

CHIMERA

by

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**FADE IN:**

**EXT. MILL MOUNTAIN - DAWN**

The sun rises above blue Appalachian mountaintops.

Sticking out of lush green hills is a manmade 88-foot metal structure - THE ROANOKE STAR.

The serenity is interrupted by a dull roar - almost like the sound of a flying saucer in a bad drive-in flick.

The roar gets louder. A chorus of CICADAS pass by.

Wind created by the cicada commotion forces some papers to fly off of a bulletin board at the base of the Star - revealing a faded missing persons poster for a fair-haired teenage girl, MALLORY CARROL.

**INT. WOMEN'S SHELTER, LOBBY - THAT MORNING**

LILA (29, slender but with a paunch) and BEATRICE (50s, tough) stand behind a counter wearing matching work polos with embroidery that reads "Mallory's House."

Lila wears a baby bjorn, carrying BRIAN (<1). Beatrice focuses on a pile of receipts, and plucks away at a printing calculator.

A drained and frail woman, JASMINE (40s), sits in a puffy chair with a clipboard, struggling to fill out forms.

LILA

It's ok if you leave some stuff blank.

The phone rings and Beatrice answers. Jasmine approaches the counter.

All done?

LILA (CONT'D)

BEATRICE

(on phone)  
Mallory's House....

LILA (CONT'D)

Let's go see your room.

Jasmine locks arms with Lila.

BEATRICE

(on phone)  
Now!? I'm on my way.

Beatrice hangs up and puts on her coat.

LILA

Mom?

Beatrice walks out the front door without responding.

**INT. ROANOKE POLICE STATION HALLWAY - THAT MORNING**

CHIEF EDWARDS (50s) and a tall and handsome officer, LUKE (38) briskly lead Beatrice down a hallway.

Behind Beatrice are two junior officers HILT and TILL (both late 20s).

Beatrice, trapped in the middle, does her best to keep up with the pace of these trees.

**INT. ROANOKE POLICE STATION, HOLDING ROOM - MINUTES LATER**

Luke takes a step inside, making room for Beatrice. Edwards stands with his back against the wall, looking towards a TWO-WAY MIRROR, which produces a slight reflection.

The entire scene feels like it's stuck in a jar of mayonnaise.

The moment Beatrice locks eyes on what's beyond the glass, her mouth opens and she wobbles like a boxer who's been rocked.

Beatrice drops to her knees. Luke and Edwards rush to her side.

It's uncertain if this is a good or bad update, if she got what she wanted or what she absolutely didn't want.

**TITLE: CHIMERA**

In darkness.

The screams of children. Frantic. There's yips and yells. After one particularly sharp shriek...

**EXT. BACKYARD BIRTHDAY PARTY, PETERSON HOME - AFTERNOON**

The screams come from two girls, BECCA (8, today!) and RACHEL (10), though it's hard to tell which is older.

They dart back and forth through the backyard, their blonde hair flowing, with their larger-than-life father, EARL PETERSON (38), in tow, donning a Werewolf mask left over from a Halloween bargain bin.

The girls, and a flock of other children of various ages, weave through the centre of pockets of sweater-wearing adults who stand together making small talk.

There are streamers, a stunning pinwheel piñata, and party hats - ALL HANDMADE.

**INT. KITCHEN, PETERSON HOME - SAME TIME**

Outside, the gaggle of children run past an open window above a double-basin sink.

They're being watched by their quiet and attentive mother, JUNE PETERSON (35). She has brown hair, brown eyes, and wears her hair back.

June rinses dishes next to a man hanging on to his youth, FREDDIE (26), her brother-in-law, who's on drying duty. Freddie talks, but June half listens.

FREDDIE

Comm...No, Journalism? Are those the same thing? It's one of those. You guys are gonna love Karen.

JUNE

But... you're dating Denise too?

FREDDIE

Gotta play the field.

JUNE

It sounds a little...scummy?

FREDDIE

I'm hedging my bets. It's a thing people do.

JUNE

Scummy people?

FREDDIE

It's not scummy! Trust me on this. For Wednesday, do you want us to bring wine or dessert?

JUNE

Let's get through today first.

Suddenly, Earl, still in the mask, pops up at the window expelling some sort of cry, or maybe a howl?

It's supposed to be scary. It's not. But the kids eat it up anyway.

Earl removes the mask, his hair messy.

EARL

I'm draggin ass. I could really use some help out here, bro.

Freddie looks to June for permission.

JUNE

Go.

EARL

Thanks, Juney!

Earl kisses June through the window, slips the mask back on and is back to terrorizing the youth.

FREDDIE

You sure?

JUNE

Get out there before he hurts himself.

Freddie exits through a sliding door to the backyard.

*Finally*, a moment of solitude for June.

June looks at the calm sink water, noticing her reflection.

She pulls the stopper, closes her eyes, and drops her hand into the water, letting it run over her fingers.

The water makes it's dying cry down the drain. June opens her eyes. Back to work.

**EXT. BACKYARD, PETERSON HOME - MOMENTS LATER**

June walks into the backyard and immediately has to stop and wait for the kids and her husband to run by.

Once the traffic clears, June moves toward a cooler, but Becca runs up and wraps herself around June.

JUNE

Having fun, birthday girl?

Rachel also runs up, joining the hug.

JUNE (CONT'D)  
Non-birthday girl, same question.

BECCA  
(Mumbling)  
I love you.

JUNE  
What was that?

BECCA (Yelling) I LOVE You! RACHEL She loves you, Mom.

JUNE  
Good girls.

June is already walking away.

BECCA  
Daddy said he's a LYE.. a LYE-CAN-

JUNE  
Great. Go play.

BECCA and RACHEL run off, almost knocking over LYNN (early 30s), a mother of one of the partygoers.

June audibly aches as she bends down to open the cooler.

LYNN  
Look at you, Supermom!

JUNE  
Hi Lynn-

LYNN  
I love the piñata! It's much better than the store-bought ones.

June rummages through the cooler. All soda.

LYNN (CONT'D)  
You're like a crafts wizard!

JUNE  
Thanks-

LYNN  
Speaking of, Matty's birthday - he wants to do a whole Harry Potter thing.  
(MORE)

LYNN (CONT'D)

Do you have anything for that? Like can you make wands do stuff?

JUNE

Sounds good, Lynn, I'll email you.

LYNN

Oh ok, do you have my email?

June walks across the backyard, but must stop again to let the kids run past, followed by her out-of-breath husband.

EARL

Hey, it cake time yet?

JUNE

After the piñata-

EARL

Right, right.

June continues to a second cooler where her mother-in-law EUNICE (60s, made-up to look 40) chats with a few friends. Eunice fake "hushes" them.

EUNICE

I'll stop bragging about my daughter now that she's graced us with her presence.

June finds a bottle of beer in the cooler. She tries to twist, but it's not a twist-off.

JUNE

Daughter-in-law.

EUNICE

Oh, semantics can pound sand!

June finds a bottle opener on the side of the cooler and pops the top.

EUNICE (CONT'D)

How's your head? Feeling better?

JUNE

Yeah, took an Advil.

EUNICE snatches the beer from June.

EUNICE

You can't mix that with alcohol, dear.  
There was a whole segment about Aspirin-  
related deaths on the news. Did you see  
that ladies?

Eunice's friends chirp affirmations.

June spots ARTHUR (8, a little brat) pulling up flowers  
from a FLOWER BED on the edge of their backyard, which  
sits before a treeline to some suburban woods.

Arthur's tired mother JANET (30s) looks on, but does  
nothing.

JUNE

HEY! that's off-limits.

JANET

Oh, sorry.

June lifts Arthur out of the flower bed. He squeals.

ARTHUR

Cake!

JUNE

After the piñata-

JANET

Can Arthur have his now?

JUNE

Before the birthday girl?

JANET

Yeah.

JUNE

No Janet, he may not.

JANET

It's just he gets fussy-

June forces a pleasant smile.

JUNE

Tough shit.

JANET

Excuse me?

JUNE

No excuse me.

June walks away, smile gone.

Freddie emerges, holding a Solo cup and a bocce ball.

FREDDIE

Need a teammate!

JUNE

I thought you were helping Earl?

FREDDIE

So that's a no?

JUNE

What's in that?

FREDDIE

Beer-

June takes the cup out of Freddie's hand.

JUNE

Give me a minute.

FREDDIE

(To the other bocce players)  
She's in!

June settles near the treeline, and downs the beer.

A cicada lands on June's finger and walks the rim of the cup for a moment. June flicks it into the air, drawing her attention to the strange November sky.

It's striking, how dark and lifeless the ground is compared to the daylight still hovering in the sky.

PLINK! PLINK! KERPLUNK!

The Heavens open up, and BALLS OF HAIL assault the party.

The partygoers scatter back inside, but June stays there for a moment, in awe of this sudden weather event.

Earl calls out with the piñata over his head for cover.

EARL

June! Inside! Let's do cake!

June follows him in.

**INT. PETERSON DINING ROOM - MINUTES LATER**

Becca sits at the head of the table, the room filled with loud party guests.

Earl flips the lights and lights the candles of an ornate BIRTHDAY CAKE, covered in autumn leaves made of fondant.

EARL

And a one, and a two, and a-

Earl starts "Happy Birthday" and the room joins, but they can't be heard - the scene is totally silent.

June stands against the wall, not singing, not even registering the moment.

The song ends. The sound returns with clapping that snaps June out of it. She puts on a smile.

**EXT. FLEA MARKET - THE NEXT MORNING**

A banner, SEPTEMBER OTTAWA SUNDAY MARKET, hangs above a long line of booths and shoppers.

*crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch... crunch, crunch, crunch-*

June's hands work in violent fashion, repeatedly using a five-pronged FELTING NEEDLE to apply a tuft of red felt into a foam blob shaped like a cat. All the construction is done, save for the empty white space where the face will go.

June's booth is filled with multiple HIGHLY lifelike needle-felted cats and dogs.

June is laser focused, until she notices a BOY ON A LEASH (5) who approaches her booth. He's fixated on a jar of ENAMEL PINS in the shapes of different animals.

The boy's MOTHER (30s) tugs the leash to get him to back up a smidge.

MOTHER

Oh, my nieces would love these!

JUNE

They have cats?

MOTHER

Yes! Well - One has a dog.

JUNE

I make dogs too.

June goes to reach for a business card.

MOTHER

Are you on Etsy?

JUNE

No.

MOTHER

Instagram?

The Boy moves his hand towards the pins, but Mother pulls on the leash with more force, eliciting a whimper.

JUNE

Email's on the card.

POTENTIAL CUSTOMER

Have you seen the ones made out of the actual pet hair?

JUNE

That's a little too real for me.

While Mother reads the card, June lifts the top of the jar of pins, and hands the Boy a few including a goat, a lion, and a dragon.

The Boy wipes his saucer eyes and takes the pins, enamored.

Mother snatches the pins and drops them back in the jar.

MOTHER

Don't encourage him.

The Boy locks eyes with June, a small cry for help. But there's nothing to be done. Mother walks on to the next booth, pulling the Boy with her.

June goes back to her felting.

#### **INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - THAT AFTERNOON**

A perfectly lovely LIBRARIAN (20s) reads a picture book to an attentive crowd of children, including Becca.

LIBRARIAN

By now, I think you know what happened to your sandwich, but you may not know *how* it happened. So let me tell you. It all started with a bear!

The Librarian shows the picture to the giggly children, before turning the page.

JUNE watches from a table not far away. Rachel is with her, peering over a worksheet with a tree printed on it.

It's a family lineage assignment. There are little spots to fill in country flags of extended family members.

June's side of the tree has no branches.

JUNE

Grandma Eunice, her Dad was Welsh, and her Mom was Dutch.

RACHEL

What does that one look like?

JUNE

It's France, but turned sideways.

Rachel colours the flag with crayons.

RACHEL

How'd they get here?

JUNE

Boat probably.

RACHEL

Did they leave any family behind?

JUNE

I don't know. Ask Grandma.

June glances at a sparse periodicals section near them.

June reaches past a *Toronto Star* and *New York Times*, and grabs a *Washington Post* to peruse.

RACHEL

There's not enough branches on my tree.

JUNE

That's all the info I've got, kiddo.

RACHEL

Can I just make up a mom and dad for you?

JUNE

No. That would be lying.

June flips a few pages into the *Post* and sees a picture of a teenage girl with fair hair and mismatched eyes (one blue, one brown), who otherwise looks IDENTICAL TO JUNE.

HEADLINE: KIDNAPPED ROANOKE GIRL FOUND AFTER 17 YEAR ABSENCE

RACHEL

It's not a lie! They exist, you just don't know who them.

June, petrified, stares a hole into the newspaper.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Mom... Mom?

June snaps into survival mode. She puts the paper back.

JUNE

Mommy has to use the computers.

RACHEL

Are you ok?

JUNE

You go do storytime with your sister.

RACHEL

But Mom! That's for babies!

JUNE

Sure, fine. But stay right here where I can see you, promise?

RACHEL

Promise.

JUNE

Good girl.

June scurries away to a public computer.

ON THE COMPUTER

June searches for MALLORY CARROLL, and a few articles pop up about the kidnapped girl.

June clicks one from the *Roanoke Times* - There is a video.

ON VIDEO

NEWS ANCHOR

Mallory Carroll is returning home after her disappearance in Mill Mountain Park seventeen years ago. In a press conference today, Roanoke Police confirmed Mallory was the victim of a kidnapping.

The video cuts to the press conference, led by Edwards.

EDWARDS

The victim was held against her will by a family of four in a nearby town. We're not going to release the details at this time beyond confirming that her captors are deceased.

NEWS ANCHOR

Mallory's mother, Beatrice Carroll who operates "Mallory's House", a women's shelter in her daughter's honor, told reporters she never expected to be reunited.

Beatrice appears on the screen, from the press conference.

BEATRICE

We know the truth about what happened. And that's a beautiful gift. We can start to reconstruct our family now.

NEWS ANCHOR

Mallory is currently being treated for injuries, but should return home to her family in a few days. More on this story as it develops.

BACK TO LIBRARY

June exits the window, and deletes the browser history.

June turns around to see Rachel at the desk READING THE NEWSPAPER.

June runs to the table and grabs Rachel by the arm.

RACHEL

Ow!

June takes the paper and throws it in a trashcan, then marches over to the storytime area.

LIBRARIAN

... So, that's what happened to your sandwich, the bear ate it.

June steps over children and plucks Becca from the group.

**INT. JUNE'S BLUE HONDA CIVIC - MINUTES LATER**

June drives in silence, Becca and Rachel in the backseat.

In the rearview, June can see Rachel looking out the window, tears rolling down her face.

**INT. JUNE AND EARL'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT**

Earl is in bed with his arm laying over his eyes.

June, in her pjs, sits in their closet transferring some bills into a small SAFE.

Earl peeks for a moment to see what she's doing, then puts his arm back over his face.

EARL

Good day today?

JUNE

More leads than sales.

EARL

So I can't quit my job?

JUNE

Not yet.

June eases her way into the bed.

EARL

The girl Freddie's bringing over - Is her name Cynthia or Cindy?

JUNE

Karen.

EARL

Really? Damn, I was way off.

Earl laughs. June doesn't.

EARL (CONT'D)

Rach told me about the family tree thing.

JUNE  
I wasn't in the mood.

EARL  
She's a kid, she's curious.

JUNE  
That's cats.

EARL  
She's interested in her Mother, whom she  
looks up to. Light touch is all I'm  
saying.

Volume from the TV downstairs. Earl spies at the door.

JUNE  
What is it?

EARL  
It's Rach. What kind of kid sneaks out of  
bed to watch the news?

June's heart drops. She hops out of bed.

JUNE  
I'll talk to her.

EARL  
Light touch.

June smacks Earl's butt hard.

EARL (CONT'D)  
Ow! Lighter!

**INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Rachel sits a few feet away from the TV, remote in hand,  
flipping through various news channels.

June tiptoes into the room.

JUNE  
You should be in bed.

Rachel looks down. June sits on the ground beside her.

JUNE (CONT'D)  
I shouldn't have grabbed you today.

June goes to touch Rachel's hair, and Rachel flinches  
into a defensive position. Rachel's eyes well.

JUNE (CONT'D)

Hey, hey!

Rachel's breath catches back up, she looks at her mother.

JUNE (CONT'D)

I'll never, ever, hurt you, ok?

RACHEL

How could you be sure?

June takes a moment.

JUNE

I won't allow it. Neither will you.

Rachel holds her mother's hand and puts her head on her shoulder.

JUNE (CONT'D)

Back to bed.

RACHEL

Ok.

Rachel walks upstairs.

June grabs the remote and shuts off the TV. The room should be dark, but a light shines in the reflection of the TV.

June turns to inspect where it comes from.

#### **INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

June looks through the window above the sink, confused.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

A STRANGER of indeterminate age and gender stands motionless in the backyard, stark naked.

The Stranger, bald with a few strands of hair on their head, kneels next to June's flowerbed.

The Stranger touches a spot of earth, then begins digging frantically.

INSIDE THE KITCHEN

June flips a switch on and off - backyard floodlights.

THROUGH THE WINDOW

The Stranger, startled by the lights, begins to walk directly into the woods.

**EXT. THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER**

June traverses the woods, catching glimpses of the Stranger's through the trees ahead of her.

The Stranger appears to light a match, bringing light and shadows to the area, then starts running.

June struggles to keep up.

The light shines, but keeps darting in different directions, moving at an impossible pace.

June transitions to a full sprint, and reaches a clearing.

For the briefest of moments, too brief to see any features cleanly, the Stranger stands looking at June, until-

The light goes out. Total darkness.

June looks around wildly in every direction, trying to discern where the Stranger is hiding.

Calmness. Perhaps this was nothing? A fever dream?

A hand grabs June's shoulder and she turns around swiftly, thrusting her palm into the face of the ASSAILANT, who drops to the ground.