

FADE IN:

EXT. CHICAGO -- ESTABLISHING -- NIGHT

EXT. AN ALLEY IN THE LOOP

Under the glow of dingy street lamps, wind blows litter along a gutter, past homeless people wrapped in ratty blankets, past a burning barrel and huddled drunks, and an old woman pushing a shopping cart filled with plastic bags. She wears a long coat and red scarf. Amid the swirl of dust and debris, she stops at a dumpster, stabs trash with a broomstick. Above her, an elevated train CLATTERS by.

EXT. CHICAGO SUBURB -- SAME TIME

The CLATTER subsides in the distance as wind-blown leaves tumble along a street in front of a red brick house with dark windows. Skeletal trees sway. A contrast of moonlight and shadows.

INT. RED BRICK HOUSE -- BEDROOM

Moonlight bathes the room in a soft glow. Everything is in its place. In bed, a couple sleeps.

(OVER) a loud THUMP - the woman is jarred awake. This is KAREN CARLYLE (52). She nudges her husband.

KAREN

Roger?

He SNORTS.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Roger. Did you hear that?

ROGER

It's the wind, Karen. Go back to sleep.

Tree branches SCRAPE the house.

KAREN

Of course, sorry.

She closes her eyes. Another THUMP. Her eyelids spring open. Terrified, she listens a beat then relaxes.

KAREN (CONT'D)

(mutters)

It's the wind, Karen. Jeeze.

Tossing and turning, she punches her pillow, then gets up, stabs her feet into slippers, and exits the bedroom.

She walks down the hall then down the stairs to the living room where she switches on a small end-table lamp and checks the front door. It's locked. Warily, she glances around then moves to the kitchen. Opening the refrigerator creates a blast of light that throws her shadow on the wall. In the fridge, she sees lids off containers, spilled milk, broken eggs dripping yoke. A frown. Turning, she scans the shadowy kitchen, sees mail scattered across the counter.

KAREN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

What the hell?

She moves to the counter, gathers the mail into a pile, looks back at the mess in the refrigerator. A long beat then a dark expression forms on her face as she remembers:

MORRIS BRENNON (30) chained to a steel chair in a room with a mirrored wall. He's fat, bald, and ugly, mad as hell, his voice raspy and deep.

MORRIS

I'll know what you ate for dinner.

I'll know what came in your mail.

Clenching her fists, Karen steps back, turns slowly. Fearful eyes dart about the kitchen. She's verging on panic.

KAREN

It can't be.

The shadow of an axe appears on the wall above her head and slashes down. She SCREAMS, bolts, the axe just missing her. A frantic scramble through the living room. She knocks over the small lamp. It CRASHES to the floor. The lampshade goes flying, the bulb POPS, dousing the room in shadows.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Roger!

She claws her way up the stairs.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Roger!

She bursts into the bedroom, jumps on the bed, shakes him.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Roger!

He's not waking up. She looks at her hands. Blood! She SCREAMS. The room lights come on. She sees Morris in the doorway, his finger on the switch, fat face wrenched in anger.

KAREN (CONT'D)

Morris Brennon?

He raises the axe.

MORRIS

I told you I'd be back, bitch.

He swings. She dodges. He jumps on the bed. She rolls off, runs for the doorway. His boots tangle in the sheets, trip him up. She runs down the hallway. Behind her, Morris bolts from the bedroom, axe held high. She SCREAMS, plows down the stairs, falls. The axe WHIZZES by her head, THUNKS into the carpeted floor. On hands and knees, she scrambles toward the door. He grabs her leg.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Far enough, bitch.

He turns her over, rips off her nightgown.

MORRIS (CONT'D)

Now you're gonna die like them nurses.

She's fighting, kicking. Her slippers fly off.

KAREN

You were executed thirty years ago!

MORRIS

And ya got famous off my story. Too bad ya didn't tell it right.

KAREN

I told my readers the truth!

MORRIS

Yeah? Well your readers are gonna love this.

He clamps his hands on her throat, starts squeezing. She spots the lamp on the floor next to her, the broken bulb, the exposed filaments still sparking. Reaching out, she grabs the lamp and stabs it into his face. SIZZLING sparks fly. HOLLERING, he rolls over, hands on his face. Smoke swirls from between his fingers. Karen scrambles for the door, fumbles with the lock. Behind her, he's getting up. She throws open the door. He lunges toward her. She dashes outside. SCREAMING, she makes it to the street, runs barefoot and naked through a swirl of wind-driven leaves. Neighbors' porch lights wink on.

EXT. A WHITE STUCCO HOUSE -- LATER

Leaves RUSTLE by another porch light that illuminates a girl's bike, a soccer ball. The faint WARBLE of a cell phone is coming from inside.

INT. WHITE STUCCO HOUSE -- BEDROOM

The WARBLE is loud. A glowing clock on the nightstand reads 4:10 and reveals a room in disarray, clothes tossed about, books, clutter. A man's fumbling hand reaches out from under the sheets, locates the phone, grabs it, and takes it under the covers. The WARBLE stops.

RITTER

Yeah. Ritter.

His voice is low, considerate of his wife sleeping beside him.

RITTER (CONT'D)

I'll be right there.

SPENCE RITTER (33) gets up quietly, turns on a small light. He tucks white shirttails into black slacks. Straps on a shoulder holster and gun. Dons a lanyard with a badge. A sport coat. He licks his fingers, combs them through his hair, looks in the mirror, calls it good. His wife appears to be sleeping, but as he exits the bedroom, she opens her eyes. She's been crying.

His silhouette moves down the hall, stops at a closed door. He opens it. Peers inside. A night-light reveals stuffed animals, dolls, pompoms, two beds, two girls sleeping. The sadness in his eyes is unmistakable. He closes the door.

EXT. WHITE STUCCO HOUSE -- MOMENTS LATER

In the driveway, a Ford Crown Vic unmarked police car fires up, lights up, and tears off.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE -- LATER

Emergency vehicles jam the street at odd angles, overheads flashing. The Crown Vic pulls up. Cops on the scene watch Ritter get out, duck under yellow tape and move toward them.

COP

Sorry to call you out this early,
detective.

RITTER

As if my wife isn't pissed off enough.
What've you got?

COP
 Neighbors heard screaming, called
 911. Got here, front door was open.
 Cleared the house, but the perp was
 gone. One body inside.

Ritter and the cop move toward the house where Karen is
 sitting on the porch, clutching a blanket. EMTs attend to
 her.

RITTER (O.S.)
 (to the cop)
 Who is she?

COP (O.S.)
 Karen Carlyle, investigative reporter
 for the Chicago Tribune.

Karen watches Ritter pass. She looks as if she's seen a
 ghost. Ritter and the cop enter the dark house.

INT. LIVING ROOM

RITTER
 No lights?

The cop turns on his flashlight.

COP
 She zapped him with a lamp. Blew a
 fuse.

The cop's flashlight shines on a broken lamp lying nearby,
 sweeps over to a nasty gash in the carpet.

COP (CONT'D)
 An axe. Perp took it with him.

RITTER
 Where's the body?

COP
 Upstairs.

INT. BEDROOM

A body lies on the bed. Bloody sheets. Cameras flash.
 TECHs dust for prints. The CORONER (65) SNAPS on gloves.

CORONER
 I haven't seen anything like this
 since Morris Brennon, some thirty
 years ago.

COP
 (to Ritter)
 He killed three nurses in Champaign.
 Got the death penalty.

RITTER
 Did Mrs. Carlyle give a statement?

COP
 She's still in shock.

RITTER
 I'd better talk to her.

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE -- PORCH -- MOMENTS LATER

Ritter exits the house, moves to Karen. She's staring into space. EMTs roll a gurney up the walk.

RITTER
 (to an EMT)
 How is she?

EMT
 Banged up pretty bad.

Ritter kneels to Karen's eye level.

RITTER
 Who did this to you?

No response. A shell of a woman.

RITTER (CONT'D)
 Why did he kill your husband?

Her eyes grow stern, meet his. No tears, just anger. EMTs help her to her feet, guide her to the gurney.

RITTER (CONT'D)
 Was it someone he knew?

She lies on the gurney. EMTs strap her in and wheel her to the ambulance. Ritter dogs along.

RITTER (CONT'D)
 Talk to me.

She's loaded into the ambulance. Ritter's standing at the back door.

RITTER (CONT'D)
 Give me something, anything.

An EMT pulls him out of the way. Doors SLAM shut. The ambulance tears off, churning leaves in its wake.

EXT. INDIANA COUNTRYSIDE -- DAY

Cornstalks stand tall under a blue sky, peaceful, until SOUNDS approach, SCUFFLING boots, CLANKING metal. Armed soldiers rush by, and overhead, the air-thumping HAMMER of helicopter blades as a squadron of Hueys flies low. It's a dragnet.

EXT. BLACK HAWK HELICOPTER -- SAME TIME

The chopper approaches a clutch of buildings surrounded by a stone wall and over-flies a sign that reads: *BLYTHE BIOTECH. U.S. GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. KEEP OUT.*

EXT. BLYTHE BIOTECH -- MOMENTS LATER

The Black Hawk lands, beating dust into the air. Doors open. An officer gets out, GENERAL HARRISON (66). He ducks and moves to a waiting group of men, some wearing white lab coats. A man in suit and tie steps forward, DR. JOHN LARSON (65).

LARSON

General Harrison.

HARRISON

What the hell happened, Larson?

LARSON

He got out through a drainage culvert, cut the bars.

HARRISON

This is the second one you've lost.

LARSON

In all fairness, sir, the other one was thirty years ago.

HARRISON

If we don't find this one, dead bodies are gonna start turning up all over.

LARSON

I told you Morris wasn't a good candidate for this project. He's unpredictable. Uncontrollable.

HARRISON

I want a full report.

He storms toward the building. The others follow.

EXT. WHITE STUCCO HOUSE -- MORNING

Long shadows, dewy lawn. (OVER) the ROAR of an engine, a car speeds down the street. A newspaper sails from the window, a prefect arc to the porch, slides under the bike and hits the soccer ball.

INT. KITCHEN

Eggs frying in a pan. A spatula flips the eggs. The cook is SHIRLEY RITTER (30). Her daughters sit at the table. BETH (10) is doing homework. Her open book rests close to a cereal bowl as TONYA (6) struggles to pour milk into it.

TONYA
I'll spill on it.

BETH
Don't you dare ... Mom!

SHIRLEY
Girls. Stop it! Your eggs are almost ready.

TONYA
I don't want eggs. They come out of chicken butts.

BETH
One butt to another.

TONYA
Mom!

SHIRLEY
I'll beat both your butts in a minute.

Her cell phone rings. She wipes her hands and answers.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
The Breakfast Club From Hell.

RITTER
(through the phone)
Honey?

EXT. RED BRICK HOUSE -- SAME TIME

Ritter leans on his car fender, cell phone to his ear. Behind him, cop cars peel away from the scene, overheads off.

RITTER
I'm sorry about this morning.

INTERCUT BETWEEN RITTER and SHIRLEY

Shirley moves into the hallway.

SHIRLEY

And last night, and the night before that. Week after week. Month after month. We're strangers in this house, Spence.

RITTER

There's been another murder.

SHIRLEY

When's the last time we've talked about anything, the kids, the weather?

RITTER

Come on, Shirl, it's my job.

SHIRLEY

I'm making bacon and eggs. Come by. Ten minutes. Five minutes. Eat and run. Hell, I don't care. Just show us you're still a part of this family.

RITTER

I gotta go to the hospital to interview a victim. I'll grab something on the run.

SHIRLEY

(flatly)

I have to get the girls to school.

CLICK, the line goes dead. Ritter closes the phone, stares at the yellow tape: *POLICE LINE - DO NOT CROSS.*