

IN SELF DEFENSE?

Written by

Michael A. Elliott

EXT. FRONT VIEW OF GURLEY HOUSE - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

Entire area is dark. Then repeated, sudden light flashes and SOUNDS of suppressed weapons fire.

Dead body on the front lawn, dead body on the front porch. Front door shredded by gunfire.

O.S. WEAPONS FIRE.

INT. GURLEY HOME/LAUNDRY ROOM - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

ANTON GURLEY, 38, wounded, propped up against the washing machine. African-American, tall, Afro hair, thick, full beard. Labored breathing, painful movements.

JAKE PAXTON 45, wounded, leaning against the dryer. Caucasian, tall, lean, long dark hair tied in a ponytail.

JAKE

You know, Anton, you deserve to die because you're so fucking stupid.

Jake faces Anton, aims his handgun at him.

SOUND of a shotgun being RACKED. Jake turns.

The air explodes with the shotgun blast. The impact lifts Jake off the floor, falls dead.

In obvious pain, Anton reaches for his flashlight. Shines it in the direction of the blast. He smiles, nods.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF WASHINGTON, DC - DAY

Establish the general area/location of the story.

EXT. PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY (MARYLAND) POLICE HQ - DAY

It's a large, multi-floor building done in typical bland, bureaucratic style. Only the title on the exterior provides any distinguishing feature.

SUPER: One Year Later.

INT. HOMICIDE DIVISION HALLWAY - DAY

A UNIFORMED POLICE OFFICE leads a VISITOR down the hallway through the squad room towards a series of private offices.

INT. OFFICE OF CAPTAIN BRAD O'MALLEY - DAY

CAPTAIN O'MALLEY heads the Police Department's Homicide Division. He's a ruddy-face, heavy set man in his mid-50s.

SFX: DOOR KNOCK.

Door opens. The UNIFORMED OFFICER stands in the open doorway.

OFFICER

Lt. Caldwell from the State Police Criminal Investigation Bureau is here.

O'Malley nods. LT. DEACON CALDWELL ENTERS. He's a trim, early 40s, African American. He projects an aura of authority.

CALDWELL

Pleasure to meet you Captain.

They shake hands. O'Malley eyes him with a mixture of curiosity and dread.

O'MALLEY

So, what brings the CIB to Prince George's?

They sit.

CALDWELL

The Attorney General asked us to look into one of your recent cases.

O'MALLEY

Really? Which one?

CALDWELL

That home invasion in Upper Marlboro. The Gurley case.

O'Malley SIGHS, shakes his head.

O'MALLEY

We closed that case a couple of months ago. Our investigation found it was self defense. So, what's the Attorney General's interest?

CALDWELL

She received multiple phone calls from the legislature's Black Caucus and the NAACP.

(MORE)

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Since the Gurleys' attackers were white, I need to find if the Paxton gang were members of or affiliated with any white supremacist group.

O'MALLEY

Considering the county is 60 percent African-American, I understand that concern. But the explanation is simple. They were trying to prevent Anton Gurley from testifying in a murder trial. It's all in our report.

CALDWELL

The AG still has to provide those groups with a satisfactory answer. That's politics.

O'MALLEY

Why wasn't I informed in advance? That's basic professional courtesy.

CALDWELL

In a potentially sensitive political investigation, I need to control the need-to-know basis. There's no intended disrespect.

O'MALLEY

(annoyed)

Nothing I can do about that now. How can we assist you?

CALDWELL

I'd like a separate conference room where my team and I can work.

O'Malley looks worried.

O'MALLEY

Team?

CALDWELL

A couple of additional investigators. It'll make everything go much quicker.

O'MALLEY

One can hope.

INT. POLICE HQ/CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Caldwell and his two-person team, SHEMIKA WEBER and CRAIG HARPER, have taken over a small conference room.

Weber, late 30s, African-American female. Muscular with short hair.

Harper, mid-40s, white, short, wiry. Heavily tattooed arms and forearms.

Seated at a table, examining folders from an impressive pile.

Caldwell attaches crime scene photos to a mounted white board.

HARPER

Seems there's a lot of sketchy shit surrounding this case.

CALDWELL

Fill me in.

HARPER

There's no indication that Anton Gurley ever left his house. So, who killed the guy on the front lawn?

CALDWELL

Any theories?

HARPER

No and neither did the police or the State's Attorneys' office. Their attitude is like, "we don't know and we don't care."

CALDWELL

Anything else?

WEBER

This definitely falls into the sketchy shit category. Forensics stopped counting the empty shell casings after they hit 400. The medical examiner reported that Mr. Gurley suffered multiple gunshot wounds to his arms and legs.

CALDWELL

And that's sketchy because...?

WEBER

There were no wounds anywhere on his upper body...

She's abruptly cut off by the ENTRANCE of Homicide Detective JOHN NAYLOR. Early 40s, African-American, average height.

He gives everyone a quick, visual once over.

NAYLOR

You asked to see me?

CALDWELL

Detective Naylor! Thank you for responding so quickly.

Naylor nods.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

And these are my associates. Sgts. Harper and Weber.

Naylor shakes their hands.

NAYLOR

The Captain said you were looking into the Gurley home invasion. But he didn't tell me why.

CALDWELL

I'm determining whether the crime had racist motivations and if the Paxtons were white supremacists.

Naylor suppresses a laugh.

NAYLOR

Tell me you're joking. Considering your background this is slumming.

Caldwell stares at him in a confrontational manner.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

You broke Al Qaeda in Iraq. Then, you join the NYPD's Anti-Terrorist Squad. You were a fucking superstar! Now, you're with the Maryland State Police?

CALDWELL

I'm doing important work!

Naylor laughs derisively.

NAYLOR

Like chasing down the latest menace
to black progress.
(makes sounds like a ghost)
Scary white supremacists?!?

CALDWELL

You don't believe in white
supremacy?

NAYLOR

It's not an issue at the street
level. Crime is out of control in
this county and getting worse.
People in Oxon Hill and District
Heights aren't worried about spooky
white people. They're worried about
the 15 year old down the street
sticking a Glock in their face and
jacking their car. They're worried
about gangs recruiting their sons
and grandsons. They're heart-sick
from attending too many funerals.

CALDWELL

What makes you think I'm not
concerned with these issues?

NAYLOR

I'm sure you are but you and your
associates are being used to give
politicians a CYA.

He nods to Harper and Weber.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

Nice to meet you. And good luck.

He EXITS.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Caldwell, Weber and HOWARD ZINDORF look at the crime scene
photos mounted on the white board. Zindorf, white, slightly
older than Naylor. Dark hair streaked gray, squat, muscular.

ZINDORF

The idea that the Paxtons wanted to
kill Anton Gurley because of his
race is laughable.

CALDWELL
You and Detective Naylor have been partners for six years?

ZINDORF
Almost 7, actually.

WEBER
No issues with him?

ZINDORF
We work well together.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Naylor drives while Zindorf reads an arrest warrant application.

ZINDORF
Holy fuck, John. You really think we'll get an arrest warrant for Nick Paxton based on this load of horse shit? Willie didn't say half of his so-called testimony in this application.

NAYLOR
Good thing he's a confidential informant.

ZINDORF
Hope we get a judge that's weak on reading comprehension.

NAYLOR
You'll back me on this, right?

Zindorf slumps down in his seat.

ZINDORF
Stop this coloring outside the lines crap. It could end our careers.

NAYLOR
I'll never ask you to sign a borderline application.

Zindorf shakes his head, bewildered by his partner's cavalier attitude.

ZINDORF
If this shit sinks your career,
I'll get dragged down by the
undertow.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER THE SAME DAY

Harper and Weber interview Naylor.

HARPER
The home invasion, you and your
partner were first on the scene?

Naylor nods.

NAYLOR
We got word from one of my
confidential informants.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - EARLY MORNING/2AM (FLASHBACK)

Dark and deserted street. All house lights are dim or off. A car careens around a corner, enters the street. A solitary red police light flashes on the car roof.

INT. POLICE CAR - EARLY MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Naylor drives. Zindorf operates the police radio.

ZINDORF
This is Detectives Naylor and
Zindorf. We need backup to meet us
ASAP at 115 Primrose Court.
Reported home invasion in progress.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
Acknowledged. Units on route.

EXT. 115 PRIMROSE COURT - EARLY MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Home, located at the end of a long driveway, makes it isolated from the other homes in the court.

The police car ENTERS the driveway, blocked by a car parked halfway up the drive. The Detectives EXIT, weapons drawn. Zindorf shines a flashlight on the other car.

NAYLOR
Fuck. That's Jake's car. We might
be too late.

The Detectives double time up the driveway. Separate when they reach the front lawn. Naylor, startled to find a dead body whose throat is slit.

The Detectives cautiously approach. Front door blasted off the hinges. Bloody dead body on the porch. Weapons at the ready they stop. Naylor leans into the opening.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

Anton!?! It's Detectives Naylor and Zindorf. Can you hear me? Anton!!!?

The Detectives simultaneously look behind them, wondering when back up will arrive.

O.S. Shotgun BLAST.

ZINDORF

We gotta go in. Now!

They enter the pitch black house.

INT. GURLEY HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

Anton and his wife TAMARA seated at the kitchen table. Caldwell and Weber seated opposite, video camera on the table top. Tamara is slim, statuesque with alert, probing eyes. Both do their best to seem calm, poised. Yet their nervousness is apparent.

CALDWELL

Thank you both for agreeing to meet. We've examined the official record of your involvement with the Paxton crime family.

TAMARA

It was a terrible time.

WEBER

Especially for you, Mrs. Gurley. How are you doing?

TAMARA

Better. We go to couples therapy regularly. It's been a great help getting us back on track.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anton is seated in a chair. Tamara, standing, looms over him as she SCREAMS in his face.

TAMARA

I'm the one who was abducted! Kept waiting, wondering if I was going to die. Because you decided to testify without asking me.

ANTON

So I was just suppose to let a cold-blooded killer walk?!?

TAMARA

(sneering)

Don't be so fucking clueless. You know the State's Attorney lets criminals go free.

Anton yells back.

ANTON

And I took care of it.

INT. GURLEY HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

WEBER

I'm certainly glad you're getting past all that trauma. What about your daughter? How is she?

TAMARA

Much better. Doing well at school. Back playing clarinet with the school orchestra.

CALDWELL

She bounced back that quickly?

TAMARA

Young kids are very resilient.

INT. PSYCHIATRIST OFFICE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

KIARRA GURLEY, 13, seated between her parents. She begins weeping, slowly at first but then deep, heaving sobs of pain. Anton pulls her close.

KIARRA

Oh Daddy...when I close my eyes, I see her face. Those people.....

She's so grief stricken, she chokes back her words and sobs. Anton hugs her tightly. The look on his face has transformed from warm and loving to anger.

ANTON

Those people got what they
deserved.

EXT. GURLEY DRIVEWAY - DAY

Caldwell and Weber walk to their parked car.

CALDWELL

Did we see the same thing?

Weber nods.

WEBER

They've got serious problems.

They get into the car.

INT. CAR - DAY

CALDWELL

Arrange a one-on-one with her.
Let's see what might come spilling
out without her husband around.

Weber nods in agreement.

INT. DINER - MORNING

Naylor and Zindorf seated in a booth, drinking coffee.

NAYLOR

Anything about Caldwell seem odd?

ZINDORF

Nothing leaps to mind. Why?

NAYLOR

Considering his resume, how the
fuck do you end up in Maryland,
investigating small-time criminals
like the Paxtons?

ZINDORF

He either fucked-up something big
or pissed off the wrong people.

Another pause while they sip their coffee.

ZINDORF (CONT'D)
When the shit hits the fan, what's
your bug-out move?

NAYLOR
I have my retirement papers all
filled out.

Zindorf nods.

INT. GURLEY HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

Weber is seated at the kitchen table. Tamara serves her a cup
of tea.

WEBER
Your home is so comfortable and
inviting. How long did it take you
to repair all the damage?

TAMARA
Oh, this isn't that house. It was
too damaged to repair.

WEBER
So you sold it?

TAMARA
Tried to. Seems people aren't
interested in a house where four
people died violently.

WEBER
You own your own beauty salon. Why
haven't you returned to work.

TAMARA
I tried but I couldn't handle all
the whispers and stares. My staff
runs the shop. I mostly avoid
people now.

WEBER
I'm honored you allowed me in.

Tamara smiles but it's not a happy smile.

TAMARA
It's OK because you don't know me
from before.

Weber stares into her cup of tea. Seems reluctant to speak.

WEBER

The little girl...Meagan Sanders.
Tell me about her.

Tamara fights becoming overwhelmed with emotion.

TAMARA

She was Kiarra's best friend.
Another reason why we moved away.
Charlie and Brenda were neighbors
and our best friends. We decided it
was in everyone's best interest to
be out of their sight forever.

She pauses to compose herself.

WEBER

Sorry to bring all this up again.

TAMARA

It's ok. I haven't really talked
about this. Not even to my
therapist.

INT. GURLEY'S FORMER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

As Tamara speaks, the scene setting slowly transforms from the present-day kitchen to the kitchen on Primrose Court. Weber visualizes her descriptive narrative in real time, as if she were physically present.

Anton is at the kitchen table, drinking coffee eating a danish while looking at his phone. Tamara chops vegetables at the kitchen sink.

KNOCK at the kitchen door.

TAMARA

Come on in, Meagan.

MEAGAN SANDERS ENTERS.

MEAGAN

Thanks Mrs. Gurley. Kiarra ready?

TAMARA

She'll be down in a minute.

Meagan is a self-assured person. She wears a sweater that is covered with patches of every shape and size.

Her hair is styled in a twisted French braid and there's even hints of make-up. Anton is bemused by her appearance.

ANTON
Who dressed you this morning?

MEAGAN
I dress to express my moods.

ANTON
I'd like to hear the expressions
your dad used when he saw you in
that get-up.

Meagan smiles sheepishly, relieved when Kiarra ENTERS. She does a double-take when she sees how Meagan is dressed.

KIARRA
Wow! Love your sweater.

Weber looks directly at "Meagan".

WEBER
She seems like a really sharp kid.

TAMARA
She was funny, had a real flair for
style.

WEBER
Men don't appreciate that.

MEAGAN
Check this out.

She lifts up one foot to show she is wearing metallic purple flats.

KIARRA
Whoa! Where did you get those?

MEAGAN
I just sprayed purple metallic
paint on a pair of old shoes.

WEBER
Metallic purple shoes!

TAMARA
She was always coming up with
crazy ideas.

KIARRA
Oh, I gotta do that! Can I paint an
old pair of shoes, mom?

ANTON
Sure and why don't you paint your
hair purple to match!?

KIARRA
I'll do that.

MEAGAN
Me too!!

TAMARA
You're going to be late for school.

They laugh and carry on as they LEAVE.

WEBER
Remember anything else?

TAMARA
That would be the last time my
daughter was happy.

EXT. GURLEY'S FORMER HOME - DAY

Weber and Harper approach the front door, now only a large piece of thick plywood secured with a key-operated, hardware store lock.

They stop, look at the dried, fading blood stains on the front porch. Harper notes the distance of the blood stain from the door.

HARPER
One of them got blown totally out
of the house.

Weber consults crime scene notes.

WEBER
That was Jerry Paxton. He took two
shotgun volleys center mass.

Harper uses a key to unfasten the master lock.

HARPER
That'll do it.

INT. GURLEY FORMER HOME/LIVING ROOM FOYER - DAY

The door swings open, Weber and Harper ENTER. The house is empty but there remains evidence of the crime.

Bullet holes virtually frame the front door opening. There's faded blood scattered on walls and floors.

Bullet holes are prominent on the floor in the center hallway that connects the living room to the kitchen.

Harper takes some of the crime scene photos from Weber. They move to the center hallway and face the front door.

HARPER

The forensics' team said the front door was shattered from the outside by automatic weapons fire.

As Harper speaks, the scene evolves into a "you are there" moment. The area is suddenly alive with furniture and furnishings. Harper and Weber appear to be in the middle of the action.

They watch as the front door suffers mini-eruptions from non-stop weapons fire.

HARPER (CONT'D)

With the door structure compromised, the gunman kicks it open.

WEBER

Jerry Paxton was 6'3" and weighed 240. No problem.

HARPER

Anton Gurley was standing pretty much where we are right now....

Weber and Harper turn to face down the hallway in the opposite direction.

WEBER

Walter Paxton, dead in the center hallway. Shot in the right ankle by a 9 mil? That shouldn't be fatal.

HARPER

Then how did he die?

WEBER

Coroner said it looked like cardiac failure.

HARPER

I don't believe that. Do you?

Weber shakes her head.

HARPER (CONT'D)
Give me the crime scene folder.

He flips through the photos. Stops when he finds what he's looking for.

Crime scene photos of the center hallway taken from the front and back entrances.

WEBER
The kitchen table is on its side
about 15 feet from the front door.

HARPER
He used it as cover. Then he
positioned the dining room table to
protect his back.

Weber paces off the position of the kitchen table to where Walter Paxton's body was found.

WEBER
Again...just 15 to 20 feet. No way
he misses at this range. Why just
the ankle?

HARPER
Do you bleed from the ankle?

Weber LAUGHS.

WEBER
I'm sure you do.

HARPER
How much do you think he would
bleed since there was no way to
stop it?

WEBER
What's your point?

Harper point to the hallway floor.

HARPER
There's no blood stains.

He begins walking through the hallway and into the kitchen.

INT. GURLEY'S FORMER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

They ENTER. Walk around the kitchen perimeter. Weber consults the crime scene report.

WEBER

Who the hell shot Jake Paxton? It wasn't Anton. He was out of position for a frontal shot... severely wounded, on the floor, leaning against the washer.

They walk to the laundry room that's right off the kitchen.

HARPER

Means there was another person in this room...in the house.

WEBER

That goes a long way to explaining how Nick Paxton ended up dead in the front yard.

EXT. GURLEY FORMER HOME/FRONT PORCH - DAY

Harper relocks the front door. He and Weber walk towards their car.

WEBER

We going to tell the Lieutenant what we found?

HARPER

I don't know how we can keep it from him.

WEBER

Considering what's happened in the past, shouldn't we try?

HARPER

The official account is fiction. Gurley said the Paxtons took him by surprise.

(BEAT)

He was waiting for them.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Harper views video footage from the Gurley crime scene. Caldwell ENTERS.

HARPER

How did it go in Baltimore?

CALDWELL
Attorney General Winters was very
happy that we found no racial angle
to the home invasion.

Harper is delighted.

HARPER
Guess we can pack up and go home.

CALDWELL
Not so fast. I persuaded the AG to
let us dig deeper. She's
transferring this investigation to
her office at my request.

Harper is stunned, disturbed.

HARPER
For what reason? We accomplished
our mission. Time to move on.

Caldwell is annoyed.

CALDWELL
As you said, there's a lot of
sketchy shit surrounding the
investigation of this incident. We
need to look into it.

HARPER
Why? There's been no complaints,
official or otherwise. No
accusations of malfeasance or
criminality, cooking the books,
whatever. Plus, you didn't consult
me and Weber. We're a team.

CALDWELL
Aren't you out of line? I'm in
charge of this team.

Harper exhales loudly.

HARPER
Sir, I supported you when...
(BEAT)
No one's been more loyal.

CALDWELL
I need that now, more than ever.

Harper nods in acquiescence.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Excellent. Then let's stir up this sketchy shit and see what we find.

HARPER

My grandfather use to say the more you stir shit, the worse it smells.

INT. DUNGEON-LIKE CELL - NIGHT

The entire room is earthen in structure and design. Dim lighting comes from an unknown source. In the middle of the room, a MAN is tied to a chair, a towel covering his face.

Three MIDDLE-EASTERN MEN ENTER. They begin cursing at the Man tied to the chair. They slap him in the head. They laugh at the pain they inflict. They force his head back and begin waterboarding him. Their laughter increases to a maniacal pitch as the Man chokes on the water.

They stop, force his head up. Rip the towel from his face revealing Deacon Caldwell.

INT. CALDWELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Caldwell awakens with a start. He scans the bedroom, looking for his nightmarish tormentors. He gets out of bed, does a quick search of the area, refusing to believe that he experienced an attack by phantoms.

INT. MOBILE CONSTRUCTION TRAILER - DAY

Anton is alone at a drafting board, studying an electrical system blueprint.

Caldwell and Harper ENTER.

CALDWELL

Thanks for agreeing to see us while you're at work. How long have you been back?

ANTON

About two months. I'm not allowed on site yet so I radio coordinate the different crews, do paperwork, answer the phone, get coffee for everyone in the morning.

He laughs at his own joke.

ANTON (CONT'D)

I got a couple more weeks of physical therapy. My legs need to be stronger.

HARPER

You fractured your ribs, too.

Anton nods.

HARPER (CONT'D)

How'd that happen?

ANTON

I ran into the kitchen to make my last stand. Legs were shot up. I fell. Slammed right on the granite floor.

Caldwell looks at Harper who merely shrugs.

CALDWELL

Why did you leave your family in Florida then drive to North Carolina?

ANTON

I decided to spend time with my brother.

Caldwell begins looking through a stack of papers.

ANTON (CONT'D)

He's not technically my brother. He was my best friend starting in middle school. His parents were heroin addicts. He was at my house all the time. They OD'ed when he was 12 and my parents moved him in for good.

CALDWELL

That would be Serge Fernandez?

ANTON

Right.

HARPER

You both joined the Army right out of high school.

ANTON

Because of 9-11.

HARPER
That's commendable.

CALDWELL
You served in Iraq, Transportation
Corps. Maintaining and repairing
electronic systems in Apache
helicopters. Your brother went full-
bore warrior. Army Rangers then
Delta Force.

ANTON
He has a nice place in the
mountains just outside of
Asheville. I sought his help to get
through my trauma.

EXT. SERGE'S MOUNTAIN CABIN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

SERGE FERNANDEZ, late 30s, Hispanic. A physically imposing
man. Shoulder length jet black hair. They are seated in lawn
chairs around a lantern, sipping moonshine

SERGE
So, what do you want?

ANTON
I need you to solve my problem.

SERGE
How?

INT. MOBILE CONSTRUCTION TRAILER - DAY

HARPER
You were gone for months? Why?

Anton's face saddens.

ANTON
I thought my marriage was over. I
had to find the courage and resolve
to make things right.

CALDWELL
No one forced you to identify Nick
Paxton as the killer. Why did you?

Anton shrugs.

ANTON
Because he tried to kill me too.

CALDWELL
We've gone over the written record.
We'd like to hear what happened
directly from you.

Anton nods.

ANTON
I had two crews out working late on
the new Alex Brown building getting
it ready for its grand opening. On
my way home, I decided to stop and
get something to eat.

INT. ANTON'S PICKUP - NIGHT

Anton drives. Caldwell and Harper are in the rear bench seat.

HARPER
Why didn't you wait until you got
home?

ANTON
I was hungry but I wanted to go
right to bed when I got home. I saw
Beefy's was open, I pulled in. The
drive through window was already
closed. That's why I went inside.

INT. BEEFY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

They are standing at the counter.

CALDWELL
The kid at the counter. That's
Ronald Case?

ANTON
Right. I didn't notice when Nick
Paxton walked in.

NICK PAXTON ENTERS. He's in his late 30s, wearing a hoodie.
The lower half of his face is covered with a bandana. He
pulls a revolver from his waistband.

NICK
All right! Everyone freeze!

SCREAMS and CRIES from the Employees.

NICK (CONT'D)
Empty the register. Hurry up. The money! The money!

ANTON
I was frozen on the spot but I couldn't stop staring at him.

The Counterman, RONALD CASE, moves quickly. Eyes fixed on the revolver pointed at him. He empties the registers. Piles the money on the counter.

A KITCHEN WORKER APPROACHES from the back, carrying empty trays. She sees what's happening, SCREAMS, drops the trays.

ANTON (CONT'D)
When that happened, Nick went off.

Nick SHOOTS at the Kitchen Worker but misses as she retreats to the kitchen.

Employees SCREAM and flee. Nick's low-key demeanor evaporates. His well-planned crime has spun out of control.

Nick looks directly at Ronald Case who slowly backs up with his hands high in the air. Nick FIRES three shots. Case jerks backwards, slumps to the floor.

Anton freezes in fear. Nick eyeballs him, smiles, aims, squeezes the trigger. Instead of a deadly revolver report, there is a hollow CLICK as the hammer hits an empty chamber. Nick CHUCKLES as if someone has played a trick on him.

NICK
Guess it's not your time, pal.

He scoops up the money, FLEES. A brief quiet then a SCREAM pierces the air. Anton looks over the counter. The body of the Counterman lays in a pool of blood. The SCREAMING continues as the Employees emerge from their hiding places.

INT. MOBILE CONSTRUCTION TRAILER - DAY

ANTON
I threw up in the parking lot. Got to my truck, drove straight home.

HARPER
If his face was so covered up, how could you positively identify him?

ANTON

He had real beady eyes. A real nasal, high-pitched voice...

HARPER

That's it?

Anton shakes his head, smiles.

ANTON

I was about to say...when he pointed the gun at me, I just stared at it. Later, I remembered he had a letter tattooed on each finger of his right hand.

As he speaks, Anton touches each individual finger on his right hand.

ANTON (CONT'D)

F...E...A...R. I thought that would be the last thing I'd see before he shot me to death.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

Caldwell and Harper EXIT from the trailer. Walk silently through the construction site.

CALDWELL

What do you think?

HARPER

The more I learn, the less I'm sure what to think.

CALDWELL

Are you alright?

Harper looks him directly in the eye.

HARPER

Sir, please. Let's leave this alone. An investigation should lead to some positive outcome. I don't see that happening here.

Caldwell is stunned.

CALDWELL

There's something going on here that doesn't add up. You know it. Sgt. Weber knows it.

(MORE)

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Putting the pieces together is the right thing to do.

HARPER

Anton and his family have paid...and are paying...a huge price because he did the right thing. We shouldn't force them to pay more.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

WILLIE DANIELS, late 20s, African-American male, seated at the table. He glances nervously around the room. Naylor is talking to him. Caldwell ENTERS.

CALDWELL

Willie Daniels?

Willie turns in the chair to face Caldwell.

WILLIE

I don't know why I'm here. I'm not a criminal. Detective Naylor said I should talk to you. I'm innocent.

CALDWELL

He said you associated with the Paxtons and could shed some light on their movements and crimes they may have committed.

Willie lets out a fake laugh.

WILLIE

No, no, no. I never hung with them. I mean, if I saw them on the street I'd say "hello" but that's it. Now, you should talk to my boy Ivan...

CALDWELL

Ivan Villarel? We'll be getting to him soon. Detective Naylor claims you've been feeding him info about the Paxtons for almost two years.

Willie looks embarrassed.

NAYLOR

Just tell him what you told me.

Another forced laugh.

WILLIE

But I'm not a snitch!

CALDWELL

It's OK. They're all dead.
Remember? What do you know or heard
about Nick committing murder?

WILLIE

I might have heard a few things
here and there...but I had nothing
to do with any of it. I swear.

He looks at Naylor who nods approval. Willie smiles for the camera.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

Nick freelanced the whole thing and
Jake was totally pissed.

EXT. ABANDONED WAREHOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Two cars parked under the harsh glare of a mercury vapor light. Nick Paxton leans sullenly against one.

Minus the hoodie and bandana, he's tall, slight, with frizzy hair and a goatee. He's being loudly berated by Jake Paxton, his older brother.

Nearby are cousins WALTER PAXTON and his brother, JERRY. Walter, early 40s, is slight, ferret-like. Jerry, late 30s, is a menacing presence with a boyish face. Willie next to Jerry. Everyone's body language and from the tone of Jake's voice, it's obvious he's the leader.

JAKE

(furious)

I don't believe this is happening.
You're a moron! What were you
trying to accomplish? Be the lead
story on the 11 o'clock news!?!?

NICK

I just thought...

JAKE

You are not suppose to think!!
That's my job! This is an example
of what happens when you think.
Anyone get a good look at you?

NICK

A guy, some "Joe Six Pack". He showed up just before closing. Completely screwed up my timing.

Jake LAUGHS.

JAKE

That's it? Just some working stiff?

NICK

Yeah, that's it.

Jake laughs even louder.

JAKE

If he's the only witness, we don't have a problem.

NICK

He wasn't more than 10 feet away. He looked straight at me.

JAKE

So what? You could have given him your address and cell number. Some stupid working slob is not going to make trouble for us.

WALTER

How can you be so sure?

JAKE

It's like on the nature shows. We're the wild dogs. We're hunters. This "Joe Six Pack" is like one of them wildebeests; slow, stupid, easy to pick off, always scared and they never, ever fight back.

WALTER

Maybe this guy is different.

JAKE

Bullshit! They're all the same. Lazy, fat and comfortable. We rip them off and who do they get pissed at? Their insurance company because they won't replace an old 25 inch TV with a 60 inch 8K. They hide in their crummy homes and hope the world won't bother them.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)
I bet if the cops question him
he'll deny he was ever there.

Nick smiles.

NICK
So it'll be all right?

JAKE
We're home free. Where's the piece?

Nick hands Jake the revolver.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Willie!

Willie approaches. Jake hands him the weapon.

JAKE (CONT'D)
Get rid of this. And don't think of
selling it on the street. It needs
to be gone for good.

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Weber and Harper interview Naylor and Zindorf.

WEBER
How'd you identify Mr. Gurley as a
witness?

NAYLOR
Eyewitness accounts and video
surveillance footage.

HARPER
What was his reaction when you
showed up at his house?

NAYLOR
He was conflicted. I felt he wanted
to cooperate but was scared. We
figured he would develop a
convenient memory lapse.

WEBER
But then, he just showed up?

ZINDORF
A total surprise.

NAYLOR

He told us about Nick's hand tattoos but that wasn't enough to get us a warrant.

INT. POLICE SQUAD ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anton flips through a book of mug shots. Naylor hovers nearby. Anton thumbs through page after page. Then he stops.

ANTON

I can't be sure. Only his eyes were visible.

Naylor takes a sheet of paper, places it over the lower half of a suspect's face.

NAYLOR

Give it another try.

Anton uses this method to re-examine the mug shots. Stops.

ANTON

Maybe this guy.

Naylor CALLS OUT to Zindorf. They look over Anton's shoulder.

NAYLOR

Which one?

Anton points to Nick Paxton's photo. The detectives look surprised.

ZINDORF

Nick Paxton?

NAYLOR

Not my first guess, either. Get the Captain.

Zindorf returns with O'Malley.

O'MALLEY

What have we got?

NAYLOR

He identified Nick Paxton as the shooter.

O'Malley also seems surprised.

O'MALLEY

Really? Interesting.

Naylor puts three individual photos in front of Anton.

NAYLOR
Recognize any of these guys?

ANTON
No, who are they?

NAYLOR
The guy you identified is Nick Paxton. The others are his brother Jake and cousins Walter and Jerry.

ANTON
He's part of a gang?

ZINDORF
They're strictly small time.

NAYLOR
Still, just sort of recognizing him is too thin. Anything else you remember about him?

ANTON
His voice. It was kind of squeaky and a bit high pitched.

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

ZINDORF
It wasn't much but added to the tattoo ID it was enough for an arrest warrant. We went to a CI to find where Nick was hiding out.

EXT. STREET CORNER - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Both Detectives are talking with Willie Daniels.

NAYLOR
We want to buy information.

WILLIE
Such as?

NAYLOR
Where we can find Nick Paxton.

WILLIE

I got nothing.

Naylor gets into Willie's face.

NAYLOR

Don't give me that shit. You're a fence for those assholes. We're going to make an arrest. If it's not Nick Paxton it'll be you.

Willie swallows hard.

WILLIE

Word is he's hiding out at the Congress Hotel over on Albermarle Street.

Zindorf pats Willie on the back. Stuffs two \$20 bills into Willie's shirt pocket.

INT. CONGRESS HOTEL LOBBY- DAY (FLASHBACK)

It's a seedy, run-down lobby populated with SUSPICIOUS-LOOKING MEN. A CLERK operates from behind a bullet-proof shield. Naylor and Zindorf ENTER. Zindorf presses his badge and a picture of Nick Paxton against the glass.

CLERK

Room 318.

INT. THIRD FLOOR - DAY/FB

Naylor and Zindorf find Room 318. Withdraw their weapons, Naylor KNOCKS on the door.

NICK (O.S.)

Yeah? Who is it?

NAYLOR

Nick Paxton, this is the police. We have a warrant for your arrest.

O.S. BREAKING GLASS.

Zindorf kicks in the door. The room is empty. The window leading to the fire escape has been busted open.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

Head him off.

Zindorf races for the stairs. Naylor follows Nick out the window.

EXT. THE ALLEY - DAY/FB

Nick climbs down the fire escape, sees Naylor, runs down the alley towards the street.

INT. LOBBY - DAY/FB

Zindorf comes running down the stairway, heads for the door, pushes aside several lobby denizens.

EXT. THE STREET - DAY/FB

Nick runs out of the alley, turns down the street away from the hotel. Naylor is close behind.

Zindorf spots them. Runs to the car, puts the flashing police light on the dashboard, turns on the SIREN, goes after them.

Nick looks over his shoulder, sees Naylor closing in, turns down a long alley.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY/FB

Zindorf steers down a side street, accelerates.

EXT. THE ALLEY - DAY/FB

Nick almost reaches the end of the alley when the police car cuts him off.

In an acrobatic move, takes a running leap, uses a garbage can as a stepping stone, climbs on top of a dumpster and leaps to a nearby fire escape.

Naylor duplicates Nick's moves. Zindorf follows.

EXT. FIRE ESCAPE - DAY/FB

Nick climbs rapidly upwards. Naylor and Zindorf keep pace.

EXT. THE ROOFTOP - DAY/FB

Nick reaches the top, runs across the roof. Naylor and Zindorf APPEAR.

Nick leaps from the first building to a second, increasing his lead over the detectives.

Then he leaps from the second building to a third; which is half-a-floor lower.

He DISAPPEARS from sight. Loud CRASHING SOUND.

NICK (O.S.)
Help! Help!

Naylor and Zindorf reach the roof's edge, peer down to the third building. They hear Nick but don't see him.

EXT. ROOFTOP, BUILDING 3 - DAY/FB

The Detectives reach the rooftop from the building's interior stairway. Still don't see Nick.

ZINDORF
Anyone up here?

NICK (O.S.)
Over here! Help! Over here!

They discover Nick wedged in a hole he created when he landed and the roof collapsed under him.

ZINDORF
Well, well..looks like the rat got trapped in his hole.

NICK
Get me outta here.

NAYLOR
Don't be so upset, Nick. Hell, with any luck you'll be able to sue the building owner because it was his negligence that led to your arrest.

NICK
Arrest?

NAYLOR
Why do you think we were chasing you? To give you a citizenship award? Raise your right hand.

Nick is puzzled but he's in no position to argue. He wiggles his right arm free and raises his right hand.

The Detectives give Nick's right hand a close look. Smile when they see the tattoos just as Anton described.

Naylor reaches into his jacket.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)
You're busted, sweetheart.

Slaps Nick in the face with the warrant.

END FLASHBACK

INT. SQUAD ROOM - DAY

Naylor is at his desk, on the telephone.

NAYLOR
Good morning, I'm Detective John Naylor from the Prince George's County Maryland police, homicide division. I wanted to make inquiries about a former officer (BEAT).
His name is Deacon Caldwell.

EXT. HOME OF CALDWELL'S EX-WIFE - DAY

Caldwell's car pulls into the driveway, parks. The doors open and Caldwell's children, JACOB, 12 and LILLY, 10 climb out, carrying overnight bags.

The front door opens. MONICA CALDWELL STEPS OUT. She's an attractive, late 30s, Hispanic female. The children rush to greet her.

MONICA
Did you have a good time in Ocean City?

LILLY
Yea, we had a lot of fun.

JACOB
Even though Dad is lame at carnival games.

She smiles.

MONICA
Get upstairs and clean up, get ready for dinner.

She waits until they disappear into the house. Closes the front door.

MONICA (CONT'D)
Thanks for taking them this weekend.

CALDWELL
We had a lot of fun.

MONICA
How are you feeling these days?
Still having trouble sleeping?

CALDWELL
Not so often anymore. It helps the work is a lot more low key than the past. Although I'm working on what could be a breakthrough case.

Monica shakes her head in distress.

MONICA
Be a regular cop for once. You'll stay out of trouble that way.

INT. CALDWELL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

He ENTERS. Drops his overnight bag in front of the dresser. Takes off his watch, lays it on the dresser.

Stares at a framed photo. Picks it up, looks at it closely. He's dressed in the formal attire of an Army Captain, holding a Congressional citation. He appears happy and proud. He's surrounded by smiling politicians.

He starts to put it back on the dresser, stops. Drops it into a wastebasket.

INT. ASSISTANT STATE'S ATTORNEY DANIEL CAGAN'S OFFICE - DAY

DANIEL CAGAN, white, 50ish, thinning hair in a comb-over. Thick, tortoise-shell eyeglasses. Seated at his untidy desk.

CALDWELL
As I understand it, the ID of Nick Paxton was shaky.

CAGAN
It was borderline. New bail guidance makes it near impossible to keep offenders locked up.

(MORE)

CAGAN (CONT'D)

I was going to do everything possible to hang the murder on Nick. So, we planned a surprise for the line-up.

INT. POLICE INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Nick is seated at the table, staring straight down. Naylor is across from him. Zindorf paces behind him.

Cagan and STUART FRANKEL, Nick's attorney, ENTER. Frankel is a tall, well-dressed, oily-looking individual.

CAGAN

Detectives, you know Stuart Frankel. He's kept quite busy on behalf of the Paxton clan.

Frankel sits next to Nick.

FRANKEL

Question and answer time is over gentlemen.

CAGAN

Your client is charged with felony murder. We've got an eyewitness who puts him at the scene and pulling the trigger.

The door is opened by a UNIFORMED OFFICER.

OFFICER

Your witness is here.

INT. VIEWING ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Cagan, O'Malley and Frankel are present. Naylor, Zindorf and Anton ENTER.

FRANKEL

Is this your witness?

CALDWELL (V.O.)

If he never saw his face, how could he identify him?

CAGAN (V.O.)

That was the surprise.

CAGAN

Mr. Gurley, this is Stuart Frankel.
He represents Nick Paxton.

ANTON

Does he have to be here?

FRANKEL

I make sure my client's rights are
protected.

ANTON

What about the rights of the kid he
murdered?

FRANKEL

So you've already convicted my
client?

CAGAN

Save your theatrics for court.

FRANKEL

I'm only interested in justice.

CAGAN

We're all painfully familiar with
your love of justice.

While Cagan and Frankel verbally joust, Naylor stays close to Anton.

NAYLOR

Don't let him rattle you. It's part
of his circus act. Relax, take your
time. Don't say anything until
you're positive.

Naylor motions to Zindorf who draws the blinds shut on the viewing window. Presses the intercom button to speak to the POLICE OFFICERS on the other side of the one-way glass.

ZINDORF

Send them in.

FIVE MEN, including Nick, ENTER. They're shown where to stand. Each is handed a piece of paper.

ZINDORF (CONT'D)

Number 1, please read what's on the
paper.

NUMBER ONE (O.S.)

Guess it's not your time, pal.

Anton shakes his head.

ZINDORF
Number 2.

NUMBER TWO (O.S.)
Guess it's not your time, pal.

Again, Anton shakes his head.

ZINDORF
Number 3, read the statement.

NUMBER 3 (O.S.)
Guess it's not your time, pal.

ANTON
Ask him to say it again.

ZINDORF
Again, Number 3.

There's a noticeable pause.

ZINDORF (CONT'D)
Number 3, again.

NUMBER 3 (O.S.)
Guess it's not your time, pal.

ANTON
That's him definitely.

Zindorf raises the blinds. Number 3 is Nick.

FRANKEL
With such a tenuous ID, I'll have
him bonded out in two hours.

Cagan hands Frankel a document.

CAGAN
That's a sworn affidavit from our
witness. He initially identified
your client based on the tattoos on
his right hand. The hand that held
the murder weapon.

The line-up room POLICEMAN checks, nods. Holds up Nick's
right hand.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

CALDWELL

That was enough to sustain a murder charge?

NAYLOR

Cagan thought so. It made Anton a target. I'm certain Frankel outed him to the Paxtons.

CALDWELL

And the bail hearing?

NAYLOR

A total farce. Killed one person. Tried to kill the witness. Bail set at \$50,000. Took only \$5,000 to put him back on the street.

INT. GURLEY KITCHEN/FORMER HOME - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

Anton and Tamara are eating breakfast. Kiarra ENTERS.

KIARRA

I'm going over to Meagan's.

She kisses each parent, EXITS.

O.C. Front door opening.

O.C. HYSTERICAL SCREAMS

Anton and Tamara bolt out of their seats.

INT. GURLEY LIVING ROOM/FORMER HOME - DAY/FB

Kiarra in the open doorway SCREAMING, points at the front porch. Tamara pulls her inside. Anton steps around the women. The front porch is littered with dead rats.

EXT. GURLEY FORMER HOME - LATER THE SAME MORNING/FB

An active crime scene investigation in progress. The rats have been removed. Forensic teams scour the porch, front yard and driveway looking for evidence.

INT. GURLEY FAMILY ROOM/FORMER HOME - LATER THE SAME MORNING/FB

A POLICE COMPUTER TECHNICIAN operates the family home computer. Naylor hovers over her shoulder. They are studying images from the Ring doorbell/camera. The Tech toggles the images back and forth. Anton is on the couch observing from a distance.

TECH

So, he comes up the front steps and the first thing he does is disable the camera. Time stamp puts it 3:09am.

The INTRUDER disables the camera using black spray paint.

TECH (CONT'D)

That's all we've got, 8 seconds.

NAYLOR

He's wearing a hood, ski mask, gloves, coveralls...

The Tech toggles the video to where the Intruder walks up the steps and onto the porch deck.

TECH

Looks like he's wearing booties too. No fingerprints, footprints, probably no DNA.

O'Malley ENTERS. Motions Naylor to approach.

O'MALLEY

Anything?

NAYLOR

The video is worthless.

O'MALLEY

The forensic people are coming up empty too.

NAYLOR

Howard is canvassing homes on adjacent streets, seeing if doorbell cameras picked up anything.

O'Malley approaches Anton.

O'MALLEY

How are you doing, Mr. Gurley?

ANTON

How the hell do you think I'm doing? I have a hysterical daughter, a near-hysterical wife and I'm scared shitless. Are you going to arrest anyone for this?

O'MALLEY

Not until we have some evidence.

ANTON

Then I want police protection for me and my family.

O'MALLEY

Impossible, unfortunately. Our budget's been gutted, officers keep quitting or retiring. We're far below minimum staffing.

Anton is alarmed

ANTON

That's it?!? That's all you can offer? It's less than nothing.

NAYLOR

Can't patrol check this area overnight every couple of hours?

O'MALLEY

The overnight shift in this sector use to have eight on patrol. Now, it's four. My advice, Mr. Gurley, is to install additional security cameras and motion detectors. Maybe a guard dog, too.

ANTON

I don't believe this. I'm the witness, the good guy. And you're telling me I'm on my own? We have to hide behind security cameras while those creeps run free?

O'MALLEY

That's just the way things work. Or don't.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. SQUAD ROOM - DAY

Naylor at his desk. A notification sound comes from his desktop computer. Checks his email, sees he has a new one.

NAYLOR

Howard, come look at this.

Zindorf rolls his chair to view Naylor's screen. He has opened an email whose banner is from the NYPD. Naylor downloads an attachment. It quickly opens. Both men lean forward, begin reading a series of documents.

ZINDORF

Holy shit.

NAYLOR

Interesting indeed.

INT. GURLEY HOME - DAY

Weber ENTERS the house. Is greeted warmly by Tamara. They sit in facing chairs.

WEBER

You wanted to talk about something important?

Tamara nods.

TAMARA

I need to talk about my abduction and Meagan's disappearance. I've kept it all inside. Since you're an experienced investigator, you might hear something that can lead to a clue...anything.

WEBER

Of course. Tell me about that day. Start anywhere you feel comfortable.

INT. GURLEY FRONT YARD/FORMER HOME - DAY

Weber and Tamara watch Anton raking leaves

TAMARA

It was a couple weeks after the dead rats. Nothing more had happened so we started to relax.

(MORE)

TAMARA (CONT'D)

Then, on a Sunday, Kiarra had band practice at school. They were getting ready for a state-wide competition.

Tamara approaches Anton.

TAMARA (CONT'D)

Time to pick up Kiarra.

ANTON

Didn't know middle school band competitions were so...well...competitive.

TAMARA

She told me to pick up Meagan. Said she needs her help to find an outfit for the concert.

ANTON

Sure you don't want me to come?

She kisses him on the cheek.

TAMARA

You'd just be in the way. I have Detective Naylor's cell phone on speed dial. We'll be fine.

She gets into the family SUV, drives off.

EXT. PARKLAND ROAD WAY - DAY

Tamara and Weber stand by the side of the road that cuts through a heavily-wooded park.

WEBER

This is a perfect spot for an ambush. No homes so no doorbell cameras. No security cameras. Not even traffic cams.

Tamara's SUV rounds the corner, enters the blind spot. A car traveling in the opposite cuts it off. Then a vehicle bumps her SUV from the rear.

TAMARA

It happened so fast. I didn't have time to react.

From each vehicle a SKI-MASKED MAN EXITS. They each also wear coveralls, latex gloves and are armed with semi-auto handguns. Tamara locks the doors, fumbles for her cell phone.

WEBER

It's the Paxton cousins. I've stared at their photos so much I recognize the body types.

The MEN, using the butt of their weapons, smash open the front windows. Meagan SCREAMS while Tamara freezes.

Their seatbelts are cut away, Tamara and Meagan are yanked from the SUV; each herded into one of the attack vehicles.

WEBER (CONT'D)

Jerry grabbed you. So, it was Walter who took Meagan.

INT. ATTACK VEHICLES - DAY

Tamara physically resists but is quickly overpowered by her much bigger Captor. She attempts to SCREAM only to be silenced by her Captor's massive hand.

Meagan puts up a fight, especially when her Captor places her in his vehicle and attempts to put plastic cuffs on her wrists and a cloth bag on her head.

She's so animatedly furious that her Captor struggles to get her under control.

She attempts to claw at his face, grabs the top of his ski mask, rips it from his head.

WEBER

My god. That poor child.

TAMARA

I'm sure they thought Meagan was Kiarra.

WEBER

And when they found out she wasn't, she was disposable.

INT. O'MALLEY'S OFFICE - DAY

WEBER

This was an "all hands on deck" situation?

O'MALLEY

As much as possible. It was Sunday so we were operating with a skeleton staff. When I heard from Detective Naylor, I called in as many people as I could.

HARPER

Including Naylor and Zindorf?

O'Malley LAUGHS.

O'MALLEY

They were the first ones in.

EXT. POLICE HQ - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anton and Kiarra ENTER the building. Greeted immediately by Naylor and Zindorf.

ANTON

Have you found out anything?

Naylor leads him aside while Zindorf stays with Kiarra.

NAYLOR

Tamara was kidnapped. Patrol found the SUV with its windows broken out.

He looks back at Kiarra.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

Was she alone?

Anton is near tears.

ANTON

Kiarra's best friend, Meagan, was with her. They were going shopping.

INT. SQUAD ROOM - DAY/FB

Naylor leads Anton to O'Malley while Zindorf sits with Kiarra. The room buzzes with activity.

ANTON

Do you have anything?

O'MALLEY
Forensics is going over your SUV.

Anton begins to quietly boil with anger.

ANTON
You know damn well who did this!

INT. SQUAD ROOM - LATER THE SAME DAY/FB

Anton and Kiarra are seated on the bench. She's curled up against him as tightly as possible. He's dazed, angry. CHARLIE SANDERS and his wife, BRENDA, have RUSHED INTO the police station. Their faces lined with agony. Charlie moves in zombie-like steps as he approaches them.

O'MALLEY (V.O.)
The worse part was when the parents of the little girl arrived. We had nothing. Some days it really sucks to be a cop.

CHARLIE
Who took our baby?

Tears well in Anton's eyes. His lips quiver. Charlie looks directly at Naylor.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Where's my little girl?

Charlie and Brenda collapse in each other's arms, SOBBING. Naylor quickly gets them help. Pledges they will do everything possible to find Meagan.

O'MALLEY
Your daughter and Mrs. Gurley are probably together. I'm sure they won't be harmed.

He retreats into his office, begins working the phones.

Naylor and Zindorf place the Sanders and the Gurleys in separate interview rooms. As they're walking back to the squad room they are stopped by a FORENSICS DETECTIVE. He shows them a small, shiny cylindrical object.

FORENSICS
This was attached to the SUV's frame. It's a sophisticated tracker. It's pretty clean so it hasn't been on there long.

Naylor and Zindorf are stunned.

ZINDORF
Son-of-a-bitch!

INT. POLICE HQ - SEVERAL HOURS LATER/FB

O'MALLEY (V.O.)
The investigation went on and we were stalled. I got into it with Cagan. He's a good attorney, a good guy. Problem is, he answers to Anita Wolff. Two people are missing and her attitude was this could wait until Monday.

Cagan, O'Malley, Naylor and Zindorf ARGUE over the failure to obtain sweeping search warrants.

Anton, Kiarra and the Sanders remain in their respective rooms. Vowing to stay until family members are rescued.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM ONE - EARLY EVENING/FB

O'MALLEY (V.O.)
Ironically, our first break actually came from the kidnapers.

Anton's lanky frame spread across two metal chairs. Kiarra's head is resting on her arms crossed on the metal table.

He keeps nodding off, then he bolts upright, reaches into his pants pocket. His cell phone, BUZZING and vibrating. He checks the screen. Jumps out of his chair.

INT. SQUAD ROOM - EARLY EVENING/FB

Anton approaches Naylor and Zindorf, holds his cell phone out in front of him, like it's radioactive.

ANTON
It's from Tamara's cell phone.

Naylor takes it from Anton. He's shocked. Zindorf and O'Malley crowd him to read the screen.

SCREENSHOT
I'm ready to come home now. I'm at 11022 Temple Hills Parkway. Hurry. Love You (heart emoji).

NAYLOR

I need a fix on an address...11022
Temple Hills Parkway. Now!

Every Member of the squad room runs to their computers.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

And a visual. We need to know what
we're dealing with.

The renewed commotion has drawn Kiarra and the Sanders to the
squad room.

SQUAD MEMBER 1

The address is a location in
Hyattsville on the District line.

Sanders approaches Anton.

CHARLIE

They found them? They found them?

Anton nods. Charlie hugs his wife. They cry. Kiarra embraces
Anton. She cries.

SQUAD MEMBER 2

I've got a visual. It's an
abandoned industrial park.

Naylor rushes to that computer to check it out.

O'MALLEY

Get a copter over the site. Let's
roll out now!

Turns to Cagan.

O'MALLEY (CONT'D)

I don't give a royal fuck how many
judges you have to piss off. I want
arrest warrants.

CAGAN

On what grounds?

O'MALLEY

Be creative. Let's give a shit
about the victims for once!

EXT. TEMPLE HILLS PARKWAY - EVENING/FB

An old, abandoned industrial park that straddles the Maryland-DC border. Several police cruisers and a van approach. Trailing them is an EMS ambulance.

The police helicopter hovers overhead, illuminating the target building with its searchlight.

The police vehicles park a short distance away. POLICE OFFICERS and SWAT TEAM MEMBERS EXIT their vehicles.

O'Malley silently leads them to the warehouse door. SWAT Team members approach with a battering ram. But, when they try the door handle, the door swings open effortlessly.

INT. WAREHOUSE - EVENING/FB

Darkness inside. The Police ENTER, multiple flashlights illuminate the area.

O'MALLEY

There! Over there!

All lights travel to the warehouse center. Tamara is tied to a chair. A cloth bag over her head.

NAYLOR

Mrs. Gurley, it's Detective Naylor.
You're safe now.

TAMARA

Thank God! Thank God!

He slowly removes the cloth bag. Tamara furiously blinks at the lights focused on her.

TAMARA (CONT'D)

I thought for sure they left me
here to die.

NAYLOR

The girl, Meagan. Where is she?

Tamara struggles to catch her breath, to reorient herself.

TAMARA

I don't know. We were separated.

EMTs wheel in a gurney. Carefully lift her from the chair place her on it.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
My family...?

NAYLOR
They'll be here shortly.

She is wheeled out of the warehouse.

O'MALLEY
Get as many officers here soon as possible. K-9s, too.

INT. PATROL CAR - EVENING/FB

Anton, Kiarra in rear seat. She clings tightly to her father.

NAYLOR (V.O.)
(from the police radio)
Wait 15 minutes then bring them in.

POLICE OFFICER 3 acknowledges.

EXT. WAREHOUSE PARKING LOT - EVENING/FB

Tamara sits upright on the gurney. She's being examined. Two Patrol Cars APPROACH. Before the lead car comes to a complete stop, a rear door flies open. Anton and Kiarra JUMP OUT, run towards Tamara.

Emotional reunion. Crying and kissing. Expressions of love. Naylor pulls Anton aside.

NAYLOR
Physically she's fine but...

ANTON
And Meagan?

Naylor shakes his head. The horror overwhelms Anton. His body sags, wavers. Naylor supports him physically. Anton looks back. Sees Zindorf talking to Charlie and Brenda.

Brenda lets out a blood-curdling SCREAM. Faints. Zindorf catches her before she hits the ground. EMTs rush to her aid. Charlie pounds his fists on the police cruiser.

CHARLIE
No! No! No! No!

Anton staggers to his wife and daughter. They embrace, CRY in their shared misery.

Naylor motions to Zindorf, points to the lead police cruiser. Zindorf commandeers the vehicle.

NAYLOR

C'mon. Let's get you home.

INT. OFFICE OF ASA DANIEL CAGAN - DAY

CAGAN

So the investigation went from one disaster to another. Anita Wolff, who didn't care about finding two kidnapped women on Sunday suddenly ordered a line-up on Monday.

CALDWELL

Why the urgency?

CAGAN

I bullied a young magistrate to issue an arrest warrant. I got reamed for that. The pisser was Jake and Nick's alibi. Frankel said they were at his office going over Nick's defense. They demanded a quickie line up to weaponize Mrs. Gurley's trauma.

CALDWELL

"They"? You're implicating your boss?

CAGAN

I'm convinced she was colluding with Frankel. They were BFFs for years in the Public Defenders Office. I was expecting a disaster but I had no concept of how big a clusterfuck it would be.

INT. POLICE HQ, SQUAD ROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The Detectives and Gurleys ENTER. Are met by Cagan and O'Malley. Then Frankel ENTERS.

INT. LINE UP ROOM - DAY/FB

Cagan, O'Malley, Frankel ENTER. Followed by Naylor and Tamara. Frankel gives Tamara withering stare. Naylor steps in front of Frankel, stares him down.

Naylor presses the intercom button.

NAYLOR
Send them in.

The POLICE in the line-up room escort in SIX MEN, including the Paxton cousins.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)
Number 1, step forward.

O'Malley moves next to Tamara.

O'MALLEY
Take your time, Mrs. Gurley.

TAMARA
It all happened so fast. I was taken by surprise.

CAGAN
Try hard. Concentrate.

Her frustration grows.

TAMARA
He had on a ski mask! My face was covered.

NAYLOR
Step back, Number 1. Number 2, step forward.

TAMARA
And he never spoke.

O'MALLEY
You're our only shot.

Frankel senses an opportunity to make matters worse.

FRANKEL
Quit coaching her.

NAYLOR
Step back Number 2.

FRANKEL
I insist you end this farce immediately.

CAGAN
(angry)
Mr. Frankel!

Overwhelmed by traumatic events now only hours old, she begins crying.

TAMARA
I can't. I just can't.

INT. SQUAD ROOM - DAY/FB

Tamara, tears streaming down her face, EXITS the line-up room. Anton rushes to comfort her. Naylor, Zindorf, Cagan, O'Malley and Frankel FOLLOW.

FRANKEL
I'd love to see you build a case
around a whining, hysterical woman.

Anton increasingly tense watching his wife suffer, explodes at Frankel's remark. Attacks him. The room dissolves into bedlam. Naylor pulls Anton off Frankel as he YELLS for help.

INT. O'MALLEY'S OFFICE - DAY/FB

Anton sits in a corner chair, fidgeting like a caged animal.

CAGAN
I don't think you realize how much
damage you've done.

Anton is stunned into total disbelief.

ANTON
Damage I've done?!? They attack my
family and you're letting them go?

CAGAN
We have no choice.

ANTON
What about Meagan?

O'MALLEY
I've got every available person
working to find her.

ANTON
They know where she is. Do
something for the love of God!

O'MALLEY

Even if we could get a warrant, the no bail policy means they get released immediately. That's the law now.

Anton leaps out of the chair, leans over O'Malley's desk.

ANTON

Fuck the law! The law is working great for the criminals. But your precious fucking laws didn't do anything for Ronald Case or Meagan and they're not doing anything for me or my family.

CAGAN

What do you want us to do?

ANTON

Protection. Someone is threatening us! Does it matter who at this point?

CAGAN

We might be able to move you to a safe house until the trial.

Anton is in no mood for half measures.

ANTON

You know, Cagan, you're a joke. What happens after the trial? Do we face the Paxtons alone?

Cagan's body language suggests he's weary from dealing with such no-win issues.

CAGAN

I'm truly sorry. I wish I was able to offer a better solution. If you don't accept our offer, no matter how flawed, you're going to be totally on your own.

Anton heads for the door, opens it, looks back at Cagan.

ANTON

Seems it's been that way since the beginning.

INT. JET CABIN - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anton is in the aisle seat, reading. Next to him Kiarra sleeps fitfully. He glances over at Tamara in the window seat. Her expression is of someone who has decided to withdraw from the world.

CALDWELL (V.O.)
So they left without telling
anyone?

NAYLOR (V.O.)
Can't blame them. We couldn't
protect them. We couldn't keep the
Paxtons locked up. He stashed his
wife and daughter with his older
sister in Fort Myers Florida.

INT. POLICE CAR - DAY

Zindorf drives as the car rolls slowly down the street. He and Naylor scour the area, looking for someone.

NAYLOR
There he is...up ahead.

Naylor points to IVAN VILLAREL, Afro-Cuban extraction, slight build, late 20s, flashy dresser. The car pulls up along side of him.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)
Ivan, when I call, it's only polite
that you call back.

Ivan keeps walking.

IVAN
I got nothing to say.

The car stops. Naylor gets out to confront him.

NAYLOR
Sure you do. Important people need
to know about the Paxtons.

IVAN
I'm no snitch.

NAYLOR
You can't snitch on dead people. I
just want to make sure you know
what not to say.

Ivan shrugs.

IVAN
I shouldn't lie. God knows when
you're lying.

Naylor is shocked.

NAYLOR
Do tell. Since when have you been
afraid of God?

IVAN
Always, I think. I've done some bad
things. At some point, I'm gonna
have to pay.

NAYLOR
Don't piss me off or you'll have
more to deal with than God.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Ivan sits at the table. Gets up walks around the room. Sits
again. Whistles. Drums his fingers on the table. Harper and
Weber ENTER.

IVAN
I want my lawyer.

HARPER
Easy. We just need some background
information on the Paxtons.

IVAN
Too bad about them. They should
have known...

WEBER
Known what?

Ivan is extremely agitated

IVAN
I better leave.

WEBER
Who should have known? The Paxtons?

IVAN
I forget. I take drugs. Scrambles
my brains. I hear shit that's not
even there.

Harper opens a folder.

HARPER

Quite a jacket you have here. Seems you have a trial pending. Aggravated assault, drug possession, felony weight. Intent to distribute...

IVAN

Ain't worried. I'll get a slap on the wrist like all the other times.

WEBER

What if we get your case transferred to the feds.

IVAN

You can't do that.

WEBER

We're good friends with the Maryland Attorney General. She owes us a big favor. I'm sure she'll expedite getting your case moved.

Ivan is deeply worried.

HARPER

What should the Paxtons have known?

IVAN

That the guy returned.

HARPER

What "guy"? Anton Gurley?

IVAN

Yea, him. He stalked them. Said he was going to kill them all.

HARPER

How do you know that?

IVAN

I was in the pool hall when he came for Walter and Jerry.

INT. POOL HALL - NIGHT

It's sparsely populated. Jerry and Walter shoot 9-ball at a far table. Ivan is seated in a chair against the wall. Harper and Weber stand next to him

IVAN

I didn't notice when he walked in
but he went straight for them.

ANTON (O.S.)

Hello boys, how it's going?

They look over their shoulders, see Anton about 10 feet away.
They begin to reach for their weapons but Anton pulls a
Remington shotgun from beneath his overcoat. RACKS it.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Drop 'em on the floor.

They hesitate. Anton waves the shotgun at them.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Try it and you're dead.

They put their guns on the floor.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Kick 'em over, nice and easy.

Jerry kicks both weapons in Anton's direction. He picks them
up, puts them in his overcoat.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Surprised to see me again?

They didn't recognize him at first because he now sports a
thick, bushy full-face beard and his hair is longer. But now
they realize who it is.

ANTON (CONT'D)

I know I look different. But take a
real good look. I'm the last person
you'll ever see.

IVAN

He's waving around that bad-ass
shotgun so I got the hell out of
the way.

Before the brothers can react, Anton FIRES the shotgun. He
raises the barrel at the last possible second. The shotgun
blows away the florescent light over the pool table.

The brothers dive to the floor, huddle against the pool
table. Anton aims the barrel only inches from their faces.

ANTON

I'm going to kill both of you. But not here...not now. So just lie there, like the dirt you are.

IVAN

I was hanging near the front door so I saw it all go down. When he passed me on his way out, he winked like he was all satisfied and shit with what he did.

Anton moves quickly, seems to vanish. The brothers stay on the floor. After a few seconds they peer over the top of the pool table.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

WEBER

No one called the police?

IVAN

In that part of town, no one calls the police.

HARPER

Witness any additional encounters?

Ivan shakes his head.

IVAN

No, but that's all they talked about. This Gurley fellow, he was fucking with them like a commando. He literally scared the shit outta Nick. Freaked him big time.

EXT. CITY STREET CORNER - DAY

Ivan, Harper and Weber observe the encounter.

Nick EXITS from his rowhouse. Takes one step. He looks down, EXHALES a low SCREAM. His stoop is covered in dead rats.

As he sidesteps the rats and hops down to the street Anton EMERGES from the alley. Points a 9mm Beretta pistol at him.

ANTON

I figured you'd want your pets returned.

It takes Nick several beats to recognize Anton.

ANTON (CONT'D)

How you been, Nick? What's it like to be free...and alive?

NICK

Be reasonable, man. None of this would be happening if you had just decided not to testify.

ANTON

Catholic school taught me there are certain sins where God demands swift and brutal vengeance. Like killing children.

NICK

That wasn't me! That wasn't me! Walter did that!

ANTON

He's not here so you'll have to do.

Nick cowers, fully expecting to be shot. Anton pulls the trigger. The gun's hammer strikes an empty chamber. Nick peeks. Anton is smiling.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Guess it's not your time pal.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

HARPER

You expect us to believe that Anton Gurley...an ordinary man...no criminal record or background..took the fight to the Paxtons??

IVAN

Ironic, ain't it? I mean, they laughed at him. And when he disappeared, they were sure Nick was in the clear and then...boom...he shows back up all different and shit. Like he went to Rambo University.

WEBER

Jake. What was his reaction?

INT. FOYER, JAKE'S APARTMENT BLDG. - EARLY EVENING

IVAN

He called them pussies. Said they were a bunch of wildebeests, whatever the fuck that is. Then he came for Jake. Did a total mind-fuck on him. Brilliant, really.

HARPER

This place is a dump.

IVAN

Jake said spending money made you a target.

Jake approaches his mailbox, opens it with his key. Looks inside. His face reveals surprise, disbelief. Reaches in, pulls out a sheet of paper. Taped to it is a 9mm bullet.

Written on the paper is: "This is how it ends."

INT. BARROOM - EVENING

Jake sits at the bar, drinking a beer. He spins the 9mm bullet with his finger. He appears lost in thought. B.G. Telephone rings. The BARTENDER answers.

BARTENDER

Hey Jake! Telephone.

The Bartender slides the phone to him.

JAKE

Yeah?

ANTON(V.O.)

I'm watching you.

JAKE

Who is this?

ANTON (V.O.)

The bullet.

JAKE

What do you want?

ANTON (V.O.)

I'm going to take you down. And you won't see me coming.

Jake slams down the receiver. Angrily tosses the bullet across the barroom.

EXT. THE STREET - EVENING

Ivan, Harper and Weber watch the action unfold.

Anton stands directly across the street. Listens to the phone go dead. Smiles. He removes the phone's SIM card. Crushes it with his foot.

IVAN

The dude was really inventive.
Jake, being Jake, refused to
believe this guy was a problem.

INT. ROWHOUSE APARTMENT STAIRS - NIGHT

Jake slowly walks to the top of the dimly-lit stairs.

IVAN

Ambushing Jake right in front of
his own apartment was crazy and
brilliant at the same time.

HARPER

This is all bullshit, you petty ass
conman. Anton Gurley is not a real-
life Rambo. Did Naylor help you
create this fantasy?

IVAN

Every word is the truth. I swear.

INT. ROWHOUSE APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway also is poorly lit. Jake approaches his apartment.

Gets to the door, stops. Looks at it suspiciously. Gives the door a gentle push. It swings open.

Jake backs up slowly. Then, as if out of thin air, an arm reaches out from behind, yokes Jake around the neck.

The tip of a long-blade hunting knife jammed against his jugular.

ANTON (O.S)

When I said you wouldn't see me coming, I felt compelled to prove it. I'm going to take care of you last. Lie face down, no quick moves.

With the knife point still against the jugular, Jake complies. Anton frisks him, locates a revolver.

Anton pushes the blade against the jugular. A small spot of blood appears. Jake's face contorts in rage.

ANTON (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Now, it's down to you and me.

Suddenly it's quiet. Jake finally looks up. The hallway is deserted.

EXT. THE STREET - NIGHT

He EXITS FROM the apartment. Starts to run down the street. Doesn't see anyone. Reverses direction. Still doesn't see anyone. Touches his neck, looks at the blood on his fingers. Kicks a trash can in frustration.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Harper and Weber seated at the bar.

WEBER

So? What do we do now?

HARPER

Did you believe his story?

WEBER

A lot of it sounded like he was hallucinating the entire thing. Still....

Harper nods.

HARPER

The part where he said Jake called them wildebeests. Ivan didn't pull that word out of the air.

WEBER

Then Anton really was a Rambo??

HARPER

As strange as this entire case
is...why the fuck not? For now,
let's keep this to ourselves.

Weber nods agreement.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

CALDWELL

And you didn't see Mr. Gurley again
until after the home invasion?

NAYLOR

I didn't know he had returned.

INT. GURLEY KITCHEN/FORMER HOME - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anton is at the table, eating a sandwich. DOORBELL. Reaches
for a Beretta. DOORBELL continues as he approaches the front
door. Stands on the backside.

ANTON

Who is it?

NAYLOR (O.C.)

Detective Naylor.

ANTON

What do you want?

NAYLOR (O.C.)

To talk.

Anton unlocks and opens the door. Naylor is surprised to be
greeted by a long-haired, bearded man wielding a firearm.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

What the hell happened to you?

Anton turns his back to Naylor, walks back to the kitchen.

ANTON

I thought you wanted to talk? So
talk and make it quick.

Naylor enters the kitchen, sees the weapons and ammo.

NAYLOR

An informant told me someone was stalking the Paxtons. I never imagined it was you.

ANTON

Neither did the Paxtons. That's worked to my advantage.

NAYLOR

Have you lost your mind? Jake is going to come for you.

Naylor then spots a calendar on the pantry door. Studies it closely. He notices all the red marker slashes, the circled date of "May 27". This day's date is "May 23".

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

But that's what you want him to do.

Naylor takes out his cell phone.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

You're insane. You have no legal justification

ANTON

Now you sound like that asshole, Cagan. You're right. There's been no direct threat. Legally, there's no clear and present danger. But sooner or later, they're going to kill me, my wife and daughter. I decided to make the first move.

NAYLOR

You still can get protective custody.

ANTON

I've got all the protection I need.

Naylor picks up the shotgun.

NAYLOR

When the time comes, you won't be able to use this.

Anton smiles at Naylor.

ANTON

Wait and see.

NAYLOR

You actually think you can get away with this?

ANTON

Why not? The criminals do it all the time. They're doing fine. If you decide to have me arrested, watched or whatever you think will stop me, it'll only delay the inevitable. You can't stop me any more than you could have stopped Nick from killing that kid, or the Paxtons from terrorizing my family or to prevent what happened to Meagan. Truth is, you can't stop anyone. All you can do is wait and react and hope everything works out. Doesn't sound like much of a system.

Naylor stares at Anton, LEAVES without speaking.

Anton reaches for his cell phone. Dials a number.

ANTON (CONT'D)

It's me. Don't hang up! Please don't hang up! Yea, I'm back. I've got something planned and I could use your help.

INT. SOUTH BALTIMORE ROWHOUSE - DAY

Weber ENTERS via the front foyer.

WEBER

I'm home!

SAMANTHA JASPER, APPEARS from the rear of the downstairs. She's an African-American woman in her mid-40s. She's as petite as Weber is large. She gives Weber a hug. They kiss.

JASPER

I'm so happy you could make it back this weekend.

They walk through the living area into the kitchen where dinner is being prepared.

WEBER

I needed to separate myself from this case...for my own sanity.

(MORE)

WEBER (CONT'D)

(BEAT)
Everything looks delicious.

JASPER

All your favorites. Why are you so troubled?

Weber begins gnawing on some cut vegetables.

WEBER

This is the most confusing, upside-down, heartbreaking case I've ever encountered. So much of it makes no sense and the parts that do shouldn't.

JASPER

You're an excellent investigator. I'm sure you'll solve it.

Weber continues to consume the raw veggies.

WEBER

(quietly)
I don't think I want to.

EXT. ROUTE 1 HIGHWAY, LAUREL, MD - DAY

Harper drives along one of the main roads in PG County, MD. Traffic slows to a crawl and his attention is drawn to an apartment complex parking lot.

The lot is jammed with police, fire and EMS vehicles from various jurisdictions, plus a growing crowd of onlookers.

He pulls into the parking lot. Makes his way through the crowd. When he gets to the police restraining line, he shows his CIB badge and is waved in.

The focus is a red sedan. Forensic experts surround it, working diligently in search of clues.

Harper approaches two Prince George's POLICEMEN who are securing the crime scene. He shows his badge.

HARPER

What's going on?

PG OFFICER 1

Homicide investigation.

The Officers examine his badge.

PG OFFICER 2
Is CIB taking over this case?

Harper shakes his head.

HARPER
No. I was driving by, saw all the
commotion.

The PG Officers escort him towards the red sedan. The driver's window is down. The lifeless body of an African-American female is slumped over the steering wheel.

She has been shot in the face. Blood, brain and bone spattered across the steering wheel, dashboard and windshield.

PG OFFICER 2
This is Eva Blasingame; 36 years
old, shot gunned to death by her
husband. Their 3 children saw the
whole thing from the back seat.
Happened this morning, in broad
daylight.

HARPER
An ambush?

PG OFFICER 1
She was expecting something to
happen. Wore a bullet proof vest.

PG OFFICER 2
Had a protective order too.

PG OFFICER 1
He beat the living shit out of her
couple of nights ago. It all was
recorded on their home security
cameras. Brutal.

HARPER
And he was out?

The two Officers look at each other.

PG OFFICER 1
You're obviously not from around
here. Thanks to our progressive
State's Attorney, you don't get
locked up for anything.

PG OFFICER 2
They pleaded him down to simple
assault and he got released. No
bail. No nothing.

Harper stares at the victim.

HARPER
You guys ever hear of Anton Gurley?

The Officers look at each other, processing that name.

PG OFFICER 1
Oh yea. He wiped out the Paxtons.
Good riddance.

HARPER
Do you think it was right or wrong?

They seem reluctant to answer.

HARPER (CONT'D)
We're totally off the record here.

PG OFFICER 1
Right or wrong doesn't matter
anymore.

The two Officers turn away from Harper. A clear sign they're
done answering his questions.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Caldwell is on a ZOOM call.

CALDWELL
Thank you, Major Fernandez for
agreeing to talk to me.

Even on a laptop screen it's apparent Serge is angrily
annoyed.

SERGE
I was ordered to cooperate. What do
you want?

CALDWELL
It's about your brother's visit.

SERGE
And?

CALDWELL

Didn't it seem odd that he left his family in Florida and came alone?

EXT. ASHEVILLE, N.C. - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Anton drives through the city of Asheville, following signs taking him in the direction of The Great Smokey Mountains.

EXT. RURAL WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA - DAY/FB

Wide highways disappear, replaced by two-lane rural roads.

SERGE (V.O.)

He had no choice. Tamara blamed him for everything. They had to separate for the marriage to survive. Where else could he go?

EXT. WILDER CREEK, N.C. - DAY/FB

A small town near the Tennessee border. Hasn't made many concessions to the 21st Century. A few buildings straddle the main road.

Anton drives slowly, looking for signs of life. Spots several LOCAL MEN gathered at a combination general store/gas station. He parks, approaches them.

MAN 1

You lost?

ANTON

Not sure. I'm looking for an old friend. Name is Serge Fernandez.

The Men give each other knowing looks. Anton notes it.

MAN 3

You a government man?

ANTON

No. Why do you ask?

MAN 2

Couple times a year he has visitors. They show up in black Suburbans with DC tags.

MAN 1

They hike into the forest and come back a few days later.

ANTON

How do I get to him?

MAN 3

On foot. It'll take you three, maybe four hours.

EXT. THE FOREST - DAY/FB

Anton hikes along a steep trail, stumbles frequently. He's out of shape for such a climb. Sits on a log, takes a swig from a canteen. Checks his watch.

ANTON

Three or four hours, my ass.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY/FB

Spots a cabin in a clearing. His legs find a new burst of energy. He reaches the cabin. Listens for any sound, looks for any movement. Surveys the cabin exterior. Notes the solar panels and multiple antennas on the roof.

ANTON

Serge? Serge?

SERGE (V.O.)

We hadn't seen each other in years, with me being deployed mostly overseas. It was a real surprise.

INT. CABIN - DAY/FB

Anton carefully pushes open the unlocked door. It is a neat, nice-sized cabin. A separate kitchen has a refrigerator and propane fueled stove top. Shelves stacked with canned goods occupy one wall. A table is pushed against one corner. A small bedroom completes his quick tour.

ANTON

Serge?

No answer. He's drawn to a cluster of framed photos on top of the dresser. They're all of Anton and Serge.

A picture of them as high-school football players. A picture of their high school graduation. Anton and Serge stand on either side of Anton's MOTHER and FATHER. Everyone is happy.

Anton turns back to the door, is startled to find Serge standing in the doorway. A shotgun is pointed right at him.

ANTON (CONT'D)
Fuck! Where'd you come from?

SERGE
You set off the security alarm.

Anton points at the shotgun still pointed at him.

ANTON
You wouldn't or would you?

Serge smiles.

SERGE
Up here it's easy to hide the body.

They LAUGH, embrace in a joyous reunion.

CALDWELL (V.O.)
What did you two do during all that time?

SERGE (V.O.)
Spent time catching up. Told me all about what happened. He was an emotional mess.

EXT. CABIN PORCH - TWILIGHT/FB

Serge lights a lantern. Picks up a crockery jug, pours the content into two cups. Hands one to Anton.

ANTON
This is quite a set-up you got.

SERGE
It serves its purpose.

The men sip their drinks. The silence is awkward.

SERGE (CONT'D)
Coming here is a mistake. I can't help you.

Anton's voice assumes a tone of pleading desperation.

ANTON

They've killed two people. My family is next. When Dad was dying you showed up at the hospital, like out of thin air. He made you promise that you'd always look after us.

The mention of Anton's father causes a noticeable reaction in Serge. He becomes lost in a flood of memories. His speech is soft, almost child like.

SERGE

He was the greatest man I've ever known. I owe your family everything. If I go missing and bodies begin piling up in my hometown the consequences would be far more dangerous than any threat from a local gang.

ANTON

Sounds like you got caught up in some real nasty business.

Serge shrugs.

SERGE

The less you know, the better.

ANTON

You still can help me.

SERGE

How?

ANTON

Train me to kill. Make me your proxy.

Serge's first reaction is disbelief. Then LAUGHTER. Anton doesn't like being ridiculed.

ANTON (CONT'D)

Why is that so funny?

SERGE

What you want is impossible. You're too old, too comfortable, too soft, too moral.

ANTON

I was in the Army. I know how to handle weapons.

SERGE

Oh, I can teach you to be an above average marksman but that's not the problem.

He taps Anton on the forehead and then on the chest.

SERGE (CONT'D)

I can't give you the mind and heart needed to kill. It's way too late.

Anton is angered by Serge's casual dismissal.

ANTON

With your help, I can do it.

CALDWELL (V.O.)

Did he ask for your assistance?

SERGE (V.O.)

Why don't you just ask what you want to ask?

Serge calmly pours himself another drink.

SERGE

Forget it. I'm not going to fool you into believing you can, only to send you merrily to a certain death. Take Tamara and Kiarra and start all over somewhere new. I've done it plenty of times. It's not that bad.

ANTON

If I run, the criminals win.

SERGE

What makes you think they haven't won already?

ANTON

I've got to settle the score. I've got to make damn sure my family can live in peace. I'm going to do this, with or without your help.

Serge looks into Anton's eyes.

SERGE

You're angry enough. You're certainly scared enough. Who knows, maybe you can do it.

EXT. SERGE'S CABIN - DAY/FB

It's a sunny morning. Anton and Serge EMERGE from the cabin. Five scarecrow-like figures are situated in a row at the edge of the clearing.

On a bench are a shotgun, shells, several handguns, ammo clips. Serge picks up the shotgun.

SERGE

This is a Remington 870 Magnum slide-action pump shotgun. It's the 18-inch barrel, police riot model. Its 12-gauge shells can be fired in rapid succession.

He loads it, walks to within 15 yards of the scarecrows. He fires from the hip. Multiple shots FIRED in a near continuous burst. Serge's hands work the shotgun slide like a virtuoso.

Anton jumps at the noise. Watches in amazement as the buckshot effortlessly rips through the targets, reducing 4 of the 5 to nothingness. After a few seconds the stillness returns. Serge hands the shotgun to Anton.

Picks up a handgun.

SERGE (CONT'D)

This is the Beretta M9. It's lightweight, accurate and deadly. Use it in close quarters when the target is out of the Remington's range.

ANTON

I always imagined you used super sophisticated weapons like James Bond.

SERGE

The Remington's my favorite. Great kill power.

Anton examines the weapon cautiously, as if he's afraid to accidentally unleash its force. Serge takes it back, reloads it. Gives it back to Anton, points to the remaining target.

SERGE (CONT'D)

He's yours.

Anton approaches, raising the shotgun to his shoulder.

SERGE (CONT'D)
It's got a kick. Brace yourself
then just squeeze the trigger.

Anton FIRES the shotgun. The recoil staggers him backward. He trips, falls, misses the target completely. He looks up at Serge, embarrassed.

SERGE (CONT'D)
Not bad for your first try. Do it
again.

Anton gets up, aims, squeezes the trigger. This time he's prepared for the recoil. His aim is off badly. The buckshot hits the target in the "feet".

SERGE (CONT'D)
It takes real talent to miss
anything at this range.

ANTON
Sorry.

SERGE
Don't be.

Points to the target.

SERGE (CONT'D)
You're suppose to make that son-of-
a-bitch sorry.

Anton raises the shotgun.

SERGE (CONT'D)
That's not some stuffed dummy.
That's the animal who put his hands
on Tamara. It's the human garbage
who'd sell Kiarra to sex
traffickers.

His voice rises.

SERGE (CONT'D)
That's the motherfucker who's made
your life a living hell. You want
to kill him! Kill him! Kill him!!

Anton FIRES, cuts the target in half. He can't believe what he's done. Serge nods, smiles.

SERGE (V.O.)

My mission was to help him overcome his trauma so he could begin to rebuild his life.

CALDWELL (V.O.)

How did you manage to accomplish that?

SERGE (V.O.)

We did a lot of fun "guy" stuff.

EXT. THE WOODS III - DAY/FB

Serge leads Anton on an obstacle-course-style run through dense underbrush and forest. Leap a small ravine, zigzag up and down a rise, cross a rapidly running stream.

EXT. THE WOODS IV - DAY/FB

They use a 2-man saw to cut through a large tree trunk. Anton struggles to keep up the pace while Serge works effortlessly.

EXT. SERGE'S CABIN -DAY/FB

Anton laying on the ground. Serge repeatedly slams a medicine ball into his mid-section. Anton doubles up in pain.

SERGE

How you doing?

ANTON

(through clenched teeth)
Fine!

Serge slams the medicine ball even harder

EXT. SERGE'S CABIN - DAY/FB

Anton sits in a wooden tub, soaking his tired body. Serge APPROACHES, carrying a bucket of hot water. He pours it into the tub. Anton SIGHS from exhaustion.

SERGE

You OK?

ANTON

I feel like shit.

SERGE

Good.

EXT. CLEARING IN THE WOODS - DAY/FB

Serge stands at the edge of the clearing. Anton sprints from the woods, carrying the shotgun. His hair is even longer, the beard full and bushy.

SERGE

Now!

Anton hits the ground, rolls forward, comes up standing, shotgun at the ready. FIRES at nearby scarecrow target. Hits it dead center. Quickly pivots 180 degrees, FIRES another round and destroys another target.

Races to the edge of the clearing, hits the ground, assumes the prone firing position. Hits the targets positioned at the tree line. Serge APPLAUDS.

EXT. SERGE'S CABIN -DAY/FB

Anton and Serge stand 10 feet apart.

SERGE

Close your eyes.

When he does, Serge aims a handgun at Anton, FIRES a round. Anton's reaction is panic, falls to the ground.

ANTON

That was a fucking live round!!

SERGE

The Paxtons aren't going to be shooting blanks. You need to stay composed when you're under fire.

He fires off another round. Anton has the same reaction.

SERGE (CONT'D)

Panic gets you killed...quickly.

EXT. THE WOODS - DAWN/FB

A heavy mist hangs over the mountains, swirls around the trees like floating cotton swatches.

Anton, carrying a hunting rifle, moves quietly through the woods. He stops, checks for signs. He is stalking something.

Enters a small clearing. From the other side comes a LOUD, GRUNTING SOUND, the fearsome warning of a large beast.

Anton moves forward, rifle in firing position. The GRUNTING becomes louder. A LARGE TUSKED BOAR BURSTS from the forest cover. Charges directly at Anton.

He aims, hesitates. Not the boar. It charges forward with full intent on goring him. From behind SHOTS RING OUT. The boar stumbles, rolls forward, stops at Anton's feet, dead.

Anton turns. Serge COMES RUNNING out of the woods.

ANTON

Serge...I...

Serge is livid. He charges as relentlessly as the boar.

SERGE

You sloppy, stupid bastard. I knew you couldn't do it.

Anton tries to stammer out a response. Serge delivers a forearm smash to the head. Anton crashes to the ground.

SERGE (CONT'D)

You pathetic clown. How do you expect to kill four men when you can't kill a wild animal?

Serge grabs Anton's shirt collar. Pulls him face-to-face.

SERGE (CONT'D)

You're asking me to send you to a certain death. That outcome is god-damn-guaranteed unless you develop the will to pull the fucking trigger without hesitation, remorse or regret.

Serge STORMS OFF. Anton struggles to his feet, trembles and shakes in rage and humiliation. Begins kicking the dead boar. Kicks it repeatedly to relieve his anger and despair. Picks up the rifle, uses it to repeatedly club the boar. Then tosses it into the woods.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT/FB

Serge, dressed in camouflage, face smeared with lampblack, moves silently through the woods. Stops. Strains to listen for any sound. Hides behind a tree. Stands motionless for an extended time. When he's satisfied it's safe, he moves.

As if he materialized from the night mist, Anton takes him totally by surprise, puts the point of a long-blade knife to Serge's jugular. He raises his hands in surrender. Anton applies pressure on the knife, draws blood. Shocked at first, Serge's face creases into a big, wide smile. Anton lowers the knife. Serge nods approvingly.

EXT. SERGE'S CABIN -DAY/FB

Serge fires repeatedly in Anton's direction. He stays upright, stoic. He's bare-chested, showing additional muscle.

Serge moves at him, firing shot after shot. Anton remains unaffected. Fixes his gaze on Serge as he approaches.

When Serge is within arm's reach, Anton employs a cat-like move and literally snatches the handgun from Serge's grasp. Aims it as his head.

Serge, totally surprised, LAUGHS.

EXT. THE CABIN - NIGHT/FB

Several large pieces of brown wrapping paper have been nailed to the side of the cabin. Drawn on them are rough sketches of the interior of Anton's house. He explains the layout to Serge using a red magic marker, circles key strategic areas.

SERGE

Run the wires from here to here and then to the generator. No way they'll expect this. That'll help even the odds.

EXT. CABIN PORCH - NIGHT/FB

The two men relax, sipping Serge's moonshine, under the light of several kerosene lanterns.

Serge goes into the cabin, returns carrying several items.

SERGE

Some going away presents.

Hands him a stack of ammunition clips for the Berettas.

SERGE (CONT'D)

I personally designed and loaded these rounds. They're extremely lethal. Stand up.

Anton does. Serge holds up a bulletproof vest.

SERGE (CONT'D)
Body armor with my special
modifications.

Taps it with a fist. It sounds thick, solid.

SERGE (CONT'D)
It'll stop anything short of a
bazooka.

ANTON
Thanks Serge.

SERGE
I wonder if you'll be able to live
with the person you'll become.

ANTON
Will I grow another head? Or fangs?
I'm going to take care of this and
then get back to normal.

SERGE
Don't con yourself into thinking
you'll be the same Anton Gurley who
hiked up this mountain a few months
ago. During a killing frenzy you'll
experience a sense of power you
never thought possible. It
rearranges every fiber of your
being. It's seductive.

ANTON
"Seductive"? Strange choice of
words.

SERGE
How many times did we see "Star
Wars"?

The question really baffles Anton.

ANTON
A dozen times, maybe more?

SERGE
Remember the "dark side" of The
Force?

He nods.

SERGE (CONT'D)
Then you know what to expect.

INT. TAMARA'S SUV - DAY

She's on a phone call via Bluetooth.

TAMARA
Ralph, I don't care what they offer. Take it. We've got to get rid of this property....They plan to tear it down? Good! The place will be open....no, I don't know what shape the interior is in...I haven't been back since..I haven't been back. Just hurry and get here.

She hangs up as she enters the driveway. Stops in front. Stares at the home for a long time.

EXT. FRONT PORCH, FORMER HOME - DAY

Steps up on the porch, sees the dried blood, does her best to side-step it as she unlocks the plywood door.

Removes the padlock, pulls the door open. Turns away to face the front yard. Looks back over her shoulder at the wide open entrance. Turns, leans to get a look at the inside.

She takes a small step towards the entrance. Stops, leans forward to look again. Even though it's a sunny day, the house's interior projects a foreboding darkness.

Finally, lured by curiosity, she steps inside.

INT. GURLEY FORMER HOME/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tamara ENTERS. Takes small steps. Stops, waits for her eyes to adjust to the change in contrast. Begins to notice the signs of the struggle. The wooden banister is decimated with multiple spindles reduced to matchstick size.

Turns and faces the entrance way, GASPS at the multitude of bullet holes. Takes hesitant steps into the hallway, as if expecting an attack. Slowly walks towards the kitchen.

INT. GURLEY'S FORMER HOME/KITCHEN - DAY

Tamara ENTERS. The amount of visible damage conveys to her the magnitude of the struggle that happened in that space. She covers her mouth, as if stopping herself from screaming.

Her attention is drawn to the louvered doors that once separated the laundry room from the kitchen. They now are just random bits of wood sawed away by an ammunition barrage.

She pushes the doors open and reacts with a visible jolt as she sees the total annihilation of that space, Her eyes are drawn down to the floor. She leaps back as she finds herself standing on an unfamiliar substance.

She leans closer then recoils when she realizes it is a large area of dried blood. She leans over and touches it. Pulls her hand back, touches it again. Kneels.

Begins scratching at it with her fingernails. Slow at first then quicker, checking under her fingernails. Then frantically as if she can determine the DNA of the victims through osmosis.

Harder and harder she scratches, in a futile attempt to remove it. Then she releases a low, yet shrill scream. Stops. Looks at the flakes of blood on her hands. Starts crying. Softly then increasingly louder and more emotionally painful until it rises to the level of a forlorn wail.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Harper and Weber are putting manila files into boxes. Caldwell ENTERS.

CALDWELL

Sorry I've been away. How's the investigation going?

HARPER

We're done.

Caldwell is shocked.

CALDWELL

I must not have heard you correctly.

HARPER

Sgt. Weber and I have found zero evidence that absolutely contradicts the findings of the Prince George's police or the State's Attorney.

Caldwell looks at Weber.

WEBER

We both agree on this, sir.

CALDWELL

What happened to all the so-called sketchy "shit"?

HARPER

It was more sketchy than we thought. We got carried away in our initial enthusiasm.

WEBER

None of it panned out.

CALDWELL

What the fuck is going on?

Harper SIGHS. His shoulders sag. Weber continues putting folders into a box while shaking her head.

HARPER

Sir, we're wrong to second guess the work of this police department. They're going to push back hard.

CALDWELL

Let them.

WEBER

Naylor is digging into your background and the powers in this county are not going to stop him.

HARPER

(softly)

We're done. Time to go home.

Caldwell remains defiant.

CALDWELL

Stand down. I have one more card to play.

HARPER

Which is?

CALDWELL

I'm collecting more background information on the mysterious Major Fernandez.

He EXITS. Leaves behind two dispirited subordinates.

EXT. GURLEY LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Anton is alone. Mindlessly staring at the TV, not truly watching it. Tamara ENTERS. Grabs the remote, turns off the TV. Sits next to Anton, surprised by her actions.

TAMARA

I need to know something.

ANTON

Sure. What?

TAMARA

I need to know how you killed those men.

Anton is shocked almost beyond words.

ANTON

I...I've tried to forget it. Why..why now after all this time...?

She gently take his hand, kisses it.

TAMARA

I've wrestled with my feelings about this. I can let it go if I know you made those monsters suffer. Even if only for a moment they felt the pain that I've felt. That Kiarra has felt and that Charlie and Brenda feel every day. Tell me they didn't die quick, painless deaths.

Anton squeezes her hand. Pained expressions cross his face.

ANTON

Serge came up with the plan. Use my skills as an electrician to give me the tactical advantage.

INT. GURLEY FORMER HOME/CENTER HALLWAY - NIGHT

The scenes evolve in what seems to be real time as Anton recounts that night. Tamara witnesses his actions.

In the hall from the kitchen to the living room. Anton nails thin, meshed wire to the floor. He secures the corners with knobbed glass insulators.

Stands, nods in approval. Strings wire along the ceiling, stapling it. Connects the wires to small spotlights.

Takes all the lead wires, unrolls them into the living room.

ANTON

The goal was to transform the
downstairs into an electrified
killing field.

INT. GURLEY HOME/FORMER LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

In the living room sits a 115 volt portable generator and a control panel. He drops the lead wires from the hallway.

In the front foyer he constructed a set-up identical to the hallway. Takes the lead wires, unrolls them to the generator.

He connects all the lead wires to the control panel. Uses a magic marker to indicate which toggle switches are "live". Connects the wires from the control panel to the generator.

Finally, he uses scatter rugs to conceal the meshed wire.

INT. GURLEY KITCHEN/FORMER HOME - NIGHT

Anton uses a hand truck to bring in six 12 amp car batteries. Places them in a bottom kitchen cabinet. Uses battery cables to connect the six batteries together.

Connects the batteries to a roll of copper wire. Strings multiple strands across the kitchen floor to the opposite wall.

Secures the wire to the floor. Attach it to a solitary toggle switch, places the switch in the laundry room. Closes the cabinet doors.

TAMARA

I had no idea. I've been so wrong
about so many things.

He puts his arm around her.

ANTON

So have I. Serge said I'd regret starting on this path. I had no idea how right he was.

INT. GURLEY LIVING ROOM/FORMER HOME - NIGHT

Anton puts on the body armor, then a tactical combat vest. Checks his weapons. Puts spare ammo clips and shotgun shells in the vest pockets.

Rolls the kitchen table into the living room. Positions it so he has cover plus a direct line of fire to the front door and bottom of the stairs. Then brings in the dining room table to cover his back.

INT. GURLEY LIVING ROOM/FORMER HOME - NIGHT

Places a bucket of water next to the generator. Walks to a radio sitting on an end table, turns it on. Tunes in to a music station. Turns off all the downstairs lights. Stretches out on the living room couch.

EXT. GURLEY DRIVEWAY/FRONT YARD/OLD HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Jake's car stops halfway up the driveway. Everyone GETS OUT. Begin a slow, cautious walk towards the house. Stop when they reach the edge of the front yard.

Jake hands Walter large wire cutters.

JAKE

Cut the electric, then we attack.
Nick, stay out here for now.

NICK

But why? I want to be the one that kills that son-of-a-bitch.

JAKE

We have no idea what's waiting inside. Need you as back up. I'll send you a signal.

The Paxtons move out.

INT. GURLEY LIVING ROOM/FORMER HOME - LATER THAT NIGHT

TAMARA

So, you just had to sit around and wait for them?

ANTON

I didn't have to wait long.

Anton asleep on the couch. The radio plays softly. Suddenly stops. He wakes immediately, grabs the shotgun.

Pours water from the bucket on the scatter rugs in the hallway and foyer. Turns on the generator, it SPUTTERS to life. He crouches behind the tables.

O.S. The sound of BREAKING GLASS

Anton's attention is drawn to the front door. The door knob seems to turn.

O.S. The sound of BREAKING GLASS becomes louder.

Avoiding the carpet, he moves down the hallway towards the kitchen and the sound of the breaking glass. Stares into the pitch black area, peppers the kitchen with a SHOTGUN BARRAGE.

Moves back to the living room, reloads, crouches between the tables. The front door splinters from automatic weapons fire.

It fractures apart, CRASHES into the foyer.

Automatic fire comes from behind. Bullets splatter around Anton like angry bees. He's hit.

Reaches for the control panel, activates a toggle switch. The lights nailed to the hallway ceiling cast a soft, eerie glow. Anton spots a shadowy figure retreat back to the darkness of the kitchen. That person begins FIRING at the lights.

Automatic weapons FIRE comes from the front. The outline of a human figure ENTERS the doorway. Anton waits until it takes a few steps into the foyer. Activates another toggle switch.

The lights on the foyer ceiling bathes Jerry in bright light.

Jerry on the water-soaked rug. Anton clicks another switch. Jerry SCREAMS as he feels the current surge through him.

ANTON (CONT'D)

I never knew a human being could scream like that. I let it go on as long as I could.

FIRES two shotgun blasts, impact hurls Jerry out the door.

More FIRE from behind. Hallway lights extinguished. Anton drops to the floor, activates switch number 4. Expects to hear screams but doesn't. Weapons FIRE gets closer.

Anton grabs a Beretta, uses a small flashlight and shines the light down the hallway. Walter flattens himself against the wall creates a smaller target, avoids the electrically-charged mesh. Anton fires at Walter's feet. He jumps out of the way and into Anton's trap.

The current's effect is immediate. He SCREAMS in agony.

ANTON (CONT'D)

When I saw who it was, I decided to let the current finish the job. Let him feel death coming for him in the most violent, painful way.

Tamara leans over, kisses him on the cheek.

The air EXPLODES with the silencer induced BUZZ of an automatic weapon fired from the bottom of the steps. Anton suffers multiple hits. The body armor serves its purpose. He clings to the floor. Crawls away.

Looks for the Remington. Spots it near the front table, out of reach. FIRES both Berettas in the direction of the stairs. Forces Jake back. Anton crawls towards the shotgun.

The room suddenly fills with light. Jake shines a hunter's spotlight around the living room. The light finds the shotgun then Anton. He FIRES at the light.

Jake sees Anton can't reach the shotgun, lays down a fire pattern that forces him away.

Going for the shotgun spells certain doom. Anton rips all the wires out of the generator and control panel. Crawls towards the kitchen.

INT. HALLWAY/FORMER HOME - NIGHT

Reaches Walter's lifeless body. Reloads the Berettas. Jake's light sweeps the living room. A blast of weapons FIRE. The generator goes silent.

JAKE (O.S.)

That's all the experiments for tonight, Mr. Science.

The light moves towards the hallway.

INT. KITCHEN/FORMER HOUSE - NIGHT

Anton limps into the kitchen, feels for the copper wires strung across the floor, SIGHS with relief when he finds it.

The light appears from the hallway and spills into the kitchen. Anton takes cover in the laundry room.

Jake ENTERS.

JAKE

C'mon out, man. It's over. If it's any consolation I underestimated you. Much respect. You can go hard or you can go quickly.

Jake waits. When there's no answer he unleashes a FIRESTORM of bullets. The kitchen rocks with the intensity.

Even laying flat on laundry room floor, Anton is nicked by flying debris and ricocheting ammo. Jake expends a full magazine then reloads. He shines the lantern in all directions. He spots the door to the laundry room. Walks towards it.

EXT. GURLEY FRONT YARD/OLD HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick becomes increasingly agitated as he can only imagine what's happening inside. Finally he's tired of waiting, checks his weapon.

A hand appears out of the dark behind Nick and plunges a knife into the right side of his neck.

Before Nick realizes what happened, the ATTACKER pushes the knife deeper, gashes open his throat. The knife is withdrawn. Nick collapses. The Attacker watches him choke on his own blood then races towards the house.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Anton watches from the slightly open door. His grip tightens on the toggle switch as Jake advances.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jake steps on the wires.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - NIGHT

Anton flips the toggle switch to "on"

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jake receives only a mild jolt but is so startled he drops his weapon. Anton BURSTS FROM the laundry room, aiming a Beretta right at Jake who raises his hands in surrender. Anton sees Jake's fear.

He hesitates. Jake seizes the moment, reaches behind him, pulls a handgun from his belt. FIRES at point blank range.

Anton is knocked backwards and off his feet. The flak jacket saves him but he is severely injured.

Jake shines the light on him, startled to find Anton alive.

JAKE

How in the hell?

He taps Anton's chest, hears the solid THUMP of the flak jacket.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Nice touch but it's no help now.

Jake breathes deeply, places the lantern down. He's wincing in pain. Leans against the dryer.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Fuck. You took some pieces out of me. Well, has it been worth it? All because of some burger flipper. Why didn't you stay away?

Anton exhales slowly.

ANTON

I owed it to that "burger flipper", to my daughter's friend...and to my family. It's my duty to testify.

Jake slams the dryer in anger. He speaks through clenched teeth, venom and loathing in every word.

JAKE

That's what's wrong with you solid fucking citizens. You actually believe that grammar school civics "we can make the system work" crap. It's a con job.

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

It's what makes people victims.
Dumb shit. Two families destroyed.
We all could have gotten through
this mess without casualties.

ANTON

What about Ronald Case and his
family? What about Meagan's family?
Who makes that right?

Jake shakes his head.

JAKE

You should have chalked them up to
unfortunate collateral damage.
Nothing was going to bring them
back. You can't fool yourself into
believing you can make a
difference. You know, Anton, you
deserve to die just because you're
so fucking stupid.

Jake moves in front of Anton, points the weapon at his face.
Surprised when he hears the SOUND of the shotgun being
RACKED. Turns. The air ripples with the blast. Jake literally
is lifted off the floor. Falls dead.

Barely able to move, Anton reaches for his flashlight. Shines
it in the direction of the blasts. Smiles, nods. Charlie
Sanders holds the shotgun.

Sanders drops the shotgun, runs up to Anton, hugs him.

SANDERS

(whispers)

Thank you. Thank you.

Tamara cries.

TAMARA

My God! Oh my God! Charlie??

Anton nods.

ANTON

I'd be dead without him.

TAMARA

Do the police know?

NAYLOR (O.S.)

Anton! Anton!

Naylor and Zindorf ENTER the kitchen area. Shine their flashlights around the room. Spot Charlie, kneeling in front of Anton.

ZINDORF
Hands! Hands! Show us your hands!

Charlie raises his hands.

NAYLOR
Stand up slowly. Walk backwards to
the sound of my voice.

Charlie does. When he reaches the officers, they grab his hands to cuff him. Zindorf recognizes him.

ZINDORF
Wait!

Shines the flashlight in his face.

ZINDORF (CONT'D)
Holy shit. It's Charlie Sanders.

NAYLOR
The dad?

Zindorf nods.

ZINDORF
What are you doing here?

SANDERS
Killing my demons.

The Detectives look at each other, barely comprehending the scene before them.

ZINDORF
Get out of here.

Sanders nods. Turns, waves at Anton who returns the wave. EXITS through the kitchen door.

Naylor and Zindorf rush to help Anton.

ANTON
Am I going to make it?

NAYLOR
You've lost a lot of blood but you
should pull through.

ANTON
You guys missed a hell of a party.

NAYLOR
Help me take off his body armor.

They get Anton to a sitting position. Slowly remove his flak jacket. Naylor gives it to Zindorf.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)
Get rid of it.

ZINDORF
What are we doing?

NAYLOR
What needs to be done.

ANTON
I passed out, woke up in the hospital. They had operated on me for hours. I was shot up pretty bad. The Detectives told me they took care of everything. I didn't understand at first.

He notices Tamara is starting to cry. His body language indicates he believes he is the cause.

ANTON (CONT'D)
I'm sorry...I didn't mean...

Tamara interrupts him.

TAMARA
No, I'm sorry. I'm the one who needs to be sorry.

She looks at him and for the first time in a long time she gives him a warm, radiant smile. She takes his hand.

TAMARA (CONT'D)
Let's go upstairs.

INT. SQUAD ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Naylor and Zindorf working on some reports, the phone RINGS. Naylor answers.

NAYLOR
Homicide. Detective Naylor.

Alarm fills his face as he listens.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)
Yea..we're on our way...

Hangs up.

ZINDORF
What? What?

NAYLOR
We're needed at Holy Cross
Hospital.

INT. HOLY CROSS HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Naylor and Zindorf ENTER. Greeted by two UNIFORMED POLICEMEN
and a MEDICAL DOCTOR..

NAYLOR
What the hell happened?

UNIFORM 1
Looks like a drug deal went bad.
Willie Daniels, one of your CI's?

The Detectives nod.

UNIFORM 2
Shot to death. The other one got
hacked up bad with a machete. He's
been calling for you. Said it's
important.

ZINDORF
Is he going to make it?

DOCTOR
No and he seems to know it.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - NIGHT

Zindorf and Naylor ENTER. Ivan is laying on a gurney. He's
attached to multiple monitors. His head heavily bandaged,
only one eye and his mouth visible.

NAYLOR
Ivan??

The eye opens.

IVAN
I need to tell you something.

NAYLOR
Sure, go ahead.

IVAN
The little girl. I think I know
where she is, what happened to her.

The Detectives look at each other, stunned by the news.

NAYLOR
Really. How?

IVAN
Jake told Willie and me to get rid
of a car. Told us where to dump it.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The rain pours down as two cars, driving caravan style, roll through the dark. Their headlights illuminate a large roadside sign that says:

WELCOME TO WEST VIRGINIA

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - NIGHT/FB

IVAN (V.O.)
We got paid five grand. Jake told
us not to ask questions just drop
it in this lake.

It still rains hard. One of the cars is poised on the edge of a lake created when water filled a former stone quarry.

Willie and Ivan push the car towards the water. The force and momentum carry it over the edge. It bounces several times on some rocky ledges. Lands top down. Takes less than a minute to sink into the dark waters.

Willie nods in approval, turns and gets into the remaining car. Ivan notices something on the ground. Picks it up.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - NIGHT

IVAN
I found a shoe. A kid's shoe. A
girl's shoe. It was kinda strange
looking.

EXT. MOUNTAIN LAKE - NIGHT/FB

Ivan holds the shoe, turns a flashlight on it. It's been painted with purple metallic paint, some has worn off.

IVAN (V.O.)

It was painted purple. Something only a kid would do. I stuffed it in my jacket, didn't say anything to Willie.

INT. HOSPITAL EXAM ROOM - NIGHT

IVAN

It's at my place. Top dresser drawer. Take my phone, too. I saved the GPS coordinates.

Ivan does his best to point to his personal possessions on a nearby cabinet. Zindorf finds the phone. Shows it to Ivan.

IVAN (CONT'D)

There's got to be more cars in that lake. Hope this helps.

NAYLOR

Ivan....thanks....

IVAN

I didn't want to die with this...

Before he can continue, the monitor alarms ring simultaneously. Various MEDICAL PERSONNEL RUSH INTO the room in an attempt to save him.

A NURSE tells the Detectives they need to leave immediately.

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Detectives lean against the wall. They're emotionally spent and distressed. Both seem on the verge of crying.

O'Malley ENTERS. Naylor and Zindorf are beyond surprised.

ZINDORF

Didn't know you cared about what happened to our CI's.

That statement baffles O'Malley.

O'MALLEY

What? I'm here to tell you that
Caldwell's been shot to death.
Figured you should hear it from me.

NAYLOR

How? Where?

O'MALLEY

A convenience store on Seat
Pleasant Drive, a half hour, 40
minutes ago. Follow me.

EXT. CONVENIENCE STORE - NIGHT

The murder investigation is in full swing. Caldwell's vehicle
is covered by an evidence tent; designed to preserve
potential evidence and the crime scene from the elements.

Naylor, O'Malley and Zindorf are present, consulting with
other POLICE PERSONNEL, FORENSIC EXAMINERS AND THE CORONER.

Harper and Weber ENTER. Weber is crying. O'Malley approaches.

O'MALLEY

We're sorry. This is just tragic.
Our County Executive has contacted
the Governor, Attorney General and
State Police Superintendent. We'll
find whoever did this.

INT. CONVENIENCE STORE OFFICE - NIGHT

Naylor, Zindorf, Harper and Weber view the store's security
camera footage. Watch as Caldwell arrives.

NAYLOR

He pulls in, comes inside. Guy on a
motorcycle pulls up, waits.

The action on the viewing screen matches Naylor's narrative.

NAYLOR (CONT'D)

Caldwell comes out, gets in the
car. Motorcycle Man approaches.

(BEAT)

Blow up the image. We need a closer
look at his weapon.

The image is enlarged. Naylor uses a finger to draw an
imaginary circle around the end of the barrel.

HARPER
Silencer.

NAYLOR
Shoots him twice in the head. Gets
back on his bike. Drives off before
anyone realizes what's happened.

HARPER
He definitely was targeted.

NAYLOR
Think this has anything to do with
your investigation?

Harper and Weber stare at each other, look as if they can't
or won't answer that question.

WEBER
We urged him to drop it.

ZINDORF
Drop it? Why?

HARPER
Seemed that was best for all
concerned.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Weber and Harper remove photos from the white board, load
files and papers into a large box.

Naylor, Zindorf and Cagan ENTER.

CAGAN
Almost done?

WEBER
Time to go home. Funeral's day
after tomorrow.

NAYLOR
We'll all be there.

WEBER
We appreciate that.

There's a long silence that becomes increasingly awkward.

NAYLOR
What really happened in Iraq?

HARPER

You've been investigating him.
Don't you know?

NAYLOR

My sources don't have access to
that level of detail.

Harper looks at Weber who nods agreement.

HARPER

Al Qaeda put a bounty on his
family. Two million dollars each.
Another two million for video proof
of a beheading. He went berserk. No
restraints on waterboarding.
Torture. He went hunting for those
responsible. The rest, you know.

CAGAN

And New York?

WEBER

He saw it as a way to redeem his
reputation. He believed he could do
what no law enforcement agency had
done. Cripple the drug trade and
human trafficking by capturing
members of the Sinaloa cartel
operating in the 5 boroughs.

EXT. BROOKLYN, NY WATERFRONT - NIGHT/FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT/FB

Caldwell, in the front seat, wearing full body armor, talks
to his task force over the radio.

WEBER (V.O.)

The task force included members of
the DEA, Homeland Security and FBI.
We had an informant and two members
of the anti-terrorist unit
undercover in the organization.
Seemed it might be a slam dunk.

The Task Force vehicles, lights off, silently pull up to a
waterfront warehouse. Multiple LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS,
including a SWAT TEAM emerge from the vehicles, stealthily
approach the different warehouse entrances and on a pre-
arranged signal, breach the location.

INT. BROOKLYN, NY WATERFRONT/WAREHOUSE - NIGHT/FB

The task force STORMS IN. The cavernous interior is dark and empty.

HARPER (V.O.)

There had to be a leak. They knew
we were coming.

After the initial confusion, they find the warehouse lights. Turn them on and the light reveals a truly gruesome sight. The heads of the Informant and two NYPD officers are mounted on straw-stuffed dummies dressed in the appropriate law enforcement uniforms. The bodies are posed while sitting around a table.

The horror is evidence in the faces and reaction of the assembled law enforcement cadre.

No one shows this pain more than Caldwell. In a near-rage he strips off his protective equipment as if it were on fire. Leaves it on the floor. His body language is one of a totally defeated, broken man. EXITS and no one attempts to stop him.

INT. POLICE CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

WEBER

The involved agencies sent the
fiasco down the memory hole. The
Lieutenant was allowed to quietly
resign.

ZINDORF

Why did you stick with him?

HARPER

You should have seen him at Gitmo
and in Iraq. He was at his best. A
great leader. A great patriot. When
you look at his tragic history and
this case, there's a common theme.

Everyone stares at him, eagerly waiting for the answer.

HARPER (CONT'D)

It's family. The bounty incident
scared the lieutenant's wife so
much, she divorced him, went into
hiding with the kids. When it was
safe to resurface, she didn't take
him back. He never was the same.

WEBER

Jake Paxton was a nasty, twisted fuck but like Anton, he did what he did to preserve his family. The two of them had more in common then they realized.

HARPER

Makes me glad I never had a family.

WEBER

Like some woman would be dumb enough to marry your hopeless ass.

The interjection of a brief moment of humor breaks the deep pall of gloom.

Harper stands, grabs a box. Weber grabs the other box.

NAYLOR

How close were you?

HARPER

You guys are great investigators but holy shit, you're the worst liars ever.

NAYLOR

So, what's next?

HARPER

Who knows?

They EXIT.

INT. GURLEY KITCHEN - EVENING

The entire family works together to prepare dinner. They're relaxed, smiling, lots of cross-talk, lively banter.

B.G., DOORBELL RING.

The noise startles them momentarily. Kiarra takes off.

KIARRA

I got it!

She EXITS, leaving her parents to look at each other in speculation.

KIARRA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Mom! Dad! It's Uncle Serge!!

Anton is stunned. Tamara smiles, moves into the living room.

INT. GURLEY LIVING ROOM - DAY

Serge is holding Kiarra in his arms. Tamara ENTERS.

SERGE

I can't believe how big she's gotten. How old are you now, 21?

KIARRA

You're silly, Uncle Serge.

SERGE

Tamara, you look magnificent. If you weren't married to my brother!

She gives Serge a major hug and kiss on the cheek.

TAMARA

So good to see you. Thanks for everything.

They don't notice when Anton ENTERS.

ANTON

What are you doing here?

His response annoys Tamara.

TAMARA

Is that any way to greet your brother?

SERGE

He always was a sourpuss.

Serge gives Anton a hug.

SERGE (CONT'D)

The man can't handle prosperity.

TAMARA

And you will stay for dinner!

She shoots Anton a dirty look.

INT. GURLEY KITCHEN - EVENING

Dinner has wound down. Except for Anton, everyone seems relaxed.

KIARRA
May I be excused?

SERGE
Why you leaving me so soon?

KIARRA
I promised to text my friend,
Amaya.

SERGE
Sure, you're excused.

Serge and Kiarra look at Tamara. She smiles.

TAMARA
Uncle Serge is family. He can
excuse you.

Kiarra kisses Serge on the cheek. EXITS the kitchen.

ANTON
You still haven't explained why
you're here.

Serge gives Anton, a "fuck you" smile.

SERGE
Had meetings at the Pentagon.

ANTON
About?

SERGE
They said if I delayed retirement
I'd be promoted to full bird
Colonel. Told them I'd consider it
as long as I'd be posted state-
side. No more overseas deployments.
Told them I need to spend more time
with my family.

Tamara is thrilled.

TAMARA
That's wonderful. We'd love to see
more of you.

SERGE
Same here. Family is everything.

ANTON
Did you know Deacon Caldwell?

SERGE

We had a Zoom meeting about a month ago. He asked a lot of questions about your visit.

ANTON

He was shot to death a couple of nights ago.

SERGE

That's a shame but this is DC. America's crime capitol. Not unusual for someone to get randomly shot on the street, at a gas station...or a convenience store.

He smiles at Anton, who feels his blood run cold. Serge puts his hand on Tamara's arm.

SERGE (CONT'D)

You guys look wonderful; healthy, happy. I've got to be going. I have an early morning flight to Florida to visit our sister. We should all go down there. Spend some quality time together.

TAMARA

I would love that.

She gives Serge a another big hug and kiss on the cheek.

ANTON

I'll walk you out.

EXT. GURLEY HOME - NIGHT

Serge and Anton EXIT from the house. Anton closes the door behind them.

SERGE

I know what you're thinking. Don't beat yourself up. This worked out exactly the way you wanted.

ANTON

(desperately)
No it hasn't!

SERGE

Are you and your family safe? Have all threats been handled? How's your marriage?

(MORE)

SERGE (CONT'D)

You asked me to solve your problem.
Mission accomplished. Be happy.

ANTON

(a near shriek)

I didn't know it would end with
such a high body count.

SERGE

Calm down! What did you expect?
There's an old saying, "if you seek
revenge, dig two graves". Don't let
this late burst of guilt push you
into yours.

Serge prepares to get into his car.

ANTON

Was Caldwell necessary?

SERGE

When Caldwell was the victim of a
random street crime, I was at the
Pentagon meeting with two Generals
and a CIA analyst.

Anton nods.

ANTON

Good to know.

Serge gives Anton a wicked-looking smile.

SERGE

Besides, I don't know how to drive
a motorcycle.

Serge gets into his car, guns it in reverse out of the
driveway. Starts down the street laying rubber while tires
squeal. Waves good-bye from the driver's window.

He leaves behind a perplexed, conflicted and guilt-ridden
brother.

THE END

