

PLAYING CARS

Written by

Paul Knauer

FADE IN:

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

ASHLEY, 34, bags under her eyes, no makeup, mussed hair, opens the front door.

ASHLEY  
Thank you, Detective.

DETECTIVE ROBERTS, 52, stands from the nearby couch.

DET. ROBERTS  
I'm sorry I don't have more.

He shuffles to the door.

DET. ROBERTS  
He's just not saying much.

ASHLEY  
I understand.

DET. ROBERTS  
Still says he's innocent, of course. They all say that. But, the evidence --

ASHLEY  
-- I know.

DET. ROBERTS  
Of course you do.

He steps outside.

INT./EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - ENTRY - CONTINUOUS

Ashley, still inside the house, braces against the open door as the detective steps clear of the porch stairs outside.

ASHLEY  
It's his birthday, you know.

He stops, turns back.

DET. ROBERTS  
Your husband?

ASHLEY  
No -- why -- ?

DET. ROBERTS

I'm sorry. I should've -- I saw it  
in the paper.

ASHLEY

February eighteenth. He's nine.

DET. ROBERTS

We'll get a break. I promise.

ASHLEY

Don't promise.

He nods, turns for his car.

She closes the door, sets the alarm, and, walking past a  
long-dead Christmas tree, she heads for the

KITCHEN

Ashley searches the fridge, grabs a bottle of wine.

The clock behind her reads: 2 PM

She twists the cap, tosses it into the trash where it lands  
on a pile of empty bottles.

LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Ashley pours a drink, downs it.

Pours another.

She looks at the Christmas tree.

Ashley takes a present from under the tree, brushes off the  
dead pine needles and the dust.

She sets the gift on the coffee table, stares at it for a  
moment, then bolts from the room.

The present sits alone on the table.

She returns, a roll of wrapping paper in hand.

Ashley rips the old paper from the gift. It's a remote  
control car.

She frantically rewraps the gift in birthday paper.

Finished, she sits back. Almost immediately, she sweeps the  
gift to the floor.

Sobbing, Ashley collapses on the couch.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley wakes. Checks her phone. Tosses it aside.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Ashley leans, her forehead against a door, next to a child's drawing: a car, a stick figure, a name, Justin.

A picture hangs in the hallway: a MAN, 34, a boy, JUSTIN, 8. On a construction site. Matching smiles, matching construction helmets.

Ashley grabs the photo.

KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ashley smashes the photo on the corner of the table.

She rips the picture from the frame, oblivious to the broken glass that cuts her fingers.

Using scissors, she violently cuts the photo in half, splitting the two figures.

She carefully sets the boy's half aside.

Then, in one vicious motion, she stabs the scissors through the man's face, pinning the photo to the kitchen table.

HALLWAY - LATER

Ashley slowly opens the bedroom door.

She steps into

A CHILD'S BEDROOM

Cars everywhere. Hot Wheels cases, filled. Posters of cars. Model cars. If it's a car toy, it's in this room.

She settles onto the child's bed. Falls asleep.

LATER

Ashley tosses restlessly.

BEEP. The sound wakes her up.

A remote control car sits alone in the middle of the room -- the birthday present.

The car rocks slowly back and forth, its little red headlights the only light in the room.

Ashley sits up.

The car lurches forward. Stops.

Ashley swings from the bed, stands.

The car turns for the door and disappears into the hallway.

Ashley hesitates, but follows.

HALLWAY

The car buzzes down the hallway and turns the corner.

LIVING ROOM

Ashley peers into the kitchen where the car slowly rocks back and forth.

On the floor behind her, by the coffee table: a pile of crumpled birthday wrapping paper -- from the gift, unwrapped.

She grabs her phone.

KITCHEN

Ashley cautiously steps in.

The car turns, bumps into a closed door. BEEPS.

The car backs up. Makes another run. Bump. Again. And, again.

Ashley picks up a nearby knife, opens the door.

She peers down the stairs, into the basement.

The car BEEPS.

She slides her phone into her pocket, picks up the car and, holding the knife out, she starts down the stairs.

BASEMENT

Ashley reaches the bottom of the stairs, sets the car down.

It races into the darkness.

She fumbles along the wall, searching.

She finds a light switch, flips it on. She's in a main area. A large space, many dark corners.

She steps forward. The lightbulb above her head POPS. Startled, Ashley SHRIEKS.

Darkness. She hesitates.

Little red headlights ease toward her. The car, returning.

It turns, again disappears into the darkness ahead.

Holding her phone out for light, she follows.

Across the room, she catches up to the car. It bumps the wall. BEEP. Bump. Bump. Bump.

Ashley feels the wall.

Tears form. She shakes her head.

ASHLEY

No, Baby.

Bump. Bump.

Using the handle of the knife as a hammer, she punches a hole in the wall.

She tears at the sheetrock with her bloodied fingers, ripping it away.

Inside, a small space. No door.

She climbs inside.

SMALL SPACE

Ashley holds her phone out, the small light illuminating the corners of the tiny space.

A large chest sits in the far corner.

Ashley tentatively shuffles to it, her face a mixture of realization and denial.

She drops to her knees, reaches for the chest, caresses it.

ASHLEY

Justin, Baby?

JUSTIN (V.O.)

Wanna play cars, Mommy?

Tears flow as she looks at the knife, then her wrist.

Ashley nods.

FADE OUT.