

BL DLIST



FRESH BLOOD SELECTS

A Small Town Murder Mystery
an original teleplay by
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A Small Town Murder Mystery

TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. BLACKTOP HIGHWAY - NIGHT (TWILIGHT)

The iced-over two-lane cuts through the barren farmland of winter. Off on the horizon stands a state of the art wind turbine. It towers as a beacon, a reminder a world exists beyond the county lines of Small Town, America.

Somewhere, someone SCREAMS.

INT. THE SILVER MINNOW BAR - NIGHT

A retirement party is in full swing. A banner strung across the small bar reads, "Congratulations!" Balloons of black and silver are everywhere. The raucous party is the source of the screaming.

SHERIFF DUNLEVY, 43, stands at the center of a group of WELL-WISHERS. Dunlevy, a stout man, is playfully jostled as a few of the gatherers pat him on the back.

A CAMERA FLASH goes off as townsfolk after quirky townsfolk lean in and get a quick selfie with the retiring sheriff. Dunlevy humors all of them, but it's obvious he would rather be elsewhere.

JUNE DELILAH, 22, the Storyville County Fair Cattle Queen, cuts through the group and kisses Dunlevy on the cheek. Delilah, wearing her sash and crown, appears to have just come off stage.

JUNE

Sheriff Gabriel Dunlevy. My hero!

Sheriff Dunlevy blushes.

THE CROWD

Dun-Lee-Vee! Dun-Lee-Vee!

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY, 67, weaves through the crowd and vigorously shakes Dunlevy's hand. With his celebratory top hat and cane, McKloskey looks more like the Monopoly Man than a local mayor.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY

As mayor, if I had a key to the city,
it'd be yours, Sheriff. Job, well
done!

(turns to the crowd)

Drinks on the house!

The BARTENDER pops open a cork of something.

The packed room CHEERS!

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (CONT'D)

(coughs)

Uh, first round, anyway!

The packed room BOOS.

DEPUTY DALE CHRISTMAS, 27, steps into the bar and makes eye contact with the floundering sheriff. While Christmas stomps the snow off his boots, Dunlevy cuts through the free-drink-free-for-all and makes his way to the gangly, scarecrow of a man.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

The star of the hour!

Christmas extends his hand and Dunlevy snags it like a drowning man grasping for help.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

I'll quote the banner, Sheriff.

(points to the congrats
sign)

You made it.

SHERIFF DUNLEVY

Honestly? Never thought I would. Not
in a million years.

The deputy laughs.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

You're too young to retire, Chief!
What are you gonna do now?

SHERIFF DUNLEVY

(playfully looks around)
Anything but this.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Come on, that is an absolute one
hundred percent bona fide low blow.
Some of us still have to live here.

Obviously anxious, Dunlevy looks to the crowd and then to the door.

SHERIFF DUNLEVY

Look, Christmas. I gotta go. I put
in my thirteen. I'm done.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Town's gonna miss you, Gabe. Really,
they will. Bunch a 'podunk farmers.

Dunlevy chuckles and once again glances at the door.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Well, then. I guess this is it.

Sheriff Dunlevy...

(touches his forehead
and gives a slight
salute)

You're free to go.

Dunlevy takes a step toward the door, but stops when Christmas COUGHS. He glances at the young man, who taps his own SHERIFF'S BADGE on his uniform. Dunlevy looks to his own chest and the starred badge over his pocket. Sheepishly, he smiles and removes the piece of metal.

Sheriff Dunlevy tosses his BADGE to Deputy Christmas, who catches it one-handed.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

End of an era, Chief. You were one
of the best.

Sheriff Dunlevy, now "Citizen" Dunlevy, slips on his winter jacket and exits the Silver Minnow.

EXT. THE SILVER MINNOW - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The MUFFLED PARTY can still be heard as Dunlevy lets the door close behind him. He takes a deep breath of cold air.

The night is quiet, the bar is full, and the parking lot is jam-packed with farm trucks, city cars, and the odd snowmobile or two. There is even a riding lawnmower outfitted with a mini-snowplow parked in a handicapped spot.

On the other side of the street stands the town's heavily-worn welcome sign. Part of it is covered in snow and ice. The visible part reads: "All Clues Lead to Storyville!" On the opposite side of the happy-go-lucky font, the sign continues: "A MYSTERY around every corner!"

Tears swelling, Dunlevy stares at the lit sign. He takes one final deep breath and turns away. The highway leading out of town stretches out before him.

Dunlevy steps onto the highway and starts the long, cold walk away from Storyville. He stifles a cough, which turns into a chuckle as he picks up the pace. He even does a playful skip or two as he starts to run.

The former sheriff slips on the icy road and falls to his knees. He lets out a WHOOP OF JOY and marvels at the open country before him. In the cold winter air, the illumination of stars is incredible. It's like he is seeing the entire wonder of the universe for the first time. The blinking red light at the top of the far-off wind turbine beckons.

Unbeknownst to the former sheriff, the door opens at the Silver Minnow. Dunlevy doesn't see a FIGURE exit the building and walk up to him until it is too late.

A flicker of movement startles the former law officer. His joy immediately disappears.

SHERIFF DUNLEVY

No... No!
(shakes his head)
It's over! It's over!

The figure raises a PISTOL.

SHERIFF DUNLEVY (CONT'D)

I did everything you said! Everything!
I solved it all! I SOLVED IT ALL!

BAM! The gun goes off and the body of the former Storyville Sheriff, Gabriel Dunlevy, slumps onto the blacktop highway.

The figure turns away from the dead man and heads back into town.

End Teaser

ACT ONE

EXT. FLYOVER COUNTRY - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: Eight months later.

The sun is out and the countryside is alive. Rows of dried, ready-to-harvest, corn and soybeans flank the highway on either side of the road. Up ahead, a tractor takes up almost two lanes of the blacktop. Just another day in the Midwest.

EXT. STORYVILLE WELCOME SIGN - DAY

The same Storyville sign from before looms freshly painted and ready for the season. The now ice-free portion of the sign reads: "Where anyone can be the Sheriff of Mystery Fest at the Storyville County Fair! Maybe even YOU! Since 1977!"

An UBER exits the highway and pulls to a stop in front of the sign.

A sunglasses-wearing CARLY HAMIT, 22, exits the backseat of the vehicle with her duffel bag. The car retreats and leaves Carly stranded on the outskirts of the small town.

Staring at the billboard, she takes out her CELLPHONE and taps on an app. Once the app is activated, she removes a NECKLACE from the pocket of her duffel bag and brings its FROG-SHAPED CHARM up to her lips.

CARLY
(into the charm)
Testing... testing...

The charm is a voice-activated microphone that is synced to her phone.

CARLY (CONT'D)
(into the mic)
Alright, Sharon. Let's see if your
faith in me is warranted.

Carly slips the necklace around her neck and hides the charm under her shirt. In doing so, she spots a series of JAGGED WRIST SCARS peeking out from under her sleeve.

She runs her fingers along the scars.

CARLY (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Time to prove myself.

Finished with her mic setup, Carly takes a deep breath and snaps an enthusiastic thumbs-up selfie in front of the "Mystery Fest!" section of the billboard.

She's interrupted by the short WHOOP-WHOOP of a POLICE CRUISER as it pulls up to the sign.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

(rolls down the window)

You must be Carly Hamit. I'm Deputy Dale Christmas. Your editor said you'd be here around six. Consider me your official welcoming party.

CARLY

Deputy Dale?

(motions to the sign)

Is that your Mystery Fest name?

Christmas winks as if he's in on a joke.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

The local constabulary requires your attendance at the fairgrounds... m'lady.

Carly heads to the passenger's side.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

So you write for...

CARLY

Buzzfeed. Just part-time while I finish school.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

What are you studying?

CARLY

(smiles)

Criminology.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Ah, so that's how you got nominated to write up our little event.

CARLY

You kidding me? I volunteered.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

For Mystery Fest?

CARLY

I had to beg my editor to pull some strings.

(smiles)

Your town's a tough nut to crack.

(MORE)

CARLY (CONT'D)

An official ride-along with a well known news site was the only way I could get anyone to return my calls. Add in a healthy dose of Agatha Christie and Veronica Mars and this has been on the bucket list for a long time.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

A long time? What are you, twenty?

CARLY

Twenty-two.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

You'll certainly be the youngest Grand Marshal Storyville's seen.

CARLY

Grand Marshal? I think the term you're supposed to be selling is "Acting Sheriff of Mystery Fest."

(tosses her bag into
the backseat)

If I'm gonna write an article about some murder-mystery convention, then I want nothing but one hundred percent commitment from you, Deputy Dale.

(climbs into the car)

Besides, 22's the perfect cover. No one expects a millennial to solve life's greatest mysteries.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

"Life's greatest mysteries?"

(looks at the sign)

You'll fit right in here.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STORYVILLE - LATER

Downtown is a quaint community consisting of an old school movie theater, coffee shops, a bank or two, and several craft-oriented establishments.

At every opportunity, the town plays up its annual "Mystery Festival" tourist trap. The movie theater is playing, "The Thin Man", the street lamps are decorated in the style of "Spy vs Spy", and one of the craft shops is actually a hokey spy/surveillance and magic shop.

Announcing it all is a BANNER strung across the main street that reads: "WELCOME TO MYSTERY FEST!"

The police cruiser glides through what looks like an abandoned downtown. There are no people or cars on the street. If anything, it looks like an alien invasion flick and the entire small town has been wiped clean.

CARLY (O.S.)

Man, you weren't kidding. I feel like I'm in a Stephen King novel and the people haven't been written into the story yet.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)

Folks take their fair celebration seriously here.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - SAME

Deputy Christmas continues the slow drive through the apocalypse, while Carly gawks at the abandoned surroundings.

CARLY

So this is the Mystery Capital of the World.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Home of the Storyville Skeptics. Pride and joy of Storyville High.

CARLY

Please tell me the mascot is some shifty dude in a trenchcoat?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Anything to stay on brand. Town's population is 8,987. Down thirteen from last year's census.

CARLY

Down thirteen?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Small town, America. We lose more than we gain.

(turns a corner)

Except for a few glorious days in the fall when the population almost triples. We get authors, actors, fans, and most importantly... their dollars. Enough to put the entire town in the black.

(shrugs)

Could be worse. With a name like "Storyville," the town could've embraced the romance novel.

(MORE)

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

(smiles)

Everybody loves a good thriller.

CARLY

No need to sell it to me. A whole town that gets into character with me playing amateur detective? This is my nirvana. Dinner theatre and LARPing... When do we begin?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Officially, your term doesn't start until 9:00 am, tomorrow.

CARLY

And unofficially?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Mayor McKloskey's gonna want to get you sworn in.

Deputy Christmas leans forward and toggles on the flashing red and blue lights of the cruiser.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

It's just a formality.

EXT. FAIRGROUNDS - GRANDSTAND - NIGHT

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (O.S.)

Caaaarrrrrlllllyyyyy Haaammmmmiiiiittttt!

Carly bursts through a "wall of paper" onto the stage. Like a deer in headlights, she is immediately caught off guard by the elaborate production before her.

A COUPLE OF FIRE-BREATHING JUGGLERS toss their flaming torches high into the air and extinguish them in one synchronized movement. The CROWD in the stands hoots and hollers as Mayor McKloskey dances in the middle of the smoke and steam.

With his trademark top hat and cane, McKloskey has the appearance of a circus ringleader. In his other hand, he holds a comical MAGNIFYING GLASS.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (CONT'D)

As your elected official, it is my civic duty, nay! My privilege to remind each and every one of you... the world is a *mysterious* place!

The CROWD CHEERS.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (CONT'D)

One fraught with intrigue, with
suspense, with thrills galore! And
you, the good people of Storyville,
you know... that world needs a
champion!

McKloskey dances his way to Carly.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (CONT'D)

Someone who has what it takes to
question the world's chaotic
quandaries! To stare down its radical
riddles! Right its woeful wrongs.
And to secure their position amongst
the greatest crime solvers in history!
(pauses for applause)
Only one person will take the oath
of office and say, "I do solemnly
swear, that I will be faithful and
true to the Commonwealth of Storyville
County.

The spotlight gives the Mayor's shadow the appearance of
some over-the-top creeping cartoon villain.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (CONT'D)

That I will execute to the best of
my ability the role of lead
investigator of Storyville and its
surrounding communities!

With Carly unaware, June Delilah, the County Fair Cattle
Queen, saunters onstage. June holds an OFFICIAL LEDGER and
an overly fancy QUILL PEN. Lit by the insane light, the duo
of June and McKloskey look like demented gameshow hosts.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY (CONT'D)

And above all... to protect its
citizens, so help me god!"

McKloskey leans toward Carly as if waiting for an answer.
Carly glances offstage to Deputy Christmas, who nods and
gives a thumbs up.

CARLY

So-

Her voice echoes throughout the fairgrounds as McKloskey's
microphone picks it up.

CARLY (CONT'D)

So help me god!

June Delilah steps forward.

JUNE

Sign please.

The Cattle Queen holds open the ledger and CONTRACT. Carly takes a deep breath and signs with a quick dash of the quill pen.

MAYOR MCKLOSKEY

Ladies and gentlemen, viewers at home... Sheriff Carly Hamit!

The CROWD CHEERS as Mayor McKloskey presents Carly with the MAGNIFYING GLASS.

Old school FLASHBULBS go off as the local high school band starts playing some upbeat mystery anthem. Away from the grandstand, the Lions Club sets off fireworks.

For Carly, the pageantry is overwhelmingly fantastic and absolutely infectious.

CARLY

(to herself)

Let the mystery begin.

The mystery anthem continues to play--

EXT. CARLY'S MOTEL ROOM - DAY

--into the next morning.

Dressed in her fitted SHERIFF'S UNIFORM, Carly exits her motel room. She takes a deeply satisfying breath.

CARLY

Badass.

She snaps a quick selfie in front of the Motor Inn and its blinking "Free Wifi" sign.

MOTEL CLERK (O.S.)

Mornin', Sheriff!

Carly spots the MOTEL CLERK sweeping in front of the office.

MOTEL CLERK (CONT'D)

Great day for a mystery!

As if on cue, a BUSLOAD OF SCHOOLCHILDREN pass by. The DRIVER honks and all of the children simultaneously yell.

SCHOOLCHILDREN

Good morning, Sheriff!

EXT. DOWNTOWN STORYVILLE - LATER

Carly strolls down the sidewalk of the bustling downtown. The hopping town center is in sharp contrast to the desolate location of yesterday. Classic cars line the streets and some of the TOURISTS wear costumes. There are several "Poirots," "Miss Marples," and "Columbos." There are even a few out of place "Doctor Whos" and "Trekkies."

Like something out of a feel-good movie, everyone she passes waves or says "Mornin', Sheriff," as if it's part of the town's script.

ANGELINA, 36, exits the Storyville Diner and hands Carly a paper bag and a fresh cup of coffee. Playfully scrawled on the paper bag is the word, "EVIDENCE."

ANGELINA
Buenos dias, Sheriff.

CARLY
(takes the bag and
coffee)
Oh... Thank you!

Carly opens the bag and inhales. The aroma is intoxicating.

All along the street are the various SHOPOWNERS all ready to greet their new Sheriff.

CARLY (CONT'D)
Good morning, Storyville.

EXT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - LATER

The old school brick building is connected to the multilevel courthouse.

INT. SHERIFF'S ADMINISTRATION - CONTINUOUS

The main room of the department is straight out of the 1990's with filing cabinets, Gateway computer monitors, and stacks of binders and folders in need of filing.

Deputy Christmas sits with his feet on his desk as he tosses a STRESS BALL into the air. "MOTHER" MARY OGDEN, 53, busies herself with the latest invoices and tickets. The older woman is dressed like Basil Rathbone in Sherlock Holmes.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
Ah, there she is!

Carly enters the station carrying various boxes and bags of baked goods along with a tray of coffees.

MOTHER MARY

Oh, my.

CARLY

I know! I think I gained five pounds just walking here!

MOTHER MARY

(grabs the boxes and bags)

Thanks for the help, Dale.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Hey, she found the place okay.

CARLY

I did, I did.

MOTHER MARY

Shouldn't you be driving her around? Isn't that the deal?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

It's less than half a mile to the Motor Inn. This way she gets to see downtown, fall in love with "the beat." Her stage, so to speak.

(motions to the food)

Enjoy the spoils of law enforcement.

MOTHER MARY

(tosses one of the bags to Dale)

Stow it, Dale.

CARLY

(to the deputy)

I like her.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Okay, okay, before Mother starts chucking coffee. Let me give you the grand tour. You know, "official-like."

Christmas stands up and clears his throat.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Welcome to dispatch. The control hub for all things Storyville proper.

(points to a closed door)

Back there's some additional office space and the drunk tank where we let our "less than savory characters" stew for a bit.

(MORE)

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

(playfully bows)

I, Deputy Dale Christmas, will be your guide and mentor.

(motions to Mother Mary)

Mother Mary Ogden. Administration, resident hard-ass, and chucker of-

(looks into the "evidence" bag)

-croissants!

Mother Mary growls at the deputy.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Any questions so far?

Carly sips her coffee and looks around.

CARLY

Um, yeah. After last night, I was expecting-

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

More pomp and circumstance? More of Mayor McKloskey doing his Snidely Whiplash shtick?

CARLY

Maybe a few photographers, I guess.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Don't worry, everyone has their part to play.

(waves Carly's concerns away)

This is just the preamble.

Christmas holds his hand out. In his palm is the tiny stress ball.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Technically-

He closes his palm, hiding the ball. With his other hand, he points to his closed fist. Without breaking eye contact with Carly, he points to the clock on the wall.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

-your day doesn't officially begin until...

They all look to the clock. The second hand hits the 12. It is exactly 9:00 a.m.

Christmas opens his palm. The stress ball is gone.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
Good morning, Sheriff.

Mother Mary claps as Deputy Christmas points to the radio desk where the RADIO CRACKLES to life.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
Like a well-oiled machine.

MOTHER MARY
Oooh, I love this part!

The older woman bounces over to the radio, picks up the mic, and toggles it on.

MOTHER MARY (CONT'D)
(into the radio)
Sheriff's dispatch.

VOICE OVER RADIO
Good morning! This is Principal Levar over at the Storyville Elementary School.

MOTHER MARY
Good morning, Principal Levar!
(whispers to Carly)
That's Principal Levar over at the elementary school.
(into the mic)
What can we do ya for, Principal Levar?

VOICE OVER RADIO
We have a situation with the second grade. Jasper Buttontop is missing.

MOTHER MARY
Oh, dear. Oh, dear! We'll put out an APB immediately! You tell those kids... You tell those kids not to worry, Principal Levar! Sheriff Carly Hamit is on the case!

Mother Mary toggles the mic off and turns to Carly.

MOTHER MARY (CONT'D)
We have a 10-57. Jasper Buttontop has gone poof!

CARLY
 (excitedly rubs her
 hands together)
 Alright, alright. Hit me. Who is
 Jasper-

MOTHER MARY
 Buttontop.

CARLY
 Who is Jasper Buttontop?

EXT. STORYVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - LATER

From the bushes right outside of the second grade window,
 Carly raises the cage holding JASPER BUTTONTOP, the rabbit
 mascot for the grade schoolers.

CARLY
 I found him!

A CHEER erupts from the school. Carly takes a bow before the
 window full of CHILDREN. A TEACHER dressed like Carmen
 Sandiego stomps her foot with a playful "foiled again."

SERIES OF SHOTS

-Sheriff Carly judges a "Best 'Mystery' Pie" competition,
 while Deputy Christmas performs a card trick for some kids.

-Carly okays a store putting up Halloween decorations and
 nixes another putting up Christmas decorations.

-She cuts in line to have LAWRENCE BLOCK, crime author, sign
 his latest book.

-Carly and Deputy Christmas stand in front of a pumpkin
 display at ANDERS DRUGSTORE. Several smaller pumpkins surround
 an empty spot where a larger pumpkin has been stolen.
 Christmas takes this one more seriously (it's obviously a
 real, albeit minor, crime).

-Sheriff Carly flips the lights on the cruiser and motions
 to a group of jaywalking tourists to use the crosswalk.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. STORYVILLE SAVINGS AND LOANS - DAY

A BANK ALARM abruptly cuts off.

INT. STORYVILLE SAVINGS AND LOANS - CONTINUOUS

BANK CEO
 This is preposterous!

TOURISTS and BANKERS all stand around FOUR CRIMINALS IN SKI MASKS, bound on the floor. Deputy Christmas stands threateningly behind the BANK CEO.

Carly is casually seated on the teller's counter.

CARLY

Oh, really, Mr. Banker?

(leaps off the counter)

And what was the point of this so-called heist?

(faces the audience)

To acquire a family heirloom. An heirloom worth millions to be sold via black market by a father-son team in order to spite the family's matriarch.

(walks up to one of the criminals and removes the mask)

Isn't that right, Junior?

The crowd GASPS.

CARLY (CONT'D)

A son to create the illusion of a heist, a father to take advantage of the chaos. Foiled only by the sudden appearance of a local sandwich maker double-parked across the alley as he delivered his lunchtime wares. And the missing heirloom? Why it never left the building. It's currently in the pocket of one Mr. Banker, Sr. Deputy Christmas-

(plays to the crowd)

-arrest this man, this... CEO.

Everyone CHEERS and Carly bows theatrically. The BANK CEO breaks character to shake Carly's hand.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Now, I think someone mentioned lunch?

INT. STORYVILLE DINER - LATER

The diner is everything you would expect of a small-town eatery whose main clientele consists of the morning and lunch crowds. At the moment, it is packed with tourists and locals.

Outside, Carly poses with a small mob of tourists. After a seemingly endless wave of photos, she ducks into the diner.

The ENTRANCE BELL over the door gives her a welcome chime as she takes a deep breath and decompresses.

JUNE (O.S.)
 Good afternoon, Sheriff!

Dressed in her "Storyville Diner" uniform of jeans and branded t-shirt, the young woman saunters by carrying a couple of hot plates.

CARLY
 (instantly recognizes
 the cattle queen)
 Hey! Moonlighting, I see.

June winks as she heads toward a group of diners.

JUNE
 Can't be all glamour 24/7.
 (motions to the back
 of the diner)
 Your booth is in the back. Ange'll
 get your order up.

CARLY
 My own booth, I could get used to
 this.

The far corner booth is devoid of any customers and a placard on the edge of the table reads: "RESERVED FOR THE SHERIFF."

CARLY (CONT'D)
 I could DEFINITELY get used to this.

Another plaque mounted on the armrest of the bench reads:
 "SHERIFF LOBO/CLAUDE AKINS SAT HERE - SEPT. 28TH, 1979."

The cozy spot offers a view of the entire diner with minimal distraction. SIGNED PHOTOS of Angelina Loya posing with the VARIOUS SHERIFFS line the immediate wall.

Carly zeroes in on a photo of a scrawny sheriff that reads,
 "Ange, mejor comida en el condado! Thanks for everything! -
 Sammy."

ANGELINA (O.S.)
 That one's my favorite.

Carly smiles and turns to the woman.

CARLY
 I'll bet. Barriga llena, corazòn
 contanto.

ANGELINA
 "Full belly, happy heart!" Someone
 speaks the language of my soul!

CARLY

Just enough to embarrass myself.
 (looks to the photos)
 No Sheriff Lobo photo?

ANGELINA

(chuckles)
 Before my time. At least there's a
 plaque.
 (motions to the booth)
 Welcome to your "second office." I
 like to keep a spot open in case you
 need to take a break or clear your
 head. Your very own safe space away
 from the circus.

CARLY

(feigns exhaustion)
 It has been an utterly exhausting
 afternoon.

ANGELINA

Trust me, I know. Dale can be... a
 handful.

CARLY

Oooh, "Dale" is it?

ANGELINA

(playfully rolls her
 eyes)
 Sorry. The *esteemed* Deputy Christmas.
 And you can tell him I said that.

CARLY

Uh-oh, small town life just got a
 little more interesting.
 (gently ribs Angelina)
 Just kidding, none of my business.
 Although it does explain why he
 decided to wait in the car.

ANGELINA

(sighs)
 He is the reason I never left this
 town.

CARLY

That little heartbreaker!

The "ORDER UP" BELL DINGS and June Delilah holds up a big
 bag of takeout.

ANGELINA

Order up.

CARLY
What's the damage?

ANGELINA
On the house. Sheriffs eat for free.
(motions to the photos)
As the unofficial chronicler of their
time here, it's the least I can do.

Carly claps her hands.

TOURIST #1 (O.S.)
Excuse me, can we get a quick photo?

CARLY
Ah, duty calls.

Carly poses with the group of tourists.

CARLY (CONT'D)
Everybody ready... Mystery pose!

The photo is quickly snapped and Carly snags the takeout
from the counter.

CARLY (CONT'D)
I'll be back later to get a photo
for the wall!

ANGELINA
No rush, Sheriff. Plenty of time for
that later.

The entrance bell chimes as Carly exits.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - LATER

Carly and Christmas are parked on the outskirts of town. The
windows are down and the two are eating their late lunch.
Off in the distance, the giant WIND TURBINE slowly churns.

With one hand, Christmas absentmindedly shuffles a DECK OF
CARDS like a magician (or a conman).

Every now and then, the RADIO CRACKLES with Mystery Fest
chatter.

CARLY
Ugh. I can't eat anymore.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
Perks of the job, Sheriff. Enjoy it
while it's free.

CARLY

No more free stuff, I can't take it.

Deputy Christmas snakes the remainder of Carly's onion rings.

CARLY (CONT'D)

I'd kill for your metabolism.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

(hoists a ring into
the air)

To a job well done. The criminology
major suits you.

(pops the ring into
his mouth)

So what's your next move? After
college, I mean.

CARLY

Are you seriously asking someone who
counts Clarice Starling as a personal
hero what they plan to do with their
police sciences major?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

The fictional character?

CARLY

Hey, some people get inspired to
become bakers by watching Paul
Hollywood.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Until they realize they have to get
up at 2:00 a.m. every day for the
rest of their lives just to make
bread.

CARLY

(shrugs)

Yeah, maybe. But for me, once I
decided to go for it, the focus really
helped me through a rough patch.

Carly unconsciously pulls at the sleeve hiding her scars and
covers up the act by scrolling through the photos on her
phone. She stops on one with her cuddling Jasper Buttontop.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

You sending those to your editor?

CARLY

When I'm able to. Service here is
janky as anything. I've received
nothing all day.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
Welcome to the boonies.

CARLY
Spotty internet aside, your town has
its charm, Deputy.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
So...

CARLY
So no article stating the "Top 10
Reasons Why Being the Sheriff of
Mystery Fest Sucks."

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
McKloskey'll be glad to hear that.

Deputy Christmas goes back to his one-handed card work.

CARLY
(holds up her hand to
stop Christmas)
With the caveat that I'll actually
be able to write it.
(smiles)
You said it yourself. The criminology
major suits me.
(casually goes back
to her photos)
So of course, I did my research. In
the years since Mystery Fest became
a thing, there hasn't been one post-
festival statement from anyone who
participated in your little event.
No blogs, no articles, not even a
random Facebook post.
(makes eye contact
with Christmas)
How is that possible?

With one hand, Christmas cuts the deck of cards and holds up
the QUEEN OF HEARTS.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
It's a mystery.

CARLY
Or McKloskey suckers people into
signing one heckuva Non-Disclosure
Agreement...

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
Can you blame him? It is this town's
bread and butter.

CARLY

Well, there are ways around an NDA.
 (glances at the hidden
 recording app on her
 phone)
 So, is he technically your boss? I
 noticed there's no "official" Sheriff
 on the books.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Yeah. Since... the last guy, the
 town figured it would be in the
 Festival's best interest to leave
 the post open. Add to the allure.

CARLY

Why? What happened to the last guy?

Before Christmas can respond, the cruiser's RADIO CRACKLES.

MOTHER MARY

(over the radio)
 Dispatch to Sheriff. Dispatch to
 Sheriff Hamit.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Sounds like you're back on the clock.

Carly smiles and reaches for the CB mic. After the full day,
 she's an old pro at handling the radio.

CARLY

(into the CB)
 Sheriff Hamit to Dispatch, we hear
 you, Mother. What's up?

MOTHER MARY

(over the radio)
 A 10-54 over at the McKloskey farm.

CARLY

McKloskey? Mayor McKloskey? I mean,
 roger that, Mother. We are on it!

Silence.

MOTHER MARY

You forgot to say "over."

CARLY

Oops. Over.
 (hangs up the receiver)
 Alrighty then. It's getting late and
 there are after parties to get to.
 (MORE)

CARLY (CONT'D)
Last call for law enforcement! What's
a ten fifty-four?

Deputy Christmas deftly slips the playing cards into the
breast pocket of his uniform.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
A possible dead body.

Carly's smile fades.

CARLY
Seriously?

The smile returns.

CARLY (CONT'D)
Awesome!
(claps)
Can we use the siren?

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. MCKLOSKEY FARM - DAY

Siren blaring, the police cruiser shoots down the country road, kicking up a trail of dust and gravel in its wake.

It turns and races down the long drive toward the residence. Cornfields surrounding the area give the farm the appearance of being an island in a sea of harvest-ready waves.

The cruiser slows and stops alongside a COUNTY AMBULANCE parked in front of the three-level farmhouse.

In her excitement, Carly is the first one out of the car.

CARLY

This is way better than a listicle.

She immediately snaps a photo of the ambulance and farmhouse. Without missing a beat, she moves to the other side of the parked ambulance and catches the TWO DRIVERS having a smoke.

Twin brothers, ELBERT and NED KRUSE, both 33, of the Storyville "Kruse-Control" Emergency Services, quickly stamp out their cigarettes and stand at attention.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Ah-ha! Caught you guys out of character!

(looks the two over)

Wow, ain't you a set of bookends.

(looks around)

Not much of a crime scene.

NED KRUSE

We didn't touch nothing!

The twins relax when they see Deputy Christmas walk up behind Carly.

ELBERT KRUSE

Deputy.

NED KRUSE

We, uh, we thought it best to wait until you guys got involved.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Where's-

NED KRUSE

Emma's inside.

ELBERT KRUSE
She's doing the dishes.

NED KRUSE
Over and over and over. We couldn't-

ELBERT KRUSE
We couldn't get her to come outside.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
Emma?

The two Kruse brothers share another glance.

BOTH BROTHERS
It's the Mayor.

CARLY
Ooh, a 10-54 on the Mayor? Bold choice
writing himself out at the beginning
of the festival.
(playfully elbows
Christmas)
Sounds like you potentially answer
to no one now.

ELBERT KRUSE
I've never seen anything-

NED KRUSE
Me, neither.

BOTH BROTHERS
We've never seen anything like it.

Carly takes it all in. Finally, she hoists herself up with a-

CARLY
Well, then.
(claps her hands)
Let's go talk to Mrs. McKloskey.
(nods to the brothers)
At ease, boys. The pros are here.

As she and Deputy Christmas approach the front door, Carly
leans in close to whisper.

CARLY (CONT'D)
So what exactly is a "possible dead
body?" Is that like murder or is it
some type of heart attack. Sounds
vague.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Until we have eyes on it, it
 absolutely is.

Deputy Christmas holds open the door.

INT. MCKLOSKEY HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Carly scans the area looking for anything out of place (as much as she can determine what defines "out of place").

CARLY
 (cop voice)
 What we have here is your typical
 farm domicile.
 (whispers)
 The only crime I'm seeing is an over-
 reliance on country chic and-

Amidst the country-living knickknacks and decorations are photos of bigtop circus life. A young Mayor McKloskey stands in the center of a ring as elephants, trapeze artists, and circus strongmen dance around him.

CARLY (CONT'D)
 Huh. I guess this shouldn't be
 surprising.

A FURIOUS SCRUBBING SOUND comes from the KITCHEN.

Carly motions to the sound. Deputy Christmas instinctively puts his hand out to slow Carly down, but she brushes him off and enters the small room.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Wearing a long-sleeved, tight-collared farm dress, EMMA MCKLOSKEY, 67, furiously scrubs the morning dishes. The most notable thing about the woman is that she is extremely tiny. At about 4'11", the matriarch of the McKloskey farm needs to stand on a step stool to reach the sink.

CARLY
 Mrs. McKloskey?

The older woman abruptly stops scrubbing.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Emma?

Like something out of a horror movie, Emma McKloskey jerks her head to face the two law enforcement officials.

EMMA
 What?!

Carly jumps.

Emma immediately calms down and flicks the water off her hands.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Sorry, sorry. I'm so sorry, please forgive me.

CARLY

(laughs)

Holy... whew.

(playfully slaps the
deputy's arm)

I jumped. Did you jump?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

I probably jumped a little.

CARLY

Haha, whatever, tough guy.

(to Emma)

You're good.

EMMA

Would you two like some tea?

Carly looks to Christmas, who shakes his head.

CARLY

No, no thanks.

(coughs)

We're here on official police
business, ma'am.

Ignoring the response, Emma immediately sets about getting two cups and saucers.

CARLY (CONT'D)

(to Deputy Christmas)

Should I be taking notes?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

(ignores Carly)

So, Emma, can you tell us what
happened?

EMMA

The darnedest thing. Jimmy-

CARLY

Jimmy? The Mayor?

EMMA

You have to know, Jimmy always hated the garden.

Carly and the deputy share a glance.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

The garden?

EMMA

MY garden.

(happily pours hot water from a tea kettle into the cups)

He called it small potatoes.

(chuckles)

No time for carrots, or green beans, or beets.

(looks at Carly)

You understand what I'm saying?

CARLY

I hate beets.

EMMA

So did Jimmy. Once he retired from the old life, it was all seed corn and soybeans. That's where his new passion lay. His farmer's passion.

CARLY

Farmer's passion?

EMMA

That and serving the town, of course.

Emma falls silent as she takes an uncomfortably long time to lower two tea bags into the hot water.

CARLY

I really-

(to Deputy Christmas)

-I really feel like I should be writing this down. This one's the big leagues. This feels important. Like there's gonna be a quiz on this one. The show-stopper.

Emma holds out the cups of tea.

EMMA

Here we go. Hot and ready.

Deputy Christmas reaches out and takes his. Carly grabs hers and hoists it into the air with a-

CARLY

Cheers!

Before she can take a sip, Deputy Christmas gently pushes her hand down.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Right...

(nods to the deputy)

Keep it professional.

Deputy Christmas ignores her and focuses on Emma. Carly, still excited, glances around the area and-

CARLY (CONT'D)

So where's... Where exactly IS Mayor Mc...uh, Jimmy?

EMMA

Oh, he's about. That was Jimmy. You never knew where he was or what he'd be doing. Ever since he became mayor, he'd be here one minute, gone the next. But that's farm life. You knew he would be there when you needed him. Except when I was-

CARLY

In the garden!

(taps her temple at
Deputy Christmas)

Because the Mayor hated the garden.

(whispers)

See? Call me Nancy Friggin' Drew.

Emma glances at the backdoor leading from the kitchen.

EMMA

He never went there. Not until-

CARLY

Not until today. Am I right?

Emma nods.

Deputy Christmas slowly sets his cup down.

CARLY (CONT'D)

(holds out her hand)

Relax, Deputy. I got this.

(winks)

Learned from the best.

Carly moves to the door, while Emma turns to the deputy.

EMMA

Jimmy hated beets with the fury of a biblical blight. Said if he could, he'd get them outlawed.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

An excited Carly lets the screen door slam shut. She can see roughly 3/4 of the backyard. The rest is obscured by the corner of the house.

Completely surrounded by a rabbit-proof fence, the only way in or out of the garden area is through the kitchen.

Her excitement wanes as she takes in the setting. From where she stands, there is no sign of any "possible dead body."

CARLY

Huh. So much for hunches.

As she leaves the safety of the house, she finds herself amidst the dead and dying summer beans and tomato vines.

Once she clears the corner of the farmhouse, Carly stops short, startled by an ominous PUMPKIN-HEAD SCARECROW holding court over the dying crops.

The scarecrow is wearing a TOP HAT.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Nice!

With its torso tied to the post and its arms dangling over a crossbeam, the mannequin is disturbingly lifelike.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Daaaamn. This town goes all-in.

Carly takes a step toward the garden's protector.

As she gets closer to the thing, she realizes it wears the same exact outfit Mayor McKloskey wore at the fairgrounds.

CARLY (CONT'D)

No mistaking who you're supposed to be.

(playfully looks around)

Missing your cane, though.

(winks at the scarecrow)

Bettin' that clue's coming back later.

Carly snaps a photo of the pumpkin-head. The crude black marker grin sketched on its surface smiles down on her.

It is creepy.

She swats a few flies away and cautiously walks right up to it. At the last moment, she abruptly turns away and brings up her CELLPHONE for a tension-breaking selfie.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Say, "Greetings from Mystery Fest!"

She takes the photo.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Hang tight, Mr. McKloskey.

(in her best cop-show
voice)

Appears pumpkins and murder... are
in season.

(puts on her sunglasses)

Yeeow!

She hooks her arm around the base of the scarecrow and snaps another photo.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Hello, new profile pic.

In doing so, she jars it slightly. One of its arms slips free from the crossbeam and falls to its side. It cracks Carly on the side of the head as it does so.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Hey!

She pushes away, which jolts the figure. Now off-kilter, the unanchored pumpkin-head rolls off the top and hits the ground with a thud.

A SWARM OF FLIES erupts from the neckhole of the scarecrow and a startled Carly leaps back.

FLIES are everywhere.

And then it dawns on her...

The scarecrow is way too lifelike.

Staring at the headless thing, she snakes her hand up and removes her sunglasses.

From this distance, she realizes the scarecrow is definitely NOT made of straw.

With one hand covering her mouth, she slowly reaches out to tug on the glove of the scarecrow's hanging arm.

The glove slips off easily. Underneath is a human hand covered in dried blood.

The scarecrow is a headless MAYOR MCKLOSKEY.

Carly backpedals and trips over the fallen pumpkin. Her sunglasses go flying as she twists her ankle and falls to the ground.

A sales sticker on the pumpkin reads: "Anders Drugstore".

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)
Looks like we found our missing
pumpkin.

Horrified, Carly forces her attention from the fly and blood-crusted pumpkin to make eye contact with the solemn deputy.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
What do you think, Sheriff?

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. MCKLOSKEY HOUSE - DAY

Carly bursts through the front door of the farmhouse and beelines towards the police cruiser.

She makes it halfway before she veers off and vomits into some bushes. After a couple of seconds, she closes her eyes and sits with her back against the quaint mailbox post.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)

The first one's never easy.

Hyperventilating, Carly raises her head to see Deputy Christmas kneeling beside her. He holds out her SUNGLASSES and a HANDKERCHIEF.

CARLY

The first one?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

First break. First big case. First murder. Always hits hard. No matter how prepared you think you are.

CARLY

That was a real body.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Yeah.

CARLY

No, you don't understand.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

(taps his Deputy's badge)

I think I do.

CARLY

We have to tell someone!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Sheriff-

CARLY

We have to call the police!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Sheriff, we ARE the police.

CARLY

WHAT?!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 First thing we do is radio it in.
 It's no longer a 10-54. This bad boy
 just graduated to homicide.

CARLY
 Homicide?!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 (nods)
 Next we secure the scene.

CARLY
 We?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 We. You and me.

Confused, Carly tries to get her bearings.

CARLY
 Is this... is this part of...

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Don't worry. I'll walk you through
 it.

The deputy stands straight and looks around as if assessing
 the area.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
 Best thing to do is secure it before
 we start losing light. Have Mother
 call the coroner, get the doc out
 here. Maybe get some lights set up,
 just in case. Probably get Ginny out
 here as well. She's our resident
 photographer. She also works for the
 local paper, so we better get her
 working on official police business
 before she has a chance to go to
 press.
 (smiles)
 Unless you feel up to taking more
 photos on your phone?

Carly shakes her head.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
 Fair enough. That's no Jasper
 Buttontop back there.
 (looks down)
 You ready for this?

CARLY

What?! No!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

You did great today. You'll be fine.

CARLY

I... wait, I think I'm missing something.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

How's that?

CARLY

That's a real body back there. He has no head!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Right. We've covered this already, Sheriff.

CARLY

That's Mayor... Mayor McKloskey-

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Hold up. Let's not jump the gun. Technically, we don't have a positive ID on the victim yet.

Deputy Christmas holds his hands up to pacify Carly before she can object.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

But I get what you're saying. That's good intuition. Good insight. I'd expect nothing less from the Chief.

Carly offers no response.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

(claps his hands together)

Now, best get cracking. We have a job to do.

CARLY

You're serious.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Why wouldn't I be? We're not selling baked goods out here. This ain't Paul Hollywood.

(MORE)

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Sheriff, I get what you're going through. In our position, in a small community surrounded by people you know, sometimes you're put in a situation where you have to take a step back. There's fun and games and then there's the real work. When the job calls, you can't look at the people you're protecting as your family. In those moments, they're not your friends, they're not the people you see in church or on the drive in to work. When faced with the unthinkable, you gotta put up a wall. It's how we get through it.

The deputy puffs out his chest like he's a coach at a football game.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

It's how YOU'RE gonna get through it. Time to build your wall, Sheriff.

(smiles)

I believe in you.

CARLY

You're crazy.

Deputy Christmas moves to help Carly up.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Don't touch me!

Carly first makes eye contact with Christmas, then turns to the twins, who are still casually smoking in the shade of the ambulance. She hears the front door of the McKloskey house open and spots Emma standing in the doorway.

None of them acknowledges the oddity of the situation.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Is this part of the festival? Is this all an act?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Sheriff-

CARLY

Stop calling me that!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

What am I supposed to call you?

CARLY
 (takes a deep breath
 and unconsciously
 pulls at her sleeve)
 My name is Carly Hamit. And I'm a
 reporter with BuzzFeed.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 You're not just a reporter.

CARLY
 Two days ago, I turned in an article
 on how to find a soulmate based on
 your ice cream preference. I'm a
 current student at the University. I
 am NOT your Sheriff. Hard stop.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Correct me if I'm wrong, but you
 were officially sworn in by Mayor
 McKloskey.

CARLY
 What are you talking about?!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 We were all there, Sheriff.

Carly scrambles to her feet and marches towards the cruiser.

CARLY
 Okay, we're done here. It's been
 fun. But game over.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Sheriff, please-

CARLY
 I'm out, DEPUTY. You hear me, I'm
 out! I draw the line at roleplaying
 with actual dead bodies.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Sheriff-

CARLY
 Out!

Carly reaches out to open the passenger's door, but the door
 "CLICKS" locked before she can grab it.

CARLY (CONT'D)
 Take me back to town.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 (holding the key fob)
 Carly-

CARLY
 Now.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 (takes a step forward)
 -hold on. Let's talk it through.

CARLY
 Talk what through? In half-an-hour,
 I'm on the first Uber out of here. I
 don't know what kind of clever game
 you think this is, but what you do
 with... the recently deceased, is
 your business.
 (points to the house)
 I don't know where you picked up
 that guy, but I'm sure his family
 would love to know what you're up
 to. But hey, to each their own. Have
 fun, you psycho. Give the Mayor my
 regards when you see him. I'm outta
 here.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Slow down. One step at a time. Let's
 examine the facts.
 (motions to the house)
 The clues.

Carly slams her fist onto the top of the cruiser.

CARLY
 I'm done playing police officer!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 So now's your chance. It's what you
 wanted. It's what you talked about.
 Why pretend to be Clarice Starling-
 (takes a step toward
 Carly)
 -when you can BE Clarice Starling.

Carly shakes her head as a look of illness washes over her.

Deputy Christmas glances over at the two ambulance drivers
 and sheepishly turns back to Carly.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
 (whispers)
 You're not seeing the big picture
 here.

Deputy Christmas's hand rests on the FIREARM at his side.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

(grits his teeth)

You're the Sheriff. This is what you do. This is what you've been sworn in to do. You have to solve it.

CARLY

Why?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Because it's a mystery.

CARLY

Goddammit, stop saying that!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

This is tough, I know it. Trust me, we've all been there. But we can get through this. You just have to calm down and look at the facts.

Carly takes a step back.

CARLY

The facts. The clues.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

For starters, what's the first thing you noticed? When you got here?

CARLY

(forces a laugh)

I am not playing this game anymore.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

You said it didn't look like a crime scene. Those were your words. "Not much of a crime scene."

(moves closer to Carly)

Now take that thought a step further. No sign of a struggle, no overt violence, no forced entry.

(pauses)

What does that tell you?

Carly takes another step back.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

That means either Jimmy McKloskey was taken by surprise... Or he knew his assailant.

Carly freezes.

CARLY
 (tears swelling in
 her eyes)
 Why are you doing this?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS
 Because it's our job.

Carly bolts.

She doesn't stop at the end of the driveway, instead, she continues into the CORNFIELD.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
 Sheriff! Sheriff, wait!
 (to himself)
 Dammit.

INT. CORNFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Carly shields her face as she whips through the mess.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)
 There's a murderer out there, Sheriff!

Carly skids to a stop.

CARLY
 (to herself)
 It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a goddamn
 game.

Through the stalks of corn, she can just make out Deputy Christmas beside the cruiser. Christmas is not pursuing.

CARLY (CONT'D)
 Screw this.

Carly turns and plunges deeper into the field.

She takes out her CELLPHONE and searches for a signal. She has no bars.

More angry than terrified, it's not long before she becomes disoriented and needs to stop and gain her bearings.

Except for WIND WHISTLING through the cornstalks, it is disturbingly quiet.

Another look at her phone. Still no bars.

Completely lost, Carly looks up and sees the giant WIND TURBINE in the distance.

She forces a deep, calming breath.

FLASHBACK

The sign on the Motor Inn says, "Free WIFI."

END FLASHBACK

In an attempt to orient herself, she points to the turbine. With her other hand, she turns ninety degrees from where she stands and-

CARLY (CONT'D)
(pointing deeper into
the corn)
Town.

DISTANT RUSTLING off to her side startles her.

Carly kneels down to see through the forest of corn.

MORE RUSTLING from behind.

Someone is stalking her.

CARLY (CONT'D)
Up yours, Dale!

The RUSTLING gets closer.

Carly straightens up to see the tops of the stalks of corn bend with the weight of someone approaching, like a shark through water.

CARLY (CONT'D)
Deputy?

No response.

Carly breaks for it. Without looking back, she sprints toward the safety of the town.

Razor-sharp whips of corn cut at her face as she races through the harvest. The rows are so thick she can barely see ten feet in front of her. It's also why she doesn't see the object in her path.

Carly trips and falls, losing her grip on her CELLPHONE.

Caked with mud and corn dust, Carly turns over and frantically searches for her phone.

She spots it a row over.

She reaches for the phone at the same time she becomes aware of a new sound.

The furious BUZZING OF FLIES.

At her feet, is the HEAD OF MAYOR MCKLOSKEY.

EXT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - SAME

Deputy Christmas leans against the front end of the vehicle. His demeanor could not look more casual as he holds a LETTER with one hand while he methodically shuffles his deck of cards in the other.

It is Carly's signed ACCEPTANCE LETTER for the "Sheriff of Mystery Fest" event. It's from June Delilah's ledger.

Emma McKloskey approaches with a GLASS OF LEMONADE.

EMMA

I thought you might be thirsty.

Deputy Christmas doesn't take the glass, so Emma sets it onto the hood of the cruiser.

EMMA (CONT'D)

This is never the easy part, is it,
Dale?

Deputy Christmas sighs as he stares at the letter.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

They never read the fine print.

EMMA

They never do. You know that.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

But every time. Every damn time-

EMMA

Dale, language.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Sorry, ma'am.

(sheepishly goes back
to the letter)

Every time I think it's going to be
different. I think it's going to be
easier.

EMMA

Is it ever?

Deputy Christmas shakes his head and flips one card over. It is the QUEEN OF HEARTS.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You can't control things. Or change them. No matter how much you may want to.

Christmas tucks the cards back into his pocket and picks up the glass of lemonade.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Maybe.

Within the yellowish liquid, particles of fresh-squeezed lemon float and collide like mini-galaxies.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

You know, as the stereotypical "farmer's wife," you're our primary suspect, Emma. You know that, don't you?

EMMA

Ah. That's why you wouldn't let her drink the tea.

(leans in)

Dig a little deeper, Deputy.

Emma pushes one of her sleeves up to show an arm completely tattooed in nothing but WEBS AND BLACK WIDOW SPIDERS.

EMMA (CONT'D)

You know I'm anything but stereotypical.

(smiles)

We all are. It's what makes our town... unique.

Deputy Christmas smiles, takes one last skeptical look at the lemonade, and pours it out. He makes sure it is far enough away that it won't splatter on him or Emma.

EMMA (CONT'D)

I'm not going to poison you, Dale.

(sighs)

Jimmy and I have been together for over forty years. I loved him. Him and that stupid outfit. You have to realize that... You have to believe it.

The two make eye contact.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

I meant no offense. That's just how these things work. Police business.

Emma is the first to look away. She points to the cornfield across the driveway.

EMMA

You know the town won't let her leave.
Not until she fulfills her duty.

Deputy Christmas sets the empty (and possibly poisonous) glass onto the hood of the cruiser.

EMMA (CONT'D)

Not until she solves her thirteen.

At the mention of "the thirteen," Deputy Christmas brings the letter back up and shakes his head.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Why don't they ever read the fine
print?

ANGLE ON THE LETTER

Deputy Christmas stares at the signature line. Beneath the "Carly Hamit" signature, it reads, "I, the above, agree to fulfill my duty as Acting Sheriff of Storyville Township until I am deemed unworthy or successfully solved the murder of thirteen individuals."

BACK TO SCENE

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Sheriff of Mystery Fest, my ass...
(looks to Emma)
Sorry.

The two are interrupted by a SCREAM coming from the corn.

Still leaning on the cruiser, Deputy Christmas doesn't make a move. Instead, he casually folds Carly's letter and tucks it into his front pocket. He then takes out his HANDGUN and makes sure it's loaded by methodically checking each chamber.

EMMA

You like her, don't you?

No answer.

EMMA (CONT'D)

And you think telling her what's
going on is really going to make a
difference?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

I guess we'll see. At the very least,
I think we owe her that much.

Satisfied, Deputy Christmas closes the cylinder on the revolver and stands up.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
But first we have a murder to solve.

With the gun still out, Deputy Christmas looks to the cornfield.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)
I don't make the rules.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

EXT. EDGE OF CORNFIELD - DAY

Carly staggers out of the cornfield and finds herself on the outskirts of town.

Disheveled and out of breath, she looks up at the Motor Inn's sign and its "Free Wifi" beacon.

A quick glance at her phone and it still shows no bars.

CARLY

You gotta be kidding me.

INT. CARLY'S MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Cellphone in hand, Carly enters the room, but finds she still has no bars on the phone.

CARLY

Come on!

She tosses the cellphone onto the bed and rushes over to the in-room phone.

The motel door closes behind her.

Carly picks up the receiver and pushes "0" repeatedly.

MOTEL CLERK

(through the phone)

Front desk?

CARLY

I need someone to call me an Uber.

MOTEL CLERK

Excuse me?

CARLY

An Uber! Your wifi isn't working. I need you to call me an Uber. And the police. Preferably, the state patrol.

MOTEL CLERK

Sheriff Hamit?

CARLY

Yes, yes! It's me. Can you call me an Uber, please?

MOTEL CLERK

Sorry, Sheriff.

(MORE)

MOTEL CLERK (CONT'D)
 Tower's been acting buggy. We got
 nothing. No incoming or outgoing
 calls. Local only.

Carly slams the phone down.

CARLY
 God dammit!

She glances out the window, but the parking lot is bare.

Quick as she can, Carly bags up her belongings and puts her
 cellphone into her back pocket.

She pauses when she picks up the MAGNIFYING GLASS McKloskey
 gave her at the fairgrounds. Instead of bagging it up, she
 tosses it into the trash.

EXT. CARLY'S MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Duffel bag in hand, Carly steps out of her motel room. She
 takes a deep, focused breath.

MOTEL CLERK (O.S.)
 Mornin', Sheriff!

Carly jumps.

The clerk is sweeping in front of the office, exactly like
 before.

MOTEL CLERK (CONT'D)
 Great day for a mystery!

Carly takes a step toward the young man.

CARLY
 What did you say?

MOTEL CLERK
 (eyes widen)
 Huh?

CARLY
 Just now. What did you say?

MOTEL CLERK
 I mean, uh, it's a nice day, uh-

On cue, a BUSLOAD OF SCHOOLCHILDREN pass by. The DRIVER honks
 and all of the children simultaneously yell.

SCHOOLCHILDREN
 Good morning, Sheriff!

In awe, Carly watches the bus continue down the road.

Confused, Carly pulls out her cellphone and checks the time. It reads: 5:35 PM.

CARLY

What the hell?

She turns back to the motel clerk just in time to see the man scurry into the motel office and quickly flip the lock on the door.

A couple seconds later, the "No Vacancy" sign comes on.

EXT. DOWNTOWN STORYVILLE - LATER

On edge, Carly walks downtown. The unfolding scene appears to be almost identical to the one from this morning.

The classic cars still line the streets. The only differences are that it's late in the day and there aren't as many tourists dressed in costume.

Angelina exits the Storyville Diner and quickly moves to her spot on the sidewalk. In her hands, she holds a fresh cup of coffee and a paper bag that says, "EVIDENCE."

Angelina smiles as Carly freezes.

ANGELINA

Buenos dias, Sheriff.

CARLY

What is going on?

Angelina maintains her forced smile.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Answer me!

Angelina gives a quick glance behind her. Down the block, the various SHOPOWNERS are all lined up with their various treats, ready to greet the new Sheriff.

FLASHBACK

INT. SHERIFF'S ADMINISTRATION - DAY

Deputy Christmas smiles.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Don't worry, everyone has their part to play.

END FLASHBACK

Holding the bag and coffee, Angelina takes a step toward the confused Carly.

ANGELINA
 Sheriff? You okay?
 (holds the bag of
 treats out)
 Maybe you should eat something.

Carly smacks the bag and coffee out of Angelina's hands.

CARLY
 What the hell is going on?

The coffee splatters onto the window of the local spy shop.

With a look of horror, Angelina looks past Carly.

Carly whips around.

A GROUP OF TOURISTS have all stopped to watch the show.

CARLY (CONT'D)
 (to the tourists)
 What are you looking at?

They flinch at her anger, but keep watching. Just like they did at the school... and the bank...

CARLY (CONT'D)
 You think this is a game?

A COUGH from behind interrupts Carly.

ANGELINA
 Sheriff.

Angelina scoops up the bag of croissants and forces them into Carly's hands.

ANGELINA (CONT'D)
 You have to go.

Angelina grabs Carly's hand and squeezes.

ANGELINA (CONT'D)
 Sheriff, please... We're all counting
 on you.

Carly staggers away. Instead of heading toward the row of shopowners, she flees across the street. Angelina watches her go.

Once Carly is gone, the nervous tension of the SHOPOWNERS dissipates.

A few seconds later, they all turn and shuffle back into their respective shops.

INT. STORYVILLE DINER - CONTINUOUS

Angelina enters the empty diner and heads to the register.

Never taking her eyes off of the floor, she takes up position behind the counter and stands on top of a small, white "X" taped on the tiles. It's the same kind of mark an actor would use onstage.

Once on her mark, her eyes drift to the register. Stuck to the side of the machine is a PHOTO OF ANGELINA AND HER SON (8). In the photo, the two smile as the mom pulls the boy into a cuddling embrace.

She turns her attention to the wall clock across the room. Standing as still as she can, she watches the second hand mark the passing of time.

All she can do is wait.

EXT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - LATER

The front door of the station is locked.

The panicked Carly shakes the door and peers inside. All of the lights are off.

Frustrated, she stops to look around and only realizes she still has the "EVIDENCE" bag in her hand. Carly tosses it aside and gives another glance into the building.

INT. SHERIFF'S ADMINISTRATION - CONTINUOUS

The room is dark with only a few exit signs giving off any light.

The MUFFLED BREAKING OF A WINDOW comes from beyond the door leading to the back room and drunk tank.

A few seconds later, the back room door opens and Carly, duffel still in hand, slips into the administration room.

She beelines right to Mother Mary's radio desk.

The entire setup is completely foreign to her as it looks like something straight out of the mid-70's.

Without taking a seat, Carly picks up the microphone and toggles it on.

She is about to say something, but pauses. Out of precaution, she changes the receiver's channel so it is not on the same channel Mother Mary used to call her and Deputy Christmas.

Carly takes a deep breath and toggles the mic on.

CARLY
(whispers)
Hello?

She closes her eyes for a second and then looks around. Satisfied she is alone, Carly leans into the mic once more.

CARLY (CONT'D)
(speaks up)
Hello. Is there anybody out there?
My name is Carly Hamit.
(no response)
Can anybody hear me?

Carly waits for another couple of seconds.

CARLY (CONT'D)
Anybody? This is an emergency. My name is Carly Hamit. I'm the Sheriff.
(catches herself)
My name is Carly Hamit and I'm over in Storyville... Over.

The radio crackles to life.

VOICE OVER RADIO
We read you, Ms. Hamit. This is Johnson County.

CARLY
Yes!

VOICE OVER RADIO
How can we be of service?

CARLY
I need you to send help!

VOICE OVER RADIO
Come again?

CARLY
Help! I need you to send help! I'm over at the Sheriff's Department!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)
 (through the radio)
 Hey, Karl, this is Dale over in
 Storyville, belay that. We got us a
 couple of pranksters over here.

CARLY
 What?! No! This isn't a joke!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)
 We are on top of it.

CARLY
 No! Someone's... someone's been
 killed! There's been a murder! You
 need to send-

Carly is knocked over the head from behind.

Instantly, she releases the microphone and falls to the floor.

POV CARLY

Her world a blur, she sees Mother Mary standing over her.
 Still wearing the Sherlock Holmes costume, the grim-faced
 woman now looks like a villain straight out of a community
 theater production.

VOICE OVER RADIO
 Is this another Mystery Fest gag?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)
 (laughs)
 Yeah, you got us. I'm putting a stop
 to it now. I'll make sure we put out
 another memo. See that it doesn't
 happen again. Kids. Amiright?

VOICE OVER RADIO
 (laughs)
 I hear you, Dale. Put 'em through
 the ringer for me.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (O.S.)
 Will do, Karl.

VOICE OVER RADIO
 Happy hunting. Over.

As Carly starts to fade out, she hears a POLICE SIREN
 approaching.

Through blurred vision, she watches Mother Mary hurry to
 unlock the front door as Deputy Christmas pulls up in the
 police cruiser.

Christmas is in such a hurry, he throws open the cruiser door and his DECK OF CARDS accidentally spills onto the ground. He doesn't stop to pick them up as he sprints inside.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Dammit!

MOTHER MARY

I didn't know what else to do!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

It's okay, it's okay, let's get her up.

Deputy Christmas helps the fallen Carly to her feet, while Mother Mary pulls over one of the office chairs.

Carly groans.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

Easy, easy.

Christmas lowers Carly into the chair. As he does, his SIDEARM is right in Carly's line of vision.

MOTHER MARY

Did you see the Mayor?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Yeah. It's not good.

MOTHER MARY

Aw, geez. Any, any suspects?

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

We didn't get that far. We'll have to go back out there.

As Deputy Christmas sets Carly down, he accidentally catches a glimpse of the jagged scars under her sleeve.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS (CONT'D)

What the--

CARLY

No... No!

Carly grabs Deputy Christmas's SIDEARM and pushes away.

Deputy Christmas lunges forward, but Carly pulls the trigger.

BAM! The gun goes off and shatters the inner door of the department's entryway.

BACK TO SCENE

Arms up, Deputy Christmas takes a step back as Carly staggers to her feet.

MOTHER MARY

Dale!

Carly points the gun at the older woman.

CARLY

Shut-up!

Mother Mary YIPS!

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

Carly!

CARLY

(points the gun at
Christmas)

I said, shut-up!

Carly motions for Deputy Christmas to step away from the door. She then backs away from the two.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

You can't leave, Sheriff. I don't
know how many different ways I can
say that.

CARLY

Watch me, Deputy.

She backs out through the shattered door.

CARLY (CONT'D)

Feel free to call anyone you like.
Highway patrol, National Guard, call
the President. I don't care. They
can meet me in the next county.

Carly backs out of the building and climbs into the police cruiser. Before she closes the car door completely, she tosses the HANDGUN into the gutter.

As the police cruiser pulls away, Deputy Christmas steps outside and slowly lowers his arms.

DEPUTY CHRISTMAS

We really need to put it in the budget
to get a second vehicle.

(turns to Mother Mary)

I'm gonna need your car keys.

At his feet are the forgotten PLAYING CARDS. A trick deck, every card is THE QUEEN OF HEARTS.

EXT. STORYVILLE WELCOME SIGN - LATER

The police cruiser races past the welcome sign.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - SAME

Carly feels the knot on the back of her head as she guns the engine.

Sitting crooked, she reaches into her back pocket and removes her phone. Without thinking, she tosses it onto the seat next to her.

Off in the distance, the wind turbine continues to churn.

EXT. BLACKTOP HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

The cruiser picks up speed.

INT. SHERIFF'S CRUISER - SAME

Carly focuses on the highway as it leads her away from the small town community.

ANGLE ON CELLPHONE

As she gets further from town, the bars on her CELLPHONE light up.

Her cellphone service returns-

-and the CELLPHONE RINGS.

The name of the caller is "SHARON DUNLEVY."

BACK TO SCENE

Startled at the sudden return of phone service, Carly fumbles for the phone.

She grabs it and immediately hits "Accept."

CARLY

(into the phone)

Mrs. Dunlevy! Sharon, Sharon, you were right! You were right!

(looks into her

rearview mirror)

There is something strange going on in this town!

The vehicle races past the wind turbine and rockets onto a crossroads-

-where it gets t-boned by a large TRACTOR COMBINE.

Wearing no seatbelt, Carly is immediately thrown into the side of the vehicle.

EXT. BLACKTOP HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

With an explosion of glass and metal, the police cruiser flips end-over-end and comes to a smashing halt in the ditch.

Then nothing.

The only movement from the wreckage is the flickering light of the police cruiser.

EMMA (V.O.)

You know the town won't let her
leave... Not until she solves her
thirteen.

Eventually, the flickering lights fade out. The cruiser is dead.

The steady "WHUMP-WHUMP" of the wind turbine remains.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT ENTRANCE - LATER

Mother Mary sweeps up the remaining glass from the broken door and dumps it into a trash bin.

She then moves back into the entryway and removes a photo of Sheriff Dunlevy and hangs a FRAMED PHOTO of a beaming Carly Hamit in its place.

She takes a step back and smiles. The photo, with Carly in her Sheriff's outfit, hangs alongside the photos of Deputy Christmas, Mayor McKloskey, and even a photo of Mother Mary.

The photos are the first thing any individual would see once they enter the Sheriff's Department.

Mother Mary reenters the main lobby with Sheriff Dunlevy's photo in hand.

INT. SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The administrator tucks the framed photo into a cardboard box. Along with the photo, the box contains various office knickknacks such as a coffee cup, notebooks, and a CELLPHONE.

In black marker, she writes the name "Sheriff Dunlevy" onto the box.

INT. BACK HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

With the DUNLEVY BOX tucked under her arm, Mother Mary walks the long hallway toward the door at the end.

INT. BACKROOM - CONTINUOUS

The sheriff's administrator unlocks the door and enters the dark room where she unceremoniously deposits the box onto a stack of similar boxes as the overhead fluorescent lights flicker to life.

The room is full of boxes.

Each box below the "Sheriff Dunlevy" box has a name scrawled on it. The boxes read: "Sheriff Peterson," "Sheriff Jones," and "Sheriff Sagadraca."

Mother Mary leaves. With her hand on the light switch, she looks into the room one last time.

The room is full of numerous boxes. Each one is similar to the one she just brought in. All of them have the scrawled names of the various Sheriffs throughout the years (at least thirty of them).

Mother Mary makes the sign of the cross and shuts off the light.

FADE OUT:

THE END.