

FADE IN.**INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - MORNING**

Morning mist clings to the weathered windowsills of the modest Warrington cottage. Lace curtains filter soft diffused light into the cluttered kitchen, casting deep shadows across faded linoleum and stacks of unopened bills. The palette is muted grays and earth tones, rain-slicked silvers glinting on the kettle.

MARGARET FINCH, 70, with a lined face, sharp blue eyes, and gray hair pinned in a bun, moves through the space in worn slippers and a faded cardigan over a simple blouse. She wears spectacles. Her veined hands work with precise habit.

She fills the kettle at the sink. Water runs cold and steady. She sets it on the stove. The gas clicks, then catches with a low blue flame.

Margaret opens the cupboard. A chipped mug waits on the shelf. She reaches for the tin of chamomile, the lid scraping softly.

The kettle begins to hum. Steam rises in lazy spirals, filling the air with earthy scent.

Margaret places a tea bag in the mug. She watches the water boil, the first bubbles breaking the surface.

Outside, a blackbird calls once from the suburban street. The sound is distant, muffled by glass.

She pours the steaming water. The tea bag bobs and bleeds color. Her hands cradle the warm mug.

Margaret settles at the wooden table. The chair creaks under her slight frame. She sips slowly, eyes drifting over the cluttered counter.

The room holds only the faint tick of the clock and the soft creak of old wood settling. Margaret sits alone, the steam curling upward between her and the empty chair opposite. Her expression is introspective, tension already gathering in the set of her shoulders.

She traces the rim of the mug with one finger, the chipped edge catching the light. The cottage remains still around her.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - MORNING

Morning light filters through lace curtains in soft, diffused beams, catching dust motes that drift over the cluttered kitchen table. Margaret Finch, seventy and sharp-eyed, moves with deliberate steps across the faded linoleum, her gray hair pinned tight in a bun. She wears a cardigan the color of old slate over a simple blouse, slippers whispering as she approaches the front door where envelopes lie scattered from the morning post.

She bends slowly, veined hands gathering the stack. Bills in plain white envelopes slide against her fingers first, then charity appeals with their familiar bold print. She sorts them at the table, the paper rustling under muted gray light that leaves deep shadows in the corners of the room. A faint creak from the chair accompanies her as she sits, spectacles perched on her nose, eyes scanning the return addresses with quiet habit.

One envelope stands apart. Brown paper wraps it unevenly, edges worn and frayed as if carried far. The foreign stamp shows Paraguay in faded ink, the

postmark smudged but clear. Margaret turns it over in her hands, feeling the slight weight and the give of the wrapping. No return address marks the surface, only her name scrawled in an unfamiliar hand.

She sets the other mail aside. Her fingers trace the package's seam, the paper cool and slightly damp from the mist still clinging outside the weathered windowsill. A subtle shift inside produces a muffled rattle, barely audible over the ticking clock on the wall. Margaret pauses, sharp blue eyes narrowing as she lifts the package closer to the window light, the muted earth tones of the room pressing in around her.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - MORNING

Morning light filters through lace curtains in muted grays and faded earth tones, casting long shadows across the cluttered kitchen. Margaret Finch, seventy, with a lined face and sharp blue eyes, moves with careful precision in her faded cardigan and sensible shoes. Her gray hair sits pinned in a bun. She stands at the wooden table, the package from Paraguay resting before her like an uninvited guest.

Her veined hands hover over the brown paper, fingers tracing the frayed edges and foreign stamp. The room holds the faint scent of old linoleum and dust. Margaret tilts her head, studying the parcel under the soft, diffused light that highlights every crease in her skin. She reaches for scissors from the drawer, their metal blades glinting briefly before she slices through the tape.

Layers of tissue part to reveal the tarnished silver teapot. Intricate etchings catch the light in antique gold hues, the spout crooked and heavy in her palms. Margaret lifts it slowly, turning it over. Something shifts inside with a faint rattle that echoes in the quiet cottage. Her expression tightens, eyes narrowing as she peers into the spout.

A yellowed cassette tape wedges tightly within, labeled only with a single scrawled number: 19. Margaret extracts it with steady fingers, the plastic casing cool and brittle. She holds the tape up to the window light, the number stark against the muted palette of the room. A subtle chill settles in her posture, shoulders tensing beneath the cardigan.

She sets the teapot down beside the package, the object now gleaming dully on the table amid scattered bills and charity letters. Margaret examines the cassette from every angle, her sharp blue eyes tracing its worn edges in the natural light that leaves deep shadows in the corners. The cottage remains still, save for the distant sound of rain beginning to tap the weathered windowsills.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - MORNING

Morning light filters through lace curtains in thin gray shafts, catching dust motes above the cluttered kitchen table. Margaret Finch stands at the counter in her faded cardigan and slippers, her gray hair pinned tight in a bun, spectacles resting on her lined face. Her veined hands turn the tarnished teapot slowly, the metal cool and heavy, its crooked spout glinting with antique gold flecks under the weak glow.

She sets the teapot down beside a dusty cassette player. The tape, yellowed plastic labeled only with the number 19 in scrawled ink, slides into place with a soft click. Margaret presses play. The machine whirs, static hissing like distant rain against the windowpanes.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice on tape, cold and precise)
I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever know.

Her sharp blue eyes widen. She leans closer, the shallow focus of the moment pinning her face against the cluttered background of unopened letters and chipped mugs. The tape continues to spin, faint mechanical clicks punctuating the silence.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice on tape)
Nineteen days. That's all I have left to make sure it stays buried.

Margaret's fingers tighten around the edge of the table. A faint rattle echoes from inside the teapot as she shifts her weight, the sound swallowed by the low groan of the player. Shadows from the lace curtains stretch across her blouse like bars.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice on tape)
The body is where no one will look. The garden won't give it up.

She hits stop. The room falls into heavy quiet, broken only by the distant call of a blackbird outside. Margaret stares at the machine, her breath shallow, the muted earth tones of the cottage pressing in around her. She reaches for the teapot again, turning it over, the weight inside shifting once more.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - DAY

Margaret Finch sits rigid at the kitchen table, the tarnished teapot open beside the yellowed cassette player. Weak daylight filters through the lace curtains, catching dust motes that drift over the chipped mug and stack of unopened letters. Her lined face is pale, sharp blue eyes fixed on the spinning reels as static hisses from the speaker.

MARGARET FINCH

I did it. I killed him.

She reaches out with a veined hand and stops the machine. The click echoes in the cluttered room. Her gray hair has loosened from its bun, a few strands clinging to her damp forehead. The faded cardigan hangs open over her blouse, the fabric smelling faintly of chamomile.

MARGARET FINCH

(softly)
Nineteen days. That's what it said on the label. Nineteen days to find out who he is before... before what?

She stands, slippers scuffing the linoleum, and paces the length of the counter. Her fingers trace the edge of the foreign stamp on the discarded brown paper. The silver teapot gleams dully under the light, its crooked spout pointed toward the window like an accusation.

MARGARET FINCH

It can't be real. A voice on a tape from Paraguay? I don't even know anyone there. But it sounded like me. Cold. Certain.

She returns to the table and rewinds the tape with a mechanical whir. The player groans under her touch. Margaret presses play again, then pauses it mid-hiss.

MARGARET FINCH

If it's true, then someone dies. And I do it. Unless I stop it. But how do you stop something you haven't done yet?

Her voice cracks on the last word. She sinks back into the chair, the wood creaking under her slight frame. Outside, rain begins to tap the weathered windowsills. Margaret stares at the number scrawled on the cassette: 19.

MARGARET FINCH

I need to know who he is. The victim. Before the days run out. Or I become the woman on this tape.

EXT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - DAY

Margaret Finch pushes open the weathered front door, the hinges groaning under faded wood. Morning mist lingers in the narrow garden path, turning the cobbled street beyond into a wash of muted grays and damp earth tones. She wears her frayed cardigan buttoned tight over a simple blouse, gray hair pinned in a bun, slippers scuffing against wet stone. Her sharp blue eyes scan the quiet row of cottages, seeking air after the tape's cold echo.

She pauses at the gate, hands gripping the rusted latch, breath visible in the chill. Across the street, half-hidden in the shadow of a dripping hawthorn, stands The Shadowy Figure. Black coat collar turned high, hat brim low, face obscured except for the glint of an intense gaze fixed on her cottage window. He shifts his weight, boots silent on the slick pavement.

MARGARET FINCH

Who's there? Show yourself.

The figure remains still, one gloved hand resting inside his coat. A distant blackbird calls from the roofline. Margaret steps forward onto the curb, cardigan hem brushing her skirt.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice tightening)

I saw you last night by the post. What do you want with an old woman and her post?

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

(low, measured)

The tape. You played it. Now the count begins.

Margaret stops mid-step, fingers tightening around the gatepost. Rain-slicked silver light catches the figure's stubble as he leans slightly forward.

MARGARET FINCH

You sent it. From Paraguay. Why?

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

Debate it with yourself, Finch. Nineteen days to decide who dies first.

He turns, coat flaring in the gray air, and melts into the narrow alley between two houses. Margaret remains at the gate, chest rising, eyes locked on the empty space where he stood. A single droplet falls from the eaves onto her sleeve.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - DAY

Morning light filters through lace curtains, casting muted gray patterns across the cluttered kitchen table. The tarnished teapot sits upright, its crooked spout catching a thin beam of sun. Margaret Finch stands over it, her faded cardigan buttoned to the throat, gray hair pinned tight. Her veined hands hover, then lift the cassette from the spout once more. She slots it into the dusty player.

The machine clicks. Static hisses, then her own voice cuts through, cold and precise: "I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever know." Margaret's sharp blue eyes narrow. She stops the tape. The silence stretches, heavy with the scent of yesterday's chamomile still clinging to the air.

She turns the teapot slowly, tracing the foreign stamp's faint ink on the brown paper wrapping. Paraguay. The word lingers. Margaret sets the teapot down, moves to the counter, and pulls open a drawer. Inside lie old letters, a pair of spectacles, and a small notebook. She slips the notebook into her cardigan pocket.

Her slippers whisper across the linoleum as she crosses to the window. Outside, Warrington's suburban street remains quiet under overcast skies. She watches a blackbird land on the sill, then turns back. From the shelf she retrieves a battered atlas, its pages yellowed. She flips to South America, fingers pressing the faded map.

Margaret pauses at the table again. The teapot gleams dully in the shallow focus of the window light. She picks up the wrapping paper, examines the edge, and folds it flat. Her breath steadies. She retrieves a small suitcase from the hallway, sets it on a chair, and begins placing essentials inside: the notebook, the atlas, a change of clothes in muted earth tones.

She stops at the sink, runs water over her hands, and stares at her reflection in the glass. Determination hardens the lines around her eyes. Margaret switches off the player, tucks the cassette into her pocket, and lifts the teapot once more, weighing its hidden rattle.

She carries it to the suitcase, nestles it among the folded items, and snaps the lid shut. The cottage holds its shadows as she moves toward the door, coat in hand, the decision sealed in the set of her shoulders.

INT. QUAIN T LIVERPOOL ARCHIVE - DAY

Dust motes drift in shafts of weak gray light that filter through high, grimed windows. Rows of oak shelves sag under yellowed ledgers and bound newspapers, the air thick with the smell of aged paper and mildew. Margaret Finch stands at the front desk, her gray bun pinned tight, faded cardigan buttoned against the chill. She wears spectacles that catch the dim glow as she signs the visitor log with a steady hand.

She moves down the central aisle, slippers silent on worn carpet. Her fingers trail the spines of files marked PARAGUAY TRADE 1962-1975. She pulls a heavy volume free. The leather cracks under her grip. She carries it to a scarred reading table under a single green-shaded lamp and opens it flat.

Margaret flips pages slowly. Trade manifests. Shipping manifests. A column of names catches her eye. She leans closer, shallow focus tightening on her

lined face. One entry reads VARGAS, E. - TEA EXPORTS, ASUNCION TO LIVERPOOL. She traces the ink with a fingertip. The paper smells of dust and forgotten rain.

She stands, returns to the shelves, and hauls down a second stack of local coroner reports. The pages rustle like dry leaves. She settles again, spectacles low on her nose, and scans columns of deaths. Heart failure. Accident. Undetermined. Her breath slows when she reaches a 1974 entry: unidentified male, mid-forties, blunt trauma, no next of kin. The file photo is a faded black-and-white blur.

Margaret's sharp blue eyes linger on the page. She mutters under her breath, voice low and measured.

MARGARET FINCH

Nineteen days. Someone wanted me to find this.

She closes the ledger, stands, and slides the volume back into its slot. The shelf creaks. She pulls another file on Paraguayan expatriates, the paper edges crumbling at her touch. A single photograph slips free—an old steamship manifest with a circled name. She picks it up, holds it to the lamp. The light catches antique gold lettering on the cover of the next ledger she opens.

Her shoulders tighten, but she keeps turning pages, the only sound the soft rasp of paper and the distant tick of a wall clock.

INT. QUAIN T LIVERPOOL ARCHIVE - DAY

Dust motes drift through shafts of weak gray light that filter past tall, rain-streaked windows. Yellowed file boxes line the musty shelves, their faded labels curling at the edges. Margaret Finch sits at a scarred oak table, her faded cardigan buttoned to the throat, spectacles low on her nose. She flips through a brittle ledger, fingers tracing entries on Paraguayan imports from the 1970s.

ELENA VARGAS steps from the shadows between two aisles, her embroidered dress catching the dim light in faded reds and golds. She carries a single slim folder.

MARGARET FINCH

I requested the customs manifests for 1987. These stop at 1985.

ELENA VARGAS

The archive keeps its secrets in layers. One must know which thread to pull.

Margaret looks up. Elena sets the folder down without opening it.

MARGARET FINCH

Do I know you?

ELENA VARGAS

You know the teapot. That is enough. It traveled with my cousin from Asunción. He never spoke of its weight until the night before he died.

MARGARET FINCH

(quiet)

How do you know about the teapot?

ELENA VARGAS

The same way you know the voice on the tape is yours. Some objects remember their owners.

Elena pulls out a chair and sits opposite, her olive hands resting on the folder. Margaret studies her face, the subtle smile that never reaches her eyes.

MARGARET FINCH

The stamp said Paraguay. The note was unsigned.

ELENA VARGAS

My cousin signed nothing after 19 March. That is the day the silver left his hands and entered the post. He told me only that the next owner would hear her own confession before she ever spoke it.

MARGARET FINCH

Nineteen days. The number on the tape.

ELENA VARGAS

The teapot counts its own hours. Inside the spout there is more than one recording. The second side names the man who dies.

Margaret's hand tightens around the edge of the ledger.

MARGARET FINCH

Who is he?

ELENA VARGAS

Names are fragile here. Better to ask what he took from Paraguay and why he mailed it to a woman who has never left Warrington.

Margaret leans forward, voice low.

MARGARET FINCH

I need to know if the voice is real. If I am the one who...

ELENA VARGAS

(interrupting)

The archive does not answer that question. Only the silver does. Listen to both sides before the nineteenth day ends. Then decide whether to burn the tape or follow it.

Elena rises, leaving the folder unopened on the table. She turns toward the aisle.

MARGARET FINCH

Wait. What is your name?

ELENA VARGAS

Elena Vargas. The rest is in the folder.
Read it in the light you have left.

Elena disappears between the shelves. Margaret stares at the folder, then slowly draws it toward her. Outside the windows, rain begins to tap against the glass.

EXT. BUSTLING WARRINGTON TOWN CENTER - DAY

Rain slicks the cobbled streets under a low gray sky, turning shop windows into smeared mirrors. Margaret Finch moves through the crowd, her faded cardigan dark at the shoulders, spectacles dotted with droplets. She clutches a folded archive note in one veined hand, eyes scanning the storefronts for the address scrawled in faded ink.

A blackbird calls from a rooftop gutter. Margaret pauses at a corner, rain pattering on her gray bun, and checks the note again. She steps off the curb, shoes splashing through shallow puddles that reflect the muted earth tones of the buildings.

She glances over her shoulder. Twenty paces back, a man in a black coat and hat lingers at a newsstand, face half-hidden by the brim. Margaret quickens her pace along the slick stones, passing a fruit stall where the apples gleam like polished silver under the drizzle.

The man follows, boots silent on the cobbles. Margaret ducks into a narrow alley between two shuttered shops, the air thick with the smell of wet brick and distant coal smoke. She presses against the wall, breath visible in shallow clouds, listening.

Footsteps echo closer, then stop. She peers out. The Shadowy Figure stands at the alley mouth, gloved hands in pockets, gaze fixed on her through the rain.

MARGARET FINCH

(under her breath)

Nineteen days and already company.

She turns and walks deeper into the alley, emerging onto another rain-slicked street lined with shuttered pubs. The figure trails at a measured distance, coat flapping once in the wind. Margaret stops at a bus shelter, pretending to read the timetable, but her sharp blue eyes track his reflection in the glass.

The Shadowy Figure pauses across the street, partially obscured by a lamppost. Water streams from his hat brim. Margaret folds the note tighter, knuckles whitening, then steps back into the flow of pedestrians, shoulders squared against the chill. The rain thickens, silver threads catching the weak daylight as she leads him onward through the gray.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - NIGHT

Margaret Finch sits hunched at the kitchen table under a single yellow bulb. Stacks of yellowed archive photocopies and faded newspaper clippings cover the linoleum. Her faded cardigan sleeves are pushed to the elbows. Gray hair has slipped from its bun. The chamomile in her chipped mug has gone cold, a thin skin forming on the surface.

She lifts a brittle clipping to the light. The headline reads LOCAL MAN REPORTED MISSING, 2003. Her sharp blue eyes scan the text once, twice. She sets it down and reaches for a parish registry page, fingers tracing the

column of names.

MARGARET FINCH

(quietly)

Henry Corby. Warrington. Born 1958.

She slides another document free: a blurry black-and-white photograph of a man in a dark coat standing beside a market stall. The image is grainy, but the stance matches the description in the margin note she copied earlier. She leans closer. The lamp throws her lined face into deeper shadow.

Margaret picks up a fountain pen and draws a circle around the name. She adds the date from the teapot label beside it. Nineteen days. Her hand pauses.

She stands, slippers scuffing, and crosses to the window. Outside, rain streaks the glass. A single streetlamp glows through the mist, illuminating the wet pavement and the dark shape of the neighbor's gate across the road. She watches a figure pass beneath the light, coat collar up, hat pulled low. The figure turns the corner and vanishes.

Margaret returns to the table. She sorts the papers into two piles, then three. One pile receives a fresh note in her neat script: "Possible match. Local. Paraguay connection via export records." She taps the pen against her teeth, then writes again.

MARGARET FINCH

If the voice on the tape is mine, then the
body has to be someone I could have known.
Someone who wouldn't be missed right away.

She lifts the photograph again. The man's face remains indistinct, yet something about the tilt of the shoulders feels familiar. Margaret places the picture next to the open parish page. Both names now carry the same circled date.

She sits back. The chair creaks. Her eyes move from document to window and back, the muted grays of the room pressing in around her. The kettle on the stove ticks as it cools.

INT. QUAIN T LIVERPOOL ARCHIVE - DAY

Dust motes drift through shafts of weak daylight slicing between heavy oak shelves. Yellowed files sag under their own weight, the air thick with the smell of old paper and damp wool. Margaret Finch sits at a scarred reading table, her gray bun pinned tight, spectacles low on her nose. She flips through a stack of brittle folders, her veined hands careful, the faded cardigan sleeves brushing the wood.

ELENA VARGAS approaches from the stacks, an embroidered dress of faded reds and greens catching the light. She carries a single Manila envelope, its edges soft from handling.

ELENA VARGAS

You came back.

MARGARET FINCH

The tape won't let me rest. Neither will the
teapot.

Elena sets the envelope down between them. Margaret studies it, then looks up.

MARGARET FINCH

What is it?

ELENA VARGAS

Something the postmark led me to. A clipping from the Asunción papers, nineteen years old. The man named inside matches the voice on your tape.

Margaret slides the envelope open. Inside lies a folded newspaper page, the ink faded to dusty brown, a photograph of a suited man half-obscurd by shadow. She reads in silence, lips moving.

MARGARET FINCH

He was a solicitor too. Died in a fall the week after this ran.

ELENA VARGAS

The official line called it an accident. The family never believed it.

Margaret taps the date printed at the top.

MARGARET FINCH

Nineteen days before the obituary. Same number.

ELENA VARGAS

Whoever recorded that confession knew the timing. They wanted you to count.

Margaret folds the clipping again, slower now. The archive's single radiator ticks in the quiet. She glances toward the high windows where rain begins to streak the glass.

MARGARET FINCH

This links the tape to him. Not to me.

ELENA VARGAS

Not yet. But the teapot came from his estate. Someone in Paraguay still remembers the fall.

Margaret rises, the chair legs scraping. She tucks the envelope into her worn handbag.

MARGARET FINCH

Then we keep looking. Before the nineteenth day arrives.

Elena watches her go, the golden light from the far doorway catching the subtle smile on her face. Shelves loom darker behind them as Margaret's footsteps fade toward the exit.

EXT. BUSTLING WARRINGTON TOWN CENTER - NIGHT

Rain slicks the cobbled streets under weak sodium lamps, turning the gray facades into blurred mirrors. Shoppers have thinned to a few late stragglers hurrying past shuttered stalls. Margaret Finch steps from the mouth of an alley, her faded cardigan soaked at the shoulders, spectacles dotted with droplets. She clutches the cassette case tight against her chest.

A figure in a black coat and hat lingers beneath the awning of the closed newsagent, face half-lost in shadow, gloved hands still at his sides.

MARGARET FINCH

I know what you left in the teapot. I heard my own voice.

The Shadowy Figure turns slowly. His intense gaze catches the light for a second before the brim of his hat drops it back into darkness.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

You shouldn't be here at this hour, Mrs. Finch.

MARGARET FINCH

Tell me who the voice belongs to. Who dies in nineteen days?

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

Keep asking and it will be you.

Margaret takes one step closer. The streetlight catches the sharp lines of her face, the faint tremor in her hand.

MARGARET FINCH

I retired from the law because I was tired of other people's secrets. Not mine. Not anymore.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

The tape was a warning, not an invitation. Paraguay is a long way from Warrington. Let the past stay there.

A bus rumbles past, its headlights sweeping across them and throwing the figure's stubble and coat into stark relief before plunging him back into silhouette. Margaret does not flinch.

MARGARET FINCH

I already opened the package. I already listened. Whatever happens in nineteen days started the moment that tape played.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

Then stop digging. Or the confession you heard will be the least of what they find.

He adjusts his hat, boots scraping wet stone as he steps backward into the deeper dark of the alley. Margaret remains under the lamp, breath visible in the cold air, the cassette case pressed harder against her ribs. The rain keeps falling, steady and indifferent, on the empty street.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - NIGHT

Margaret Finch sits at the cluttered kitchen table, the single bulb above casting a weak pool of light that leaves the corners in deep gray shadow. Her faded cardigan hangs loose over her shoulders, the fabric frayed at the cuffs. The teapot rests beside the old cassette player, its tarnished silver catching faint glints from the lamp. Outside the lace curtains, the night presses close against the weathered windowsills.

She rewinds the tape with a deliberate click, then presses play again. Static hisses, then her own voice cuts through, flat and cold: "I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever know." Margaret pauses the machine. Her sharp blue eyes fix on the label scrawled with the single number 19. She reaches for the wall calendar pinned beside the sink, fingers tracing the dates in the dim light.

Nineteen days from the postmark. She counts them aloud, voice low and steady.

MARGARET FINCH

Nineteen days until what?

She stands, slippers scuffing the linoleum, and crosses to the window. Rain-slicked silver light from the streetlamp outlines the garden edges. A floorboard creaks somewhere behind her. Margaret turns slowly, scanning the cluttered counters where unopened letters sit in a neat stack. She pulls open a drawer, removes a small notebook, and begins writing the dates in careful script, each number pressed hard into the page.

The cassette player whirs on, tape still turning though the voice has stopped. Margaret glances at the teapot again, then at the foreign stamp still clinging to a scrap of brown paper. Her hands, veined and steady, close the notebook. She moves to the back door, tests the lock once, then twice. A faint rattle sounds from the front of the cottage, like wind against the mail slot, but the air outside hangs still.

MARGARET FINCH

(quietly)

They already know.

She returns to the table, switches off the player, and sits once more in the single circle of light. The room settles into silence, broken only by the distant drip of a tap and the low groan of settling wood. Margaret stares at the number 19 until her eyes blur.

INT. QUAIN T LIVERPOOL ARCHIVE - DAY

Dust motes drift through shafts of weak daylight piercing the high, grimy windows. Rows of yellowed files sag on oak shelves that smell of mildew and forgotten ink. Margaret Finch leans over a long oak table, her faded cardigan sleeves brushing scattered index cards, spectacles sliding down her lined nose. Elena Vargas stands opposite, embroidered dress catching faint gold from a desk lamp, fingers tracing a ledger bound in cracked leather.

MARGARET FINCH

The tape said nineteen days. That number keeps pulling up the same three files. Arthur Whitby, solicitor in Warrington until 1987. Then there's this Paraguayan import clerk, Luis Mendez.

ELENA VARGAS

Mendez sailed back to Asunción the same month the confession was recorded. Whitby stayed local. His name appears in three shipping manifests tied to that teapot stamp.

Margaret flips a brittle page. The paper crackles under her steady hands. Outside the tall window, rain begins to speckle the glass, turning the

street beyond into a smear of gray.

MARGARET FINCH

Whitby's wife filed a missing-person report two weeks after the date on the tape. No body ever surfaced. Mendez's file just ends with a note about "family business."

ELENA VARGAS

(quietly)

Family business that smells like a body in the river. We cross off the banker, then. His alibi is ironclad in the police blotter.

Margaret writes a line through one name. Her pen scratches loud in the hush. A floorboard creaks somewhere in the stacks behind them. Both women glance up but see only shadow between the shelves.

MARGARET FINCH

That leaves Whitby and one more. A man listed only as "the associate." No first name. Just an address that burned down in '91.

ELENA VARGAS

The associate's signature matches the one on the tape's original shipping label. Same crooked loop on the capital T.

A soft metallic click echoes from the far end of the reading room. Margaret's hand tightens on the ledger. Elena steps closer, voice dropping.

ELENA VARGAS

Someone followed us from the station. I saw the coat and hat again on the platform.

MARGARET FINCH

Then we finish narrowing here. Whitby's the only name left that fits both the confession and the nineteen-day window. Everything else is ash or ocean.

Margaret slides the remaining file toward Elena. Their eyes meet across the table, the lamplight carving deep lines into both faces. Footsteps, deliberate and slow, approach from the aisle behind the shelves.

EXT. BUSTLING WARRINGTON TOWN CENTER - DAY

Rain-slicked cobbles gleam under a flat gray sky. Shoppers hurry past shuttered storefronts, their coats dull beiges and faded earth tones. Margaret Finch clutches her worn cardigan tighter, gray hair pinned in a tight bun, spectacles fogged at the edges. She steps off the curb toward the archive bus stop, a stack of yellowed files tucked under one arm.

A black sedan idles at the corner, its engine a low growl. The Shadowy Figure sits behind the wheel, face half-hidden by a pulled-down hat brim, dark stubble catching the weak light. Gloved hands tighten on the wheel.

Margaret pauses, eyes narrowing at a flicker of movement in the alley across the street. The sedan's tires screech. It lurches forward, accelerating straight at her.

MARGARET FINCH

(sharp intake of breath)

She stumbles back, files scattering across the wet stones. The car swerves closer, grille filling the frame. Margaret throws herself sideways, shoulder slamming into a lamppost. Metal clips the hem of her skirt.

The Shadowy Figure leans forward, gaze locked on her through the windshield. The sedan brakes hard, then reverses, tires spinning on the slick cobbles.

MARGARET FINCH

(shouting)

Who are you?

Pedestrians scatter. Margaret scrambles to her feet, one slipper lost in the gutter. The car guns forward again. She darts between two market stalls, knocking over a crate of bruised apples that roll into the street.

The Shadowy Figure yanks the wheel, the sedan mounting the curb in pursuit. Its fender clips a newsstand, papers exploding into the air like startled birds. Margaret presses against a brick wall, chest heaving, eyes wide behind cracked lenses.

The sedan stops inches from her. The driver's window lowers. The Shadowy Figure stares, silent, one gloved hand resting on the gear shift. A red thread unspools from the cuff onto the seat.

Margaret's breath clouds the cold air. She meets the gaze for one frozen beat, then bolts down a narrow alley. The sedan's engine roars as it backs into the flow of traffic, disappearing around the corner.

Rain begins to fall harder, turning the cobbles to dull silver.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - NIGHT

Margaret Finch sits hunched at the kitchen table, the single bulb overhead throwing a cone of yellow light that dies quickly against the shadowed walls. Yellowed case folders lie open in uneven stacks, their edges curling like dried leaves. The cassette player rests beside her chipped mug, the tape inside still, its label reading 19 now smudged by her thumb.

She flips another file, the paper rasping under her fingers. Her spectacles slide down her nose; she pushes them back with a knuckle. A name catches her eye—Harold Keane, 1997, a property dispute she handled for the firm in Liverpool. She stares at the photograph clipped inside: a man in his forties, sharp suit, eyes already half-closed against the flash.

MARGARET FINCH

(quiet, almost to the room)

No.

Her breath fogs the cool air. She pulls the next folder, then another, fingers moving faster. More names surface—men she once represented, advised, or cross-examined. The table creaks as she leans closer, the muted gray light from the rain-slicked window catching the faint tremor in her veined hands. Outside, a blackbird calls once and falls silent.

She stops on a single sheet: a settlement letter signed by Keane, the ink faded to dusty brown. Her own initials sit at the bottom in neat, younger script. Margaret lifts the page, holding it under the bulb. The light bleaches the paper until the signature swims.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice cracking)

It was you. I remember the way you laughed
when the judge ruled.

She drops the letter. It flutters onto the tape player. The cottage seems smaller now, the lace curtains heavy with shadow, the linoleum cold beneath her slippers. Margaret presses both palms flat on the table, shoulders curling inward. The realization settles like silt in still water—no escape, no one left to call, just the weight of a name she once knew professionally and the nineteen days still ticking.

She closes the folder slowly. The snap of cardboard echoes off the cluttered counters. Outside, the wind rattles the weathered windowsill. Inside, only the low hum of the fridge answers.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - NIGHT

The kitchen sits in near darkness, only a single lamp casting a dull pool of light over the scarred wooden table. Muted grays and faded earth tones swallow the room, shadows pooling thick in the corners beneath the weathered windowsills. Lace curtains hang limp against the glass, blocking any glimpse of the rainy night outside.

Margaret Finch sits alone at the table, her lined face half-lit, sharp blue eyes fixed on the old cassette player. Her gray hair remains pinned in a tight bun, but strands have loosened around her temples. The faded cardigan drapes loosely over her shoulders, sleeves pushed up to her elbows. Her hands rest flat on the table, veined and still, beside the tarnished teapot and its crooked spout.

She presses play. The machine whirs, then clicks. Static hisses like distant rain.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice on tape, cold and clear)

I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever
know.

The words fill the room again. Margaret's jaw tightens. She stares at the spinning reels, breath shallow. She reaches out and rewinds the tape, the motor grinding in reverse. Her finger hovers, then presses play once more.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice on tape)

I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever
know.

She closes her eyes. The lamp flickers once. Outside, rain taps against the windowpane, soft and insistent. Inside, the only other sound is the tape's low hum and the faint creak of her chair as she leans forward.

Margaret opens the drawer beside her and pulls out a stack of yellowed letters, flipping through them with trembling fingers. Bills. A charity plea. Nothing with answers. She sets them down and turns the teapot slowly in her hands, tracing the etched patterns that catch the weak light. Something shifts inside again, a faint rattle against the metal.

She rewinds once more, slower this time. The tape clicks into place. She presses play.

MARGARET FINCH

(voice on tape)

I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever know.

Her shoulders slump. She lifts the mug of cold tea to her lips, sips, and sets it down untouched. The chipped rim catches the lamplight. Margaret stares into the darkness beyond the table, eyes unfocused, the weight of the words settling heavier with each repetition.

The tape keeps spinning. Static fills the gaps between confessions. Her breathing grows shallower, each exhale visible in the cool air. She does not reach to stop it.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - DAWN

Morning light bleeds through lace curtains the color of old bone, painting faint silver streaks across the cluttered kitchen table. The teapot sits open beside the cassette player, its tarnished spout catching the weak glow. Dust motes drift in the air like forgotten secrets. Margaret Finch stands at the counter in her faded cardigan, gray hair pinned tight, sharp blue eyes fixed on the number 19 scrawled across the tape label. Her veined hands, still steady, grip the edge of the sink.

She turns the player off. The room falls into silence broken only by the distant drip of a faucet. Margaret crosses to the window, slippers whispering over linoleum, and stares out at the garden where mist clings to the hedges like a threat that hasn't yet lifted. The package wrapping lies torn on the floor, brown paper edges frayed, the Paraguayan stamp faded to a dull red smear.

MARGARET FINCH

No. Not after.

She moves with sudden purpose, pulling open drawers until she finds a notebook and a pen. The chair creaks as she sits, its wooden legs scraping the floor. Margaret writes in deliberate strokes, the nib scratching against paper, listing times and places from the tape's static confessions. Her brow furrows, spectacles slipping down her nose. The muted earth tones of the room press in around her, grays and beiges swallowing the edges of every shadow.

MARGARET FINCH

(quiet, to the empty air)

I won't wait for the body. I'll stop it before it happens.

She tears the page free, folds it, and slips it into her cardigan pocket. Outside, the blackbird calls once, sharp and final. Margaret rises, the hem of her skirt brushing the table leg, and walks to the door. Her fingers turn the lock with a deliberate click. The teapot remains on the table, its crooked spout aimed toward the dawn like an accusation she has chosen to outrun.

INT. QUAIN T LIVERPOOL ARCHIVE - DAY

Dust motes drift through shafts of weak daylight piercing the high arched windows. Yellowed folders sag on oak shelves that creak under their own weight. Margaret Finch stands at a long oak table, the tarnished teapot and its cassette before her, her faded cardigan buttoned to the throat. Her sharp blue eyes scan a ledger open to a page marked "VARGAS - 19--."

ELENA VARGAS steps from the shadows between two aisles, her embroidered Paraguayan dress catching the light in faded reds and golds. She carries a single folder, fingers steady.

MARGARET FINCH

I asked for the sender's records. Not company.

ELENA VARGAS

You asked for the truth about the tape. The sender was my brother. He mailed it the night before they found him in the river.

Margaret's hands tighten on the table edge. The archive's single radiator ticks in the cold.

MARGARET FINCH

Your brother sent me a confession in my own voice.

ELENA VARGAS

He recorded it from you. Twenty years ago, when you were still practicing. You told him everything after too much wine in Asunción. He kept the reel because he loved you. Then someone paid him to send it now.

Margaret's breath clouds in the chill air between them. She studies Elena's face, olive skin lined but calm.

MARGARET FINCH

Who paid him?

ELENA VARGAS

The same man who wants you to remember. The murder on that tape never happened. It was a rehearsal. A warning. My brother was supposed to deliver it and disappear. He refused. So they made the confession real.

Elena opens her folder and slides a single black-and-white photograph across the table: a younger Margaret beside a man whose face is half-shadowed beneath a hat. The teapot sits between them, its crooked spout pointing at the image like an accusation.

ELENA VARGAS (CONT'D)

Nineteen days from the postmark. That is when they will make the tape true unless you stop it. The motive is not money. It is silence. Yours.

Margaret lifts the photograph. Her voice drops, low and edged.

MARGARET FINCH

Then we break the silence first.

Elena nods once, the golden-hour light from the far window catching the subtle smile at the corner of her mouth. The archive clock ticks forward, loud in the stillness.

EXT. BUSTLING WARRINGTON TOWN CENTER - DAY

Rain-slicked cobbles gleam under a flat gray sky. Margaret Finch sprints past market stalls, her faded cardigan flapping, spectacles fogged at the edges. Shoppers blur around her. A blackbird cries from a wet awning. She clutches the yellowed cassette case in one fist, the number 19 smudged by her thumb.

MARGARET FINCH

(breathing hard)

Nineteen days. Not one more.

She veers into an alley lined with dripping brick. The Shadowy Figure lingers at the far end, black coat collar turned up, hat low. Margaret stops short, chest heaving. The figure turns away, boots echoing on stone.

She bursts back into the open square. A bus hisses to a stop, passengers spilling out under faded bunting. Margaret scans faces, sharp blue eyes narrowed. Her slippers slap through puddles that mirror the muted sky.

MARGARET FINCH

Elena. It has to be Elena. The teapot. The stamp.

She spots a woman in an embroidered dress near the fountain, olive skin catching the weak light. Margaret pushes through the crowd, elbowing aside a cart of wilted flowers. The woman glances over her shoulder, dark hair loose, then quickens her pace toward the library steps.

MARGARET FINCH

Wait! Please!

The woman does not turn. Margaret stumbles, knees scraping cobbles. She rises, cardigan streaked with grime, and keeps running. The town hall clock chimes once, the sound swallowed by traffic and distant thunder.

She reaches the steps just as the woman disappears inside. Margaret pauses at the threshold, rain dripping from her bun. Her hands shake around the tape. Inside the archive, shelves of yellowed files stand in deep shadow. She steps forward, the door swinging shut behind her with a soft click.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - NIGHT

Margaret Finch stands in the center of the cluttered kitchen, her faded cardigan pulled tight over her shoulders. The single bulb above the table casts long shadows across the linoleum, turning the stack of unopened letters into dark rectangles. Rain taps against the weathered windowsills. She grips the tarnished teapot in both hands, its crooked spout aimed like an accusation.

The back door creaks open. The Shadowy Figure steps inside, black coat glistening with droplets, hat brim low over his obscured face. His boots leave wet prints on the floor. He closes the door without a sound.

MARGARET FINCH

I know what you did with the tape.

The Shadowy Figure removes his gloves slowly, one finger at a time. His intense gaze stays fixed on her.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

You were never meant to find it so soon.

MARGARET FINCH

Nineteen days. That number on the cassette.
You planned every hour.

She sets the teapot on the table. The metal clinks against wood. Her sharp blue eyes catch the faint light from the window.

MARGARET FINCH

My voice on that recording. You stitched it together from phone calls, didn't you? Old messages to the solicitor's office.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

You always were precise with your words,
Margaret. Easy to harvest.

He takes one step closer. The coat hangs heavy, hiding his frame. Shadows swallow the lower half of his face.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

The teapot came from Elena's cousin in Paraguay. She owed me. A simple delivery, nothing more.

MARGARET FINCH

Elena Vargas. She smiled when she handed me the package at the archive. She knew.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

Elena only carried the weight. I chose the confession. I chose the victim. You were always going to be the one holding the proof.

Margaret's hands tremble once, then steady. She reaches for the dusty cassette player on the counter.

MARGARET FINCH

Play it again. Let me hear what you made me say.

He doesn't move. The rain outside grows heavier, streaking the lace curtains.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

You already know the ending. The tape was never about the murder. It was about who would believe you once the body turned up.

MARGARET FINCH

There is no body.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

Not yet.

The bulb flickers. Margaret presses play. Static fills the room, then her own recorded voice cuts through, cold and clear.

RECORDED MARGARET (O.S.)

I did it. I killed him, and no one will ever know.

The Shadowy Figure smiles faintly beneath the hat brim. Margaret stops the tape. Her voice is steady when she speaks again.

MARGARET FINCH

You wanted me to spend nineteen days proving
I didn't.

THE SHADOWY FIGURE

And you almost did.

INT. MODEST WARRINGTON COTTAGE - DAWN

Dawn light seeps through the lace curtains, painting the cluttered kitchen in muted grays and faded earth tones. The teapot sits on the table, its tarnished silver catching a sliver of gold from the rising sun. Margaret Finch stands at the counter, her lined face set, gray hair still pinned in a tight bun. She wears the same faded cardigan from the night before, sleeves pushed up to her elbows. Elena Vargas watches from the doorway, her embroidered Paraguayan dress catching the soft glow, olive skin warm against the cool morning air.

Margaret lifts the cassette player. The tape inside still hums with static residue from the night. She pops it open, fingers steady but veined knuckles white.

MARGARET FINCH

This voice isn't mine anymore.

She pulls the cassette free. The plastic cracks under her thumb. Elena steps closer, the hem of her dress brushing the linoleum.

ELENA VARGAS

You don't have to carry it alone.

Margaret moves to the sink. She holds the tape under the faucet. Water hisses as it hits the magnetic strip, warping the label marked 19. The number bleeds ink down the drain.

MARGARET FINCH

Nineteen days of wondering who I'd become.
No more.

She drops the ruined cassette into the metal bin. It clatters once, then settles. Elena reaches for the teapot, turning it slowly so the crooked spout faces the light.

ELENA VARGAS

The package came from my side of the family.
I thought it might help. Instead it pulled
you backward.

MARGARET FINCH

(quiet)

It tried.

Margaret opens the drawer and takes out a pair of scissors. She cuts the brown paper wrapping into strips, letting each piece fall to the floor like old skin. The foreign stamp from Paraguay lands face-down. Elena picks it up, folds it once, and tucks it into her pocket.

ELENA VARGAS

We can bury what's left of it. Or burn it.
Your choice.

Margaret sets the scissors down. She looks at Elena, sharp blue eyes catching the dawn.

MARGARET FINCH

I choose forward. With you.

She lifts the empty teapot and places it on the high shelf beside the chipped mugs. The metal scrapes wood, a final sound in the quiet kitchen. Outside, the blackbird calls once more. Margaret turns off the tap. The room holds only the scent of chamomile cooling in two untouched cups.

Elena moves to the table and pulls out a chair. Margaret sits. Their hands rest near each other on the worn wood, not quite touching, but steady in the growing light.