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STAY ON THE LINE

Lead Focused / Thriller / 5-6 min
Cast 3-4 Female x1 Male x2 Any x1

Sam is a 911 dispatcher on the night shift. A woman whispers that someone is inside her house, and every free unit is at a highway pileup. Sam must keep her alive by voice alone while a supervisor insists on the script.

CHARACTERS

SAM OKAFOR (LEAD) - 30s, any gender, dispatcher with six years on the floor, precise under pressure. The caller is never heard; the actor plays every response.

GLENN - 50s, shift supervisor, by the book because the book has saved him before.

NIA - 20s, dispatcher at the next console, working the radio.

DEV - 30s, dispatcher two seats down. Can be cut, with his lines given to Nia.

SETTING

A regional emergency dispatch center at 2:40 in the morning, a row of consoles under low light.

A regional emergency dispatch center, 2:40 in the morning. A row of consoles under low light. SAM is mid-call, headset on, one hand flat on the desk. NIA works the radio at the next console. DEV is two seats down. GLENN stands behind Sam with a clipboard.

SAM

Renee, I need you to keep your voice low, just like you're doing. You're doing it right. Where in the house are you?

(listening)

Upstairs bedroom. Is the door closed?

(listening)

Okay. Is there a lock on it?

(listening)

A push button. That's fine. Push it. Push it now, gently. Good.

(to Nia, without turning)
Closest unit.

NIA
Everything's on the interstate. The pileup. Nearest free car is twelve out. Maybe fourteen.

GLENN
Don't give her the number.

SAM
I wasn't going to.

(into headset)
Renee, officers are on the way. I'm going to stay on with you the whole time. What do you hear right now?

(listening)
Downstairs. Drawers. Okay. He's downstairs, you're upstairs, there's a door and a lock between you. That's good. That's a lot.

DEV leans over.

DEV
Sam. That address came up tonight. Eleven-oh-six. Open line, thirty seconds, then a hang-up. I flagged it.

SAM
Same address?

DEV
Same address. There was a man's voice in the background.

SAM's hand closes on the edge of the desk.

SAM
(into headset)
Renee. Small question, okay? Did you call earlier tonight? Around eleven?

(listening)

You didn't. Was anyone at the house with you at eleven?

(listening)

Okay. Okay. He left at ten. Does he still have a key?

(listening, very steady)

Then he didn't break in, Renee. He let himself in. And that means he's not looking for the TV.

GLENN

Sam.

SAM

(pulling the mic away)

She needs to know what this is.

GLENN

She needs to stay calm and stay put. That's the protocol. Shelter, lock, wait. You don't editorialize.

SAM

He's been down there four minutes. You don't open drawers for four minutes in a house you know.

GLENN

And you don't know that.

SAM

(into headset)

I'm here. I'm right here. What's changed?

(listening)

Stairs. He's on the stairs. Okay. Renee, look at the window. Is it the kind that opens?

GLENN

No.

SAM

(to Glenn)

The lock is a push button. Push buttons open with a coin.

GLENN

Second story, dark, no visual, and you want to put her out a window? That's not in the book. If she falls, that's on you.

SAM

Then it's on me.

(into headset)

Renee, open the window. All the way. Is there a roof under it? A porch, anything?

(listening)

The porch roof. Yes. Sit on the sill. Turn around. Go out feet first, on your stomach, and slide until your feet touch. Do it now. I'm not going anywhere.

A long stretch of listening. SAM's eyes are closed.

SAM

I hear you. Keep going.

(listening)

That's him at the door. That's fine. You're already on the roof. He's in an empty room. Go to the edge. It's a short drop. Bend your knees.

(listening)

I heard it. Are you hurt?

(listening)

Then go. The house on the left with the porch light. Bang on the door and don't stop. Don't look back at your house. It's just a house.

NIA

(off the radio)

Car forty-one. Two minutes.

SAM

(into headset)

Two minutes, Renee. You hear that? Two minutes. Stay with the neighbor. Don't hang up until you see the lights.

(a long breath)

You see them. Okay. Okay. You did that. That was you.

SAM sits back. Pulls the headset off one ear.

GLENN sets the clipboard down on the console.

GLENN

Write it up. Every word. Start with the window.

SAM

After the next one.

NIA

Line four.

SAM pulls the headset back on.

SAM

911, what is the address of your emergency?

END OF SCRIPT