

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MAURA MURRAY

A Retention Architect Documentary Script

Target Runtime: 23 Minutes (~3,450 Words)

1. THE COLD OPEN | 0:00 - 1:12

[VISUAL: Black screen. A single pair of headlights cutting through heavy snowfall on a dark rural road. The image shudders. Then silence. Cut to: A close-up of a white Saturn sedan; its front end buried in a snowbank. The windshield wipers are still on. Steam curls from the hood. Slow push-in on the tailpipe. A dark cloth rag is jammed inside it.]

[AUDIO CUE: Wind. Low, constant, biting. A faint police scanner crackle beneath it.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

February ninth, two thousand four. Haverhill, New Hampshire. Temperature: seven degrees.

A car sits crooked in a ditch on Route 112. The airbags have deployed. There's a spiderweb crack across the windshield. And stuffed into the tailpipe is a rag a trick her father taught her to stop a car from smoking.

[VISUAL: Slow pan across the car's interior, an open box of Franzia wine, a bottle of Kahlúa, a bottle of Bailey's. Coca-Cola. A textbook. No phone. No Maura.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

She bought forty dollars of alcohol that afternoon. She didn't drink a single drop. She packed her dorm room into boxes. She never checked out. She emailed her professors about a death in the family.

Nobody had died.

[BEAT]

Here's what I need you to hold in your mind for the next twenty-three minutes:

If you were running for your life, truly running, would you take the time to lock your car doors?

[VISUAL: Cut to exterior. The Saturn, locked. All four doors. In the middle of nowhere.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Because Maura Murray did.

And then she stepped into seven minutes of silence that no one, not the FBI, not the state police, not the thousands of amateur detectives who have spent two decades combing every inch of these woods has ever been able to explain.

[AUDIO CUE: Static cut. Hard silence.]

[TITLE CARD: THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MAURA MURRAY]

2. THE INCITING INCIDENT | 1:12 - 4:36

[VISUAL: Archival footage of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Gray stone buildings. Cadets in formation. Then, a photograph of Maura Murray in uniform. Young. Focused. A trace of something guarded behind her eyes.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

To understand the disappearance, you need to understand the pressure.

Maura Murray wasn't a drifter. She wasn't reckless. She was a Division I track athlete. A nursing student. A former West Point cadet who survived one of the most psychologically demanding academic environments on the planet and then walked away from it.

She transferred to the University of Massachusetts Amherst after her first year. The official reason was never made public. Some say the military structure wasn't for her. Others say something happened there that set the first crack in a foundation that looked unshakeable from the outside.

[VISUAL: UMass Amherst campus. Wide shots of snow-covered grounds. Then a slow push-in on a student ID photograph of Maura softer here, less guarded.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

At UMass, she studied nursing. She was good at it. She was also, by most accounts, under enormous pressure. And in the months before she vanished, that pressure left marks.

Here's something most people skip past: in November 2003, three months before her disappearance, Maura was caught using a stolen credit card number. Not a stolen card, a number. She had used it to order food delivery to her dorm. The charge was over a hundred dollars. It was a Fort Knox Federal Credit Union card belonging to someone else entirely.

[VISUAL: A close-up of a credit card statement, redacted. Stylized. The delivery address highlighted.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

She wasn't charged criminally. But she was facing disciplinary action from the university. And that sword was still hanging over her head on the night when everything changed.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: Exterior of the Hadley, Massachusetts UMass campus at night. A campus security vehicle parked outside a dorm.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Saturday night. February seventh. Two nights before the crash. Maura borrows her father's brand-new Toyota Corolla to attend a dorm party. Sometime after two a.m., she drives it into a guardrail. The car is totaled. When her father, Fred, arrives, Maura is standing on the curb.

She is, by his account, catatonic.

Not crying. Not explaining. Just absent.

Fred later told investigators he tried to talk to her that night. He said she seemed like she was somewhere else entirely.

[VISUAL: A crumpled Toyota against a guardrail. A young woman standing motionless in the headlights of a tow truck.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

The next day, Fred takes Maura car shopping. They look at used vehicles. They eat dinner together. He gives her money to put toward a replacement. Everything, on the surface, seems fine.

But here's the detail that doesn't get enough attention: earlier that Saturday, before the party, before the crash, Maura received a phone call from her older sister Kathleen. The call lasted several minutes. And after hanging up, a coworker at Maura's campus security job said she became visibly distraught. She couldn't finish her shift. She had to walk back to her dorm.

What was said on that call has never been made fully public.

[BEAT]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Monday morning. February ninth. Maura searches MapQuest for directions to Burlington, Vermont, and the Berkshires. She emails her professors: "There's been a death in the family." She emails her boyfriend, Bill Rausch, a brief note. She withdraws two hundred and eighty dollars cash from an ATM. She packs her belongings into her Saturn. She buys alcohol.

And then she drives north.

Now and this is where I need you to pay close attention; some investigators believe Maura wasn't alone on that drive. There's a theory, supported by cell records and witness accounts that have never been fully reconciled, that another vehicle may have been traveling in tandem with hers.

Remember that. We'll come back to it.

[AUDIO CUE: A low, building drone. Almost imperceptible.]

3. ACT I: THE RABBIT HOLE | 4:36 - 11:30

[VISUAL: Aerial drone footage of Route 112 in winter. A two-lane road flanked by dense forest. White birch. Deep snow. No streetlights. No buildings for half a mile in either direction except one.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

At approximately seven twenty-seven p.m., Maura's Saturn collides with a tree or snowbank at a sharp curve on Route 112, near the weathered-shingle home of Faith and Tim Westman.

Faith Westman calls 911. She reports the accident. She reports seeing a figure moving around the car.

And then, ninety seconds later, another person arrives.

[VISUAL: A yellow school bus pulling to a stop near the Saturn. The headlights illuminating the wrecked car.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

His name is Butch Atwood. A school bus driver. He lives just down the road. He's driving the bus home when he spots the wreck.

Atwood later told police he approached the car. Maura was inside. She was conscious. He described her as shaken but coherent. He offered to call for help. She told him, quote, "I've already called Triple-A."

She hadn't. There's no record of that call. Not on her cell phone. Not through AAA.

Atwood went home. He called 911 from his landline. And between the moment Butch Atwood walked inside his house and the moment Sergeant Cecil Smith's cruiser rolled up to the crash site, Maura Murray vanished.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: A digital clock, cycling through minutes. 7:29. 7:30. 7:31... 7:35... 7:36... 7:43... 7:46.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

The exact length of this gap is disputed. Atwood said it was seven to nine minutes. The police log suggests it could have been as many as thirteen. But let's call it what it is: a window. A narrow window in which a twenty-one-year-old woman, on an empty road, in the freezing dark, with no working car, disappeared completely.

When Sergeant Smith arrived, the Saturn was locked. The rag was in the tailpipe. Maura's alcohol was open on the passenger seat. Her personal belongings were inside. Her cell phone was gone. She was not.

[VISUAL: A police officer shining a flashlight through a frosted car window. The beam catches the open Franzia box. The textbook. A pair of gloves on the dashboard.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Now here's where most people land and where most people stop thinking.

The obvious answer. The one the initial investigation leaned into: Maura, panicked about a potential DUI she'd already had the credit card incident. The Saturday night car crash, the disciplinary pressure ran

into the woods to avoid police. The temperature that night dropped below zero. A person fleeing into that kind of cold, possibly impaired, could succumb to hypothermia within hours. The body, covered by snowfall and dense underbrush, might never be found.

It's clean. It's logical.

And it falls apart under exactly one piece of evidence.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: A search-and-rescue dog handler walking along Route 112. The dog sniffs the road surface intently, moving east from the Saturn's position. The handler watches the dog's body language. The dog moves steadily... one hundred yards... then stops. The dog circles. Sits.]

[AUDIO CUE: Wind drops to silence.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

New Hampshire Fish and Game brought scent dogs to the crash site. The dogs picked up Maura's trail. They tracked it east along Route 112, not into the woods along the road. One hundred yards. And then the scent stopped. Not faded. Stopped. In the middle of the pavement.

That's not what happens when someone walks into the forest. That's what happens when someone gets into a car.

[BEAT]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Think about that. The entire "runaway into the woods" theory depends on Maura fleeing on foot into subzero wilderness. But the dogs trained, reliable scent dogs say she walked down the road and then was simply... gone. As if she'd been lifted off the earth.

Now layer in one more thing. Something the Westmans mentioned in their 911 call and later reiterated to investigators: Faith Westman said she saw a man smoking a cigarette near the Saturn. Not Maura. A man.

Law enforcement initially dismissed this as a misidentification, possibly Atwood, possibly a shadow. But Butch Atwood didn't smoke. And he was only at the car for a matter of minutes.

[VISUAL: The Westman house, looking out through the front window toward the crash site. The view is partially obstructed. A figure silhouetted, indistinct stands near the Saturn.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

So, who was the man at the car?

And why did the official investigation never conclusively answer that question?

[AUDIO CUE: A low, unsettling tone. It holds.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

There's one more detail from this timeline that almost never gets discussed. That night, during Maura's nursing clinical rotation at UMass, she was logged as having worked a shift that involved oxygen tank inventory. The records from that shift the precise log of what she handled, who she interacted with, what time she clocked out have been referenced in private investigator reports but have never been released to the public.

Why does this matter? Because it establishes something crucial: Maura's emotional state in the seventy-two hours before her disappearance wasn't stable. The coworker breakdown after Kathleen's call. The catatonia after the Saturday crash. And then, according to at least one colleague, a period of eerie calm on Monday morning. As if she had made a decision.

The question is: what decision?

4. ACT II: THE TWIST | 11:30 - 19:30

[VISUAL: A map of Haverhill, New Hampshire. Red pins marking the crash site, the Westman house, Atwood's house, and a third location an A-frame house, circled in red, approximately one mile east of the Saturn's final position.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

About a mile east of the crash site, set back from Route 112, there was an A-frame house.

In the years following Maura's disappearance, this property became the subject of intense scrutiny from both private investigators and the online community. The owner at the time had a criminal history.

Neighbors described unusual activity. And at some point, the exact date is unclear; a rusted knife was anonymously delivered to Fred Murray.

[VISUAL: A close-up of a weathered, oxidized blade. Small. Folding. The kind you'd find in a toolbox.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Fred turned it over to investigators. It was tested. The results, to this day, have not been publicly disclosed.

The A-frame house has since been torn down.

[BEAT]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Now, I want to be careful here. There is no confirmed connection between this property and Maura Murray's disappearance. But the fact that it sat directly along the scent trail's trajectory, the same eastward direction the dogs followed has not gone unnoticed by those who've studied this case.

[VISUAL: The scent trail path, overlaid on a satellite map. It extends east from the Saturn. The A-frame sits along that line.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

And then there's the red truck.

Multiple witnesses in the Haverhill area reported seeing an older-model red pickup truck or SUV in the vicinity of the crash site that evening. One witness referred to in case files as Witness A described it as parked, without lights, near the curve where Maura crashed.

The driver of this vehicle has never been publicly identified.

Cecil Smith's police report doesn't mention it. The initial canvass didn't flag it. It surfaced only later, through interviews conducted by private investigators and journalists who re-walked the area.

[VISUAL: A darkened stretch of road. In the distance, barely visible, the shape of a vehicle with no headlights.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Some investigators believe this truck may be connected to the tandem driver theory, the idea that someone was traveling with Maura, or following her, and picked her up after the crash. Others believe it belongs to a local resident who simply never came forward.

But here's what's difficult to reconcile: if Maura voluntarily got into a vehicle whether a tandem driver or a stranger, she did so within a seven-to-thirteen-minute window, in freezing darkness, on a road where police were already en route. That's not the behavior of someone making a casual decision. That's urgency.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: A computer screen. A web forum, circa 2006. Threads with titles like "MAURA MURRAY - New Theory" and "Who is 112DIRTBAG?" Cursor scrolling through heated comments.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

In the years that followed, the case didn't just stay alive. It was metastasized.

The internet took Maura Murray's disappearance and turned it into one of the first true crowdsourced investigations. Forums lit up. Bloggers drove to Haverhill and knocked on the doors. Armchair detectives mapped timelines down to the second.

And then the ugliness started.

A figure emerged online a local man who lived near Route 112. He was never named as a suspect by the police. He was never charged with anything. But the internet decided he was guilty. They called him "the 112 Dirtbag."

[VISUAL: A blurred face. Comment sections full of accusations. Screenshots of threatening messages.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

What happened next is a case study in digital mob justice. His name was posted publicly. His address was shared. People showed up at his home. Threats were made. A video, recorded by an unknown individual and uploaded under the title "112 Dirtbag," showed his property and implied guilt through nothing more than proximity and innuendo.

He was never arrested. He denied any involvement. And the harassment continued for years.

I'm telling you this not because he's a suspect. I'm telling you because this is what happens when grief meets the internet. When a family's worst nightmare becomes content. When the need for an answer — any answer overrides the need for the right one.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: Fred Murray, in a later interview. Older now. Exhausted. But still talking. Still pushing.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Fred Murray never stopped searching. He filed lawsuits to access case files. He fought the state of New Hampshire for records. He drove those roads hundreds of times. He said, in interviews, that he believed Maura met with foul play. That she didn't run into the woods. That someone took her.

Law enforcement, at various points, told him his daughter was a runaway. That she'd staged her own disappearance. That she'd simply decided to leave her life behind.

Fred's response to that was simple: "Then why haven't we found her?"

[BEAT]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

And here's something that rarely gets discussed in the surface-level coverage of this case.

Maura's cell phone.

After the crash, after the disappearance, Maura's phone went dark. No calls, no texts, no data. But cell tower records indicate that at some point, and the exact timing is a matter of dispute; her phone pinged a tower in Londonderry, New Hampshire.

[VISUAL: A map of New Hampshire. A red line traces Route 112 in the north. Then a second pin appears far to the south. Londonderry. Over ninety miles away.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Londonderry is over ninety miles south of the crash site. It's not on any logical route from Haverhill. It's not between the crash site and Amherst. It's not between the crash site and anywhere Maura was known to be heading.

If this ping is accurate and there are valid questions about cell tower reliability in 2004 it means one of two things. Either Maura's phone was carried south by someone, or there's a data anomaly that has never been properly explained.

Neither answer is comforting.

[AUDIO CUE: A phone ringing. Unanswered. It rings three times and cuts to voicemail silence.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

And this connects to something else. In the hours and days after the disappearance, Maura's boyfriend, Bill Rausch, called her phone repeatedly. He was stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He left message after message. Her voicemail box eventually filled up.

But here's the thing that's always bothered investigators working on the periphery of this case: there were incoming calls to Maura's phone in the hours before the crash that have never been fully accounted for. One call, placed from an unidentified number, lasted long enough to suggest a conversation. Not a pocket dial. Not a wrong number. A conversation.

Who called Maura Murray before she drove into the White Mountains? And what did they say?

The official case file has not released this information.

[VISUAL: A phone screen, glowing in darkness. An incoming call from an unknown number. The screen lights a face we cannot see.]

5. THE CLIMAX & RESOLUTION | 19:30 - END

[VISUAL: Aerial footage of the White Mountains at dawn. The forest stretches endlessly. Snow-covered ridgelines fade into clouds. It is vast and indifferent and beautiful.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Twenty years.

That's how long the silence has lasted. Twenty years of theories and counter-theories. Twenty years of Fred Murray driving those roads. Twenty years of a family asking one question: where is she?

[VISUAL: A slow montage. The Saturn, now in an evidence lot, rusted. The Route 112 curve, in summer wildflowers growing where the car hit the snowbank. A missing person poster faded and peeling on a telephone pole. Maura's face, caught mid-laugh in a photograph from a time when everything was still possible.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Let me tell you what we know. Not what we think. Not what the forums say. What we know.

We know Maura Murray was under extraordinary pressure. Credit card fraud charges. Two car accidents occurred in three days. A phone call that broke her composure. And then a sudden, silent departure

packed bags, cash withdrawal, alcohol purchased, emails sent, and a drive into the mountains with no confirmed destination.

We know she crashed on Route 112. We know Butch Atwood spoke to her. We know she lied about calling AAA. We know that within minutes, she was gone.

We know the dogs lost her scent in the middle of the road.

We know there was a red truck. We know there was a man near the car. We know there is a cell tower ping that makes no geographic sense.

And we know that every single one of these facts can be arranged to tell a completely different story depending on which one you put at the center.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: The crash site, present day. Dusk. The road is empty. A small memorial flowers, a cross, a weathered photograph is visible near the curve.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

If Maura ran into the woods, she decided, born of panic, and the mountains kept her. It happens more often than people realize. The White Mountains have claimed hikers in better conditions than a freezing February night. The terrain is punishing. The cold is absolute. A body, covered by successive winters, could lie undiscovered for decades.

If someone took her a stranger, someone in that red truck, someone from the A-frame house, someone we haven't even considered, then this is a crime scene that was treated as a traffic accident for the critical first hours. And those hours are the ones that matter most.

And if she left voluntarily if this was a planned disappearance, a woman dismantling her life piece by piece and then walking away from it — then she did something almost no one in the modern age can do. She stayed gone. No credit card activity. No social media. No sighting. Nothing.

For twenty years.

[BEAT]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

But here's what this case really does to you if you sit with it long enough. It stops being about Maura. It starts being about you.

Because what Maura Murray's disappearance forces us to confront is a question most of us would rather not ask:

How well do we really know the people we love?

[VISUAL: A family photograph. Maura with her father and her sisters. Everyone smiling. A normal family on a normal day.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Kathleen knew something that made Maura break down on a Saturday night. Fred saw something in his daughter's eyes after the car crash that he couldn't name. Her professors received an email about a death that never happened. Her boyfriend called a phone that would never be answered again.

Every person in her life held a piece of the picture. And not one of them had enough pieces to see it whole.

[BEAT]

[VISUAL: The White Mountains. Night. The forest is black. Stars above. The road is empty. The wind moves through the trees.]

[AUDIO CUE: Wind. Slow. Steady. The same wind from the opening.]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

Route 112 is quiet tonight. It's quiet most nights. The curve where Maura's Saturn hit the snowbank has been repaved twice since 2004. The Westmans have moved away. Butch Atwood passed away in 2015, still insisting he told the truth. The A-frame house is gone. The memorial remains.

And somewhere in the frozen ground beneath these mountains, or in a town we've never thought of searching, or in a place the Londonderry ping was trying to tell us about Maura Murray is either waiting to be found or choosing not to be.

[BEAT]

NARRATOR (V.O.):

The woods are silent.

But the internet is not.

If you know something, anything about the disappearance of Maura Murray, the New Hampshire Cold Case Unit can be reached at the number on your screen.

[VISUAL: Contact information. Cold Case Unit phone number. The screen holds for five seconds.]

[VISUAL: Fade to black.]

[AUDIO CUE: One final gust of wind. Then silence.]

[END CARD]

TXT ON SCREEN: "Maura Murray has been missing since February 9, 2004. She would be 42 years old today. The case remains open."]

[VISUAL: Fade to black. Subscribe prompt. Next video suggestion.]