

ETCHED

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A black screen.

We first hear the soft commotion of a city street: cars, air flow, maybe some folks walking by. Then... a ringing. We hear the muffled sound of an awaiting call stuck in its repeated ring.

It rings again...

And again...

And again...

We hear a little snuffle over the continuous rings, when all of a sudden-- voicemail:

FORREST

*"Hey, it's Forrest. Sorry I can't pick up. You know what to do--"*

*BEEP*

We hear a light voice speak into the phone:

JANESSA

(sweet)

Hey... Hey, Love, it's me...

EXT. COURTHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Janessa (early 20s) hunches over herself, squatted on the cold, hard steps to the city's main courthouse. Though her voice sounds rather gentle, her face says otherwise. Her work clothes hang loose and a little messily around her body- a formal blazer and a nice top. She grips the phone to her ear rather tightly. Something's wrong and she's not good at hiding it.

JANESSA

(gentle)

I just got out. So, I'm gonna head home... my bus doesn't-

(sighs)

I might just call an Uber, I don't know.

Long beat. She's struggling to spit out:

JANESSA (CONT'D)

(trying)

Something happened... well, that's dramatic, but I didn't wanna... bullshit- wow, this is hard.

(a nervous chuckle)

(MORE)

## JANESSA (CONT'D)

It's not about something with us, Love, don't worry. It's stupid, really... complaining about this job, drawing court... whatever. It's dumb, I know, I'm sorry. I shouldn't... I shouldn't, um... whatever! I was on my last trial today, it was a murder case. So I'm doing my thing and um... he looked at me. The guy. The- the person who... yeah, he looked right at me. They don't do that. They don't ever do that. I mean, there's not a rule to not, but- but, I... it was just really weird and I'm kind of scared and I don't know what to... It was right at his sentence, too. They gave him the dea-

*BEEEEEP*

Times up.

She loosens her grip on the phone and sighs. She fights back an anxious tear, looking around if anyone can see her. She looks down at her other hand, she's holding something:

A piece of scribbling parchment.

She takes a beat before she crumples it. She moves to a nearby, overfilled trashcan and tosses it.

As she begins to leave, we stay with the trash, panning over to get a birds-eye-view of inside, revealing...

A drawing of a middle-aged, disheveled man with a blank stare, directed right at the artist.

**TITLE**

EXT. CITY - VARIOUS - MOMENTS LATER

We now follow Janessa, having decided to walk home instead. She moves through all the nooks and crannies of the tight, cold city during the winter. Until...

The safety of home.

INT. HOUSE - EVENING

The house is dimly lit, not surprising for a group of grad students looking to save on their utility bill. Janessa enters the front door, taking off her jacket as a twitching light begins to flash at her from a nearby room.

JANESSA

Hello?

No response. She stumbles a little as she removes her shoes.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

Guys. Forrest? Trey?

Still no response. She moves to the room with the flashing light. When...

--A CLIP FROM "THE STRANGERS" LIGHTS UP A TV SCREEN: the jump scare of bag-head's face in the window--

The sudden scare forces a flinch out of Janessa.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

Jesus- fuck!

TREY

Hey, Janessa.

Trey, her Grad film-student roommate, sits at the edge of a leather couch. He scribbles in a notebook, but is zoned in on the film.

JANESSA

You didn't want to say "hi" before?

TREY

I was focused before.

JANESSA

On what?

He points at the TV.

TREY

It's for class.

She tries to hide a scoff. To her, its just a shlock horror movie.

JANESSA

This is what you call ivy-league film studies education?

TREY

Aren't you gonna be the main one to rave when Jackson Pollack sneezes on a paint pallet again and calls it art?

JANESSA

Sure, if he wasn't dead. Where's Forrest?

Trey cracks open the door a little more, revealing that Forrest has been with him the entire time. He has headphones on, lost in his laptop.

FORREST

Hey, babe.

JANESSA

Did you get-?

He takes out his headphones.

FORREST

Huh..?

JANESSA

Did you get my message?

A puzzled look on his face. He points at his laptop.

FORREST

I... um... no?

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Forrest walks in with two cups of tea. He hands one to Janessa on the couch, now in pajama-like sweats. Trey sits across from her.

TREY

What kind of look was it?

JANESSA

What?

TREY

I just want to know if it was giving like... sad clown, or... Michael Meyers.

Forrest takes a seat next to Janessa. She leans on him.

FORREST  
That makes no sense.

TREY  
It makes perfect sense. One says,  
"please, little one, help me..." the  
other...

He points at Janessa, followed with a goofy stabbing  
motion.

FORREST  
T...

TREY  
I'm just saying-

FORREST  
(to Janessa)  
What was the charge?

Janessa looks up from her tea.

JANESSA  
2nd Degree... 3 counts.

FORREST  
Jesus christ.

TREY  
3 counts? You sure they got that degree  
right-? How do you kill three people  
without planning?

FORREST  
That's scary, babe. I'm so sorry.

He holds her. She's a little reluctant, lost in thought.

JANESSA  
I don't... I don't know.

FORREST  
What is it?

JANESSA  
I mean it was scary, but... that's not...  
(revealing)  
There's like a- a guiltiness that I can't  
really- I think so at least, but-

FORREST  
What?

JANESSA

I don't know, I can't shake it. It's weird, I know...

FORREST

Why would you feel guilty?

JANESSA

I don't... Maybe, getting the death penalty, it's kinda hard to watch let alone draw-

FORREST

Why would that matter?

JANESSA

What?

FORREST

Babe, he killed 3 people. He deserves it.

She hesitates.

JANESSA

Sure, but-

TREY

Yeah, juries out. I don't see any more proof to show he's a bigger hunk of shit.

Unconsciously, she snaps at that:

JANESSA

Were you there?

Beat. The two look at her confused.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I don't- I mean I'm not defending the action of 3 murders, but... like what if there's stuff we don't know.

FORREST

Like what?

JANESSA

I... I don't know. Maybe it was an accident? Who were the people he killed? Did they deserve-? This is terrible, I shouldn't even be talking about this.

TREY

Well, you were there.

JANESSA

What?

TREY

The trial? What did they say happened?

She hesitates, feeling attacked. She wants to flee, but...

JANESSA

Found him with three dead, all stabbed. DNA matched. He was found guilty.

TREY

And therefore he should be punished.

JANESSA

But even so, wouldn't rotting somewhere be more... like isn't death, too...

FORREST

Too, what?

She sighs, too exhausted to go on with this. She can't take her roommates' team-up either.

JANESSA

You know what? Forget it. Let's move on. I just want to drink this, lay around. Watch some stupid TV and just...

(to Forrest)

Lay in our bed together tonight. Is that okay?

Forrest hesitates. He looks at Trey.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

(re: his look)

What?

TREY

I'm getting a beer.

Trey leaves.

FORREST

Trey's shooting for his thesis short tonight. I'm his set medic.

JANESSA

Oh...

FORREST

It counts as EMT hours, I just...

She tries hiding her disappointment. It's not working.

FORREST (CONT'D)

Do you want me to call off?

JANESSA

No. No, no, you should go. You promised.

FORREST

I know, but you're scared and-

JANESSA

I'm not scared.

Pause.

FORREST

I'm going to split the shift with someone. I'll make a call, come right back here after, and you'll probably already be passed out. How about that?

Janessa gives him a smile, a little more relieved. She nods.

FORREST (CONT'D)

And can I ask you a question?

JANESSA

Yeah.

FORREST

You don't really feel guilty for that guy. Right?

JANESSA

(faking)

What-? No. No, I'm just- I was scared. And I'm tired, so I think I just need to--

SMASH CUT:

EXT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Sleep... she curls into a ball on the couch. She's out, ignoring the drool falling from her mouth and the dark of night outside the window behind her. Then...

Janessa jolts up from the couch. She breathes heavily, as if she'd been having a nightmare... She looks about the living room, empty now. Forrest and Trey are nowhere in sight.

Finally, she notices the dark outside. She's too delirious and unaware to process any sense of time. She closes the blinds, creeped out by the night.

She goes to check for a watch on her wrist, but it's gone. She instead notices something written on her palm. It's sharpie:

"Headed out with T. Will meet you in bed when I get back. Love you!!!

- F"

She tries to wipe the marker off her hand- no good.

JANESSA  
 (to herself)  
 Why would you..?  
 (Sighs)  
 Dammit.

She looks about the room, now for her phone or any kind of clock. Also gone. Forrest must have moved it.

JANESSA (CONT'D)  
 (annoyed)  
 And where the fuck you put my phone?

She lifts herself from the couch, stretches and moves to...

INT. FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

...the front hallway. In the corner of her eye she notices--

--the door... it's slightly cracked, just enough for the outdoor light to peek in.

Janessa sighs to herself again.

JANESSA  
 (to herself)  
 I swear, you two...

She moves to the door and closes it.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Janessa struggles at the sink to get the sharpie off of her hand. She has only mere dish soap to aid her.

She tries a sponge to wipe it off. No good. She tosses the sponge down, when...

*CRREEEEK...*

The back, kitchen door swings wide open. Janessa slowly turns to it. Has it been open this whole time? Just like the-?

She realizes. She slams the back door shut and locks it tight, grabbing a kitchen knife off the counter in the process.

It's quiet in the house.

JANESSA  
(calling)  
Hello..?

Nothing.

JANESSA (CONT'D)  
(again)  
Forrest, you home?

Still nothing. She sits in the silence for a second and then...

JANESSA (CONT'D)  
Mm-hmm... nope.

SMASH CUT:

INT. CLOSET - MONTAGE

--she grabs a flashlight from the closet, as well as--

SMASH CUT:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MONTAGE

--her keys from the living room coffee table.

INT. HOUSE - MONTAGE

We then follow as Janessa attentively checks every room in the house with her flashlight and knife. Fortunately, no sign of invaders. No one in any closet, under any bed, behind any door, so...

INT. FRONT HALL - LATER

She instead locks and bolts the front door, calling it a night, bringing her knife and flashlight upstairs...

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

We slowly push in as Janessa washes her face at a bathroom sink. She dries her face with a towel and sighs, taking a good look at herself in the mirror.

JANESSA

(mocking Trey)

"Why would you feel guilty..." asshole...

She turns off the lights in the bathroom and moves to the bed.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

The knife now sits on her bed side table.

Even after taking the nap of her life, she's completely restless. Tossing and turning, unable to even look at her missing phone to pass the time...

She forces her eyes shut, thinking it may do something, but...

Nothing. She sighs, sit's up, and turns on a light. She covers her face, frustrated with herself for being unable to clear her head of what had happened today.

She gets up from her bed and leaves. We linger behind, moving towards her bedroom window... slowly. As we creep up for an outside glance we see the slightest glimpse of what may be a figure standing under a nearby street light...

...a man? What ever it was it's moved away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Janessa huddles under a blanket on the couch, she sips on a tea at her side and half-watches a movie: "The Big Chill," the complete opposite of "The Strangers..."

In the meantime she works on something in her lap: a new sketch, another face still at the beginning stages.

INT. HOUSE - SAME TIME

As Janessa relaxes, we explore the cavernous, empty house. The darkness swallows any sense of homeliness you'd find in the day time. Nevertheless, fortunately it's empty. But, meanwhile--

INT. FRONT HALL - SAME TIME

We push in on the front door to the house, specifically towards the door knob. It begins to shake, making the slightest jingle noise that...

INT. LIVING ROOM - SAME TIME

...Janessa cannot hear.

INT. FRONT HALL - SAME TIME

It jingles a little more, a tad more aggressively too. It stops...

We slowly back away from the door, when all of a sudden--

*BAM BAM BAM*

The "knocks" echo through the whole house. A moment of silence follows, the movie now muted in the living room, as Janessa slowly peeks her head from the door frame.

She enters the hall, only staring at the front door in the silence. Then...

JANESSA

Forrest-?

*BAM!*

Janessa lets out a small scream. It's silent again, just for a moment, when she suddenly makes a bolt for the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She scrambles to couch, removing cushions and blankets in search of her phone.

JANESSA

Phone, phone, phone, phon- where the fuck did you put it?!?

She stops, looking at the outside window behind the couch. The curtains are drawn. Slowly, she reaches, grabbing one of the ends tightly, then...

SHE THROWS IT OPEN TO FIND... nothing. No one is there on the porch. She gets a better look: still nothing.

INT. FRONT HALL - SECONDS LATER

She even checks through the peephole of the front door. No one in sight. Janessa snatches a nearby shoe on the ground, holding it in an attacking stance. She unlocks the door and suddenly--

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

--THROWS HERSELF OUT THE DOOR SWINGING THE SHOE LIKE MAD, HOPING TO HIT SOMETHING!!!

She stops, out of breath. There's no one in sight. She sighs and begins to re-enter the house, when...

...she notices something. Something under her foot, a piece of paper. She rips it off her foot and gives a quick glance. She stops, her heart skipping a beat. Her eyes widen as she looks about the porch. Still nobody.

JANESSA

(panicking)

No, no, no, no, no...

She throws the paper to the ground and sprints back inside, slamming the door behind her. We remain on the porch, panning over to see the page: it's her drawing from the court room, the one she threw away, the one... of him. The eyes and mouth are cut out now.

INT. FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Janessa locks the door tight, she leans on it, starting to cry from panicking.

JANESSA

No, no, no, no, no- please...

She backs away from the door and...

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

....all the way into the dining room. She flips on a light as she moves and tries to calm herself down.

JANESSA

(to herself)

Calm down... calm down... you saw that,  
it's not- it's not your fault, it's  
not... calm down...

She continues moving back...

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

...even into the kitchen. She slows down to a halt, her breath does the same. When...

She flips the lights on -- REVEALING A MAN IN THE DOOR WINDOW, HOLDING THE DRAWING WHERE HIS FACE SHOULD BE -- HE DASHES OFF, DROPPING THE DRAWING.

Janessa screams and makes a break for it.

INT. FRONT HALL - CONTINUOUS

She makes it to the stairs, sprinting for the first bedroom she can find on the second floor.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

She slams the door behind her, running for the closet to hide in the darkness. She's in Trey's room.

She breathes heavily, not knowing what to do with herself-

*BAM BAM BAM*

Janessa goes silent. It's the front door again. It continues.

*BAM BAM BAM*

And again...

*BAM BAM BAM*

JANESSA

(to herself)

I did nothing to you, I did nothing to  
you- it's not my fault, it's not my  
fault, it's not my fault--

(to him)

IT'S NOT MY FAULT!!!

The banging stops. It's quiet again.

Janessa lifts her head and takes a moment before moving  
for the door.

INT. HALL - CONTINUOUS

She peeks into the second floor hall. It's still quiet.  
She looks to her left and right before stepping out.

She looks up to the top floor: her and Forrest's room.  
She remembers the knife she'd left there and  
immediately...

INT. JANESSA'S ROOM - SECONDS LATER

...snatches it off her bedside table.

INT. HALL - SECONDS LATER

Janessa makes a charge down the stairs, heading for the  
front door with her knife ready. She stops, dropping the  
readied knife to her side. Her face turns white at the  
sight of...

...the front door, now wide open.

Janessa begins to breathe heavily again.

JANESSA

Fuck it.

Janessa runs for the open door with the hope of fleeing--

--the door suddenly closes by itself forcing Janessa to  
run right into it!!!

She falls to ground, but quickly scrambles to her feet,  
maintaining the knife. She runs for the back door this  
time, trying to cut through the dining room, when she  
suddenly stops.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

But, how could you not? Especially when copies upon copies of the same sketch cover the walls head to toe. The room is dimly lit, now with a few candles freshly warm to illuminate more of drawings.

Janessa doesn't know what to do... how is this possible? It can't be real. She ponders this in panic as we circle her... and circle her... and circle her, until--

She notices... the back door is open too.

*CREEK*

A floorboard sounds right behind Janessa. She snaps her head around... finding him.

He stands still in an open door frame, wearing all black, but around his face: the drawing, worn like a mask with the eyes and mouth cut open...

Janessa points her knife at him.

JANESSA

Back away!!!

He remains still and silent, not even a flinch.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

What do you want?!

He says nothing. Only still.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

Please... what do you want?!

Still nothing... Janessa cries in her panic.

JANESSA (CONT'D)

What happened to you- your sentence, I didn't... It's not my fault. I didn't do anything... I didn't do anything, You-YOU! You did... It's not my fault, why... I just draw it.

(pause)

I just draw it... Please...

He slowly reaches his hand out, giving her something.

Janessa shakes her head. No way is she moving towards him. She keeps her knife up.

He slowly flips the paper around.

Janessa sees it, out of our view. Her eyes widen. She looks to him.

JANESSA (CONT'D)  
I didn't... I didn't... why?

CUT TO BLACK

We sit in the darkness for a bit until...

The sounds of a door opening.

FORREST(V.O.)  
Janessa..?  
(pause)  
Babe?

INT. FRONT HALL - LATER

Forrest enters the house by himself, early from the shoot just like he said.

Janessa's movie- "The Big Chill" -still plays from the living room. He moves to it.

FORREST  
Sorry, I took your phone, Love. I thought it was my-

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He stops. Seeing she's not there.

FORREST  
Could've at least turned off the TV, if you were gonna...  
(calling)  
Love?

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The dining room is now back to normal... no drawings, no candles, no man, and no Janessa. It's a bit dark. Forrest switches on a light.

He sighs, when...

He sees something on the table: a piece of paper.

It's a drawing, but not the one we've grown used to. It's of Janessa, not really finished yet.

Through the dark charcoal on the parchment she looks right at Forrest... It creeps him out.

FORREST  
(calling)  
Janessa? Are you-?

*STRETCH*

The sound of a rope stretching echos from behind Forrest. He slowly turns around, looking into the kitchen:

A chair is knocked to the ground. Above that...

Two dangling feet.

Forrest looks up to what hides in the darkness of the kitchen. His eyes widen.

FORREST (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
Oh my god...

CUT TO BLACK

**END**