

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 passes by.

Wind created by the commotion forces 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 with one blue and one brown eye, MALLORY CARROL.

INT. WOMEN'S SHELTER, LOBBY - THAT MORNING

LILA (29, slender but with a paunch) and BEATRICE (50s, tough) stand behind a counter in 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.

LILA (CONT'D)

All done?

BEATRICE

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

LILA (CONT'D)

Let's go see your room.

Jasmine locks arms with Lila. Beatrice freezes.

BEATRICE

(on phone)
I'm on my way.

Beatrice hangs up and puts on her coat.

LILA

Mom?

Beatrice darts out of the building 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, almost interchangeably bland).

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

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

Beatrice drops. Luke and Edwards rush to her side.

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

TITLE: CHIMERA

In darkness.

Yips and yells. The screaming of children.

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 frolic through the backyard, their fair hair flowing, with their larger-than-life father, EARL PETERSON (38), in tow.

Earl dons a Werewolf mask left over from Halloween.

The girls, and a gaggle of other children, weave through the centre 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, children run past an open window above a 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. Beyond those cosmetic differences, she looks identical to Mallory Carroll **because she is Mallory Carroll... or she was.**

June rinses dishes next to a man hanging on to his youth, FREDDIE (26), her brother-in-law. He'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 what people do.

JUNE

Scummy people?

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

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

Earl removes the mask, his hair messy.

EARL

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

Freddie looks to June for permission.

JUNE

Go.

EARL

Thanks, June!

Earl kisses June through the window, slips the mask back on and returns 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 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 its 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 partygoer.

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. Can you
make wands that do stuff?

JUNE
Sounds good, Lynn, I'll email you.

LYNN
Oh ok, do you have my email?

June walks across the yard, 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 uses the opener on the side of the cooler.

EUNICE (CONT'D)
How's your head? Feeling better?

JUNE
Yeah, took an Advil.

Before June can drink, Eunice snatches her beer.

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 white bunchberries from a FLOWER BED that rests on the edge between the backyard and a treeline to some woods.

Arthur's tired mother JANET (30s) looks on, but does absolutely 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 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 above.

PLINK! PLINK! KERPLUNK!

The Heavens open, 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. The lights flick off.

Earl saunters in holding an ornate birthday cake covered in autumn leaves made of fondant, candles lit.

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 a 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 orange felt into a foam blob shaped like a cat. The construction is done, save for the empty space where the face will go.

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

June's focus is interrupted by a GIRL ON A LEASH (5) who approaches her booth. She's fixated on a jar of ENAMEL PINS of different animals.

The girl's MOTHER (30s) tugs the leash.

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 Girl moves her hand towards the pins, but Mother pulls on the leash with more force, eliciting a whimper.

JUNE

Email's on the card.

MOTHER

Have you seen the ones made from actual pet hair?

JUNE

That's a little too real for me.

While she reads the card, June opens the jar of pins and hands the Girl a few; a goat, lion, and a dragon.

The Girl wipes dry her saucer eyes and gladly takes the pins, enamored by their beauty.

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

MOTHER

Don't encourage her.

The Girl locks eyes with June, a small cry for help. But there's nothing to be done.

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.

Not far away, June watches from a table. 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's 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 periodicals section near them.

June reaches past a *Toronto Star* and a *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 the Missing Persons picture of Mallory Carroll.

HEADLINE: KIDNAPPED ROANOKE GIRL FOUND AFTER 17 YEARS

RACHEL

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

June, petrified, stares a hole through 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 story time with your sister.

RACHEL

But Mom! That's for babies!

JUNE

Sure, fine. Stay where I can see you.

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's a video.

ON VIDEO

The local WDBJ news anchor, KIM VALDES (30s) speaks on-location outside the Carroll home.

KIM

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 in a nearby town. We're not going to release the details at this time beyond confirming her captors are deceased.

KIM

Beatrice Carroll, Mallory's mother and founder of "Mallory's House", a local women's shelter, 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 reconstruct our family now.

KIM

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

June exits the window and deletes the browser history.

June turns around to see Rachel 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 story time 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.

EARL

Good day today?

JUNE

More leads than sales.

June eases her way into 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
Maybe it wouldn't be so bad to tell her
about your parents.

JUNE
I don't know...

EARL
She'd be less curious if she knew what
they were like, if she knew why you were
taken away from them-

JUNE
I'm not telling her that.

EARL
Why not?

JUNE
I want to ease her into it. Light touch.
Volume from the TV downstairs. Earl spies at the door.

JUNE (CONT'D)
What is it?

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

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

JUNE
I got it.

EARL
Ok, light touch.

On the way out, 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 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 holds her mother's hand and puts her head on her shoulder. June squeezes back, communicating her love.

RACHEL
I'm sorry your mom and dad gave you away.

JUNE
I'm not. Some people shouldn't have kids.

June touches her forehead to Rachel's.

JUNE (CONT'D)
What do we say?

RACHEL
Tomorrow we start anew.

JUNE
Good girl.

Rachel heads upstairs. June pats her head as she goes by.

June shuts off the TV. The room should be dark, but a light flickers in the screen's reflection.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

June looks through the window above the sink, confused.

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 flower bed, digging.

The Stranger appears to be holding a small lighter or match - June can't tell which - the source of the reflection in the TV.

June flips a switch on and off - backyard floodlights.

The Stranger, startled, quells their light and walks directly into the woods.

EXT. THE WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

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

The Stranger ignites their light source again and runs.

June struggles to keep up.

The light darts in different directions, moving at an impossible pace.

June reaches a clearing.

For the briefest of moments, too brief to see 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.