

THE TAKEN

WRITTEN BY

ERIC D. STUMPF

FADE IN:

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DUSK

A normal block in a normal neighborhood, filled with normal houses. Lawns perfectly manicured, large oaks line the streets and form a tunnel of trees. The street lights lining the sidewalks in perfect symmetry flicker on as the sun sets, their orange hue attracting moths and small flying insects.

We look over the neighborhood, passing one house after another that all look remarkably similar. Two story, most of them are white, brown or a shade of grey.

Settling on one in particular, we slowly focus on it.

A Volkswagen sedan sits in the driveway. The entire downstairs is illuminated by light.

Upstairs is dark but highlighted by one window that is glowing from the lamp within.

We slowly move in on that window.

FADE TO:

INT. HOUSE - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM

Barbie dolls and stuffed animals sit perched on shelves stretched across the walls, perfectly posed.

A YOUNG GIRL, no older than 8-10, lays on her bed on her side, her eyes stare at the nightstand, looking at nothing in particular. Headphones are plugged into her ears and her hand clutches the voice recorder attached to them. She periodically hits rewind until it stops, then hits play, listening over and over, the play and rewind button's logos are worn down to the point that you can barely see them anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN

DOMINIC, 41, in shape and looking young for his age prepares dinner. Resting to his right is a glass of wine. The half empty bottle from which it came sits on the counter within easy reach.

Finished cooking, he plates everything and puts it on the kitchen table.

DOMINIC

Sophia!

No answer. He sits, taking another drink of the wine.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

Sophia!!

Again, no answer.

He gets up and starts for the stairs, stopping to grab the glass of wine like it's his pacifier before trudging up them to Sophia's room.

He knocks.

No answer again.

He opens the door and sees Sophia lying on the bed on her side, her back to him.

He walks to her and places his hand on her shoulder, it startles her.

She turns, pulling the headphones off her ears, he sees now why she hasn't responded and notices fresh tears on her cheeks.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

(softly)

Dinner's ready.

SOPHIA

Ok.

She tosses the headphones onto the bed and leaves the room, heading downstairs.

Dominic turns his head and sees her disappear around the corner of the door. Hearing her footsteps go down the stairs, he looks down at the headphones and the recorder that's still playing.

He GRABS it and hits stop...then rewind.

The recorder's rewind button pops up loudly, signaling that it's reached the beginning.

He places the headphones over her ears and hits 'play'.

As he listens we see anguish come over his face, he cups his hand over his mouth and hits stop.

Slowly taking the headphones off his ears he places them carefully on the bed next to the recorder, exactly where Sophia had them before she left.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DINING ROOM

The dinner table.

Sophia and her dad eat dinner in silence. The clinks of silverware hitting the plates are the only things we hear. Dominic looks at Sophia, the top of her head is the only thing he can see.

DOMINIC

Did you finish your homework?

Without lifting her head.

SOPHIA

Yes.

DOMINIC

How do you like your new teacher?

SOPHIA

She's nice.

DOMINIC

That's good.

Dominic takes another swig of his wine, finishing the glass and dumps what's left of the bottle into it.

The continue to eat in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN

Sophia and Dominic wash the dishes together, again in silence.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - SOPHIA'S BEDROOM

Dominic tucks Sophia in, kisses her forehead.

DOMINIC
(whispering)
I miss her too.

Sophia nods in acknowledgement, a small smile escapes her lips.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Dominic pops another bottle of wine, plops on the couch with a heavy sigh and turns on the TV, settling in for another sleepless night.

MONTAGE

- Dominic grabs the bottle of wine, fills up his glass.
- Flicks through the channels.
- Grabs the bottle.
- Settles on a sports game.
- Wine splashes into the glass.
- The bottle gets put down for the last time, empty.

END MONTAGE

Dominic's having trouble keeping his eyes open, his head nodding forward as he tries to stave off sleep. His head falls forward, his nearly empty wine glass balanced precariously on his thigh.

Over his shoulder, in the kitchen there is BLURRY MOVEMENT.

A PERSON'S SHAPE, MOVING SLOWLY.

SOMEONE'S IN THE HOUSE.

FADE TO:

INT. SOPHIA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Sophia's asleep, the recorder and headphones lay on the nightstand, next to a picture of her, Dominic and her MOM.

A CRASH DOWNSTAIRS causes Sophia's eyes to shoot open.

She sits up, listening intently, was it just a dream?

THUD!

She whips the covers off herself.

Her feet hit the floor.

She creeps towards the door.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

The doorknob leading to Sophia's room slowly turns and the door creaks open. Sophia's eye peeks through the opening, scanning the hallway, it's empty.

She opens the door fully, stepping out.

SOPHIA

Dad?

No response.

She walks down the hallway stealthily until she reaches the top of the stairs. She looks down.

The dim flicker of the TV dances over the walls and floor.

Sophia creeps down the stairs, stepping strategically on the parts of the dark wood she knows won't creak.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM

Sophia steps off the last step and onto the main floor, checking out the couch, there's no sign of her dad.

She turns the corner to see into the kitchen and --

INT. HOUSE - KITCHEN

There, like freshly hunted game is Dominic, ON HIS STOMACH, HOGTIED AND GAGGED.

Sophia SCREAMS!

She runs to him, sliding down onto her knees next to his head.

SOPHIA

Dad!

Tears stream out of his swollen eye and blood leaks out of his nose.

He tries desperately to talk to her, but his speech is unintelligibly muffled through the cloth gag.

Sophia looks over him to the counter, eyeing the KNIFE BLOCK.

Jumping up, she grabs one of the PARING KNIFES and returns to her father.

Starts sawing at the gag's knot on the back of his head.

Dominic shakes his head, like he's fighting her from doing it.

Behind her THE BLURRY SHAPE OF THE MAN APPROACHES.

DRAWING CLOSER...

..CLOSER...

...CLOSER...

She cuts through the gag, it falls from her father's mouth.

DOMINIC

He's in the house! RUN!

Before Sophia can react, the Blurry Shape from behind her comes into focus - it's a MASKED MAN.

He grabs her around the chest with one arm, with the other he wraps his hand over her mouth.

Her screams are now muffled.

Her limbs flail helplessly.

Spittle flies from Dominic's mouth as he screams at the Masked Man.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

You son of a bitch! Let her go!
Take whatever you want!

Despite the Masked Man's size and strength advantage over Sophia, she's proving to be a formidable foe.

His hand slips for a split second giving Sophia the opportunity to BITE into the soft flesh between his thumb and forefinger.

The Masked Man bellows in pain through the covering over his face, blood spurts up between her teeth that have pierced the gloves he was wearing and onto her face.

Still holding on to her with the other arm around her midsection, he yanks his hand from her snapping jaw.

Sophia through her flailing and bloodied face that makes her look part Braveheart and part zombie, realizes she still has the paring knife in her hand when the glint of it catches her eye.

She quickly jabs it down, embedding it into the Masked Man's hip, who instinctively let's her go and grasps the knife's handle.

She TUMBLES down on top of her father, knocking the breath out of him.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

Run!

Sophia, pushes herself up and scampers up the stairs, disappearing from our view.

The Masked Man yanks the handle of the knife out of his hip with an audible SCRAPE as it leaves the bone. He drops it to the ground, inches from Dominic's face, stepping on his back as he heads to the stairs in pursuit of Sophia.

Dominic struggles against the binding, but with every movement he makes, the ropes tighten, cutting off circulation to his hands and feet.

SCREAMS FROM UPSTAIRS.

A THUMP.

THE SCREAMS STOP.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Please, god no...

Tears stream down his bloodied face as HEAVY FOOTSTEPS descend from upstairs and become louder as they reach the bottom.

The Masked Man's heavy work boots hit the floor a few feet from Dominic and continue methodically for the front door.

Dominic raises his head to see Sophia slung over the Masked Man's shoulder, unconscious.

Dominic makes one last plea.

DOMINIC (CONT'D)
Please. Don't do this. I'll do
anything.

The Masked Man stops.

MASKED MAN
Anything.

DOMINIC
Yes, anything.

MASKED MAN
Call the police and tell them two
black men broke in and took your
daughter. I will be monitoring the
police frequencies and the news to
make sure you have reported this
accurately.

DOMINIC
What?

MASKED MAN
If you do this, exactly as I have
told you, I *will* be in touch and
you *will* have an opportunity to
have your daughter returned to you.

The Masked Man picks up the cordless phone from the end
table, dials '911' and tosses the phone to Dominic, it slides
to a stop just in front of his face.

It's ringing.

911 OPERATOR (O.S.)
911, what is your emergency?

Dominic looks up at the Masked Man, confused and terrified at
the same time, wondering if this is a test to see if he'll
squeal.

MASKED MAN
Tell them everything.

He opens the front door and walks out with Sophia over his
shoulder, into the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET(SMALL TOWN USA) - DAY

Rock music blasts, assaulting our ears.

The town is small, one Post Office, one school, one mom and pop pharmacy type of small town. The type of town where the old man doctor treats everyone, has treated their parents before them and makes house calls if needed, not necessarily for medical reasons, sometimes just to catch up and talk about old times or gossip about what's going on in town.

At the intersection of Main Street, are the only 4 four stop signs this close together inside of twenty miles.

A beat up SUV pulls to a stop in front of one of them.

INT. SUV - DAY

At the wheel is SARAH, mid-20's, good looking - considering she's wearing a tank top, her hair's pulled up into a ponytail and she's wearing no makeup.

The back of the SUV is loaded to the ceiling with boxes and clothes, blocking her view out the back window completely.

Her phone rings over the bluetooth connection to her radio lowering the rock music we were hearing before.

Sarah looks at the caller ID which reads 'Asshole'.

Below the caller ID name are two buttons, one reads 'answer', the other 'decline'. Her finger hovers over 'answer', hesitates, and hits 'decline'.

The music raises to it's previous level, but not before a honk behind her makes her realize she's been sitting at the stop sign way too long.

She looks in her side mirror and sees it's an Old Man, waving his hands frantically to signal her to move.

SARAH

Ok, ok.

She lowers her window and waves her hand out of it to signal 'My bad'.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(to herself sarcastically)

Like you have somewhere you need to be.

Sarah continues through the stop sign and pulls into TOM'S, the local grocery store parking lot.

Sarah sits for a minute enjoying the song, when it lowers again as her phone rings. She looks at the caller ID 'Asshole' is on the display again.

This time she hits 'answer'.

SARAH (CONT'D)

What?

MAN (O.S.)

Sarah, we have to talk about some things, you can't keep ignoring what's happening.

SARAH

I'm glad this is so easy for you.

MAN (O.S.)

It's not. It never was.

Sarah eyes the hang up button, she's tempted, but decides to get this over with.

SARAH

What do you need? The divorce papers signed?

She looks in the rearview mirror at the stacks of her things filling the back of her car.

SARAH (CONT'D)

I have them, they're just somewhere in all the boxes.

MAN (O.S.)

Sarah--

SARAH

--I'll sign them, it's not a problem.

MAN (O.S.)

Please--

SARAH

--I'm not avoiding it if that's what you think.

MAN (O.S.)

I don't but--

SARAH

--I'll find them when I get settled and send them to you, promise.