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THE ROOM AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BOB WHITE DRIVE - DAY

It's a quiet street in a residential neighborhood. The houses are mostly two stories, thirty years or so years old, with small, well-manicured yards and trimmed hedges.

Parked at the curb is a large, dark SUV.

INT./EXT SUV - DAY

In the driver's seat of the SUV, alone, is SASHA JONES (30, African American, forensic psychologist).

She's holding a tablet, watching a looping video clip.

The clip was shot at night with a webcam. It's from a camera that was set up inside of a birdhouse. There are no birds. The shot catches the sidewalk and curb and the part of the walk leading up to the door of the house across the street.

The video shows someone entering the frame at an anxious jog from the left and turning to go up the short walk to the front door. It looks like it may be a slim teenaged girl. She disappears from the frame at the top. It's only a few seconds long. The video is low-resolution and the focus is off.

On the seat next to Sasha is an open folder. There's a 3 x 5 photo of SANDRA DAVIS (17, dark-hair and small for her age, almost elfin). It looks like a school picture. Next to that is a police report.

EXT. BOB WHITE DRIVE - DAY

Another car, similar to hers, pulls up behind her and parks. The door opens and Detective CARTER BRAGG (40, Caucasian, heavy-set, wearing an inexpensive suit) gets out, steps over to the sidewalk, and approaches Sasha's car. He's carrying a folded sheet of paper in one hand.

He's got a nine-millimeter handgun in a holster on his hip.

INT./EXT SUV

When he gets to Sasha's car he raps on the passenger's side window, and she unlocks the door. She gathers up the picture and report into the folder and takes it off the seat as Bragg opens the door and sits.

SASHA  
Did you get it?

BRAGG  
You're not going to be happy.

He hands her the paper and she unfolds it and looks it over.

SASHA  
So, we're only allowed to see if  
she's in there?

BRAGG  
Yes.

She sighs and hands the search warrant back to Bragg.

BRAGG (CONT'D)  
Let's just be glad the guy who has  
that camera set up finally thought  
to check the feed from that night.

SASHA  
Why are they being so careful?

BRAGG  
Well ... considering the history of  
the woman who lives there, it's  
pretty dicey. And that video is  
really blurry. Maybe it isn't her.

SASHA  
(angry)  
Who else could it be, at that hour  
on that night on this street?

BRAGG  
At least we can go in and look  
around now.

SASHA  
(bitterly)  
Yeah. At least we have that.

EXT. BOB WHITE DRIVE

They get out of the car and cross the street, approaching the  
house that was in the video.

SASHA  
Where was the car parked?

They both stop and he turns and nods toward his own car.

BRAGG

About where I'm parked now.

SASHA

So, her fuel pump dies as she's passing through. It's 2 a.m. She's not getting a signal for her cell phone --

BRAGG

Yeah, reception sucks in this area.

SASHA

She looks around and sees the lights on in this house here.

BRAGG

Yeah. I think Ms. Hubbard was passed out drunk and left her lights on. Poor woman.

SASHA

She's a suspect in a kidnapping.

BRAGG

Why would she do that? I'm not a forensic psychologist, but it seems like in cases where a woman is trying to replace a baby that's died, she usually goes after one that's about the same age. Her baby was two months old. Sandra Davis is seventeen years old.

SASHA

Eighteen, now. Yeah, I know.

They resume walking towards the house.

SASHA (CONT'D)

Maybe she's gotten into sex trafficking or something since her divorce.

BRAGG

That's ridiculous.

EXT. FRONT DOOR TO MARILYN'S HOUSE - DAY

They reach the door and Bragg rings the doorbell.

BRAGG  
 (quietly)  
 Remember, we're not talking to a  
 suspect.

SASHA  
 (muttering)  
 Yet.

The door is opened by MARILYN HUBBARD (40, slim, gray-haired, wearing a track-suit).

MARILYN  
 (annoyed)  
 I'm sorry, but I've long since  
 found Jesus and I don't have any  
 money to buy anything.

She starts to close the door but Bragg stops it, gently.

BRAGG  
 Ms. Hubbard, do you remember me?

He holds up his badge and she squints at it.

MARILYN  
 Ah, you're one of those cops,  
 looking for that lost little girl.

BRAGG  
 Detective Tom Bragg. This is Dr.  
 Sasha Jones. She's a psychologist.

SASHA  
 I specialize in finding missing  
 children. I'm a private consultant,  
 working for Sandra Davis's parents.

MARILYN  
 Oh, those poor people.

BRAGG  
 May we come in?

Marilyn looks them over appraisingly before stepping aside so they can enter.

INT. HUBBARD HOUSE FOYER - DAY

The foyer is small, with a coat rack next to the door. Just past the coat rack is the bottom of the stairs leading up. Marilyn closes the door when they are inside.

Bragg turns towards her and extends his hand, with the search warrant.

BRAGG

Ms. Hubbard, we have a warrant to search the premises.

Marilyn takes the warrant from Bragg and looks at it.

MARILYN

What are you looking for?

She tries to hand the warrant back to Bragg.

BRAGG

That's your copy. As it says there, we're looking for Sandra Davis.

MARILYN

I've already told you, she isn't here. That hasn't changed from four months ago.

SASHA

Ms. Hubbard? Maybe we could go into the living room and sit down to talk while Detective Bragg looks around.

MARILYN

(hostile)

Talk about what? How you're invading my privacy?

Sasha extends a hand towards the living room.

SASHA

Please?

Marilyn walks past her into the living room, Sasha following. Bragg follows Marilyn and Sasha into the living room.

INT. HUBBARD HOUSE LIVING ROOM

The living room is neat, looking like it had been cleaned and vacuumed recently.

The length of the stairs is visible from the living room, and at the top landing there's a door, closed.

SASHA

You have a lovely home.

MARILYN

Thank you.

Marilyn settles into an easy chair and Sasha sits on the sofa, the end closest to Marilyn. There's a coffee table in front of the couch, a few magazines and a couple of books on top of it.

Bragg comes up behind the couch.

BRAGG

Is there anyone else in the house?

MARILYN

No.

Bragg nods and heads for the stairs.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

Don't you break anything!

SASHA

Maybe we should talk about that night.

MARILYN

What night?

SASHA

The night Sandra went missing.

MARILYN

I've already told that detective I didn't see her that night. Or any other time.

Marilyn nervously watches Bragg go up the stairs towards the closed door. She's trying not to be obvious about it.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - DAY

Bragg reaches the top of the stairs and looks up the hallway.

There are several doors, all of them open except for the one directly in front of him.

Bragg goes up to the closed door, reaching for the doorknob

...

INT. HUBBARD HOUSE LIVING ROOM

Marilyn watches Bragg open the door and go inside, biting her bottom lip.

SASHA

Ms. Hubbard, we've found a video where it appears that Sandra came up and rang your doorbell that night.

MARILYN

Really? Can I see this video?

SASHA

Sure.

She gets out the tablet, where the video is already queued up. She hands the tablet to Marilyn.

MARILYN

How do I --

SASHA

Just tap the screen.

Marilyn taps the screen and watches the video for a few seconds.

MARILYN

That's really blurry. And it doesn't show much.

SASHA

The camera that shot that is across the street and it's pointing at your house.

MARILYN

Why?

SASHA

It's in a birdhouse and it's supposed to stream birds nesting for an Internet site. It shows her coming up to your door.

MARILYN

Are you sure it's her? It seems to be really blurry to me.

SASHA

Reasonably sure.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - DAY

Bragg opens the door.

The room inside was obviously the nursery. The walls are covered with Mother Goose figures, and there's a desk with several cases of baby-food.

There's a box of diapers, as well.

In the middle of the room is a crib, completely covered with a heavy sheet that extends all the way to the floor.

Bragg takes out a small flashlight and turns it on, then opens a door inside the room which turns out to be to a mostly empty closet.

He exits, closing the door behind him.

INTERCUT: UPSTAIRS HALL AND LIVING ROOM

Bragg heads up the hall.

When Bragg exits the room, closing the door, after apparently not finding anything, Marilyn relaxes slightly.

SASHA

Did anyone ring your doorbell that night, Ms. Hubbard? Anyone at all?

MARILYN

No.

Bragg comes back down the stairs, walking through the living room and into the kitchen.

SASHA

I understand you were drinking heavily --

MARILYN

(sighs)

Yes. But I've quit drinking. I'm in recovery.

INT. HUBBARD HOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is equally neat, with a few empty baby-food jars on the counter. Bragg opens the dish washer and sees several more jars inside of it, all of them clean.

BRAGG  
 (loudly)  
 There's a lot of baby food jars.

INTERCUT - LIVING ROOM and KITCHEN

MARILYN (O.S.)  
 (loud and impatient)  
 That's to be donated to a homeless  
 shelter, Detective!

Marilyn focuses on Sasha again.

MARILYN (CONT'D)  
 I had been through the death of my  
 baby. A death that was my fault.  
 Then my husband left me. He's an  
 orthopedic surgeon, you know. I was  
 his nurse. I lost my job, and  
 nobody will hire me.

Bragg heads to the back door and exits into the back yard.

INT. BACK YARD - DAY

The yard is small, and well-manicured, surrounded by a tall and new privacy fence, with some hedges, freshly-trimmed. A row of rose bushes runs along the wall of the house, the ground underneath them freshly turned.

Bragg walks to the middle of the yard and looks around and doesn't find anything of interest. As he turns to head back to the door he pauses, then turns back to the roses.

He goes over to the bushes and squats, looking at something in the soil underneath the roses.

INT. HUBBARD HOUSE LIVING ROOM

SASHA  
 I can't imagine the pain you've  
 felt. It was a terrible, tragic  
 accident.

MARILYN  
 Then why do you think I had  
 something to do with this? That I  
 could possibly harm a child after  
 what I've gone through?

SASHA

The video, Ms. Hubbard. I'm sure you would've heard her ringing the doorbell.

MARILYN

But how --

SASHA

She rang the doorbell and you answered.

Sasha digs through the folder and takes out the picture of Sandra.

SASHA (CONT'D)

You saw this beautiful young girl, out there in the night, who needed your help --

MARILYN

No.

INT. HUBBARD HOUSE BACK YARD - DAY

Bragg has noticed a small piece of white plastic poking out of the ground underneath the roses. He touches it, then pulls on it.

It's part of a much larger piece, a big plastic bag, buried underneath the roses.

INTERCUT - LIVING ROOM AND BACK YARD

Marilyn takes the picture of Sandra.

MARILYN

(whispering)

So beautiful. Such a tiny, beautiful thing.

Marilyn sobs silently.

Bragg's face is twisted as if he's smelling something really bad as he fights awkwardly with the big plastic bag, finally dragging it out from underneath the roots of the roses.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

(crying)

My baby. My poor baby. I came down the stairs, carrying her, going to show her off to my sister, and I tripped and fell.

(MORE)

MARILYN (CONT'D)

She went flying ... My poor Sandra.  
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry ...

Bragg opens the bag and looks inside it, horror on his face.  
He closes the bag, stands and goes for the back door,  
hurrying.

SASHA

Your baby's name was Ellen.

Marilyn looks at her, her face haunted and streaked with  
tears.

MARILYN

What?

Bragg enters, running towards the stairs. Marilyn stands.

MARILYN (CONT'D)

No! Stop!

Marilyn chases after him.

SASHA

Wait! Ms. Hubbard, you have to stay  
here!

Sasha follows Marilyn.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - DAY

The three of them stand at the closed door. Bragg is  
obviously gathering his courage before he opens the door.

MARILYN

Stop! You'll wake her!

SASHA

What did you find?

BRAGG

(almost raving)  
I figured the crib was too small.  
So I didn't bother to check it. I  
didn't look under the sheet.

He takes a deep breath and opens the door to the nursery. The  
three of them enter, Bragg hurrying to the crib while Sasha  
hangs back with Marilyn.

MARILYN

(urgent whisper)  
Please don't! You'll disturb her!

SASHA

Ms. Hubbard? What did you do?

Bragg tries to remove the sheet. It's heavy and hard to move.

MARILYN

She wasn't quite right, though.  
She didn't quite fit. I'm so lucky.  
So lucky.

SASHA

Lucky?

MARILYN

Lucky that my husband didn't take  
his tools with him when he left.

Bragg finally whips the sheet off of the crib.

Inside the crib is Sandra Davis, alive, wearing a T-shirt, her arms and legs amputated, a tracheotomy hole in her throat silencing her screams as she looks pleadingly at them with eyes dark and full of horror.

EXT. BACK YARD

MARILYN (O.S.)

That's my beautiful baby. My sweet  
little one. Now she'll be perfect  
forever.

The white plastic bag Bragg had dug up is lying partially open on the freshly cut grass. Protruding from it are the fingers and feet of Sandra's severed arms and legs.

FADE OUT: