

# **Kill the Moment**

*A mystery/thriller in two acts*

**By**  
**Scott Gibson**

# KILL THE MOMENT

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**Kill the Moment** was produced by Conundrum Productions and received its World Premiere on April 8, 2005 at the Buntport Theatre in Denver, CO. The cast and production crew were as listed below.

**CAST**

(In order of Appearance)

GINA-----Missy Moore  
TRENT-----Josh Hartwell  
CAROL ANN-----Jillann Tafel  
GUS-----Stephen Pearce

**PRODUCTION CREW**

DIRECTOR-----Scott Gibson  
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR---Lorraine M. Zinn  
STAGE MANAGER-----Biz Schaugard  
SET DESIGNER-----Biz Schaugard  
LIGHTING DESIGNER-----Nick Kargel  
COSTUME DESIGNER-----Alice Minaga  
SOUND DESIGNER-----Gov Landrum  
PRODUCER-----Davis Bennett  
PUBLICITY-----Melanie Mayner

**ACT ONE**

**Scene One**

**AT RISE:** (Lights up on the expansive living room/den area of a rural log home. It is cozy and rugged, but suggests a degree of affluence. A lamp is on, but the room is empty. A shirt is tossed over the back of the sofa. There are three doorways leading out of the room. Up center is the wooden front door. There is an open archway upstage right that leads into the kitchen. Upstage left is an open archway leading to the bedrooms and back area of the house. Along the stage right wall, there should be a small alcove, planter, or some structure which affords a vantage point where someone could sit, relatively concealed, though it should not be readily obvious as such. Seconds pass, and then a key rattles in the lock, and the door opens. GINA and TRENT enter, wearing jackets and each carrying a bag of groceries. Both are in their late twenties/early thirties. Both wear windbreakers or parka vests.)

**GINA.** Sorry about that. The lock sticks sometimes when it's cold like this. Come on in. (TRENT holds out the grocery bag he is carrying.)

**TRENT.** Where do you want this?

**GINA.** For the moment, anywhere is fine.

(GINA sets her bag on the sofa. TRENT does likewise.)

**GINA.** Thanks for carrying it.

GINA takes off her coat and crosses to the coat rack by the door to hang it up.

**TRENT.** It's the least I could do, believe me.

**GINA.** (calling) Carol Ann? Carol Ann? (to TRENT) Let me hang up your coat.

**TRENT.** That's all right. I don't want to intrude any more than I already have—

**GINA.** (calling) Carol Ann? I'm back! (to *TRENT*) Your coat. (*TRENT* takes off his coat and hands it to her. She hangs it alongside her own. *TRENT* spots the telephone on the desk and crosses to it, pulling his wallet from his pocket and extricating a piece of paper.)

**TRENT.** I can't thank you enough for stopping. It was bad enough, getting lost. (picking up the receiver, he listens for a second. Glancing at Gina, he dials as he reads from the piece of paper) I knew I'd made a wrong turn pretty quickly, and I was just trying to find my way back. Then, that car just came out of nowhere, and-- (into the receiver) Yeah, Gus? ...Is Gus there? (*GINA* has been watching *TRENT* closely. Now she takes both sacks of groceries and exits into the kitchen.)

**TRENT.** Hey, Gus, it's Trent. ...Yeah, I know, man, but I've been sitting in a ditch for the last hour and twenty minutes. I slid off on a curve. Some jerk coming the opposite direction veered into-- ...No, I'm okay. I'm just stuck. Finally, I started walking, and-- ...Will you shut up and let me talk? ...I'm trying, but you keep-- ...Yes, yeah, that's what I'm hoping. ...Okay, just a minute. (calling into the kitchen) Uh, ma'am? Miss? What's your address? (*GINA* comes to the doorway, holding a grocery items.)

**GINA.** What?

**TRENT.** Where are we? My friend is going to come get me, but he needs to know how to get here.

**GINA.** It's... Well, he wouldn't be able to see the number in the dark. Tell him it's on Butternut Creek Road, about two and a half—

**TRENT.** (into the phone) It's Butternut Creek Road.

**GINA.** About two and a half miles up from the highway. County Road 65. Which direction will he be coming from?

**TRENT.** (into the phone) Two and a half miles up from County Road 65. It-- ...What? I don't know. I was coming the way you told me to. I-- ...I was-- ...Look, we can argue about it later. Just come get me!

**GINA.** Maybe I should talk to him.

**TRENT.** (shaking his head No) Two and a half miles. On the left. A log house, looks like it used to be a barn, or something.

**GINA.** It was. The sign on the gate says “Windy Pines.”

(GINA exits into the kitchen.)

**TRENT.** (into the phone) She says there’s a sign that says “Windy Pines” on the gate. ...The woman who gave me a lift. How long do you-- ...How long? ...Well, can’t you-- ...Yeah, I didn’t plan on this, either. Just get here as soon as you can.

...Yeah. (Trent hangs up. He puts the slip of paper back into his wallet and his wallet back into his pocket. He starts to stroll around the room, inspecting things.

GINA reappears in the kitchen doorway.)

**GINA.** Does he think he’ll be able to find us? Your friend?

**TRENT.** Yeah. Except... Well, it’s going to be a little while. I’m sorry. He’s working, and he can’t get off for another ninety minutes.

**GINA.** Oh.

**TRENT.** Yeah. Not what you bargained for. Play ‘Good Samaritan,’ give some stranger a lift, and he turns into your houseguest for the evening. (Uncomfortable pause. They look at each other.)

**TRENT.** I could wait outside. You’ve already done more than enough. Letting me use your phone. I had my cell, but it wasn’t—

**GINA.** Don’t be ridiculous. It’s freezing out there, and the wind is kicking up. Hence, the name. (pause) You’ll wait here.

**TRENT.** Well, thank you.

**GINA.** I started coffee. Will you have some? Or there’s soft drinks. Or beer.

**TRENT.** Coffee’d be great.

**GINA.** Have a seat.

(TRENT sits on the couch. GINA remains in the doorway, watching him)

**TRENT.** Thank you again for stopping. This time of night. Dirt road. I figured I was royally screwed. I didn’t think I’d see any other cars.

**GINA.** It’s more traveled than you’d think. There are a lot of homes back here. (stepping into the room) I almost didn’t. I... I had a kind of bad experience once. But there you were, just sort of

trudging along, in the dark and the cold. I figured you were reasonably safe.

**TRENT.** (laughing) Reasonably.

(GINA stares at him without expression. TRENT's laugh and then his smile die away.)

**TRENT.** Uh, would you have a bathroom I could use?

**GINA.** (gesturing to the archway) Through there.

**TRENT.** (rising) Thanks.

(TRENT crosses and exits through the archway. GINA watches him go, then turns back and exits into the kitchen.

(A moment later, CAROL ANN comes through the archway. She glances around the room. Spotting TRENT's jacket on the coat rack, she crosses to it and lifts it off its hook. She studies it for a second or so, then hangs it up again. She looks in the direction of the kitchen, then crosses down to the sofa, where she takes the shirt that is tossed across it, and exits back through the archway.

Another moment passes, and GINA, carrying two mugs, re-enters from the kitchen. She crosses to the coffee table in front of the sofa and sets one mug there.

TRENT re-enters through the archway, glancing at his watch.)

**GINA.** Sugar or cream?

**TRENT.** Uh, some cream, if it wouldn't be too much trouble.

(GINA sets her mug down on the coffee table and goes back into the kitchen. TRENT looks around the room, then crosses to sit on the sofa.)

**TRENT.** So, this is a converted barn? Did you do the renovations yourself?(GINA re-enters carrying a cream pitcher.)

**GINA.** (handing the pitcher to TRENT) Here.

**TRENT.** Thanks.

(GINA sits in the chair next to the sofa. TRENT pours cream into his coffee.)

**GINA.** This entire development used to be part of one big cattle ranch. I don't know if this was the barn, exactly, but it was one of the outbuildings, anyway.

**TRENT.** Well, it's amazing.

**GINA.** It's small.

**TRENT.** Cozy.

**GINA.** It needs work. The chimney doesn't draw properly, so we can't have fires. The wiring is screwy, so we lose power sometimes.

**TRENT.** Rustic.

**GINA.** You should write real estate copy.

**TRENT.** I bet it makes a great retreat. A wonderful place to write or paint. Pursue your creative energies.

**GINA.** (seeming to freeze up a bit) What are you going to do about your car? You'll need a tow, or something.

**TRENT.** Oh, yeah. I hadn't thought that far ahead. I can call the auto club, I guess. They'll send somebody out. Or maybe Gus can pull me out when he gets here. I don't know what kind of car he has. (CAROL ANN appears in the archway. GINA sees her immediately, but TRENT, looking at GINA, does not.)

**CAROL ANN.** So. Company.

**GINA.** Carol Ann! Where've you been? I was hollering for you when we got back.

**CAROL ANN.** I was over at The Hennesseys'. Bringing in their mail and making sure everything was okay.

**GINA.** Oh, they're away?

(CAROL ANN crosses down into the room.)

**CAROL ANN.** I guess they must be. I didn't notice them while I was there. (TRENT stands and extends his hand to CAROL ANN.)

**TRENT.** I'm Trent Selby. A temporary intruder. Your friend... (pausing and turning to GINA) I'm sorry. I just realized, I don't know your name.

**GINA.** (almost too quickly) His car got stuck. I gave him a lift.

**CAROL ANN.** That explains *him*.

**GINA.** I'm Gina Novello. And this is Carol Ann Doremus.

**TRENT.** (to CAROL ANN) Hi.

(A brief, awkward pause, during which CAROL ANN stares at TRENT, is broken by GINA.)

**GINA.** A friend is coming to get him. I made coffee. You want some?

**CAROL ANN.** I can get it.

(After another second of appraising TRENT, she exits into the kitchen. TRENT sits down again.)

**TRENT.** I... I must be messing up your plans for the evening. Hopefully, Gus can get away a little bit early, and find this place without any problem, and I'll be out of your hair.

(Pause)

**GINA.** You said you were here to visit friends..?

**TRENT.** Friend. Just one. Gus.

**GINA.** For the long weekend. Just a pleasure trip.

**TRENT.** (not sure where this is going) Yes.

**GINA.** It's a beautiful area. This isn't the best time to see it, though. It's a lot nicer in the summertime.

**TRENT.** Yeah. Unfortunately, this is the only time I could do it.

**GINA.** But you could come back in the summer. If your friend is still here then.

(CAROL ANN re-enters, carrying a beer.)

**TRENT.** Yeah. Maybe.

**GINA.** (to CAROL ANN) Change your mind about the coffee?

(CAROL ANN sits on the opposite end of the sofa from TRENT.)

**CAROL ANN.** So, Gina. I didn't expect you back quite this soon.

**GINA.** Yeah, the errands didn't take me as long as I'd thought.

(CAROL ANN sips her beer. TRENT sips his coffee.)

**CAROL ANN.** Did you offer Trent anything to eat? It's just about dinnertime, after all.

**GINA.** No, I hadn't even thought—

**TRENT.** —No, that's fine. I feel like I'm enough of an interloper as it is. This coffee is plenty.

**GINA.** (flustered) I could fix some soup, or some chili, or something...

**CAROL ANN.** (smiling at TRENT) "Interloper." There's a word you don't often hear. But isn't an interloper, by definition, a deliberate nuisance? You're more of an accidental one. (sipping her beer) That's just a figure of speech, of course. I don't mean to imply that you're a nuisance.

(Pause. TRENT sets his mug on the coffee table.)

**TRENT.** You know, it might make better sense if I wait by my car. Gus will have an easier time finding me—

**GINA.** No, Trent. Don't. You're fine here. It's... It's nice having company. (glaring at CAROL ANN) Carol Ann was just

joking. I know it's difficult to tell. That dark sense of humor, and all.

**CAROL ANN.** Yeah, that's me. A laugh a minute. (TRENT starts to get up)

**TRENT.** No, really. This place is so far off the beaten path. It'll be easier, all around, to be at the car. It still runs. I'll be warm and fine.

**GINA.** (also rising) It won't be safe, walking back on that road in the dark. Too many people drive way too fast on it. I mean, isn't that how you wound up in the ditch to begin with?

**CAROL ANN.** She's right. There's all kind of lunatics out there. You're here. You might as well stay here.

(TRENT seems to be in some sort of slight physical distress. The women do not notice.)

**GINA.** (to CAROL ANN) Careful, dear. That could almost pass for a hospitable remark.

**TRENT.** My coat. I need... Where did you put...

TRENT is swaying. CAROL ANN and GINA look at him and then at each other.

**GINA.** Trent..?

**TRENT.** (shaking his head as if to clear it) Excuse me. I think I need to... (swallowing hard) 'Scuse me.

TRENT crosses somewhat unsteadily to the archway and disappears through it. GINA takes a few steps in his direction.

**GINA.** (calling) Trent?

**CAROL ANN.** (in a hissed whisper) Just what the hell is happening here?

**GINA.** He isn't feeling well.

**CAROL ANN.** Yeah, I figured that part out. What's he doing here? Why'd you bring him here?

**GINA.** I told you, his car went off the—

**CAROL ANN.** —Dammit, Gina, you know what I mean! What in God's Name possessed you to—

**GINA.** —He was headed here already.

**CAROL ANN.** (pause) What?

**GINA.** It was the only way I could think of to get the upper hand. If he didn't think that I knew, then I thought maybe we'd be able to—

(CAROL ANN crosses to GINA)

**CAROL ANN.** Waitwaitwait. Stop right there.

(CAROL ANN looks at GINA for a moment, then stealthily crosses to the archway, listening for a second. She turns and crosses back, guiding GINA to the sofa and pushing her down. She sits beside her.)

**CAROL ANN.** Now, leaving out the bullshit, go back to the beginning and explain. You left here this afternoon to run errands. What happened?

**GINA.** That's what I was doing! While I was in the grocery store, I overheard someone asking about Katherine. I walked up to the front of the aisle and peeked around. (gesturing to the archway) It (was him. He was asking Mr. Atkinson if he knew where Katherine Van Holt was living.

**CAROL ANN.** So? Lots of people have asked that. Reporters. Busybodies. Mr. Atkinson would never tell anybody, especially a stranger.

**GINA.** I know that. It just got my attention, the way it does whenever anybody asks. I shrugged it off. After the guy—Trent—left, I got in the car and was going to the rec center and work out, like I'd planned. I can't exactly say why, but I just couldn't shake this odd feeling. So I turned around and headed back. I just needed to be sure. I wasn't even going to stop, just drive by the house and put my mind at ease.

**CAROL ANN.** (wearily) Gina...

**GINA.** I had to be sure! I had to know that nothing was going to happen! I know, it seems stupid. I was already feeling like an idiot, telling myself to turn around again, but then, there he was! Walking along the side of the road. The guy from the store. Seven o'clock at night, walking along the shoulder of a dirt road, less than a mile and a half from this place! (Carol Ann glances over her shoulder to the doorway)

**CAROL ANN.** So you stopped. Gave him a lift the rest of the way.

**GINA.** I told you, it was the only way. I—

**CAROL ANN.** —I don't want to hear that part again. (closing her eyes and resting her forehead in her hand) He's just some schmuck with poor driving skills who took a wrong turn.

**GINA.** He called a friend to come get him.

**CAROL ANN.** So?

GINA gestures to the telephone on the desk.

**GINA.** From that phone over there.

(CAROL ANN looks at the phone on the desk for a moment, then turns back to stare at GINA.)

**GINA.** I listened to his very dramatic, very believable end of the conversation. With his friend Gus.

CAROL ANN rises and walks to the desk, where she picks up the receiver and holds it to her ear.

**GINA.** Still think I'm imagining things?

**CAROL ANN.** (returning the receiver to the cradle) Damn.

From through the archway, there is the heavy thud of something hitting the floor, accompanied by the crash and clatter of many small objects. Neither of the women seems to react very much to this. GINA continues to look at CAROL ANN earnestly.

CAROL ANN turns slowly in the direction of the archway, then faces forward again.)

**CAROL ANN.** What did you put in his coffee?

**GINA.** Rat poison. It was all I could find.

(CAROL ANN continues to stare numbly ahead as the lights fade to black.)

## Scene Two

(Moments later. The room is empty. Snatches of dialogue between GINA and CAROL ANN can be heard from through the archway.)

**CAROL ANN.** (off) This is no time to be squeamish. Especially after what you've already done.

**GINA.** (off) I can't help it. I don't like... He's heavy, Carol Ann. I'm, I'm losing my grip. He's—

(The sound of something thumping heavily on the ground is heard.)

**CAROL ANN.** (off) Gina, for God's Sake!

**GINA.** (off) Stop yelling at me! You're making me nervous!

**CAROL ANN.** (off) Okay, let's just do this. Grab him under the arms. Ready? Okay, lift!

(There are offstage grunts from both women, and the sound of something being dragged, then settled onto something else.)

**CAROL ANN.** (off) Finally. Now, take this, and wrap it around here. And here. Securely. I'm going to take a look at this.

(A few seconds pass, then CAROL ANN enters through the archway. She is winded and slightly disheveled. She is carrying a wallet, and she crosses to sit at the desk, where she proceeds to look through it. She extracts various items—cards, money, etc.—and inspects them. When she finds a driver's license, she pushes everything else aside and studies it carefully. After a moment, she sets it down, thinking. (GINA enters through the archway. Like CAROL ANN, she is out of breath and somewhat disheveled.)

**GINA.** I didn't know you were going to leave me alone in there with him!

**CAROL ANN.** The light's better in here. Besides, what do you think he's going to do now?

**GINA.** I... I don't know. I just... I didn't... So, what did you find out?

**CAROL ANN.** (shrugging) Nothing. He's who he said he was. Trent Selby. Santa Monica. (picking up the license again) Organ donor. Not that that's going to do anybody much good now.

**GINA.** I'm telling you, this wasn't a coincidence! His car just didn't happen to slide off the road!

**CAROL ANN.** Okay, all right. Let me think.

(CAROL ANN concentrates, while GINA watches her worriedly. Finally, CAROL ANN tosses the license on the desk again.)

**CAROL ANN.** Check his coat. And did he bring anything else with him? (GINA crosses to the coat rack and proceeds to dig through the pockets of TRENT's jacket)

**GINA.** (as she searches) No. He wasn't carrying anything else. (CAROL ANN stands and paces.)

**CAROL ANN.** Did he say anything in the car on the way here? Anything unusual?

**GINA.** (continuing to search) Nothing, really. Just how another car took the curve wide, and that's how he—hold on. (pulling out a cell phone) Look!

(CAROL ANN crosses to GINA.)

**CAROL ANN.** What? What is it?

**GINA.** (pressing buttons on the phone) He said he couldn't use this to call for help, because he couldn't pick up a signal. But look! (holding the phone up to ear, and then to CAROL ANN for her inspection) It's working fine! (CAROL ANN holds the phone to her ear. She and GINA look at each other. GINA takes the cell phone and drops it on the upstage table.)

**CAROL ANN.** That doesn't necessarily prove anything. There are places along the roads here where my phone cuts out all the time.

**GINA.** Oh, come on, Carol Ann!

**CAROL ANN.** (pause) Okay. It's unlikely. But that doesn't exactly excuse what you—what we've... God, I wish you'd just... Well, it doesn't matter now.

**GINA.** If he's the guy who's been sending the notes...

**CAROL ANN.** The notes stopped when we left L.A. That was months ago. Gina, we can't... We can't be doing this every time somebody suspicious shows up. (sighs) Come on. Give me a hand. (CAROL ANN exits through the doorway. GINA follows. All is silent for a second or so. Then, through the doorway, a rolling desk chair emerges. TRENT is slumped in it, eyes closed. His hands are duct-taped to the arm rests and his legs duct-taped to the base. His face is shiny with perspiration. It is difficult to determine whether he is merely unconscious or dead. CAROL ANN is pushing the chair with some help from GINA. They guide it to the middle of the room, then stand back, studying TRENT. A few seconds pass, then TRENT stirs, head slumping forward. His breath comes in shallow gasps, and he makes faint moaning noises).

**CAROL ANN.** I'm going to check something. (CAROL ANN exits to the kitchen. GINA watches TRENT).

**TRENT.** I... I feel... (wretching) What's wrong with me?

**GINA.** Carol Ann! ...CAROL ANN!!

**TRENT.** I need to... I'm gonna... (realizing he is bound) What is... Why am I..? (CAROL ANN re-enters, carrying a box of rat poison, and reading the information on the back of the box).

**CAROL ANN.** Gina, go get a glass of water.

(GINA exits into the kitchen. CAROL ANN sets the box on the end table by the sofa and kneels in front of TRENT).

**CAROL ANN.** My whacko friend fed you rat poison in your coffee. So you're going to want to listen to me very carefully.

**TRENT.** Oh, God. Oh, God.

**CAROL ANN.** I don't know how much she gave you, or how much of the coffee you drank. Maybe because you're about fifty times bigger than your average rat, the effect won't be so bad.

**TRENT.** Please...

**CAROL ANN.** Do you know how rat poison works?

(CAROL ANN picks up the box and studies it).

**CAROL ANN.** It causes hemorrhaging. Rodents slowly bleed to death internally. (GINA comes to the kitchen doorway, holding a glass of water).

**CAROL ANN.** I never realized how cruel this stuff was before. (TRENT writhes and groans as if a particularly intense wave of pain has just swept through him).

**CAROL ANN.** (reading) It says, "If accidentally ingested, induce vomiting and summon a physician immediately." (CAROL ANN beckons to GINA, who comes into the room and hands the glass of water to her).

**CAROL ANN.** But I'm wondering if there's any point in it.

**TRENT.** What?

**CAROL ANN.** Is it really in our best interest to try and save you?

**TRENT.** Oh, God, this can't be happening.

**GINA.** Who are you? Why can't you just leave us alone?

**TRENT.** (swallowing hard) Huh?

**CAROL ANN.** Let me handle this, Gina. Let's not upset the man any more than we already have. We need to stay calm and rational, if we're going to get anywhere.

**TRENT.** You're a couple of lunatics!

**GINA.** If we are, we have people like you to thank for it, you son of a b—

**CAROL ANN.** –Gina! (to TRENT) I just need for you to answer a couple of questions for me.

**TRENT.** You can't...you can't just keep me here. What did I ever do to you?

**CAROL ANN.** You showed up. That was enough.

(CAROL ANN rises and crosses to the other side of TRENT.)

**CAROL ANN.** You were in town, asking questions at the grocery store. Why?

**TRENT.** (doubled over in pain) No. I... I was just asking for...for directions.

**GINA.** Liar! I heard you! You asked about m-- About Katherine!

**CAROL ANN.** Shut up, Gina! (to TRENT) Here's something odd: After you got here, you called your friend and told him where to come find you. On a telephone line that's dead.

**TRENT.** No! No, I swear to you...

**CAROL ANN.** We never had it connected when we moved in. We just use our cell phones. But this didn't seem to present a problem for you. (TRENT wretches and convulses. This spasm lasts for some time. CAROL ANN and GINA watch him. When it seems to have passed, CAROL ANN holds the glass to his lips and he drinks a small amount.)

**CAROL ANN.** It should be obvious to you that you've upset us quite a bit. We try not to make a habit of poisoning visitors, but then, we don't get very many. Katherine Van Holt. Do you know that name, Trent?

**TRENT.** (after a pause) Almost everyone...knows who Katherine Van Holt is.

**CAROL ANN.** Ah. And why were you asking about her at the store?

**TRENT.** I... I was just making conversation. I was lost, so I stopped to get my bearings. I asked... I mean, it was just an idle question. I'd heard you—she—had moved here. (finding it difficult to speak) I don't...have any...

(TRENT's entire body goes rigid in a seizure. After several seconds, he slumps forward, head down. The women do not move for several seconds. They gaze at TRENT impassively).

**CAROL ANN.** Shit.

**GINA.** (sinking onto the sofa) Oh, God. Oh, God.

(CAROL ANN crosses to the desk and gathers up the contents of TRENT's wallet, and stuff everything back into it. She studies the wallet for a moment, then tosses it back onto the desk).

**CAROL ANN.** Where'd you leave your car? Out front, or in the carport?

**GINA.** (rocking back and forth) Oh, God. Oh, God.

**CAROL ANN.** Gina, I need your help, here! Where's your car?

**GINA.** (as if it takes a good deal of effort to think) Uh...

It's...It's out front.

**CAROL ANN.** Move it into the carport so we can take him out through the kitchen.

**GINA.** Carol Ann!

**CAROL ANN.** What? Does it offend your delicate sensibilities to have a body in the trunk of your car? Maybe you should have considered that one cup of coffee ago. (when GINA does not move) Gina! Do it! Now!! (GINA rises and goes to the coat rack to retrieve her keys from her coat pocket).

**CAROL ANN.** Help me get him through the doorway.

(The two women push TRENT and the desk chair through the kitchen doorway. After a moment, CAROL ANN re-enters).

**CAROL ANN.** After you've opened it, come back in here!

(CAROL ANN exits through the archway and returns a second later carrying a roll of duct tape. Trying to decide what to do with it, she tosses it on the desk by TRENT's wallet. Moving purposefully, she picks up TRENT's coffee mug and carries it into the kitchen to empty it. She returns a moment later, carrying both the now-empty mug and a trash bag. As she crosses to the desk, she drops the mug into the bag. At the desk, she picks up the roll of duct tape and TRENT's wallet and put them in the trash bag. She grabs the box of rat poison and drops it into the bag, as well. GINA returns as CAROL ANN is doing this).

**GINA.** What are you doing?

**CAROL ANN.** Getting rid of the evidence. What did you do with his cell phone?

**GINA.** What? ...Uh, I... I don't remember!

**CAROL ANN.** Well, find it! (muttering to herself) We'll need a towel or something, to wipe our fingerprints off his things... (GINA locates the cell phone on the upstage table).

**GINA.** Here it is!

**CAROL ANN.** Drop it in the garbage bag. We'll clean these things off later. Is that everything?

**GINA.** (dropping the phone into the bag) I think so. ...Carol Ann? What... What if he was telling the truth?

(CAROL ANN, closing up the garbage bag, stops and looks coldly at GINA).

**CAROL ANN.** The time for having second thoughts has long since passed.

**GINA.** What are we going to do with him?

**CAROL ANN.** I don't know yet. Take him someplace far away from here. (thinking) The Hennesseys aren't back until Friday. We can put your car in their garage for tonight, anyway.

**GINA.** Why don't we just put him back in his own car? Let the police find him?

**CAROL ANN.** Gosh, let's think about that for a moment. Dead guy behind the steering wheel, not a mark on him. Just a gut full of rat poison. Yeah, nothing too suspicious about that!

**GINA.** But... But nobody can trace him to us, can they?

**CAROL ANN.** (exasperated sigh) Most people go their entire lives without breaking any of the major laws. But you... You just leave dead bodies in your wake, wherever you go!

**GINA.** That's not fair! You know what happened—

**CAROL ANN.** —Then it's up to me to figure out what to do.

**GINA.** Who asked you to? Who asked you to do anything?

(Their argument is interrupted by a knock at the door. Both women fall silent, looking at the door and then back at each other in fear. There is a second knock. CAROL ANN looks at the trash bag in her hand. She crosses to the archway and throws it inside, then starts to cross up to the door.

**GINA.** (hissing) Don't answer it!

**CAROL ANN.** (hissing) We've got to! The lights are on. Whoever it is probably heard our voices already. (composing herself, she crosses to stand at the door) Yes? Who is it?

**GUS.** (off) Uh, is this Windy Pines?

**CAROL ANN.** (glancing back at GINA) Yes. Who is it, please?

**GUS.** (off) I'm a friend of Trent Selby's. I'm here to pick him up. (CAROL ANN and GINA look at each other, stunned.)

**CAROL ANN.** Just a minute, please. (CAROL ANN gestures wildly in the direction of the fireplace. GINA, after a moment's confusion, dashes to the hearth to grab a fireplace poker, which she conceals behind her back. She comes to stand on the opposite side of the door from CAROL ANN. CAROL ANN opens the door.

GUS stands there, wearing a heavy black windbreaker. He extends his hand.)

**GUS.** Hi. I'm Gus Tompkins.

**CAROL ANN.** (shaking his hand) How do you do? Please, come in.

(GUS steps inside. CAROL ANN closes the door behind him. Behind GUS's back, she gives a "just be calm" gesture to GINA. As GUS steps down into the room, the women follow. GINA keeps the poker concealed behind her back.)

**GUS.** This is where Trent called me from, right? Some story about planting his car in a ditch someplace?

**GINA.** He...called you?

**GUS.** Yeah, about ninety minutes ago. I was on the desk tonight. If I'd been in a cruiser, I could've come over right away. But I didn't get off until eight.

**CAROL ANN.** "On duty..?"

**GUS.** (unzipping his jacket) Yeah. I'm with the sheriff's department. (The fireplace poker clatters to the floor behind GINA. GUS and CAROL ANN both look at her.)

**GINA.** Oops. (stooping to pick it up) I was just... (smiling feebly) Oops.

(GINA returns the poker to the fireplace.)

**GUS.** I'm in the right place, aren't I? Is Trent here?

**CAROL ANN.** Uh, come in.

(CAROL ANN and GUS take a few steps down into the room.)

**CAROL ANN.** Yes. This...This would be the right place.

**GINA.** (trailing after them) He called you? And asked you to come get him?

**GUS.** (puzzled) Yeah..? (with sudden recognition) Hey, aren't you..? Yeah! You're that actress!

**GINA.** (with a quick, desperate glance at CAROL ANN) No, I...

**GUS.** The one who... well... (changing the subject) I used to watch you all the time on "Those Who Love." (without waiting to be asked, sits on the sofa) I guess it seems silly, someone like me watching a soap opera. But I work nights mostly, and I... I don't know, I guess I was channel surfing one day, and I guess something interesting was happening on your show. So I watched for a couple of minutes, and that was it. Wham, I was hooked.

**GINA.** Oh, that's very flattering. But—

**GUS.** —That was back when your character had been abducted and taken to that island. I was just going to watch until you got rescued, but then I just kept on. There was always something going on that I had to see through to the end.

**CAROL ANN.** Yeah, soap operas are like that.

**GUS.** You were my favorite, though.

(GINA sits in the chair next to the sofa.)

**GINA.** You know, you'd be surprised how much of our viewership is adult males. (CAROL ANN is a little taken aback by this sudden fraternization.)

**GUS.** Really? Well, for awhile I was kind of embarrassed to admit to anybody that I watched, but then I thought, "Hell why not? It's not like the nighttime shows are any better, and people watch them all the time!" (pause) Oh, I didn't mean to imply that—

**GINA.** No, no, I know what you're saying. We never get the respect—or the money—that prime time actors receive. And we work twice as hard!

(CAROL ANN sinks onto the other end of the sofa.)

**GUS.** Well, when you left, and that other girl started playing your role, it was never the same. I'd turn on the show, but I could never watch her without thinking, "That's not Autumn! She doesn't look or sound anything like her!"

**GINA.** You're too sweet!

**GUS.** Why did you leave, anyway?

**GINA.** I got married. It seemed like a good time to go, and I thought maybe after a year or so, I'd try to get into features.

**GUS.** Your hair's different now. That's why I didn't recognize you right away.

**GINA.** Yes. Well, I...

**GUS.** I'm sorry about... Well, about what happened with your husband. It was such a tragedy. (Uncomfortable pause.)

**CAROL ANN.** Well, that's in the past. It's the reason we moved here. To put all of that behind us.

**GINA.** Carol Ann was Kyle's executive assistant. As well as my best friend. Kyle was my husband. (Another uncomfortable pause.)

**GUS.** I'm sorry if I brought up something I shouldn't have.

**GINA.** No, no, it's fine.

**CAROL ANN.** It's been very difficult for Gina. The trial, and the publicity...

**GUS.** Who's Gina?

**GINA.** I am.

**GUS.** Wait, I thought your name was Katherine. Katherine Novello.

**GINA.** It is. Well, my full name is Gina Katherine Novello, but when I got into acting, there was already a 'Gina Novello' with The Screen Actors Guild, so I use my middle name professionally.

**GUS.** Oh. Well. You learn something every day. ...Anyway, I'm very sorry about what happened. Please accept my condolences. And, as a fan, I hope you'll come back to acting again real soon.

(GINA stands and crosses away a few steps.)

**GINA.** Oh, well, I don't know about that...

**GUS.** So, where is Trent, anyway? (GUS looks back and forth between CAROL ANN and GINA, who look at each other.)

**CAROL ANN.** Uh, well, he left here...right after he talked to you.

**GUS.** He left? But he told me to pick him up here.

**CAROL ANN.** He... After he got off the phone, he remembered something he'd left in the car.

**GINA.** (picking up CAROL ANN's cue) He said he needed to go and get it right away.

**CAROL ANN.** Yes. He was very concerned that he'd forgotten it.

**GINA.** I offered to give him a ride back to his car. It's so cold out there...

**CAROL ANN.** But he wouldn't hear of it. Said he didn't mind the walk.

**GUS.** (laughing) Really? That doesn't sound much like Trent. (GINA spots TRENT's coat, still hanging on the coat rack by the door. She stealthily makes her way up to it.)

**CAROL ANN.** Uh, yeah... That seemed off to us, too. But he was very insistent that he needed to go and get whatever it was. (GUS turns to look over his shoulder at GINA, who freezes in her tracks, just steps away from the coat rack.)

**GUS.** I wonder why he didn't call me back to say he'd be waiting by his car, then?

**CAROL ANN.** (drawing GUS's attention back to her) Well, I got the impression that he was going to grab whatever it was, and then come back here again. What time did he leave here, Gina?

(GINA is just about to reach for TRENT's coat. This catches her by surprise, and she whirls to face the others.)

**GINA.** Uh, oh...gosh. ...Forty-five minutes ago, I suppose..?

(GUS checks his watch. GINA quickly snatches TRENT's coat from the rack and tosses it through the kitchen doorway.)

**CAROL ANN.** (again trying to draw GUS's attention) That long? Gee, I'm surprised he's not back by now. Or that you didn't pass him on the road.

**GINA.** (meaningfully) I hope something didn't...happen to him.

**CAROL ANN.** Don't be silly, Gina! What could happen? (to GUS) She's always such an alarmist. I'm sure everything's fine.

I... I suppose he might have gotten a little bit turned around out there. The road curves a lot, and there are so many side roads. It can be kind of confusing if you aren't familiar with the area.

Maybe he got lost.

**GUS.** Now, that sounds like Trent. (GUS laughs. After a short hesitation, CAROL ANN and GINA laugh weakly.)

**GUS.** (rising) I suppose I should go find him. Where did he skid off, do you know? I have to say, I didn't spot his car anywhere as I was driving up here.

**CAROL ANN.** (rising) Oh, Uh, well, Gina, can you tell the deputy where—

**GUS.** –Call me Gus.

**CAROL ANN.** Can you explain to Gus where Trent's car went off the road?

**GINA.** Well, I didn't actually see the car, but I think it's...it's by that big rock overhang. Kind of a sharp curve..? Just after you pass the split-rail fence?

**GUS.** (shaking his head) Boy, that's not... (inspiration strikes) Say, would you mind riding back there with me? That would be a big help. As dark as it is, I'd probably never spot the car otherwise. We'll find him, and then I'll bring you right back here. (GINA doesn't like this idea at all, but CAROL ANN seizes on it.)

**CAROL ANN.** That's a great idea! (meaningfully to GINA) You're the only one who actually has an idea of where the car might be. Go back there with the dep—with Gus. I'll stay here and take care of... Of making some coffee for when all of you get back.

**GINA.** (meaningfully) Special coffee?

**CAROL ANN.** No! No more special coffee. The regular kind. That we can all drink.

(GUS crosses to the door. Reluctantly, GINA follows, taking her coat from the coat rack.)

**GUS.** Yeah, you'll want to bundle up good. It's nasty out there.

**CAROL ANN.** Be careful.

(GINA nods. GUS opens the door and steps outside. GINA pauses in the open doorway to look back at CAROL ANN.)

**CAROL ANN.** (whispering) Just go! Take him to the car, look around, and then come back here. I'll... I'll think of something. Say as little as possible, and don't panic!

(GUS reappears in the doorway.)

**GUS.** You coming? (With a final, desperate look at CAROL ANN, GINA exits, closing the door behind her. CAROL ANN remains looking at the door for a moment, then turns around. She is thinking. She goes to the desk, where she grabs a set of keys. Then she crosses and exits through the doorway. The room is empty for a moment. Then the desk chair on which TRENT had been tied rolls through the kitchen doorway. Strips of duct tape dangle from the arm rests. Several more seconds pass, then CAROL ANN re-enters through the archway, wearing a coat and carrying the trash bag she'd tossed into the hallway earlier. As she crosses the room, she is fumbling with her keys, so she is only a step or two from the desk chair before she notices it.

When she spots it, she stops in her tracks. She drops the bag and crosses to the chair as if in shock. Tentatively, she reaches out to touch it. Then realization sinks in. She backs away from the chair, looks around the room fearfully, and then bolts for the front door. She flings it open. TRENT is standing there, a strip of duct tape clinging to one of his sleeves. CAROL ANN screams. TRENT lunges for her, but she dashes back into the room, headed for the archway. TRENT grabs her arm, and she pulls away, escaping to

below the sofa. TRENT stands above the couch, glowering at her, and CAROL ANN cannot decide whether to make a break for the kitchen or through the archway. Whenever she starts for either, he moves to cut her off. After several attempts, he starts to come over the sofa, and she escapes towards the open front door. TRENT is able to grab her just as she is about to get outside.)

**CAROL ANN.** (screaming through the open doorway) Help me! Help! Help me! (Holding on to CAROL ANN, TRENT is able to kick the door closed. CAROL ANN bites his arm, and he cries out in pain. He pulls her down to the sofa and throws her onto it.)

**TRENT.** (breathless) For future reference, don't leave your victims unattended in the kitchen. Lots of knives and other sharp objects in there.

**CAROL ANN.** (breathless) You don't understand. Please...

**TRENT.** I understand you tried to kill me.

**CAROL ANN.** No, that's not what... It's Gina! She's the one. I had no idea she'd do that. I'm sorry!

**TRENT.** Yet, you made no effort to save me once you found out. Instead, you tied me up. Just watched while that shit ate through my stomach lining, setting my gut on fire. Cross-examined me while I was dying. Me, an innocent guest in your home!

**CAROL ANN.** (bitterly) You, innocent? That's a laugh.

**TRENT.** It's all relative, isn't it? About as innocent as you. (stands away from CAROL ANN) You know what? You want to go running out of here, screaming for help? (TRENT crosses to the front door and opens it.)

**TRENT.** Be my guest. I'll wait here. Bring back the neighbors. The police. The National Guard. The more, the merrier. (TRENT stands waiting. CAROL ANN pulls herself into a sitting position on the couch and turns her back to him. TRENT closes the door again.)

**TRENT.** That's what I thought.

**CAROL ANN.** You didn't drink the coffee.

**TRENT.** It smelled funny. And the cream started to curdle. Couldn't be sure, though. Maybe it was just bad cream. I figured I'd act a little woozy, collapse in the bathroom. See how people would react. (laughs) I didn't expect to wind up duct-taped to a chair. You have a kinky side.

**CAROL ANN.** You took a hell of a risk.

**TRENT.** I figured I could do the Houdini thing when I needed to.

**CAROL ANN.** I wish I'd poured the rest of that box down your throat when I had the chance. What are you doing here?

(TRENT crosses down to her.)

**TRENT.** I want you to stop jerking me around. I want the money.

**CAROL ANN.** I told you; it will take a little while.

**TRENT.** What you didn't tell me was that you and that little bimbo were going to sneak away without so much as a 'goodbye' or an 'I'll be in touch.' You can see why I got a little concerned.

**CAROL ANN.** I had to get her out of L.A. She was starting to freak out with all the phone calls, the people accosting her, the notes... The incredibly nasty things people have been saying and writing.

**TRENT.** I can imagine. You plow into your husband with your Mercedes and leave it parked on top of his skull. Some people will talk.

**CAROL ANN.** The jury returned a verdict of 'not guilty.'

**TRENT.** Yeah, didn't that just frost you? That's why people are being so mean. They see a famous, soon-to-be very wealthy starlet set free. They look at their own minimum-wage, just-scraping-by, miserable lives, and they get a little testy. Make nasty phone calls. Write ugly notes. (TRENT crawls over the back of the sofa to sit next to CAROL ANN.)

**TRENT.** She's just fortunate to have a good friend like you to see her through the bad times.

**CAROL ANN.** You have no idea what's going on here. How close you've come to fouling things up.

**TRENT.** Then make it easy on yourself! Give me a hundred a twenty-five thousand dollars, and I'll let you get on with whatever you were doing. No more interference, I promise!

**CAROL ANN.** We agreed on a hundred thousand!

**TRENT.** Yeah, that was before that little rat poison incident. I'm gonna need more now. Workman's comp.

**CAROL ANN.** That's your own fault. Nobody asked you to come here. You're just lucky that little psycho didn't bash your brains out with the fireplace poker when your back was turned.

**TRENT.** All the more reason it's got to be a hundred and twenty-five. (CAROL ANN rises and crosses to the desk where she tosses the keys.)

**CAROL ANN.** Fine.

**TRENT.** And no more stalling. I want it by the end of the week. I've been a good boy. I've been patient for three months now.

**CAROL ANN.** There's no way I can get it to you that quickly! I can't just—

**TRENT.** (rising) You were Kyle Van Holt's executive assistant for five years. You're the executor of his estate. You can find a way to shuffle things around enough that nobody will even miss it. (Pause. TRENT looks at CAROL ANN who stares down at the desk grimly.)

**CAROL ANN.** Monday. Give me until Monday.

**TRENT.** Fine. Monday's good. See, I'm nothing if not reasonable. And then you get a key to a special little box someplace, and I vanish from your life forever. (looking around) Now, what did I do with my coat? Oh, that's right. (TRENT goes into the kitchen and returns with his jacket, which he puts on.)

**TRENT.** How about my wallet? And cell phone?

**CAROL ANN.** (gesturing) In the garbage bag. (TRENT crosses and retrieves his things from the garbage bag.)

**TRENT.** Time to hit the road. Thanks for the coffee!

**CAROL ANN.** I thought your car was stuck in a ditch someplace.

**TRENT.** Now, why would I want to do something like that?

**CAROL ANN.** Then, how'd you find us?

**TRENT.** It wasn't hard. Anyone who reads the tabloids knows that Katherine Novello-Van Holt retreated to somewhere around here recently to avoid the media glare. It was just a matter of asking a few questions in the right places. Real estate offices, a coffee shop or two... There's always somebody eager to share what they know. What kept coming up was, "Some place on Butternut Creek Road."

**CAROL ANN.** That's not a lot to go on.

**TRENT.** No. But you can be pretty motivated when there's enough at stake. So I drove out to the crossroad, parked, and started going door to door with the stranded motorist routine. Just

to see who lived there. I was getting pretty discouraged. But then, the most convenient thing happened...

**CAROL ANN.** Gina drove by and offered you a lift.

**TRENT.** Right to your door. See what a little clean living can get you?

**CAROL ANN.** So, where can I contact you? On Monday?

**TRENT.** The usual place. Now that we've talked, there's no reason for me to hang around this wide spot in the road they call a town. It has its charm, I'm sure. But the night life sucks.

(TRENT opens the door, then turns back to CAROL ANN.)

**TRENT.** So, who was the dude who drove off with Gina a minute ago?

**CAROL ANN.** (thoughtful; not looking at TRENT) I don't know. Somebody from town, I think. We mostly just wanted to get him away from here, when we thought you were... (shaking off the thought and smiling grimly at TRENT) Be careful out there. Walking along the road this time of night. A careless motorist might not see you in the dark.

**TRENT.** (with no trace of humor) Yeah. I'll watch my step.  
(TRENT steps outside and closes the door behind him.)

CAROL ANN waits a few seconds, then crosses up and locks the door. She takes off her coat and puts it on the coat rack. She picks up the trash bag and crosses to the rolling desk chair. She studies it for a moment, then sets the bag on the chair and begins rolling it toward the archway as the lights fade.)

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