

Off The Record

written by

Rob Herzog

Chicago, Illinois  
robherzog@hotmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

On the table: a fresh notepad and day-old takeout. Chinese.

Pacing the room, cell phone in hand, pen in mouth: LUCAS  
LOWE, 20s. He dials half of the number, pauses, resumes.

HARLAN KEY, 60s, answers in six rings. A grunt. No hello.

LUCAS  
Mr. Key?

Snort. Grunt.

LUCAS  
Harlan Key? Hello?

Muttered annoyance from Key. Lucas grabs his notepad.

LUCAS  
Mr. Key, I'm Lucas Lowe from the  
Review-Atlas.

KEY (V.O.)  
Can't hear with this phone.

LUCAS  
If I could get a moment, Mr. Key.

KEY (V.O.)  
Well, I'm shitfaced.

Lucas taps his teeth with the end of his pen. A deep breath.

LUCAS  
Mr. Key, it's been fifteen years  
since the disappearances of your  
wife and four daughters.

Silence from Key. A sniff. Uneven breaths.

LUCAS  
I know this is delicate, Mr. Key,  
but I'd like to hear your  
perspective after all these years.

KEY (V.O.)  
My perspective?

LUCAS  
Your side of the story.

Lucas waits.

KEY (V.O.)

Sunk.

LUCAS

Sir?

Lucas scribbles that word on his pad: Sunk.

LUCAS

What do you mean by that?

KEY (V.O.)

Everything, prick.

Lucas tries to follow up, but he's interrupted.

Lick. Crunch. Open-mouth chewing from Key. Snap. Smack.

His molars pulverize hard peppermints or raw walnuts or the knucklebones of his long-lost kin.

It goes on and on. Rocks in a tumbler.

LUCAS

Mr. Key?

Click. A dead line.

Lucas blurts another question, too late.

LUCAS

Did you kill them?

He sets down the phone and stares at his takeout. A miserable glaze has taken hold.

His eyes fall on his notepad: Sunk.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lucas's phone buzzes. A square of light amid darkness.

Lucas shakes off sleep and snatches the phone. The caller registers as unlisted, but Lucas answers. The time: 3 a.m.

LUCAS

Hello?

KEY (V.O.)

You're not a staff writer, you're a freelancer, Mr. Lowe. I researched.

LUCAS

Mr. Key?

KEY (V.O.)

I shouldn't have spoken to you earlier this evening. I'm usually more careful about these things. But you caught me at a vulnerable moment: Mid-shitface.

Lucas sits up. Searches for a pen, paper.

KEY (V.O.)

I'll give you a comment on the record: I pray nightly for the return of my wife and daughters. Write that down.

Lucas scrambles.

KEY (V.O.)

Will you pray with me for their safe return?

LUCAS

May I ask just one thing?

KEY (V.O.)

I'm outside your apartment, Lucas.

LUCAS

Sir?

KEY (V.O.)

I have things to say. Off the record.

LUCAS

You're outside?

KEY (V.O.)

Out back. Come see.

LUCAS

Mr. Key, maybe this should wait until morning.

Clad only in underwear, Lucas gets out of bed.

KEY (V.O.)

Off the record: I'm not without fault.

Key whistles into the phone. Random notes. Helter Skelter.

Bathed in cell phone light, Lucas takes small steps forward.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Moving past the table and the now-ancient Chinese takeout, Lucas approaches his back door. Key continues on the phone:

KEY (V.O.)  
Another thing I should mention off  
the record: None of this could have  
been helped.

A few feet from the door, Lucas stops cold.

It's ajar. The night breeze moves through.

Key's voice sounds from the phone:

KEY (V.O.)  
Do you see me, Lucas?

Lucas squats and peeks through the opening. Sure enough, there's Key, shrouded in shadow just beyond the door.

Lucas scrambles, slams the door shut, locks it, searches for something sharp. He blurts into the phone.

LUCAS  
You need to leave my property.

KEY (V.O.)  
My wife said I lacked a soul. Can  
you imagine?

LUCAS  
I'll call the police.

A short, shrill whistle from Key.

KEY (V.O.)  
One more thing. Are you listening?  
I had help.

Lucas freezes.

KEY (V.O.)  
An associate. Sneaky motherfucker.

The apartment's shadows swirl. From behind, Key's murderous ASSOCIATE emerges and pulls Lucas down.

The phone falls from his hand. Hopelessly out of reach. Key's voice continues to blare from it...

KEY (V.O.)  
All of this--the whole thing--off  
the record. Understand?

It only takes the Associate an instant to snuff out Lucas.

The killer rises, scans, spots the notebook, rips out the page that says "sunk."

He finds the old takeout, sniffs, eats.

His remorseless chews blend with a familiar sound: Key's whistling. It comes from the phone on the floor.

After a moment, the device goes black.

FADE OUT: