

Sally thinks about it long and hard, staying lost in his eyes.

Through the screen door, Sally's mother's face appears.

KATIE

Sally, I want you in here.

Sally continues staring into Dexter's eyes.

KATIE

Do you hear me, young lady? Now!

DEXTER  
Promise me, Sally.

Sally blushes.

SALLY  
Okay. I promise.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - DAY

Sally breaks eye contact with Karl. He knows something happened. He takes Sally's hand, caresses it.

KARL  
You remember. Don't you?

Sally reluctantly nods. Karl smiles, kisses her hand.

KARL  
I've never forgot.

SALLY  
But you're not him.

ANGER grasps Karl's face. He SLAPS her, sending Sally falling down onto Nikki's lap. She looks back at him, shocked. She's didn't see that coming.

Nikki starts crying. Sally sits up, pulls Nikki into her arms, trying to console her with tears welling in her own eyes.

Karl stands.

KARL  
What is wrong with you? How can  
you say that?

The mother and daughter emotional display hits Karl HARD. He looks around the room, torn. Regret shows heavy on his face.

KARL  
I'm sorry... I didn't want to  
hit you. You made me.  
(beat)

Why you say I'm not who I am?

Sally looks at him.

SALLY

Dexter Jones is dead.

Karl gives her an incredulous look.

KARL

How can I be dead when I'm standing here? I'm telling you the truth.

Sally returns her attention back to Nikki.

KARL

My mom and dad were Thomas and Lynn Jones. My brother died when he was four from an asthma attack.

She looks back at him.

KARL

My dog was hit by a car on the corner of McNeal street. When we tried to help him, he died in our arms... Need anymore proof?

Sally just stares at him. Maybe he's telling the truth after all.

KARL

Should I continue?

Sally doesn't say a word. She continues staring blankly.

KARL

I take it you believe me now?

Sally slightly nods "yes" but her face still shows her uncertainty.

KARL

Who told you I was dead?

SALLY

Your parents... They said you

drowned on a fishing trip.

KARL  
Unbelievable.  
(half-joking)  
So, how was my funeral?

SALLY  
There wasn't no funeral. You  
were cremated --  
(catching herself)  
-- I mean, we were told you was  
cremated.

Karl squats down.

KARL  
My parents weren't good people,  
Sally. You know how they use to  
take me on those long trips some  
times?

SALLY  
Yeah.

KARL  
Well, we weren't going to visit  
relatives like you all thought. They  
were taking me to some mental  
institution. Can you believe that?  
They thought I was crazy.  
(beat)  
One morning I woke up in a different  
room. It wasn't my bedroom. And it  
wasn't my house.

He stands, walks over by the door. QUIET. MOTIONLESS. This is tough for him to say. He clears his throat, opens the door. He looks back at them.

KARL  
Nikki...

She looks up at him.

KARL  
...Hungry?

She doesn't respond, her appearance says it all. And the answer is yes.

KARL  
Come on. Let's go upstairs. Get ya  
cleaned up.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Soothing Jazz MUSIC plays in the background. Sally, Nikki and Karl enter.

Sally and Nikki are fully clean, appropriately dressed for a "special" dinner. On the meticulously decorated table is a nice spread of food. A lot of thought went into this.

Karl smiles as he leads them to their seats.

KARL  
Please, sit.

Sally and Nikki just stand in place, not moving an inch.

KARL  
Don't tell me you're still afraid.  
Look at the table. See what I done?  
I tell ya, I mean no harm. Go ahead,  
sit.

They hesitantly take their seats, glancing around the table with nervous eyes.

KARL  
Thank you.

Karl takes his seat.

KARL  
Now Please. Eat.

Sally and Nikki stare at the food as if they're visually inspecting it.

KARL  
(sarcastic)  
Don't worry. There's no poison on

it.

Nikki looks at her mother for approval. Sally gives her a look that says "its okay." Karl starts piling food onto his plate. And as he finishes, Sally gives in, placing food onto their plates.

Karl starts eating, causing Sally and Nikki to take a couple of bites. Sally and Nikki exchange a look. The food isn't bad. Actually it's quite good.

Karl wipes his mouth, takes a drink of water.

KARL

See this isn't so bad. One happy  
family enjoying a nice meal together.

THE PHONE RINGS...

They all look at the portable phone, resting on the built in wall unit. Karl rises and checks the phone's caller id screen.

KARL

Your parents again.

Karl hands the phone to her. She looks at him unsure about what he wants her to do.

SALLY

You want me to answer it?

KARL

Of course, it's your parents. Just  
be smart.

Karl walks behind Nikki, places his hands on her shoulders.

KARL

Very smart.

Sally answers the call.

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Hello.

KATIE (V.O)

Hi dear. How's everything going?

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Uh, everything's okay. It's nice to hear your voice.

KATIE (V.O)

It is?

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Yeah. I miss you. I miss you so much.

KATIE (V.O)

Okay, what's going on?

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Nothing.

KATIE (V.O)

Don't give me that. It's either a miracle that you're being so nice, or something's wrong. Now which one is it?

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

You know I don't believe in miracles, mom. So it must be the other thi --

KATIE (V.O)

What do you mean, you don't believe in miracles? What has gotten into you? Miracles are --

SALLY (INTO PHONE)

Wait. You don't understand --

KATIE (V.O)

No, I understand completely. It's you who don't understand.

Karl takes the phone out of Sally's hand, presses the "end call" button. He sits back down in his seat.

KARL

Sorry for ending your call, but my intention wasn't to let you

talk freely.

SALLY

She's going to think something's wrong.

Karl shakes his head.

KARL

No she won't. She'll just think you hung up on her.

(beat)

Now back to our delicious family meal. Would you like some wine? We can toast to our great reunion.

Sally looks down at her plate.

SALLY

Sure.

KARL

Hey.

She looks at him.

KARL

There's no reason to be upset. I'm gonna take great care of you and Nikki.

He takes a drink of water, stares at her carefully.

KARL

I know your husband being killed wasn't in your plans, but it brought you to me. Sometimes bad things happen for good reasons.

A look moves across her face that says "how did he know that?"

Karl pours wine into two glasses. He raises his drink in the air, waiting for her to participate. Sally reluctantly gives in, bringing her drink up.

KARL

Here's to us. May we never lose each other again.

INT. THIRD FLOOR BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sally and Nikki walk in, followed closely by Karl. They look around the room. There's a bed, dresser and a small refrigerator serving as the furniture.

KARL  
You'll sleep here until you get use to everything. Can't have ya trying to escape.

SALLY  
What if we need to use the restroom?

KARL  
You'll have to hold it. Sorry. I can't take no chances.

He walks to the door, gives them a final look.

KARL  
(smiling)  
Goodnight.

INT. THIRD FLOOR BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Sally and Nikki lie in bed, trying to sleep but they're having a rough go at it. Sally sits up, looks down at her daughter.

Nikki's eyes open.

SALLY  
I'm so sorry, sweetie.

NIKKI  
For what, mommy?

SALLY  
For all of this.

Nikki sits up, wraps her arms around her mother.

NIKKI

Mommy, don't blame you. That  
man is just bad. But God will help us.  
He won't let us down.

Sally regards her daughter's words for a moment, then glances around the room. Her eyes stop at the window. She stands and walks towards it. She inspects it, tries to raise it. Nothing doing, it's bolted down. And even if it wasn't, it wouldn't do them any good. One step out side, and they'll fall to their deaths.

Sally's head swings around, catching the closet door. A curious sparkle jumps in her eyes.

INT. CLOSET - NIGHT

Sally steps in, turns the closet light on. Her eyes glide to the ceiling of the closet. BINGO. She spots something that may just be there way out.

SALLY  
Nikki, come here.

Nikki walks to the closet, peeks her head in.

SALLY  
Look up there.

Nikki follows her mother's eyes, stopping on a SQUARE SHAPED indent in the ceiling.

NIKKI  
What's that?

SALLY  
I think it leads to the attic...

Sally reaches up for the top shelf.

SALLY  
...and if it does, I'll be able  
to open the door. Hopefully we can  
sneak out.

NIKKI  
You're going up there?

SALLY

Yes. Only for a minute or two. Don't worry. I'll be right back.

NIKKI

What if that man comes?

Sally thinks about it quickly, shakes her head.

SALLY

Honey, I'm sure he's asleep. Just stay right here.

Sally hugs her, plants a kiss on the top of her head.

SALLY

We're gonna be okay, sweetie.

NIKKI

I know. God is with us. I've been asking for his protection.

SALLY

That's good, but... right now we have to depend on each other.

NIKKI

What you mean? Grandma said, God is --

SALLY

Sweetie, I don't wanna talk about this. Let's just focus on getting out of here.

(looking up at the ceiling)

Wish me luck.

INT. DARK AREA - NIGHT

A BOARD in the floor slowly shifts to the side, letting light spill into the dark area. Sally lifts herself through the square shaped hole. She rises to her feet, scans the area.

Hope settles on her face as she stands motionless, realizing this is indeed the --

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Sally looks down through the hole at Nikki.

SALLY

I'll come and open the door.

Sally makes her way through the darkness, focusing HARD on the floor. She doesn't see anything that looks like a way down. So she gets on her knees, crawling, feeling the wood with her hands. A flashlight would be great about now.

INT. THIRD FLOOR BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nikki sits on the bed, staring intently at the door. Every second that goes by feels more like an hour. Her anxiety is heavy. She takes a deep breath, closes her eyes.

She stays locked in this position, almost like she's meditating.

NIKKI

Lord, please let mommy come. Please  
let mommy come. Please Jesus. Let  
mommy come. Amen.

Her eyes open. She stares fixated on the door, hoping for the best.

AFTER A LONG MOMENT -- A CLICKING noise resonates from the door...

Nikki's face suddenly becomes flushed with fear.

The door CREAKS open slowly. Nikki rises off of the bed, her heart in her throat. And as the door opens wide enough, she sees --

KARL. He's all smiles as he walks inside.

KARL

Thought I'd pay you two a visit.

His smile vanishes without a trace, noticing Sally's AWOL.

KARL

Where's your mother?

Nikki doesn't respond. Her eyes start welling up.

KARL

Where's your mother?

Still no response.

KARL

Answer me!

Nikki remains a mute. Karl's anger overcomes him. He STORMS up to her, SHOUTING:

KARL

You better tell me!

There's no telling what this psycho might do. He suddenly grabs Nikki by the arms and starts shaking her.

SALLY (O.S)

Let go of my daughter!

Karl spins around, catching Sally running towards him with a POLE raised above her head. She SWINGS the pole, barely missing him. She swings it again, connecting with his arm.

Karl grabs the pole, snatches it out of her hands. He throws it to the other side of the room and PUSHES her against the wall. She goes down fast, banging her head against the floor.

Nikki rushes to her side, wrapping her small arms around her.

Karl picks up the pole, walks in front of them, glaring down with hatred.

KARL

What are you doing? Are you crazy? Attacking me with, with this thing.

(beat)

You have no idea what I went through to make it so, that we're together.

(beat)

Do you even care?

Karl drops to his knees, positions Sally's face so that she's looking up at him.

KARL  
We're together and that's that.  
We're a family. I'm your husband,  
you're my wife, and she's my daughter.  
That's it. Understand?

Sally is speechless.

KARL  
(louder)  
Understand?!

A couple of tears slide down her face. She nods "yes." Karl breaks a smile, leans in and kisses her on the lips. He looks at Nikki, kisses her on the forehead.

KARL  
(to Nikki)  
...Call me daddy.

Nikki carefully shakes her head "no." Karl places his hand on her shoulder, planting more fear into her.

KARL  
Call me daddy.

He applies pressure to her shoulder.

NIKKI  
Okay.

Karl removes his hand, waiting. Nikki looks down at her mother. They connect eyes for a moment.

KARL  
I'm waiting.

Nikki looks back at him.

KARL  
Who am I?

NIKKI  
...Daddy...

Karl smiles, gives her another kiss on the forehead.

KARL  
That's my girl.

He rises to his feet.

KARL  
Get some rest now. I'll see  
you two in the morning.

Karl walks to the door, glances at the closet.

KARL  
Don't worry, I'll fix that opening  
to the attic. Can't have ya getting  
tempted again.

He steps out of the room, closes the door.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Karl, Sally and Nikki sit at the table eating breakfast. Everyone is quiet, taking sips at their meal. Karl picks up his glass, downs some orange juice. He clears his throat.

KARL  
Listen... forgive me for last night.  
I'm sorry I acted the way I did.  
(beat)  
Isn't there something you'd like to  
say?

Sally looks at him, shakes her head "no." Karl takes another drink.

KARL  
Let me help you. You tried to leave me.  
Then you tried to hurt me. Shouldn't  
you be sorry too?

Sally doesn't say anything. She continues taking random bites of her meal. His cell phone goes off. Karl takes a

look at the LCD screen, checking the incoming call. He immediately rises from the table.

KARL

Excuse me.

He walks quickly into the hallway. We can barely hear what's being said.

After a long moment, he walks back to the table.

KARL

There's something that I must do. I have to lock ya back in the room downstairs. Let's go.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - DAY

Sally and Nikki sit on the floor, staring directly in front of them.

Through a series of FADES and DISSOLVES, we stay with them for what appears to be several hours.

Sally and Nikki now lie on the floor on the opposite end of the room.

SALLY

We might never get out of here.

NIKKI

We will, mommy. God won't fail us.

Sally rolls her eyes as if to imply "what God?"

SALLY

You know, only a kid can go through all that we've been through, and still trust in a God who seems to always be absent. Just wait till you're grown. Then you'll see that God either don't exist, or he's not interested in our human affairs.

NIKKI

How can you say that, mommy? You taught me God is our best friend.

SALLY

...I guess I was wrong.  
(off Nikki's face)  
Sweetie, I don't wanna hurt your feelings. But if God is real, why on earth did he let what happened to daddy happen?

REGRET crawls over Sally's face as she realizes that wasn't a fair question to ask her.

SALLY

Sorry. I didn't mea --

A SOUND at the door interrupts their moment. Slow to react, they sit up just as the door opens. Karl sticks his head inside.

KARL

Come out.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Sally and Nikki sit on the sofa, while Karl stands. They are all watching the late night news on television. Karl mutes the television, takes a seat on the chair. He's agitated, definitely in a weird mood.

Sally's and Nikki's eyes glide off of the television, landing on him. Karl quickly looks at them, catching them off guard.

KARL

Stop looking at me, and look at the t.v.

They turn their attention back to the television news. A series of commercials come on. Karl lets out an irritated breath.

KARL

(re: the news)  
What are they waiting for? Show it! Gotta be kidding me.

He looks at Sally and Nikki.

KARL

Just wait and see what I did  
for us. If this doesn't prove  
my love, nothing will.

The news comes back on. The NEWS REPORTER starts talking.  
Karl hits a button on the remote, turning the sound back  
on.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O)

...A grizzly scene was discovered  
about two hours ago in the upscale  
community of Oak Creek --

KARL

This is it. Listen carefully.

He turns up the volume.

ON THE TELEVISION

NEWS REPORTER

-- Two police officers stumbled  
upon the mutilated body of a woman.  
According to the medical examiner,  
the woman was beaten with an object.  
The police have no witnesses, and  
unfortunately, the woman had no  
identification on her... If any one  
has information, please contact  
the Oak Creek police department at  
815-555-1250.

BACK TO SCENE

Karl turns off the television, places the remote on the  
table. He just sits in his seat, staring heavily at them.

A CONFUSING LONG MOMENT GOES BY.

Sally looks at him.

SALLY

Why you wanted us to see that?

KARL

Because we're a family, and no one  
should stand between us.

(beat)

It had to be done.

SALLY

What?

Karl doesn't respond. He stands and walks over to the  
window.

SALLY

What had to be done?

Karl peeks out of the window, looks back at her.

KARL

What do you think?

Sally looks at Nikki, then back at him.

SALLY

What'd you do?

Karl walks next to her, kneels down -- gazing into her  
eyes.

KARL

You don't understand how much I  
love you. Do you?

Sally looks away.

KARL

What do you think I've done?

Sally timidly glances at him.

KARL

Come on now. Talk. You think  
I've done something. I want to  
know what it is.

Karl positions Sally's face so that she's looking directly  
at him.

KARL

What do you think I've done?

Sally remains silent, desperately holding back tears.

KARL

Answer me!

SALLY

...I... think you did something...  
bad.

Karl breaks a smile.

KARL

And what might that be?

SALLY

Um... I don't know.

KARL

Why are you lying?

SALLY

I'm not.

Karl stands upright, sighs. He takes a seat on the chair, glued on the black screen of the television. He stays this way for good moment, then looks over at Sally and Nikki.

KARL

The woman that was killed was  
my wife... But I'm sure you  
already figured that out.

(beat)

She was in the way. She would've  
messed everything up... I had  
no choice.

Karl leans forward in his seat.

KARL

Say something.

Sally looks away, wraps her arms around Nikki.

KARL  
You don't have anything to say?  
Not even a thank you...? I'm waiting.

Sally's eyes return back on him.

SALLY  
(hesitant)  
You need help.

Suddenly Karl JUMPS on her and grasps her neck. Nikki starts SCREAMING.

KARL  
(to Nikki)  
Shut up!

Nikki's screaming decreases to a low fearful noise.

KARL  
I'm not going to hurt mommy. Don't  
worry, dear.

Karl loosens his grip on Sally's neck, letting her breathe again. He stands, fixes his shirt.

KARL  
You better watch what you say.  
Can't believe you're this ungrateful.  
I did it for us.

The DOORBELL sounds.

Sally and Nikki look up at attention. A spark of hope moves across their faces. Karl walks over to the entranceway.

KARL  
Don't move, and don't say nothing.

Karl disappears out of the room.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Karl walks up to the door, takes a look out of the peephole. He shakes his head, irritated.

The DOORBELL chimes again. He unlocks the door, and cracks it open. Standing on the porch is Gayle Clarkson, the neighbor we've met earlier.

GAYLE

Hi.

KARL

Good evening.

GAYLE

Sorry to bother you. My car died on me a few feet down the road. My husband claimed he fixed it, but he's no mechanic.

Gayle chuckles. Karl just stares at her. What in the world does she want?

GAYLE

Anyway, I was wondering if I could use your phone? My cell also died on me. Again, my husband's fault.

KARL

Who do you want to call?

GAYLE

Believe it or not, my husband.

Gayle waits for the invitation to use the phone. Karl looks past her, taking in the DARKNESS of the woods. After a moment, his eyes glide back on her.

KARL

Uh... sure. Come on in.

Karl opens the door wide, steps aside. Gayle studies his face with suspicion.

KARL

Please...

Karl breaks an inviting smile. Gayle shrugs off her gut feeling, and walks inside.

GAYLE

Thank you.

Karl closes the door, locks it. He points down the hall that leads to the family room.

KARL

The phone's down there. Please, follow me.

He walks off into the HALLWAY, followed closely by Gayle.

GAYLE

This is a nice house.

KARL

Oh, you should see the basement.

GAYLE

Really?

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Karl and Gayle step in from the hallway. Karl does a quick scan. Sally and Nikki are no where to be seen. He looks at Gayle, ushers her to an end table, where the phone sits.

KARL

I'll be back.

GAYLE

Is your wife here? I'd like to meet her.

KARL

Oh she better be here. Excuse me.

Karl walks out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

He races through the hall, checking closets, but sees no signs of Sally or Nikki. He comes to a stop in front of the bathroom door. He places his ear to the door, listening for any sounds of movement. After a beat of silence, he breaks the door open, taking in nothing but a bare bathroom.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Gayle glances around the room. She notices the pictures on the book shelves. Her curiosity takes over. She heads over to the shelves, staring heavily at the pictures of Sally, Nikki and Sally's deceased husband. A look floats across her face that says "that's weird."

She picks up a different picture of Sally and Henry, embracing in front of a church. Her eyes squint as she focuses hard on their happy faces.

FOOTSTEPS are heard. Gayle places the photo back on the shelf, quickly dances over by the entranceway, where she --

-- comes face to face with Karl. FRUSTRATION is heavy on his face.

KARL

Made your phone call?

Gayle hurriedly nods "yes."

KARL

Okay. You have to leave now.

GAYLE

Sure.

Gayle walks over to the end table, picks up her purse. Karl stares intently at her, realizing she's very nervous.

KARL

What's wrong?

GAYLE

Excuse me?

KARL

What's wrong?

GAYLE

Um... nothing... My husband will be here any second. Good night.

Gayle goes to walk around Karl, but he steps in front of her. His intimidating presence causes her to take a few steps backwards.

KARL

I can't let you leave.

FEAR crawls over her face. She's stunned, unable to move. What has she gotten herself into?

Karl just stares at her as if he's reading her mind. A long moment passes. He breaks eye contact, scans the room like a detective. His eyes STOP at the pictures on the shelf. Gayle looks at the pictures also.

KARL

(re: the pictures)

Very photogenic. Don't you think?

They look back at each other. Karl walks up to her, takes her purse out of her hand, places it on the coffee table.

KARL

Like I said, I can't let you leave. You know too much.

GAYLE

No. I, I don't know anythi --

KARL

Yeah, you do.

GAYLE

No I --

KARL

I'm not stupid! Now I know you paid attention to those pictures. You see a woman, a child, and a man together on a photo. Hmm, what would any one think?

He waits for a response. Gayle plays dumb, shakes her head "I don't know."

Karl stares a beat, then QUICKLY grabs her.

GAYLE

Don't hurt me!

KARL

Can't promise you that. It's not  
up to me. It's up to my wife.

(yelling)

Sally, come out! I know you're still  
in here. Come out! There's a neighbor  
here to see you!

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Karl enters out of the family room, pulling Gayle along  
with him.

KARL

Honey, I know you hear me! If you  
don't come out, something terrible  
will happen. You hear me. Now come  
out!

Karl waits a few seconds to see what happens. He receives  
no verbal response, nor a physical one. And this causes him  
to SLAM Gayle against the wall. She goes down hard,  
colliding onto the hardwood floor.

She grabs her head, SOUNDS of pain erupts from her. But  
Karl doesn't stop there. He strikes her with a couple of  
kicks to the side.

Gayle's MOANS and GROANS float into the air. Karl just  
glares down on her with a face that could scare any one.

KARL

It's my wife's fault. Tell her  
to come out from hiding... Tell her!

Gayle suppresses her painful sounds and obeys.

GAYLE

Come out... Please... Come out.

KARL

Louder!

GAYLE

Please, come out! Come out!

Karl turns his head, looking in every direction.

KARL

Do you hear her?! Her desperate plea?!  
Come out, Sally. Don't let her  
death be on your hands! Come out!  
(to Gayle)  
Continue!

He gives her a kick.

GAYLE

...Come out... Please!

KARL

I know you hear her!

Karl waits several seconds, looking in front and behind him. Nothing. He loses it even more, and SCREAMS at the top of his lungs:

KARL

You've got ten seconds! If I  
don't see you, she's dead!  
(lower, but still  
loud)  
One... Two... Three... Four...  
Five... Six... Seven... Eight...  
Nine... T --

SALLY (O.S)

Okay. I'm here.

Karl turns around, sees Sally and Nikki at the far end of the hallway, FROZEN. A smile forms on his warped face.

KARL

There you are. Honey, I thought  
I lost you... Look, we have a  
visitor.  
(to Gayle)  
And oh yeah, those treats you  
gave us were delicious.

Karl helps Gayle to her feet.

GAYLE  
Please... Let me go.

Karl chuckles, shakes his head.

KARL  
Now what kind of host would I be?  
You just got here.

He starts walking her down the hallway towards Sally and Nikki.

GAYLE  
But my husband's on his way.

Karl suddenly halts. He stares at her for several seconds.

KARL  
Don't worry. I'll take care of  
him.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - NIGHT

Karl escorts Sally, Nikki, and Gayle into the room. And as soon as they get in, the DOORBELL sounds. Karl looks up at the ceiling.

KARL  
(to Gayle)  
I take it, that's your husband?

Gayle doesn't respond. She just drops her head, wiping tears from her eyes.

EXT. SALLY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

On the porch is Gayle's husband, STAN. He's fiftyish, appearing more like sixtyish due to his unlimited supply of gray hairs.

The door opens, Karl steps out onto the porch, closing the door behind him.

KARL  
It's not done yet.

STAN

What are you waiting for?

KARL

I'm not waiting for anything. What're you doing here anyway?

STAN

She called me. Remember, you let her make a call?

KARL

I know, but you didn't have to show up. Now go home. You'll hear about your wife's death one way or another.

Karl turns to go back inside.

STAN

Just make sure you do it. I came through on my end of the deal. Getting that loan approved wasn't easy.

Karl opens the door, turns and looks at him.

KARL

Stan, like I said, you'll hear about your wife's death one way or another.

STAN

What's that suppose to mean?

Karl shakes his head, sighs.

KARL

Either the news or the paper.

Stan just stares at him. It takes a long beat before it registers.

STAN

Oh, I get it.

KARL

Good... Now excuse me.

Karl goes to close the door. Stan stops him.

STAN  
Can I ask you a question?

KARL  
What now?

Stan stares him up and down.

STAN  
You just don't look like the  
"kill for hire" kinda guy. What  
happened to you?

Karl simply shrugs his shoulders and says:

KARL  
When you have an urgent need, you'll  
do what's necessary. I'm sure you can  
relate.

INT. BASEMENT ROOM - SAME TIME

Sally sits on the floor, holding Nikki in her arms. Gayle sits next to them, embracing herself, showing serious signs of pain.

GAYLE  
I don't wanna die like this.

Nikki looks over at Gayle.

NIKKI  
Do you believe in God?

SALLY  
Nikki. Not now.

GAYLE  
Huh? Do I believe in God?

Nikki nods her head.

GAYLE  
Um... not really... Why?

NIKKI

Because God is the only one who  
can save you now.

Gayle just stares at Nikki. Who is this kid?

NIKKI

Do you know who Jesus is?

SALLY

Nikki, that's enough.

(to Gayle)

Sorry.

GAYLE

No. That's okay.

CLICK! The door unlocks. It opens slowly as Karl sticks his head in.

KARL

Are we all friends now?

Karl steps inside, half-grinning, half-serious. He walks inside and steps in front of Gayle.

KARL

Your husband said hi.

Gayle looks up at him.

GAYLE

Where is he?

KARL

He went back home... He doesn't care.

GAYLE

What?

KARL

He doesn't care. Sorry. Sometimes  
that happens in marriages --

(to Sally)

-- but not ours. Isn't that right,  
sweetie?

Karl reaches out his hand to Gayle.

KARL

Let's go.

Gayle glances over at Sally and Nikki.

KARL

What're you looking at them for?  
Come on. Get up.

Gayle stares at him, pleading with her watery eyes.

KARL

Get up!

GAYLE

What are you gonna do with me?

Karl grabs her.

KARL

It's not what I'm gonna do with  
you. It's what I'm gonna do to  
you.

He pulls her up. Gayle starts PANICKING, struggling to get free. Karl pushes her hard into the wall. She falls to the floor. He bends down, staring intently at her as tears run ramped down her face.

KARL

Now get up. I don't wanna do  
this in front of my family.

GAYLE

...Do what?

Karl glances at Sally, looks back at Gayle with a smirk.

KARL

Kill you.

Karl pulls her back to her feet. She starts PLEADING for her life, shooting out the obvious, "please don't, I don't wanna die, please don't do this!"

He forces her up and out of the door. He goes to close the door.

SALLY

Karl!

He stops the door half-way, looks into the room at Sally. She suppresses her fear, rises to her feet. Her face trembles as she approaches him.

SALLY

You don't need to do this. I told her how much I love you. She understands... She won't tell no one. See, now you can let her go... She's not a threat.

Sally stops a couple of feet away from him, staring directly into his eyes.

A suffocating SILENCE fills the room. They just stare at each other. Karl appears as if he's under a spell. All he can say is:

KARL

...You, you love me?

Sally reluctantly nods "yes."

Karl smiles.

KARL

Give me a kiss, then.

Sally hesitantly steps up to him. She leans in, plants a small kiss on his lips. Sally pulls back, glances at Gayle, then stares back into Karl's eyes. She goes to speak, but before a legible word can escape, Karl grabs the back of her head with his free hand, and starts KISSING her passionately.

Sally grabs a hold of him, takes several steps backwards, causing him to follow her. And just as he's fully inside of the room --

-- Gayle fiercely YANKS away, freeing herself from his hand. She runs off, desperately trying to get away. Karl turns to run after her. Sally grabs him.

SALLY

Don't leave me.

He stares at her with a face that questions if she's real or just pulling his leg.

KARL

Don't worry. I won't be long.  
She can't escape any way.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Gayle FLIES up the basement stairs and smashes into the door. She goes for the doorknob, tries to turn it. But nothing happens... Horror spreads across her face as she continues, frantically trying to turn the knob. After a moment of this, she starts pounding, screaming and kicking the door. Realizing that won't help, she turns around catching --

-- Karl standing at the bottom of the stairs, staring up at her. He brings up a key, moving it side to side, teasing her. Gayle drinks in the key, collapses, sobbing with her back to the door.

Karl slides the key into his pocket, walks up the stairs at a slow pace.

KARL

This must be done. Sorry.

Sally and Nikki appear at the bottom of the stairs.

SALLY

Don't! Just let her go. I told  
you she understands.

Karl turns around at the half-way mark.

KARL

Sweetie, this isn't about us. It's  
about business.  
(off Sally's face)

Remember the loan? The loan that got you into this house?

Sally nods "yes."

KARL

Well, when the conventional way shot you down. I called a friend for a favor. And that friend happened to be her husband, who happened to be the owner of a mortgage company.

(beat)

He agreed to funding your loan, if I agreed to doing him a special favor. And since I couldn't bare seeing you go without getting this house, I agreed.

SALLY

Agreed to what?

KARL

Can't you put two and two together? I agreed to killing his wife.

(points at Gayle)

Her... You see, now I have to complete my end of the deal. He came through, now I have to come through.

Karl turns around and resumes climbing the stairs. And as soon as he makes it to her, Nikki shouts:

NIKKI

Don't let this happen! Don't let this happen! Don't let this happen!

Nikki darts up the stairs, takes a hold of Karl's arm. Sally quickly comes up behind her.

SALLY

Honey, what're you doing?

Nikki doesn't even acknowledge Sally. Her eyes stay fixed on Karl, who breaks a subtle smile.

KARL

You don't have to be scared, sweetie. It's okay. Now let me go.

Nikki shakes her head.

NIKKI

Don't do this... He don't want you  
to do this.

Karl looks at her strangely. He? He who? Karl's eyes move  
around the dull basement.

SALLY

Nikki, let him go.

Nikki looks at her mother.

NIKKI

Mommy, I can't... Sorry.

She looks back at Karl, who still wears a strange  
expression. He continues glancing around the basement as if  
he's looking to see someone.

Karl removes Nikki's hand and heads carefully down the  
stairs. He starts searching the basement like a bloodhound.  
Sally and Nikki exchange a look and stare at his peculiar  
behavior.

KARL

...Where you're hiding at? Come  
out. Let me see you.

(beat)

Nikki, where's he at?

Nikki walks down the stairs.

NIKKI

Everywhere.

KARL

What do you mean everywhere?

NIKKI

He is.

KARL

Who is?

NIKKI

God.

Karl just stares at her, speechless. A long beat passes as he recycles her response. Sally hurriedly walks down the stairs, pulls Nikki into her arms. Karl approaches them, never taking his eyes off of Nikki. He squats down in front of them.

KARL

God isn't here. Just me, you,  
your mother and that lady up  
there. That's all.

NIKKI

But he is.

SALLY

Nikki, shhhh.  
(to Karl)  
She doesn't know what she's  
saying.

Karl stands, touches Nikki on her face.

KARL

Don't be so foolish. God is just  
a myth. Why you think there's so  
much hate in the world? People  
killing people? If God was real,  
then stuff like that wouldn't  
happen.

He moves past them, about to climb the stairs, but freezes when he hears:

NIKKI

People let the devil control them.  
That's why there's evil in the world.

SALLY

Nikki, please... be quiet.

Karl turns around, walks back in front of them, glued onto Nikki's face. His eyes slowly rise up, glaring hard at Sally.

KARL

Why are you filling her head with such garbage?

SALLY

But I'm --

NIKKI

It's not mommy. My grandma teaches me.

Karl shakes his head.

KARL

Then she's teaching you wrong.

NIKKI

No she's not --

KARL

Hush! I don't wanna hear no more.  
God is a fraud, and that's that.  
Okay?

Nikki doesn't respond. Karl kneels to her level, intensely staring deep into her eyes.

KARL

I said okay... Answer me, young lady!

She stays quiet and this angers him even more. He SNATCHES her out of Sally's arms.

KARL

You're gonna do what I say. You hear me? Do you hear me?!

Nikki fearfully nods "yes," letting a single tear slide down her face. Karl wipes the tear away, kisses her on the cheek.

KARL

I don't wanna hear any more of that God stuff again. You hear me?

Nikki nods "yes." Karl looks up at Sally, releases Nikki. She rushes back into her mother's embrace. He stands, looks up the stairs at Gayle.

KARL

Now go back into the room. I  
don't want ya'll to see this.

Karl starts heading up the stairs.

NIKKI

(whispering to  
herself)  
Lord, don't let this happen.

Gayle falls to her knees, sobbing. She rests her back against the door.

KARL

There's no need to cry. I promise,  
I'll make it quick.

He reaches the top of the stairs, yanks her up.

SALLY

Don't do this!

Karl pins Gayle to the wall, and starts CHOKING her like a madman. But before any serious damage is done, the --

DOORBELL chimes to life, four times in-a-row. He stops the choking assault, drops her to the floor, then looks down on Sally and Nikki.

KARL

I'll be back. Don't do anything  
stupid.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Karl makes it to the door, takes a look out of the peephole. Nervousness over takes him. He steps away from the door, inhaling and exhaling.

The DOORBELL rings again. Karl gathers his emotions, shakes off his nervousness. He walks to the door, places his hand on the doorknob.

He takes one last breath, opens the door and sees --

A COP, standing on the porch, mid 20's, still wet behind the ears. He looks more like a boy scout than a full-fledge officer. Karl smiles, steps out onto the --

EXT. PORCH

KARL  
Can I help you?

COP  
Yes. There was a complaint called in, regarding a domestic dispute.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Sally, Nikki and Gayle are at one of the thick, double-sided windows, staring out. Through the high bushes, they spot the cop's car. SCREAMING erupts out of their mouths. Sally and Gayle POUND frantically on the window.

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

KARL  
Like I said, everything's fine here. I guess someone must be pulling a sick joke on you guys.

The cop studies Karl's face for brief moment.

KARL  
I have to get back inside. Excuse me.

Karl turns around.

COP  
Sir...

Karl faces the cop.

COP  
...can I see inside? I would like to see for myself that everything's okay.

KARL

Everything is okay. There wasn't no domestic dispute of any kind.

COP

Sir, I understand --

KARL

No, you don't understand. I'm not a liar.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

The desperate YELLING, SCREAMING, and window POUNDING continues. But it's doing them no good. They get a glimpse of the cop through the bushes. He's approaching his car.

Their screaming, yelling, and pounding become LOUDER, hoping to gain his attention. But the cop keeps walking, oblivious to the danger that they're in.

He gets in his car, starts it and drives off. Their yelling and screaming slowly decreases as they watch the car disappear from their view. They stare at the window, LOST, then at each other.

FOOTSTEPS are heard from above. Their eyes rise to the ceiling, following the sound of the footsteps until it stops. And it stopped right at the basement door.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Karl stands at the basement door, holding an over-sized laundry bag. There's no telling what's inside it. He unlocks the door, opens and steps inside.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

He locks the door, scans the dull basement and sees nothing but the basement. Sally, Nikki and Gayle are nowhere to be seen.

Karl walks down the stairs, searches the area, but still -- there's no sign of them. He approaches the back of the basement, looks into the basement room. The room is empty.

He walks back into the main area of the basement, craning his head around.

KARL

Sally! Where are you?!

Behind him, about twenty-feet away in a dark corner, stand Sally, Nikki and Gayle. They are gathered together in a petrified embrace. Karl TURNS around, facing them. But he doesn't react. As of matter of fact, he doesn't even see them. It's as if he's looking right past them.

He turns away, thinking.

KARL

Maybe they got upstairs. But how?

Karl bolts up the stairs and exits. Sally, Nikki and Gayle exchange looks.

SALLY

What just happened?

GAYLE

I don't know... But I think he left the door open.

NIKKI

It was God, mommy. He helped us.

Sally and Gayle stare at her.

NIKKI

You believe me now. Don't you?

SALLY

Sweetie, I don't know what to think.

Gayle trails off towards the stairs. She looks up at the door, noticing the door is partially opened.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sally, Nikki and Gayle step out of the basement into the hallway. They start making their way down it, taking careful steps.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

They reach the foyer, rushes for the door. Gayle twists the doorknob, pulls the door open. ON THE PORCH, stands KARL. They stare at him with horrified faces. He QUICKLY spins around.

An uncertain long beat passes. Someone has to make a move.

SUDDENLY Gayle makes a desperate move. She darts forward, moving at an angle, hoping to get past him. He reacts perfectly, grabbing her with one hand around the neck. She tries to scream, but only a GASPING sound escapes.

He flings her through the doorway. She connects with Sally and Nikki, sending them reeling further into the foyer. They quickly gather themselves and take off running through the house.

Karl darts inside, closes and locks the door. He turns around with a calm look on his face, and starts whistling. It's clear; he's not worried about them escaping.

INT. FAMILY ROOM - NIGHT

Gayle stands at the entranceway, peeping around the corner. She looks over at Sally and Nikki. Sally has the portable up to her ear. She removes the phone. TERROR is carved in her face.

GAYLE

What? What's wrong?

Sally looks at her, raises the phone up.

SALLY

It's dead.

Gayle approaches her, snatches the phone out of her hand. She starts pressing every button, places the phone to her ear, and of course, gets no dial tone.

They all stare at one another as if to say "what now?" Sally looks around the room, stopping at the large windows. She doesn't hesitate. Sally RUSHES over to one of the windows and starts pulling like a maniac to open it.

Gayle joins in, pulling right along with her. But the window won't budge.

They try another one, and another one, until they are all out of windows. Sally checks all of the window latches, and all of them are unlocked.

GAYLE

Maybe they're too rusty.

KARL

Maybe? Of course they are. This house is old.

They spin around, drinking in Karl standing in the entranceway, still wearing his calm face. He brings up the laundry bag that we saw earlier.

KARL

I guess ya wondering what's in this thing?

He looks inside it, smiles.

KARL

Just some props... You know, I need to get rid of the evidence.

SALLY

...What evidence?

KARL

Come on now. You know. The body of our sweet neighbor. Don't tell me you forgot?

They just stand in place, motionless. Time seems to stand still. All Gayle can do is let the tears that filled her eyes, stream down her face.

KARL

I told you, there's no need to cry. I'll make it quick, and if I could make it painless, I would. But that wasn't the design of nature...

(pulling a knife out of  
the bag)  
...so unfortunately, it's going  
to hurt a lot.

Karl drops the bag, takes a step forward but before he  
takes his next step, Nikki shouts:

NIKKI

No!

He suddenly stops and stares at Nikki.

KARL

Sorry, little one. I didn't want  
you to see this, but you and  
mommy gave me no choice. She  
has to die. That's just the  
way it is.

NIKKI

Please...

KARL

Please what?

Nikki glances at Gayle.

NIKKI

...Give her a chance.

Karl looks at Gayle, then back at Nikki. A chance? A chance  
for what?

KARL

What're you talking about?

NIKKI

A chance for her to believe in  
God.

Karl chuckles, shakes his head.

KARL

You're something else.  
(to Sally)  
Is she for real?

Sally doesn't say a word. She just pulls Nikki into her arms, whispers something into her ear. And whatever she whispered causes Nikki to YANK away.

NIKKI

No, mommy! She needs God. If she dies, she's going to hell.

Sally notices Karl's anger mounting.

SALLY

Honey, please. Just stop it.

NIKKI

I can't. Sorry, mommy.

(to Gayle)

Believe in God. That's all you need to do --

KARL

Shut up! I told you in the basement not to bring that stuff up. Didn't I?

She nods "yes." He points the knife at her.

KARL

You better obey me. Ya hear?

Nikki doesn't respond. She's too busy shaking in fear.

KARL

Do you hear me?!

She's about to answer him, but gets interrupted by the RINGING telephone. They stare in shock as the ringing continues, over and over again.

KARL

...What the... hell...

Karl looks at them, gestures with the knife.

KARL

The sofa. Sit on the sofa.

They're slow to move, obvious still trying to make sense out of how's the phone ringing. Karl barks at them:

KARL

Now!

They walk hurriedly toward the sofa and sits. Karl approaches the phone, picks it up and looks at it long and hard. The caller id screen is blank, but the ringing steadily continues.

He walks to one of the end tables, examines the phone base, making sure that the telephone cable is still unplugged, and it is.

Karl looks over at them, clueless. He brings the phone up slowly, presses the "talk" button.

KARL (INTO PHONE)

...Hello.

And all he receives for a response is SILENCE. He brings the phone from his ear, stares at it for a beat, then HURLS it against the wall over the fire place, demolishing it.

Sally, Nikki and Gayle sit motionless, glued on the remains of a once fine piece of technology.

Karl slides the knife up and down the palm of his hand, fixated on it, almost like he's admiring it.

A long moment of uncertainty passes...

Sally, Nikki and Gayle exchange looks. What do we do now? Karl steps away from the end table, stands directly in front of them. The knife's sliding motion has ceased. All of his attention is now on Gayle, who reluctantly looks up at him. Her face wears an "I don't wanna die" type of expression.

KARL

Sally, Nikki cover your eyes.  
Matter of fact, get up, go to the  
side of the room. This could get  
messy.

Sally and Nikki steal a look at Gayle's frightened face.

KARL

Come on. Get up. Or I'll kill her  
right in front of you.

Sally rises to her feet, pulling Nikki up with her. And as they trail over to the side of the room, Sally and Gayle connect eyes. All Sally can do is adlib "I'm sorry."

Karl's intimidating eyes drop back on Gayle. A sick grin breaks through on his face.

KARL

Lay down.

Gayle slowly shakes her head side to side.

KARL

Lay down!

She continues with her head shaking. He loses it, SLAPS her hard across the face. She falls down onto the sofa cushions.

KARL

Now, lay down.

She starts complying, stretching her body across the sofa.

KARL

That's good right there. I told you, I'll make this quick, didn't I? All I have to do is slide this knife underneath your rib cage. Once it connects with your heart, you'll fade away in a matter of seconds... It's not that bad. I mean, it could be worse.

He glances over at Sally and Nikki.

KARL

Don't watch this. Turn away.

(to Gayle)

Raise your shirt up. I need to get a good view.

She goes for her shirt, but stops half-way. Sally and Nikki looks on, helpless.

KARL  
Do it. Raise it up!

Gayle shakes her head "no, I can't."

KARL  
Would you like it in your throat?  
Believe me I'm doing you a favor.  
Now raise your shirt.

Gayle tries again, stops. She just can't do it. Karl shakes his head, grabs her shirt and pulls it up above her chest.

Karl bends and positions the knife at the right angle. And just as he is about to make the incision--

THE DOORBELL PENETRATES THE CHAOS, ringing repetitiously.

He looks over at the entranceway, stands to his feet. He glances at Sally and Nikki.

KARL  
(to Gayle)  
Get up!

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Karl forces them down the hall, stopping by the basement door.

KARL  
(re: the basement)  
Get in!

Gayle steps inside the basement, followed by Sally and Nikki.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Karl checks the peephole. His face shrivels in frustration. He reluctantly opens the door as the final DOORBELL sounds.

His face FLUSHES of all color as he takes in the sight of an EMPTY porch. He steps out onto the --

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

-- searching the premises with thorough eyes, anticipating catching someone hiding... But all is normal. The only thing he finds is a couple of nervous squirrels.

He stares off in the darkness, trying to make sense out of this. He shakes his head, turns around and --

-- A BRIGHT FLASH OF LIGHT STRIKES HIM IN THE EYES. Karl snaps his head away, tries blocking the LIGHT with his hands. But the LIGHT is too powerful. Karl drops to his knees with his head down. And even at this angle, the LIGHT is still too powerful. All he can do is stay down, covering his head.

The LIGHT BURNS BRIGHTER, making the entire porch area as well as the exterior of the house light up like a Christmas tree.

INT. BASEMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Sally, Nikki and Gayle stand by the door. Sally and Gayle have their ears against it, listening carefully, trying to hear anything. Nikki taps Sally on the back, getting her attention.

SALLY

Yes, dear.

Before Nikki can speak, the sound of the door unlocking STARTLES them. They scurry down to the bottom. The door opens, Karl walks in.

He stands at the top of the stairs, gazing down at them. He appears SHAKEN-UP, LOST and CONFUSED. He takes a seat on the top step. He stares at the knife, drops his head and starts sobbing.

They stare at him, not knowing how to react in this weird moment.

Karl raises his head, wiping tears away. His eyes fall on their awkward faces. A long moment passes as he tries to

gather himself. But he's not having much success. Tears continue pouring.

Nikki takes a bold step forward, followed by another one. Sally reaches out, grabs her.

SALLY  
What're you doing?

Nikki glances up at Karl, looks back at her mother.

NIKKI  
...Let me, mommy... Please.

Sally gives her a look, and quickly shakes her head "no."

NIKKI  
But I need to.  
(off Sally's face)  
God is protecting us.

SALLY  
What?

Nikki looks back at Karl.

NIKKI  
Look at him. He's different.  
Something happened to him.

Sally looks at Karl, focusing long and hard. It finally clicks; SOMETHING life changing must have happened to him, but --

SALLY  
Honey, we don't know what's going  
on with him.

They look back up at him, almost waiting to see what happens next... Karl wipes his tears away, takes a few deep breaths. And it seems to be working. He finally gains control of his emotions.

Karl looks up, drinks in their probing stares... A long moment goes by without a word being said. Nikki glances at her mother and Gayle. She looks back at Karl, and asks the question that's on everyone's minds.

NIKKI

Who was at the door?

Karl goes to speak, but stops himself half-way. He tries again, but only manages to release a faint whisper. He drops his head, inhales, exhales.

SILENCE hangs in the air for what feels like an eternity.

NIKKI

It's okay.

He lifts his head, stopping on Nikki's caring face. The knife falls out of his hand. He scoots to the side, looks at the door and back at them, giving them a clear indication.

SALLY

You're letting us go?

Karl nods "yes."

Smiles break out on their faces, except for Nikki's. Her face still wears a look of empathy.

Slowly but surely they start for the stairs. Sally in the front, Nikki in the middle and Gayle bringing up the end. They walk up the stairs, carefully. They reach the top step, moves past Karl and step out into the --

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Nikki pulls away from her mother, looks back into the basement at Karl.

NIKKI

Who was at the door?

Karl looks at her, opens his mouth -- forcefully trying to speak. But again, nothing comes out.

SALLY

Sweetie, we have to go.

Sally throws her arm around Nikki, ushers her away.

INT. BASEMENT - SAME TIME

Karl is still glued on the doorway, trying his HARDEST to utter something... After several long seconds, a sound resonates out of his mouth, followed by the mysterious words:

KARL

It... was God... It was God.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sally and Nikki are approaching the foyer, where Gayle stands, ready to step out onto the porch. Nikki stops and looks up at her mother.

NIKKI

There's no way we should've made it out alive.

SALLY

I know.

NIKKI

It was God, mommy. He did this. He helped us.

Sally glances back at the basement door; Karl steps out into the hallway. He LOCKS eyes with them, turns and walks the opposite way down the hall.

SALLY

You're right.

NIKKI

So you believe me?

Sally looks at her.

SALLY

I'd be a fool not to.

(beat)

Thank you.

NIKKI

For what?

SALLY

For believing when I stopped. For trusting when I couldn't. For having faith when I didn't want to.

(beat)

Because of you, I've learned many lessons through this ordeal. And I'm sorry. About everything.

Sally embraces Nikki, kisses her on the head. They look over at Gayle, who wears a tired smile.

GAYLE

Can we just get out of here?

Sally and Nikki look at each other, nods "we sure can," and starts making their way over towards Gayle.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Karl sits at the table, pressing a number into his cell phone. He brings the phone to his ear.

OPERATOR (V.O)

Police. How can I help you?

KARL (INTO CELL)

I would like to turn myself in.

OPERATOR (V.O)

And who are you sir?

KARL (INTO CELL)

(after a long pause)

Karl Jenkins... I killed my wife today.

INT/EXT. MINIVAN - NIGHT

Sally starts the vehicle, backs out of the driveway. Nikki's eyes are locked on the house.

NIKKI

Mommy, what you think will happen to that man?

Sally throws the van in drive, gives the house one last look.

SALLY

Don't know, sweetie, but whatever happens, I'm sure it'll be what God wanted to happen.

Sally takes off. The van rolls away into the darkness.

EXT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Karl steps out onto the porch, catching the minivan, watching as its red tail-lights disappear behind the large trees of the forest.

FADE TO BLACK.