

The Attic Trap

nerve-wracking survival

GENRE: DRAMA

LOGLINE

An asthmatic widow struggles valiantly to regain her son's trust and must succeed in begging his forgiveness but also in breaking open the jammed door before she suffocates in the attic without her inhaler.

an original screenplay
Idea and Written

by

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PREMISE:

Trapped in attic, Kate fights for breath and prays for the arrival of her long-lost son in time to save her.

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BLACK

FADE IN:

INT. ATTIC - LATE AFTERNOON

The small, cleared attic is a former homeless shelter. A few half-unpacked boxes are lying around.

Books, many of them by mystery writer and widow KATE WILLIAMS.

KATE's (63) brunette, shoulder-length hair glistens in the late afternoon sun. She sits cross-legged on the wooden floorboards, writing.

HER EYES WANDER TO A LARGE, SPORTY LEATHER BAG.

She gets up on her feet and approaches it, caresses it reverently, and her fingers land on a combination lock.

Hesitating she enters the combination to 06/05/19, and the lock opens.

Her eyes widen in shock, and she pulls her hands back in horror. She hastily closes it and replaces all the numbers.

Then she grabs her son's bag and hides it in a closet.

(BEAT)COUGHS VIOLENTLY

She pushes her red glasses back into her hair and puts her hand to her mouth, pounding anxiously her chest with the other.

However, the cough gets more frequent.

She grabs her asthma spray from the bag on the table, holds the inhaler to her wide-open mouth, and takes a deep breath.

(BEAT) Then, she puts it back in the bag.

She sits down in front of her computer with her notes and countless small, labeled index cards cluttering her desk.

Thought-sunken playing with a pen she glances at the cupboard where the bag is stored. THEN she scribbles on a white paper:

INSERT(BEAT)

"My beloved Hugh. I committed a terrible sin. You are innocent. I should have known. I hope you can ever forgive me. Please come back. Love You, Mom."

(BEAT)Then she scribbles on a posit: *Call the electricians for the bath light. Pharmacy: 2 INHALER*

KATE sticks the posit on her Notebook and crumples up the white paper and takes it to a box.

She pulls out some photos and pauses.

INSERT: (BEAT)

A PHOTO OF A HANDSOME MAN IN HIS THIRTIES ON A MOTORCYCLE.

Kate holds up the photo and blows it a kiss. The paper drops to the flor.

The evening light of dusk filters weakly through the attic window and reveals her eyes fill with tears, running down her face, which she wipes away with her arm.

(BEAT) We discover her bag on the table, with her smartphone blinking softly inside.

Then she quickly jumps up, takes off her dress, and disappears into the bathroom.

BATHROOM

SOUND OF A SHOWER AND A QUIET HUMMING.

The light from the living area falls through the large, old door into the tiny, windowless, dark bathroom.

(BEAT) Hanging wires all over the bath.

KATE's hair is tied back with a headband. Her skin looks fresh.

Her slip, see-through white nightgown hints at her lightly tanned skin and still fit body.

Her gaze moves from the mirror to the light in the living room as she brushes her teeth in the dim light.

THEN---SUDDENLY, THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT BEHIND HER.

A LOUD CLICK OF THE DOOR LOCK and the pitch-dark room make Kate breathe heavily.

LIGHT FADES TO BLACK.

SOUND OF TEETH BRUSHING

GURGLING NOISE

Kate's mood fluctuates between calm and panic.

She nervously reaches for the doorknob, but the door won't open, which sets off an asthma attack.

WE HEAR HER MOVING AND TRYING TO FIND THE DOOR HANDLE

KATE TO HERSELF
(coughing)
It won't open?

THE SHAKING AND RATTLING INTENSIFIES.

She gasps nervously.

KATE TO HERSELF (CONT'D)
What... No, no way.

She repeatedly pounds the door with her fist.

KATE TO HERSELF (CONT'D)
This damn thing has to open somehow.

HEAVY BREATHING

THEN---

---the old, massive bronze doorknob falls dully onto her foot.

A LOUD, PAINFUL SCREAM ESCAPES FROM KATE

KATE (O.S.)
(painful)
GOSH, that hurts.

---followed by a ROLLING SOUND ACROSS THE TILES.

Now, at least a faint beam of light shines through the hole.

Kate tries to see something.

BLURRY AND FOGGY

Without her glasses, she vaguely recognizes the silhouette of her bag on the table and the blinking light of her smartphone.

WE HEAR HER QUIET SOBBING.

Then she moves and tries to find her glasses on the mirror shelf. She puts them on, looks through the hole again, and calls out.

KATE (CONT'D)
(Shouting)
HELP! PLEASE!

SHE POUNDS THE DOOR WITH HER FISTS, HER BREATHING RAPID.

KATE (CONT'D)
No one knows I'm here. No one will find me. What if this is the end?

She slides coughing to the ground, darkness enveloping her.

KATE (CONT'D)
(whimpering)
Is anyone there? Please, I can't
take this anymore...
(coughing)
HELP. HELP.

Her thoughts drift to her son, who has been missing for years.

KATE (CONT'D)
(sighs)
HUGH

THE SOBBING INTENSIFIES.

KATE (CONT'D)
(LOUDLY PRAYING)
DEAR GOD, I KNOW NO ONE CAN HEAR
ME.
(cursing)
THE BUILDING IS EMPTY AND SEALED
BY THE POLICE. THE SQUATTERS HAD
TO GO. YES, DEAR GOD. NOT EVEN A
RAT.
(coughs several
time.Voice breaks.)
I hope that my beloved Hugh arises.
Please let a miracle happen. I
committed a sin. A terrible sin.
I must atone for it. I don't want
your forgiveness, but I will make
amends and get him out of this
mess.

She slams the bronze doorknob like crazy against the wooden door, again and again.

Then she hits it with her feet. Nothing.

After a while she gropes in the dim light and grabs the towel.

She lays it on the floor and covers herself exhausted with a smaller one, to regain strength.

WE HEAR A SOFT SNORING in the darkness.

BATHROOM

NEXT MORNING

A soft light filters through the tiny hole.

A LOUD YAWN

We recognize Kate's silhouette as she sits up.

A moment later:

THE SOUND OF PEEING, THEN THE HISSING OF A TOILET TANK.

SOUND OF WATER AND TEETH BRUSHING.

Then... SOME UNRECOGNIZABLE NOISE. LIKE RUSTLING.

Things seem to fall to the floor and into the sink.

Any blind person could find their way around, but Kate gropes in the dark.

KATE (CONT'D)
(hoarsely groggy)
Damn it, where are my glasses?
Isn't that my towel under my foot?
Now, Katy darling, be careful.
(half-singing)
Ah, who says so?

We see Kate peering through the hole.

KATE (CONT'D)
It must be about 6:30 in the morning. How can I tell Tomas that I am here, when my cell-phone is over there.

The first light gently falls through the hole, revealing her bag on the table. Her smartphone is no longer blinking.

KATE (CONT'D)
It will be dead, just like I'll be soon.

INSERT: NEXT DAY

We hear KATE through the door, throwing the doorknob again and again against the wooden door.

Then she drinks water and washes her face. She sighs and coughs.

SUPERIMPOSE: AN HOUR LATER

KATE exhausted slides to the floor, grabs the bath towel and bursts out snoring, with the brass doorknob still in her fist.

At the same time, there is a STRANGE NOISE at the apartment door. A SHORT, QUIET JOLT – and THEN--- the door opens carefully.

AN ATHLETIC MAN (33) NAMED HUGH, enters.

Blue eyes and a three-day beard peek out from a black hood.

He scans around the room in confusion.

HUGH

Uh... what's going on here?
(scanning the room)
(BEAT)
Where is my bag gone?

Eyes wide, he eagerly grabs TWO BOOKS, turns them over and sinks to the floor in shock, seemingly unable to comprehend the situation.

Shaking his head in disbelief, he scans the room and inevitably crawls to one of the boxes.

He rummages nervously around in it and finds familiar things.

INSERT: PHOTOS MONTAGE

1. PHOTO: One image shows a married couple with an eight-year-old child.
2. Another photo shows a elderly man and a younger man in his early twenties fishing.
3. In 2020, the family gathered under the Christmas tree, wearing masks because of the pandemic.

KATE (O.S.)

HUGH, (sighs, coughs) I want to know when you're coming home? I miss you.

HUGH freezes with the pictures in his hand and falls backwards. He looks around as if he's seen the ghosts of the place.

He shakes nervously his head like saying: "I must have heard wrong."

THEN he boldly searches through more boxes and finds documents, including newspaper articles.

INSERT:

"*FRED WILLIAMS, the well-known TV producer, has died. Born: 11.- 03.-1956 - Day of death: 06. 05. 2019*

NARRATOR (V.O.)

„In his late twenties, Hugh Williams, the son of the deceased, was wielding an old Viking axe without caution, which had been a gift to his father on his 60th birthday. Tragically, the heavy head of the axe detached, fatally striking his father. According to a witness, Police Chief Thomas King, Hugh intentionally swung the axe with significant force,

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
resulting in a lethal blow to his father. Consequently, he is facing allegations of involuntary manslaughter. Regrettably, Williams succumbed to the severe head injury before emergency services could provide assistance. Following this incident, Hugh Williams has eluded authorities and remains unaccounted for."

Tears are crossing his face like the Victorian waterfalls.

HUGH sits like frozen. Then bends his back and shoulders. Everything trembles and he seems shaken by the cruel deed.

His eyes widen as he discovers the books.

Once he has regained his composure, he slides over to the books and grabs deliberately one from the middle.

He holds it tight to his stomach and his head bends, as if before an altar. He comes up with a deep breath.

HUGH
Hey, MAN. How long has it been since I held a book in my hand of you, mom?

He opens one and reads about the author, while his fingers gently stroke her face.

INSERT:

PHOTO OF KATE WILLIAMS (mid/late fifties). The text reads:

"The American crime writer from Illinois, mother of Hugh Williams, who has been missing since 2019, has lived as a recluse ever since, while her novels explore the world."

Completely engrossed in the text, he stands up, walks backward reading, and sits on the edge of the table.

Unnoticed behind him is Kate's bag.

KATE (O.S.)
(insistently)
HELP, PLEASE HELP ME.

First a faint knock, then louder, as Kate pounds the doorknob against the door.

Hugh freezes in shock.

KATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
IS ANYONE THERE?

Hugh puts the book down and crawls with another one to the front door, opening it slowly.

THEN---

---A LOUD SOBBING.

He pulls back his hood and rubs his ears as if he can't believe them.

He stands silently in front of the door.

KATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Are you still there?
(pauses)
I beg you, don't leave.
I'm trapped in the bathroom.
(coughing)
My bag and my phone are on the
table. Help yourself, but please
get me out of here!

Hugh remains silent, looking puzzled at the bathroom door.

Hesitantly, he approaches it.

Then he tries to look through the hole and sees nothing.

THE HEAVY BREATHING OF A WEEPING, WEAK FEMALE VOICE.

HUGH
(disguising his
voice)
Who are you and what are you doing
here?

KATE (O.S.)
The new owner.

Hugh creeps hesitantly to the door. On the other side: WE HEAR KATES' COUGHING FIT.

Hugh crouches by the door, burying his head in his lap. He sobs silently, his shoulders shaking violently.

KATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
What's your name?

Hugh considers and wipes his nose.

HUGH
(disguising his
voice)
Fred.

KATE (O.S.)
Were you one of those squatters?

HUGH

I just want to get my bag.

KATE (O.S.)

Fred, get me out of here, and you can have anything you want.

HUGH

(whispers)

What for?

KATE (O.S.)

You must speak louder, Fred.

Kate has a coughing attack.

HUGH

Do you know what it's like to live in an emotional and mental dungeon?

He leans against the door, his head falling back, his eyes distant and hurt. He opens his fist and reveals the white paper, where we discover Kates' handwriting from before.

HUGH (CONT'D)

(voice breaks)

I was always on the run. Constantly afraid, constantly alone. Thank you got that the music saved me.

He glares at her scribble letter with a shaking hand. His eyes fill with tears, but he fights to hold them back.

He shakes his head, the bitterness in his voice unmistakable.

HUGH (CONT'D)

My Mom gave up on me because she trusted more this policemen than her own son. He convinced her easily that I killed my dad.

BATHROOM

KATE squats on the floor leaning with her back on the door from the other side. She has beads of sweat on her forehead.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Since then, I've been living in darkness, hidden from the world, because no one would ever believe me.

Hugh stands up and looks for cigarettes.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)

How long have you been in there?

KATE
(coughing)
Since yesterday.

LIVING

With the cigarette in hand, HUGH overhears what Kate said and opens gently her notebook.

He takes his time to face his mother to fore-give her.

Leaning back he exhales the smoke, reading a draft.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
*"If I could only see Hugh one more
time and tell him the truth about
what happened in may, 2019, he
would come back without hesitation.
Instead, he's haunted by the fear
of being arrested, because of my
sin."*

Hugh's swallows hard.

His expression transmits anger. Gritting his teeth, he closes the notebook and the posit flies in front of him.

He peeks on it: *INSERT: Call the electricians for the bath light. Pharmacy: 2 INHALER*

BATHROOM

KATE clutches her chest, her breathing quickens. Her coughing gets stronger.

KATE
There's no window here. I need my
inhaler. Quick.

KATE (CONT'D)
(whispering and
coughing)
I need my spray. Hurry

Her hands tremble.

KATE (CONT'D)
Please open the door.

LIVING

SUDDENLY, IT IS DEATHLY QUIET.

HUGH perks up and presses his ear to the door.

HUGH
She needs her Asthma spray.

Hugh jumps up and rummages through her bag. He pauses at a small talisman on her keychain.

INSERT: TALISMAN

Key with a Photo of him (6) and his young mom.

Then he grabs the spray.

HUGH (CONT'D)
(shouts nervously)
I'M GOING TO TRY TO OPEN THE DOOR
NOW. SO MOVE AS FAR AWAY AS YOU
CAN. KEEP YOUR EYES CLOSED UNTIL
I'M GONE.

KATE (O.S.)
(half whispering)
Do you know how tiny this bathroom
is?

HUGH
Just do it and listen to me for
once.

He grabs a designer chair, and slams it against the door.

KATE (O.S.)
HUGH?

Hugh tries again and again, grunting with effort.

HUGH
Hang in there, Mom!

His eyes roam the room attentively, searching.

Under the table, he discovers the outer counterpart of the doorknob. A massive bronze knob with a spindle at the end.

He picks up the heavy piece, weighing it in his wobbly hand, where the lock button on the cylinder reads:

THE LOCKED POSITION!

With wide-open eyes, he resolutely reassembles the part and sets it so that the lock opens.

The door opens a crack.

Light falls on the back of a startled Kate, trembling slightly in the corner.

As he is almost at the front door, he hears something heavy fall to the ground.

He rushes back.

BATHROOM

KATE lies unconscious on the floor.

HUGH bends over her in shock and is about to slap her.

Then hastily he wets a towel. He places the cold, wet towel on her forehead, gently tapping her cheek repeatedly. Kate's eyes flutter open.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Can you hear me, mom?

Kate blinks and starts coughing. Hugh shoots up and pours water into the toothbrush cup.

He gently holds it to her lips, then offers the spray.

Kate props herself up on her elbows. She sips and inhales deeply. Then her gaze cautiously moves upward.

Their eyes meet and before she faints again she whispers.

KATE

So, you really came, my son.

Hugh lifts her off the floor and carries her to her bed. He covers her with a blanket and holds her hand with concern.

HUGH

Stay with me, Mom. Don't leave me like Dad.

TIME CUT:

HUGH and KATE sit on the table having breakfast.

Kate's eyes wander around and everything is arranged.

We don't see any boxes anywhere.

HUGH sits at the table with showered hair pulled back into a neat plait, shaved in Kate's bathrobe and waits with breakfast.

The table is beautifully set and white lilies adorn the table.

Kate comes out of the bathroom with a towel on her head and her gaze wanders around. Everything is tidy. We don't see any boxes lying around anywhere.

She shakes her head speechlessly and her index finger points to the light in the bathroom.

KATE

Have I been asleep for ages, or have you been so flushed with everything? You even remember that white lilies are my favorite flowers.

HUGH
Mom, I was already a graduate
student when I left.

She walks around the table and hugs Hugh from behind.

KATE
I think my son needs new clothes.

HUGH
Why...what's wrong with them?
It's a Italien Designer.

Kate goes to a chest and takes out a travel bag.

HUGH jumps up and reaches for his bag, overwhelmed.

HUGH (CONT'D)
(excited)
My sheets of notes.
(wondering)
Wait a minute. Why would you keep
a peddler's old bag?

KATE
Because it's Dad's unmistakable
old holdall.

He opens it and puts on the baseball cap. Then he pulls
out handwritten sheets of music and puts them on the table.

HUGH
That asshole of police, named uncle
Tomas, who cursed me for
manslaughter, was wearing this
cap. Dad put it on me when they
came back.

Kate sits down and her gaze wanders sadly into the distance.
Then she collects herself and says:

KATE
Please sit down and listen to me
very carefully.

HUGH
Mom, let's not refresh this painful
day. Please.

KATE
He came to me apologizing that he
was totally wrong. He was in a
kind of shock and he ... he really
regrets.

HUGH
When dad died because of me, it
already felt to kill myself.

(MORE)

HUGH (CONT'D)

Why he had to kill me too, as Dad's best friend?

Kate takes a sip of her mug and hesitates. Then---

KATE

He and his team cleared this building of squatters one day. When he discovered your bag, he immediately realized that you were one of them. He didn't want you to flee again, but thought about how you and I could ever see each other again. He gave me this letter.

Hugh's expression is hard and unyielding. He bites his lips and clenches his fists.

Then he punches the table. Kate is startled and goes into a coughing fit. Hugh runs and gets her spray.

HUGH

Sorry, Mom.

He strokes her shoulder while she inhales. Then Kate stands up. Both stay hugging deeply for a while.

KATE

I am sorry, darling. I was totally wrong not to protect you. I can't even expect that you take my apologies. But, I want to apologies for my sin and tell you how much I love and missed you. Let me just finish telling you this and then we'll go and buy you some fancy clothes. Agreed?

HUGH

You're cute. But I'm already earning my own good money as a songwriter under a pseudonym.

He pulls more sheets out of the bag and shows them to her.

HUGH (CONT'D)

Have you ever heard of TAN?

KATE

Tan Zander, the film-music-composer?

Hugh nods with a pleasant smile.

HUGH

Yes, here is where I composed my songs.

(MORE)

HUGH (CONT'D)

I was in the studio briefly that morning and when I came back the building was sealed off by the police. A friend who I met here, this poor guy lost everything and ended here. He saved for me the bag which I entrusted to him. Edgar is a nice chap.

KATE

(interferes)

Thomas advised me to move in here. He knew you wouldn't come back to our house. So, he convinced me to come to you with my belongings, as he suspected that you would be looking here for your bag.

HUGH

Thomas, Thomas, Thomas. Like he convinced the press?

KATE

You're here with me, darling.

HUGH

What about the bathroom? Was that a part of his plan too?

KATE

No.

HUGH

So, if I don't get here on time you would have died, because of him?

Kate pushes an envelope over the table:

Hugh looks and opens then the folder.

THOMAS (V.O.)

Hugh, in my grief, I made a regrettable error in judgment and placed blame on you for the passing of my dear friend, with whom I had been inseparable since our high school days, as you know. I was hasty in pointing the finger at you for a regrettable incident. I believe it was even more of a challenge for him than for me. I realize now that I have added to your already heavy burden. I will always regret my actions and the impact they have had on you and your Mom.

(MORE)

THOMAS (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I will never forgive myself, but I could no longer bear to see the two of you suffering because of me. Please take care of you and your mom. Tomas

He tears the letter into a thousand pieces.

KATE

So you are Tan Zander, who wrote the music for two novels of mine?

HUGH

Yes, Mrs. Williams. We communicated per email.

KATE

Do you have a girlfriend, Mr. Zander?

He shifts his head and pulls his shoulders up.

HUGH

Don't tell me you are going to stay in here?

She shifts her head and pulls her shoulders up.

FADE OUT