

**MIND AND MURDER**

by

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"Pilot"

FADE IN:

EXT. INTERSTATE 90. BUFFALO, NY. DAY

A black CID vehicle shoots down I-90 and merges onto a single road splitting a dry deserted pasture of open field. Dark clouds close in overhead. A telephone rings.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
Detective Blackwood.

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
How's it going detective, this is Sergeant Ramos. I'm calling about the hijack that took place on the BFN network last night.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
If that isn't the talk of town. Something about a killing from a movie scene, right? Some kind of prank.

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
Yeah, right. Listen - I recognized some of the hills in the broadcast, reminded me of a spot by Hoover Ranch, South on Valley Peak. I've done some patrolling around there couple times. Had an itch I had to scratch. Turns out.. I found a female body. She's got tire marks all over.

...

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
You telling me what I think you're telling me, Sergeant?

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
All of Erie County who was tuned into the six o'clock news yesterday evening witnessed a real murder right before their eyes.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
Jesus Christ.

INT. CID VEHICLE. CONTINUOUS

A pair of hands firmly grip a steering wheel. It's starting to drizzle - our gaze fixed, looking out of the front windshield as the car veers onto a dirt roadway.

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
There's a considerable amount of blood on the scene. Nothing paramedics can do. This is real bad.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
You got ID on the victim?

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
Negative. She's got nothing on her.  
(beat)  
I gotta say, detective. If the news gets out..

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
If this story breaks we will be in the middle of an unfathomable shitstorm, Sergeant.

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
Yeah, right. M.E. is on the way. I phoned Halloway.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
Good. She's the best we've got. Set up a perimeter, tape off the area and keep this contained. Nobody touches anything until I arrive. I'll be there in ten.

SGT. RAMOS (V.O.)  
Copy that.

The line cuts.

EXT. HOOVER RANCH. EVENING

132 acres off a two-way country lane. Wide fields planted with corn, others enclosed with cattle, sheep, horses. A faded red dairy farm stands long and high by a pasture filled with dairy cows.

A couple of rookie cops part barricades for the unmarked CID vehicle approaching. The fields are littered with badges, conversing with one another, waiting.

SERGEANT RAMOS, 35, stocky, uniformed sheriff ushers the vehicle closer. He rounds the bumper in a hurry, the drizzle from the overcast picking up and approaches the driver's side.

SGT. RAMOS  
Detective Blackwood. Sergeant  
Ramos.

At the wheel is BRUCE BLACKWOOD, 47, crisp mustache, hard face, lean, in the same wrinkled suit he's been wearing the past twenty years.

BLACKWOOD  
Where's the body?

SGT. RAMOS  
(pointing)  
Right in this pigsty. I'll take you  
to her.

He kills the engine and exits the vehicle.

BLACKWOOD  
We're going to need some kind of  
tarp.

SGT. RAMOS  
Already on it.

Their boots sink into the wet mud as they make their way across the field. A couple of deputies plop a canopy over the body in the distance and Sergeant Ramos leads Blackwood closer, the jitters present in their eyes.

BLACKWOOD  
How long ago did you find her?

SGT. RAMOS  
About half an hour ago. Soon as I  
saw the body I called dispatch.

They step under the canopy as the rainfall gets progressively heavier and stare at the body now at their feet. A moment of silence. Blackwood gets closer and examines the body as Sergeant Ramos keeps his distance, looking off mostly.

REVERSE to reveal a white FEMALE, covered mostly in MUD from poor weather conditions. Her head is completely sunken into the ground. She's barefoot, wearing black lingerie, badly bruised everywhere. NOTICE TIRE TRACKS all over her pale back, and her spine, almost protruding through her skin.

For a brief moment we see an image Blackwood is recalling in his memory: A woman, her hair flowing in a subtle breeze, beautiful smile on her face with an angel-like glow around her figure.

SGT. RAMOS (CONT'D)

Pure evil.

Blackwood snaps out of it and looks back at Ramos, his nostrils flaring, real pissed.

SGT. RAMOS (CONT'D)

Never seen anything like this in my life. I wanted to be wrong.. fuck. I don't know how you do this.

BLACKWOOD

The owner, are they here?

SGT. RAMOS

We tried knocking. Nobody's home.

BLACKWOOD

Have one of your guys check the mailbox. See if they can get a name or a phone number.

Ramos looks over to a pair of deputies eavesdropping nearby and gestures them to fetch the envelope. They hurry off into the rain.

Blackwood gets to his feet and studies the TRACKS imprinted in the mud. He sees they lead to the same two-way lane he came in from.

SGT. RAMOS

Not to sound like an asshole or anything, but aren't you supposed to have a partner or something?

BLACKWOOD

Call in dispatch. Tell them we need patrols headed eastbound on Parduanga. Tell them to canvass the roads for a brown Ford pickup. Also, we could use more men if there's any to spare for a grid search. Tell 'em to bring their ponchos while they're at it. Could be out here a few hours.

Ramos grabs his RADIO and dishes out the information. Blackwood puts on a pair of latex gloves and kneels beside the body. He studies the woman's hand, her fingers sticking out of the mud, grabs them and brings them to the surface.

He wipes his thumb across the woman's wrist, brushing mud away, searching for something. Then, another memory emerges: The same dream-like woman, resting her head on a pillow in peaceful sleep. NOTICE her arm beside her face and a SCAR on her wrist.

SGT. RAMOS

Detective?

Blackwood recollects himself, staring at the woman's wrist a moment longer and realizing there's nothing there.

BLACKWOOD

Yeah?

SGT. RAMOS

We got units canvassing the area for the pickup. Also managed to get us another two dozen or so deputies for the grid search.

BLACKWOOD

Copy that.

Ramos glances at the body, clenches his jaw, bites on his lip, trying to keep himself rugged and hard, quite emotional about the whole thing, and Blackwood notices.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

You alright?

SGT. RAMOS

I look at her and can't help but picture my daughter. Knowing he got away, that he's out there somewhere.

His eyes flutter tears away.

BLACKWOOD

What's the ETA on Halloway?

SGT. RAMOS

She should be here any minute.

Silence awhile. Blackwood thinks, checks his watch, then digs into his jacket and pulls out a TAPE RECORDER.

SGT. RAMOS (CONT'D)

What's that for?

BLACKWOOD

I don't do well with notes, and as vivid and graphic as this all is - memory fades. I'm auditory-driven.

SGT. RAMOS

What's that mean?

BLACKWOOD

Means I recall things better if I describe them out loud. You can stay if you'd like.

Blackwood hits RECORD on the tape and pauses for a brief moment.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

February 21st, 2004. Erie County, Buffalo, New York. Dark gray clouds. Sunless. Raining. Cold. A ranch on the country side. Barns, livestock, dead weeds. And a deceased body in a pigsty.

LATER. Nightfall is creeping into the skies. Deputies are canvassing the area wielding flashlights, scattered about on the ranch like ants on a vast hilltop.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)

Contusions to the spine, throat and wrists. Ligature marks at the feet. Laceration to the back of the head. Likely a cause by the impact of a brown Ford pickup truck that occurred yesterday evening on a hijacked local broadcast feed.

The clouds on the horizon are bleeding red now. The deputies have regrouped near an M.E. transport van, invested in the bagging of the deceased body, carried out by two transport technicians in HAZMAT. They seal the body, hoist it on a GURNEY and load it in the van.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)

The body is pale, lifeless and beyond saving. The soul has long since fled, like the light of a day's end. Except, there's no light left to give. Nor take.

LATER. The night is young. Mosquitos buzz under a lamppost overhead by the fence line where Ramos stands, who's peering down on an envelope and holding a telephone to his ear. Blackwood makes his way over to him.

BLACKWOOD

Anything?

SGT. RAMOS

Not a zip.

BLACKWOOD

We got a name. That's all that matters.

SGT. RAMOS

Bit suspicious, isn't it? Dead body shows up on your lawn and you're nowhere to be found?

BLACKWOOD

Doesn't look too good, that's for sure.

A pair of headlights beam over the road up ahead. Blackwood and Ramos raise an eyebrow and turn to face a pickup truck heading for the barricades.

HOOVER (V.O.)

I've already got enough pigs walking around in my barn out there. I sure as hell don't need talking ones swarming the goddamn place.

EXT. HOOVER RANCH. PORCH. NIGHT

JOHN HOOVER, 55, exuding a chronic smoker appeal - anorexic, hard-worn, and a voice that really grinds against the grain.

BLACKWOOD

I just need to ask you a few questions, if that's alright?

HOOVER

Fuck you. You wanna' talk? Talk to my lawyer.

Hoover spits a loogie between them and plops himself into a chair, regarding Blackwood with disdain.

BLACKWOOD

Sure look tougher than you are.

Experience exudes Blackwood, and we see the insult proves effective. Hoover, profoundly offended, stops him before he goes off.

HOOVER

Do I look like I got something to  
hide, jackass?

He pulls a bare cigarette that's partially smoked from his pocket and coughs up a storm trying to light it with a Bic.

BLACKWOOD

A dead body was found on your  
property today.

HOOVER

No shit. Is that why you're all  
here? I thought it was to celebrate  
my birthday. Fucking tampon.

BLACKWOOD

Where were you yesterday evening  
between five and seven?

He takes a drag from his cigarette, really taking his time.

HOOVER

I was out. Left at three in the  
afternoon, didn't come back 'til  
now.

BLACKWOOD

Where'd you go?

HOOVER

I was out.

BLACKWOOD

Doing what?

HOOVER

Gambling. Lots of it.

BLACKWOOD

(skeptical)

An entire day, gambling, gone, just  
like that?

HOOVER

Pretty much. Started my night at  
the pub and gambled my entire life  
savings away by the end of the  
night.

(MORE)

HOOVER (CONT'D)

Tinkered in a bit of cocaine somewhere in between to keep the gears going. Did a little fucking with some whores down on Melrose to get the blood boiling. Surely was a night I won't forget for as long as I have left.

He takes a long slow drag from the cigarette, the tip flaring red, really savoring it.

BLACKWOOD

You understand I'm state, right?

HOOVER

Yeah, well who gives a shit. I sure as hell don't. I'll only be here for a couple more months, anyway. At least that's what the doctor said.

He regurgitates and his feeble lungs send him into a full swing of uncontrollable gagging. Blackwood softens at the sight of it.

HOOVER (CONT'D)

As you can see, I've got better things to do with the time I've got left than to be killing folks, let alone kill 'em on my own property.

Blackwood nods and, considering the circumstances, he figures that to be more true than not.

BLACKWOOD

Is it just you out here? There anyone else that helps with the livestock? Maintenance?

Hoover exhales a cloud of smoke and shakes his head.

HOOVER

Just me, myself and I, partner.  
Just me, myself and -  
(rips another cough)  
Everyone I know is dead. I seen 'em come and I seen 'em go. Fuck 'em. I like being alone anyway.

BLACKWOOD

You have cameras around here?

HOOVER

Nope. Wish I did. Get you fuckers off my property a lot sooner. What next? You wanna' know the size of my dick, too?

Blackwood grins, reaches for a contact card and slides it onto the porch railing.

BLACKWOOD

Give me a call if anything comes up. Detective Blackwood. I'll be around.

Blackwood goes off and Hoover squints, watching him go as he takes the last drag down to the cigarette butt.

INT/EXT. CID VEHICLE. HIGHWAY. DAY

The sun is rising at the peaks of towering pines surrounding Blackwood as he travels down the highway reflecting out of the window. He's got both hands on the wheel, the rain carrying over from yesterday.

He passes a BILLBOARD: 'BARBARA LEE: WRONG THEN. WRONG NOW. WE'RE VOTING NO ON THE RECALL OF MAYOR BARBARA LEE. VOTE FOR LOREN TAYLOR ON MAY 11TH'.

EXT. BFN-7 LOCAL STATION. BUFFALO, NY. DAY

Stark still. The downpour thinning. Blackwood's CID vehicle pulls into the parking lot and parks out front. He steps out onto the slick street and stares at the building - bleak and boring. It resembles an office block rather than a broadcast hub. He adjusts his coat and heads inside.

INT. BFN-7 LOCAL STATION. LOBBY. DAY

A RECEPTIONIST sits behind a desk blatantly chewing bubble gum and reading comics in this empty lobby hall. Blackwood approaches him.

RECEPTIONIST

Can I help you?

Blackwood flashes his badge, the receptionist unamused.

BLACKWOOD

Detective Blackwood. I need to speak with the person in charge of your evening broadcast.

RECEPTIONIST

That'll be Ted Beuler. Yeah he's here. He should be in Master Control. Take the elevator to the second floor, bust a left, he'll be in the third room with the red light above it.

BLACKWOOD

Thanks.

Blackwood heads to the elevator.

INT. BFN-7 LOCAL STATION. MASTER CONTROL. DAY

TED BEULER, 30s, ruffled, hair thinning, hunched over a console flipping switches as he looks up at a wall full of monitors stacked atop each other. The screens alternate between weather forecasts, commercials, etc. The door swings wide and Blackwood enters and studies the room.

Humming electronics. Waves of white noise. Ted doesn't notice Blackwood at first, his eyes fixed on the screens.

BLACKWOOD

Ted Beuler?

He waves a hand in Ted's peripheral. Ted jolts and drops his headphones around his neck.

TED

Who are you?

BLACKWOOD

(flashes badge)

Detective Blackwood. State police, homicide. You Ted Beuler?

TED

Yeah that's me, what do you want?

BLACKWOOD

Sorry for barging in like this. I knocked for about a minute. Didn't mean to interrupt.

TED

Well, a little too late for that. Wait a minute, you said detective?

Ted tries for another look at the badge but Blackwood shoves it into his coat.

BLACKWOOD  
I need the six o'clock broadcast  
from Tuesday night.

TED  
(squints)  
Who's asking?

BLACKWOOD  
State police.

Ted leans back in his seat and raises a brow.

TED  
Interesting. Usually the FCC pulls  
those tapes, not police. What do  
you got some kind of affection for  
the weather lady or something?

BLACKWOOD  
Lieutenant requests the tape and I  
make the run. I know just as much  
as you do.

Ted bounces a pen off of his lip and eyes Blackwood warily.

TED  
Sorry, can't help you. I don't hand  
over station property without  
knowing the reason. You said  
homicide, right? The hell does  
homicide want with Tuesday's  
weather forecast?

He narrows his eyes and, as a realization dawns over him,  
they go wide.

TED (CONT'D)  
No shit. The signal interference.  
The girl. The one who got mowed  
over by that truck. That was real,  
wasn't it?

Blackwood looks off, *shit*.

TED (CONT'D)  
Holy shit.

BLACKWOOD  
The tape's no longer station  
property. It's evidence.  
(MORE)

## BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

Unless you want to be charged with obstruction of justice in an active investigation, I suggest you hand over the tape.

Ted's face goes pale.

## TED

It wasn't just a prank. Someone was actually killed on our network.

He looks off in disbelief.

## BLACKWOOD

Listen, Ted. I need a favor. BFN's got enough coming its way when the the story goes public. Wouldn't do anyone good if this releases before we're ready for it to. I'm going to ask that you keep this between the two of us. You understand? Ted?

Beat. Ted momentarily snaps out of it and nods, rattled.

## BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

Alright. The tape.

INT. BUFFALO STATE POLICE HQ. LT. PRICE'S OFFICE. DAY

CLOSE on TV SCREEN. BFN-7 weather forecast. After a brief breakdown of the week's expected weather conditions, the picture is interrupted - a WOMAN appears, laboriously crawling towards us in a field vast and empty. She digs her fingernails into the dirt and looks back at a pickup sitting idle at her rear, headlights on and facing her. She whimpers and grunts and crawls in desperation as if fleeing from it.

## WOMAN

please.. please god, help..

She cries and pleads and inches forward some more, exhausted and depleted of energy, but she persists. A V6 engine ROARS from behind and completely dissipates the ounce of hope she carries. She deflates, the idea of escaping her fate rapidly fleeting and she knows it. The truck REVS its engine, the exhaust pipe muddy and heavy and unrelenting.

Beat. The truck's tires spit up dirt and haul ass towards the woman. She begins to scream and squirm towards us, the HEADLIGHTS growing and engine GROWLING and just as the woman is about to meet her fate -

LT. PRICE (O.S.)

Alright I've had enough. Turn this  
shit off.

REVERSE to reveal Blackwood in a big office decorated with medals and picture frames of military men, children, war propaganda. Sitting across him behind a solid oak desk is LIEUTENANT JIM PRICE. In his 60s, slim, clean military cut, wearing a scar sliced across his neck. Real tough shit.

They're seated, deeply disturbed at what they're watching on a small television in the corner of the room. Lt. Price's face is red, looks like he's refraining from tossing the brick of a brass name plate planted on his desk.

LT. PRICE (CONT'D)

People are getting swatted like  
fucking house flies out here. The  
Nickel City Press have everyone  
from Elmwood to Eden questioning  
our effort to solve these cases.  
And now this. This connected to  
Rodriguez' double homicide?

BLACKWOOD

I don't think so.

LT. PRICE

Santiago's?

BLACKWOOD

No. It's cold-blooded, but not  
methodical, not like this. Whoever  
did this is pretty much handing the  
prosecutor case material. This is  
different.

LT. PRICE

Who else knows about this?

BLACKWOOD

Sergeant Ramos with BPD and station  
engineer at BFN, Ted Beuler.

LT. PRICE

Ted Beuler. You trust him?

BLACKWOOD

He gave me his word he wouldn't say  
a thing until we went public.

LT. PRICE

Yeah well, that doesn't seem to  
mean shit in this city anymore.

(MORE)

LT. PRICE (CONT'D)

I'd leak the story myself if I hadn't any integrity left in me. Political repercussions for the sack'a shit in county fucking with my op's.

Blackwood cracks a smile.

LT. PRICE (CONT'D)

You I.D the woman?

BLACKWOOD

Not yet. Halloway's working on the autopsy now. Shouldn't be too long.

LT. PRICE

Leads were starting to shake loose with Santiago before County pulled out. Case has been cold for weeks. Might have you two work this one.

BLACKWOOD

Santiago's got good intuition. We could use that.

Three knocks at the door.

LT. PRICE

Come in.

ANDREA SANTIAGO, 32, in plainclothes, swings the door open.

SANTIAGO

Hey Lieutenant, sorry to interrupt.

LT. PRICE

What do you got?

SANTIAGO

There's press outside the building.

LT. PRICE

Press? For what?

SANTIAGO

Something about a murder that happened on the BFN network.

Blackwood drops his eyes, an exasperating exhale, and shakes his head. He looks up at Price and they share a stern look.

BLACKWOOD

(agitated)

Ted.

SANTIAGO

We just flipped through every channel. It's all over the news.

LT. PRICE

Who's here? What station?

SANTIAGO

All of them.

EXT. HIGHWAY. SOUTH BUFFALO. EVENING

CID vehicle speeds past a sign that reads 'Hope Haven Foster Home' in the woodlands of Buffalo. Further down the road we see a home in the grasp of overgrown vegetation, its presence stark and dreary and cold.

There's a mix of REPORTERS in V.O. yelling over one another until one projects louder than the others.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Lieutenant, Jim Price! Lieutenant! Buffalo State Police Headquarters. What can you tell us of the murder that happened live on BFN-7 Tuesday evening?

LT. PRICE (V.O.)

I've only just learned of the murder that took place on our local network this morning. Unfortunately, I have little to no information at the time.

EXT. HOPE HAVEN FOSTER HOME. DAY

Blackwood emerges from his vehicle, pausing a moment, absorbing the air of melancholy surrounding the home. He turns to the rustling of leaves from a gentle breeze. The place is quiet, almost looks abandoned.

He peers at the home once more and deflates, his spirit just as bleak as its withering paint on its sun cracked wood. He shuts the driver's door and moves for the front porch.

REPORTER 2 (V.O.)

Lieutenant! In the last year there's been a 52% increase of homicides in Erie County with clearance rates just below state average.

(MORE)

REPORTER 2 (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Some even say Buffalo has become a region for such vile acts. What are your thoughts?

LT. PRICE (V.O.)

I can assure you the increase in homicides in Erie County is not a direct reflection of our homicide department, as it is a rise of sick and twisted individuals who will be brought to justice.

REPORTER 2 (V.O.)

Or perhaps the result of a lack of manpower as County redirects its resources for the upcoming General Election?

LT. PRICE (V.O.)

No comment.

The voices swarm in and fade as Blackwood sits across --

INT. HOPE HAVEN FOSTER HOME. LIVING ROOM. DAY

MARY LYNN ROSS, 50s, wiping tears from the creases on her face, sits across Blackwood in a family room of antique furniture, porcelain figures, family photos and a grandfather clock that occupies the silence. The daylight creeps its way through the laced curtains as dust particles drift freely around them.

MARY LYNN ROSS

I called the station because, well -  
I know my daughter when I see her.  
This is for you. Look familiar?

She hands him a photograph of a young woman embracing seven other children. He studies it, her features resembling the same woman on the broadcast tape.

BLACKWOOD

I'm sorry for your loss.

MARY LYNN ROSS

Life is cruel, isn't it?

A moment of silence. The metronome becomes more pronounced.

MARY LYNN ROSS (CONT'D)

Sarah Winslow. She was a good kid.  
I adopted her when she was seven -  
she was my first.

(MORE)

MARY LYNN ROSS (CONT'D)

She'd have been with me eleven  
years in a month if she hadn't..

Her eyes hit the floor. Blackwood carries on considerately.

BLACKWOOD

When did you last see her, Mrs.  
Ross?

MARY LYNN ROSS

Tuesday morning. The day of.

(wipes tears)

We were paid a visit some time ago  
by a man working for County. Told  
us there would be a temporary  
budget cut to Social Services. That  
put a real dent in our pockets.  
Sarah decided she would go out and  
get a job to help with the bills.  
She left that morning and never  
came back. Figured she stayed with  
a friend for the night.

(brief pause)

Turned on the news yesterday  
evening, and there she was. I  
called everyone, asking if anyone  
knew of her whereabouts. But I knew  
it was her.. I just didn't want to  
believe it.

He let's Mary breathe a little before pressing forward.

BLACKWOOD

Did she tell you where she was  
headed?

MARY LYNN ROSS

No, only that she was going into  
town.

BLACKWOOD

She ever have any altercations with  
anyone? A boyfriend, a neighbor,  
maybe a friend?

MARY LYNN ROSS

Not that I know of.

(clears her nose)

She was a quiet girl, kept to  
herself mostly. All of my girls  
here are homeschooled, so there  
isn't a friend that I don't know.

(MORE)

MARY LYNN ROSS (CONT'D)

Though, every now and then I'd allow Sarah and her younger siblings to walk to the community center, get out of the house for a couple of hours. Go have some fun. She never brought up any trouble.

BLACKWOOD

Which community center?

MARY LYNN ROSS

Queen City, about a mile west from here.

Blackwood's phone vibrates. He checks the call: LT. PRICE.

BLACKWOOD

Sorry, excuse me.

He gets up and corners himself in the room. He pulls a Motorola flip phone from his trench coat and brings it to his ear. Mrs. Ross looks off and drifts into thought.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

(over phone)

Lieutenant?

LT. PRICE

(over phone)

I need you here as soon as possible.

BLACKWOOD

(over phone)

Everything alright?

LT. PRICE

(over phone)

Make it quick.

The call flatlines.

EXT. BUFFALO STATE POLICE HQ. DAY

A low-slung brick complex with weather-stained walls. Three stories. A line of cruisers sit outside, all a dull gray, with salt stains from a long winter. Blackwood exits his vehicle and hurries inside as rainfall starts.

INT. BUFFALO STATE POLICE HQ. LT. PRICE'S OFFICE. DAY

Lt. Price is behind his desk in mid-conversation with Federal Bureau of Investigation, Special Agent GUNNAR REED, early 30s, bush wild eyebrows, brawny, clean pressed suit.

LT. PRICE

I just don't understand the Bureau's angle here. I mean, this happened here in my city, last time I checked.

REED

Hijacking a federally licensed broadcast -

They're interrupted by a knock at the door.

LT. PRICE

Come in.

Blackwood walks in and closes the door behind him. Reed pulls on his suit, rises and offers his hand to Blackwood.

LT. PRICE (CONT'D)

Detective Blackwood, Special Agent Gunnar Reed.

BLACKWOOD

(offers a firm handshake)  
How do you do?

REED

Pleasure.

They size each other up for a moment.

LT. PRICE

Please, take a seat.

They sit, stealing glances of one another.

BLACKWOOD

Lieutenant?

LT. PRICE

Special Agent?

Reed pauses, straightens his posture.

REED

The FCC and DOJ are breathing down the Bureau's neck over the signal interception that happened on BFN Tuesday evening. We're looking to form a joint task force between the Bureau and CID.

Blackwood shoots a look at Lt. Price, puzzled and confused.

BLACKWOOD

The victim bled out on Buffalo soil, not in D.C. What does the Bureau want with this homicide?

REED

This kind of stunt can only be pulled by someone with extensive knowledge of transmission lines and encryption - someone with an abundance of resources. We're not dealing with your average murderer, detective.

LT. PRICE

Fact of the matter is, the hijack happened here locally.

REED

Yes, you're right, Lieutenant. But the broadcasts are federally regulated which makes this a federal offense under FCC law.

(to Blackwood)

I'm not here to steal your case, detective.

BLACKWOOD

I don't necessarily take a liking to the weight of someone else's eyes on my back. Least of all the FBI's.

REED

I'm only here to keep the case in Federal's "view." Not to prove myself or exercise my authority by any stretch. We're hunting the same man.

(eyes Blackwood)

You hunt your killer and I'll handle the interception. I'm only asking that we share intel.

(MORE)

REED (CONT'D)

From a broader perspective, it makes sense, really. The faster we move, the quicker we put him behind bars.

Blackwood looks around contemplating the proposal, and his eyes meet Reed's, trying to get a read on his bearing. Almost reluctant, and remembering the department is short-handed, he looks to Lt. Price with an expression that suggests the Fed is making a compelling case.

EXT. BUFFALO STATE POLICE HQ. DAY

It's pouring rain. Reed exits the doubled doors and huddles under the awning. He spots his vehicle through the mist and just as he's about to step off --

BLACKWOOD  
Special Agent Reed.

Blackwood exits the building.

REED  
(turns)  
Detective.

Beat.

BLACKWOOD  
This case, it's more complex than any other case I've worked for the past twenty years. And it's only just begun. And this might seem like an unusual proposition, you with the Bureau, me with State. But if we're going to partner up in some way, then I think it'd be best if we *actually* partnered up.

REED  
(confused)  
What do you mean?

BLACKWOOD  
I mean I'm old school. I think speaking over the telephone and meeting from time to time is going to set us back in some ways. And with a case like this, I'd prefer that we stick together. Feed off each other's thoughts. Develop ideas with one another.

(MORE)

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

Get ahead of the curve as opposed to playing catch up. Don't you think?

Reed stares at Blackwood and considers the idea.

REED

All of the broadcast stuff, it's very technical. Might see to it that's it's slowing you down.

Blackwood looks off a moment and contemplates this.

BLACKWOOD

Only thing slowing me down are these joints. Gravity tends to hit you hard when you're closing in on fifty. You'll see.

Reed cracks a smile, opening up to the thought.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

What do you say?

After a beat, Reed offers a handshake a Blackwood firmly takes it.

REED

It always this wet out here?

BLACKWOOD

For the most part, yeah. This is the better part of it. It gets worse.

Thunder crashes overhead, a brutal thunderstorm imminent.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

We'll take my car.

He walks off into the downpour and Reed follows.

INT. BFN-7 LOCAL STATION. MASTER CONTROL ROOM. DAY

Ted sits across Blackwood and Reed and sinks into his chair in clear shame and guilt for having crossed them. He tries to avert his eyes, the tension palpable, sweat dripping down his face. They let this sink in a moment longer.

REED

Ted Buehler. Seven years with BFN, is that right?

TED  
That's right.

REED  
I hear you're the man who blew the lid off the top. The man who caused mayhem.

Ted begins squirming in his seat and proceeds to answer to Blackwood as opposed to Reed.

TED  
Listen man this is BIG SHIT, okay? Big story, big headlines, breaking news nationwide, alright? You're telling me you wouldn't do the same in my position? This is BIG. The big that gets me a promotion kind of big, you understand? BFN is hot. Viewership is pushing past the stratosphere and I'm sorry, alright? I'm sorry that you brought me that information and I crossed you. I admit it I do - I was wrong. But the ship was sinking, man. And I do NOT want to go back to teaching fractions and decimals to a bunch of fourth graders who don't give a shit, alright? I am through with that. I REFUSE to go back.

He's out of breath, glancing back and forth between the two, desperate for an answer. Blackwood's got a sour taste in his mouth but, remembering his purpose, he deflates.

BLACKWOOD  
That's not what we're here about, Ted.

Ted eases up.

TED  
Then what?

REED  
You get a chance to take a look at the feed?

TED  
Yeah, I did.  
(eyes go wide)  
Found something interesting too.

Reed crosses his arms and Ted leans in.

TED (CONT'D)

Your guy, the one who did this..  
the man is as technically skilled  
as one can get, alright? In out  
and. No delay. No stutter. The feed  
was clean. Flawless execution.

REED

How'd he do it?

TED

He rerouted through our encoder and  
replaced the feed mid-signal. You  
understand how insane that is?

REED

The transmission was replaced from  
inside the signal chain.

TED

Precisely.

Blackwood squints, this language foreign to him.

REED

Say, hypothetically, you were going  
to replicate the interference.. how  
would you do it?

Ted's starting to get a real kick out of this, his excitement  
practically shouting as he leans in even closer.

TED

This kind of attack doesn't just  
happen from outside of the station.  
Never mind inside. The technicality  
of this specific situation is too  
complicated for your average  
"hacker," which he isn't. If I were  
to somehow hypothetically replicate  
this from the outside, I'd have to  
have access to our stream key and  
uplink IP's - and those aren't even  
public, much less written down,  
with the exception of a few  
internal memos.

BLACKWOOD

Too risky to do it from inside of  
BFN and damn near impossible to do  
it on the outside.

REED

Unless a former employee kept the passwords longer than they should have, right?

TED

(thinks)

Sure, yeah. Never thought about that.

REED

How many current employees have access to those kind of credentials?

TED

(thinks)

About ten of us, give or take.

REED

I'm gonna' need a list of all current and former employees in the past fifteen years who would've had access to those codes. I'm also gonna' need physical access logs - badge swipes, security camera footage for the control room and server racks, and a list of accounts with admin rights. That goes for vendor accounts and remote IP whitelists as well.

Ted exhales, a bit overwhelmed.

TED

Sure.

And having just taken a sip of coffee -

BLACKWOOD

Speaking of employees - you get along with everyone here?

TED

For the most part, yeah. We're all in some way acquainted.

BLACKWOOD

You run into anyone unusual? More so than most?

TED

I think anyone who works for broadcast news is in over their head in some ways. I can't think of any current employees who would've had a reason to pull this sort of thing off. But there is one former employee that comes to mind. His name is Travis Ryder. He was a station engineer. Handled the hardware and signal integrity - transmitters, encoders, satellite uplinks. You wanna' talk about weird, he's full of it.

BLACKWOOD

In what way?

TED

The things he'd say sometimes. He talked about how all media was deceptive, mind control programming to re-wire our psyche to conform to the agenda of the elite. Whatever that means. Said he'd "revolutionize" the way we viewed broadcast news. Real off the wall kind of things.

BLACKWOOD

"Revolutionize." He ever elaborate on that?

TED

Nope. And I didn't bother asking him to. All I know is the guy was a little off in the head.

REED

What happened to him?

TED

No idea. He was supposed to check the HVAC and transmitter logs, something he'd routinely do. But some time last year he never came into work. Never called. Never heard a thing. Radio silence. He just sorta.. disappeared.

Blackwood and Reed glance at one another -

EXT. HIGHWAY. DAY

The rain settles. Blackwood and Reed sit in silence awhile with the windows down, taking in the sweet SOUND of tires on wet cement as they cruise through a country lane.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)  
What'd you say his name was?

TED (V.O.)  
Travis Ryder.

Blackwood looks over to Reed and studies him a bit. He's quietly reflecting out of the window and chewing on a toothpick.

BLACKWOOD  
The victim's name is Sarah Winslow. She was a foster child over at a place called 'Hope Haven'. Mother saw her on the news, called it in. Imagine that shit.

Reed shakes his head, unsettled, doesn't turn from staring out of the window.

REED  
I've worked cases in organized crime, worked counterintelligence for a while - espionage, intellectual property theft, things of that nature, wasn't really my thing. Transferred to cybercrime for a bit, but eventually got bored. Made my way to violent crimes. Been in the field for about a month. And this.. this is my first case.

BLACKWOOD  
Hell of an introduction. How long you been with the FBI?

REED  
This spring it'll be 5 years with the Bureau. Got my bachelor's at the University of Maryland. Did a few inter-agency ops when I was local before going federal.

Blackwood's impressed.

REED (CONT'D)  
You?

BLACKWOOD

Nothing fancy. Went to college,  
joined the academy, did some  
patrolling a few years, mostly  
graveyard - had some rough nights.  
Moved my way up from narcotics to  
homicide. Been this way since '81.

Reed nods.

REED

So what's the deal with the solo  
act? Is that how you guys do things  
in Buffalo?

Blackwood steals a glance, almost offended.

BLACKWOOD

General Election is three months  
away.

REED

What's that supposed to mean?

BLACKWOOD

Means County needs to promote the  
re-election of city officials. The  
more resources you pull, the more  
ammo you got. One of those  
"resources" was my partner.

REED

County just hung you up to dry?

BLACKWOOD

They'll run PR campaigns on mental  
health and anti-poverty and claim  
that Erie County is 'investing in  
its future' while murderers walk  
freely - the kind that murder on  
live television.

REED

Jesus.

BLACKWOOD

Looks to me the newcomers running  
for office have a real chance at it  
now, with county in hot water after  
the news broke on our DB. You ask  
me, I say Buffalo could use a bit  
of change.

A cell phone rings. Blackwood answers it.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)  
 (on phone)  
 Detective Blackwood.  
 (listens)  
 Alright, we'll be right there.

He hangs up.

REED  
 Lieutenant?

BLACKWOOD  
 Halloway. Autopsy.

A big nod from Reed - *time to play*.

INT. FORENSIC SCIENCE DIVISION. AUTOPSY ROOM. DAY

Everything from the vinyl floors to the chalked up walls is as bland as the pale WOMAN who lays on a table centered in the room. Blackwood and Reed stand beside medical examiner NANCY HALLOWAY, 30s, as they study the body. Reed wears his emotions more so than Blackwood, who stares at the body with a curious and steady eye.

BLACKWOOD  
 Her name Sarah Winslow?

HALLOWAY  
 That's right. Eighteen years of age.

REED  
 Goddamn.

HALLOWAY  
 Cruel world. You want the full run down? Or just recent findings?

Blackwood pulls his tape recorder from his jacket and hits RECORD. Reed narrows his eyes, taken back by that.

BLACKWOOD  
 Give me the full picture.

Blackwood starts to move around the body, his eyes sharpen.

HALLOWAY  
 Sarah was struck by a vehicle accelerating at a high speed. The impact was from the rear - her entire spine, skull, and legs, completely shattered.

(MORE)

HALLOWAY (CONT'D)

She's got ligature marks on her legs and hands, likely a cause by climbing rope. I can tell by the synthetic strands, as opposed to the normal three strand manila rope. She's got bruises from the neck down, all of them postmortem, not indicative of inflicted trauma. It's tragic she knew it was coming, but that isn't the worst of it.

BLACKWOOD

Talk to me.

She pauses for a moment.

HALLOWAY

For a short time after impact, there was a faint muscular response in the extremities - shallow breathing, involuntary movements.

They both glance at Halloway, deeply disturbed.

REED

She was breathing?

HALLOWAY

(reluctantly nods)

She was alive for a few minutes after the impact.

Reed's about had it, the weight of his eyes fall to the floor. A sadness flushes over Blackwood's face as he looks down on the young woman's body.

HALLOWAY (CONT'D)

Her heart was beating long enough for the bruising to develop on her body.

Beat.

BLACKWOOD

She was holding onto her stomach - looked like she was already hurt.

HALLOWAY

Toxicology showed traces of arsenic - which would explain the severe abdominal pain she was displaying in the broadcast.

REED

Arsenic?

BLACKWOOD

He poisoned her.

HALLOWAY

You don't need a great deal of it, either. From what I could see in the broadcast, it seemed like it was already burning through her stomach lining. She would've gone into shock soon after, had it not been for the tragedy.

BLACKWOOD

You find any prints?

Halloway glances at Blackwood and shakes her head.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

We found her in lingerie, any signs of intercourse?

HALLOWAY

No evidence of vaginal penetration. Though, polymeric particles were traced on the external vulvar surfaces. They originate from nitrate latex gloves.

BLACKWOOD

Sounds like he was tempted. Ultimately found a way to restrain himself.

REED

If this is what restraining himself looks like, I don't wanna' see the other side of it.

They all stand in quiet reflection, as if paying their respects for the victim.

REED (V.O.)

You think she knew him?

EXT. FORENSIC SCIENCE DIVISION. EVENING

A windowless slab of concrete in a small lot surrounded by pine. Blackwood and Reed exit the building and head to their vehicle as the sun slips under the dense-barked woods.

BLACKWOOD

Possibly. Her foster mother, Mrs. Ross said something about a community center she would visit often, Queen City, couple miles from here. Thought it might be worth checking out until we get an address on that engineer, Travis Ryder.

(checks watch)

Might be closing soon.

REED

(checks watch)

We can head there first thing tomorrow. Ask around - maybe she had some friends, might know a thing or two.

A BLACK CROW shrieks overhead and they peer up at it. It's alone, circling them and cawing out relentlessly.

BLACKWOOD

You find a good place to stay?

REED

Sure. 15 minutes from the station. Westgate. You know it?

BLACKWOOD

Yeah. I can drop you off, pick you up in the morning if you'd like.

REED

That's alright. Wife wants me to pick up some Mexican tonight. Kids love Taco Tuesday. Besides, I gotta head downtown to drop these logs off with digital forensics.

Blackwood raises an eyebrow.

BLACKWOOD

(re: Reed's family)

You flew them in?

REED

Oh yeah. They love coming on work trips with me. Not too often we get to fly out of state. You got any kids yourself?

Blackwood draws his eyes away, clears his throat.

BLACKWOOD

...yeah. I got one.

REED

Lucky you. I already have three.  
Wife wants five. God help me.

Reed opens the door and plops himself into the car. Blackwood looks out to the pines where the sun's setting and sees the BLACK CROW gliding towards the dark night, no longer screeching, and ponders on it a moment before it disappears.

EXT. BLACKWOOD'S HOME. NIGHT

A small white home in a modest neighborhood. Knee high grass. Weeds eating up concrete. It's old and decaying compared to the neighboring homes, all of which are well maintained.

INT. BLACKWOOD'S HOME. KITCHEN. NIGHT

CLOSE on a CAN of beans plopping into an empty bowl. Blackwood sits at a small kitchen table for two. There's a lamp beside him that pulses onto his face and keeps him from slipping into darkness. He eats in silence.

INT. BLACKWOOD'S HOME. NURSERY. NIGHT

A wreck of forgotten tasks and cluttered mess - cardboard boxes lay half empty filled with stuffed animals, diapers and other miscellaneous items. A baby crib stands partially built in the corner of the room, dormant and still.

ANGLE ON a tabloid cut-out of a woman, the woman perhaps remembered from earlier in his memory, ANNA, Blackwood's wife, tacked on a dry-erase board with the word 'MISSING' under her photograph.

The board is filled with pieces related to her disappearance. HEADLINES such as: 44 Year Old Woman Mysteriously Disappears and Buffalo County on the Lookout for Missing Woman 'Anna Blackwood' and etc.

Blackwood's seated in a comforter and staring at the board across him, completely surrounded by a multitude of articles on the floor, disheartened and somber.

HOURS LATER.

Complete darkness. Pixels rhythmically flicker over Blackwood's face from a small television screen sitting on the floor. A VCR player is connected to it and sitting on his lap. He rewinds the tape and watches intently.

REVERSE on television screen: CCTV FOOTAGE. Time stamp -- 03:32:11 PM. Blackwood's got his eyes pierced on Anna as she exits the grocery with her hands full. She walks across the parking lot to a blue sedan and loads the groceries in the back seat. Blackwood watches, his eyes heavy, drifting in and out of consciousness.

She rounds the vehicle, and just as she's about to get in - she halts, a WOMAN approaches her and engages in a dialogue. From afar we see the woman is dressed casually, blue jeans, white top, her face too blurry to identify. Beat. The woman then walks off and Anna closes her door, follows her and disappears out of frame. REVERSE to reveal Blackwood fast asleep, sprawled out on the comforter.

INT. BUFFALO STATE POLICE HQ. CID FLOOR. DAY

The usual morning buzz of intermittent telephone rings and clattering keyboards. Hardened detectives in plain uniform roam the department floor, a wide fluorescent expanse lined with rows of cluttered desks.

Reed is amongst them seated behind a desk, eyes peeled at a computer screen studying SECURITY CAMERA FOOTAGE from BFN. Blackwood appears from behind with cups of coffee in hand and sits beside him.

REED  
(re: coffee)  
Thanks.

BLACKWOOD  
What are we looking at?

REED  
Security footage of master control  
at BFN.

BLACKWOOD  
That Ted?

REVERSE on SCREEN: Ted's seated behind the control panel and peering up at the monitor screens. The ANGLE of the camera is from the rear, slightly angled toward a side profile.

REED (O.S.)  
The only one who can override the  
feed with the flip of a switch.  
(MORE)

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

You see that button on the upper left section of the control panel? The big red button with the safety cover?

BLACKWOOD (O.S.)

Yeah, I see it.

REED

That's the manual override switch. Now watch closely.

They pierce their eyes on the screen: 06:03 PM. The weather forecast is live and Ted is overseeing it. His arms are spread out and plopped onto the control panel, like some kind of dictator with the fate of the world in his grasp. He looks off from the broadcast and peers at his wrist.

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

Checks the time. Here it comes.

Ted reverts back to the broadcast and leans further onto the control panel, the angle of which his body turns now is concealing the override switch and, almost synchronized, the image on the broadcast feed is hijacked to the scene of the crime. After a moment, Ted raises his arms over his head and gets to his feet in a sudden state of confusion.

REED (CONT'D)

(eyes Blackwood warily)  
Maybe it's just a coincidence.

BLACKWOOD

(short nasal huff)  
This the only angle you got?

REED

It's the only one in master control. As much as I wish it were true, physical logs tell me the switch hasn't been touched for twenty three years.

BLACKWOOD

Could that be tampered with?

Reed squints, thinks about it, never really considered. Detective LISA MAY, 43, striking beyond her years, rounds their desk, rests her hand on Blackwood's shoulder and extends a folder.

LISA

Hey Bruce, sorry to interrupt. This is for you.

BLACKWOOD  
(takes the folder)  
What's this?

LISA  
I went down to R&I to get the  
request I put in for the homicide  
I'm working. Thought I'd save you  
the trip.

BLACKWOOD  
(surprised)  
Oh. Thanks.

She leans over Blackwood and offers a hand to Reed.

LISA  
Detective May.

REED  
Special Agent Reed.

LISA  
Pleasure.  
(to Bruce)  
I'll see you around. Good luck.

BLACKWOOD  
(nods)  
Lisa.

Blackwood opens the folder and cocks his head back to Lisa for a split second, almost forgetting he's not alone. He turns to Reed, who's looking back at him with a faint smirk.

REED  
Doesn't sound too bad when you  
think about it.

BLACKWOOD  
What's that?

REED  
Bruce and Lisa. It's got a nice  
ring to it.

Blackwood brushes it off, turns back to the folder.

BLACKWOOD  
Just a work friend.

Reed's not buying it. He's got "bullshit" written all over his face.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

(re: folder)

He's been in and out of county for the past year. Possession - paraphernalia, petty larceny. Trespassing. Got an address too.

REED

(sips coffee)

Now we're talking.

EXT. SEA-SAC FLATS. EAST BUFFALO. DAY

A narrow lot of trailer home flats in a desolate field of dried up weeds. Most trailers are scattered around, some in decent shape, others patched with tarps and plywood. They're hemmed in by a chain-link fence that barely stands upright.

Blackwood and Reed make their way inside, their unwanted presence glaring on the faces of the townsfolk, all enjoying an evening of booze and nicotine. Some deliberately spit out of clear disgust, others drill their eyes through them silently.

Blackwood and Reed aimlessly continue inside, absorbing a feel for the place. Their eyes land on a group of children playing freeze-tag, who pay them no mind. An old BEARDED MAN leaning against a flimsy fence flags them down.

BEARDED MAN

Hey.

They glance at each other, walk towards the man.

BLACKWOOD

How's it going?

BEARDED MAN

Good 'til you's showed up.

REED

We're not here to cause any trouble.

BEARDED MAN

Then what you's here for?

BLACKWOOD

We're looking for Travis, Travis Ryder. You know him?

BEARDED MAN  
 (off to his left)  
 Maryl, you's know a boy by's the  
 name of Travis?

A disheveled woman watching from the screen door of their trailer home runs with the act.

MARYL  
 Travis? Never heard that name  
 around here.

The Bearded Man looks at the detectives, shrugs, upends his beer and tosses it into the pile of empty bottles beside him.

BEARDED MAN  
 Ran out of beer. Would be nice to  
 cool off some more.

Blackwood picks up the gist. He holds his gaze on the Bearded Man as he digs into his pocket and pulls some loose cash, handing over a five dollar bill.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)  
 Twelve pack would be nice.

MARYL  
 And I's running low on Marlboro  
 Red's.

Reed brings his hands to his hips, a weary breath slipping out of him. Bearded Man smirks, amused by his antics.

BEARDED MAN  
 You's heard the lady.

Blackwood slaps the other five in the man's hand.

BLACKWOOD  
 Travis.

BEARDED MAN  
 You's find him over there.

The man points to a trailer sitting off and away from the others in the lot.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)  
 Or at least you's would have couple  
 weeks ago. Hasn't been around in  
 quite some time. Still, the rent  
 comes in my's mailbox every month.

A telephone rings. Reed steps aside to answer a call.

BLACKWOOD  
How long? Two, three weeks?

BEARDED MAN  
(shouts)  
How long, Maryl?

MARYL  
(shouts)  
About three weeks now.

BEARDED MAN  
You's heard the lady.

BLACKWOOD  
Happen to know where he went?

BEARDED MAN  
(shouts)  
What's that you's were saying  
earlier, Maryl?

MARYL  
(shouts)  
Be nice to throw some ribs on the  
grill today.

Reed returns with a sense of urgency.

REED  
(to Blackwood)  
Digital Forensics. We got  
something.

Blackwood nods and shoots Bearded Man a stern look, his patience running thin. He empties whatever's left in his pocket and begrudgingly hands it over.

BEARDED MAN  
Off grid. I caught him when he's  
was leaving. Thought he was going  
gone for good.

BLACKWOOD  
Off grid, where?

BEARDED MAN  
Angola. Didn't tell me exactly  
where, if that's what you's after.  
You's can check the trailer too if  
you's don't believe me.

Blackwood digs his eyes into Bearded Man for a moment.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)

If somehow you's find him out there, I's be careful. Boy's got a fetish for gunpowder.

Their faces tense as they glance back to the trailer with a newfound sense of caution.

BLACKWOOD

How long have you known Travis?

BEARDED MAN

Couple years, maybe. That was about the time he moved into the lot.

BLACKWOOD

He ever leave out of the blue like this before?

BEARDED MAN

Don't think so, far as I's can remember. He's a quiet fella'. Keeps to himself for the most part.

REED

Was he acting strange at all? The day he left.

BEARDED MAN

(thinks hard)

He was real fidgety. Looking over his shoulder, like someone was after him or something. You boys detectives, ain't ya'? I can tell. Watch a lot of those cop shows.

(to Maryl)

These the kind of questions they be asking after a murder, right Maryl?

MARYL

(shouts)

Something like that.

BEARDED MAN

This about that girl that got killed the other day on BFN, Sarah Winslow?

Blackwood looks off, then back to the man, his reluctance to answer making it obviously clear that it's about the girl.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)

(pointing)

You see that little girl over there? The one in the pink shirt?

They look over to the group of children, still playing, and clock a blonde girl amongst them in a pink shirt.

BEARDED MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

That's my little girl.

They turn back to the man, a bit emotional now.

BEARDED MAN (CONT'D)

God forbid anyone else is murdered. But I'll tell you what. I's know who I'll be looking for if one of my own becomes a next victim.

The man's words laced with a subtle threat and Blackwood and Reed lock eyes with him for a long beat.

MARYL

Go on outta here now. Yall's got some work to do, ain't ya?

They get a last look at Maryl before their eyes spring back to Bearded Man, really feeling the tension.

EXT. BUFFALO HIGHWAY. DAY

Blackwood's vehicle darts down the interstate toward mid-rise district buildings up ahead.

EXT. FBI FIELD OFFICE. DIGITAL FORENSICS LAB. DAY

Tires screech to a halt in front of a bricked four story building just beside city hall. Blackwood and Reed leap out of the car and head inside.

INT. DIGITAL FORENSICS LAB. DAY

Small office. Server racks. Monitors. GPU clusters. A high-end forensic workstation stretched along a wall at the hands of Lab Analyst JOE RENDELLI, leaning over a monitor, coffee in hand and debriefing Blackwood and Reed.

RENDELLI

We pulled every log from BFN and reconstructed the broadcast from IPs, routing nodes, timestamps, everything you brought us. This allowed us to trace the path back to the entry point.

REED

(surprised)

So what? You found him?

RENDELLI

We found something. Evidence shows the stream didn't come from the station's local servers. Take a look on this monitor.

(pointing to monitor)

What you're seeing here is a normal video feed. The patterns are uniform - steady, smooth, rhythmic, consistent. Like a heartbeat. Now take a look over here.

(points to other monitor)

This is a video feed with data bursts. It's interrupted by sudden spikes, you see. But what's interesting is these spikes repeat at regular intervals, which makes it intentional - so I dug deeper, and what I found was exceptional.

Rendelli hands a note card over to Reed with coordinates written on it. He studies it for a moment, flashes it over to Blackwood.

BLACKWOOD

Coordinates.

RENDELLI

Your killer, whoever he is, hid a numeric pattern in the data - a riddle in the static with each data burst lining up with a point on a map. And it was fairly easy to decipher. Almost like he wanted us to find it.

BLACKWOOD

Where do the coordinates lead?

RENDELLI

Harbor-view Industrial. Down in rural Angola. You know it?

They go bug-eyed.

BLACKWOOD

It's a service yard. Place was abandoned in the early 90s, I think.

RENDELLI

That's right.

REED

(to Blackwood)

It's gotta' be him. It's gotta' be Travis.

Blackwood's silent, the expression on his face suggesting uncertainty.

RENDELLI

City still owns the yard. I gave them a call just before you got here. Turns out, the power's still active.

Blackwood shakes his head.

BLACKWOOD

Sounds like a setup.

REED

(to Rendelli)

I need you to cross-check with the tower logs before we roll with it.

RENDELLI

Already did. Everything checks out.

REED

(to Blackwood)

It's the best lead we've got.

Blackwood and Reed hold a glance with one another.

RENDELLI

This thing you got going on with this psycho killer gives me the chills, man. Let me know what you guys find out there.

REED

Thanks, Joe.

Reed slaps him on the shoulder and they head out.

INT. BUFFALO STATE POLICE HQ. INCIDENT ROOM. DAY

CLOSE on a series of PHOTOGRAPHS of an abandoned building in deep rural Angola. A rusted sign near the entrance reads 'Village of Angola. Service Division. Authorized Personnel Only.'

BLACKWOOD (O.S.)

Let's run through this one last time. Officer Murphy'll set up a perimeter - two block radius, no one in or out. I want uniforms on the North and South with SWAT ready to go behind them.

REVERSE to reveal a room full of bodies in PPE gear standing before Blackwood and Reed addressing the complexities of this op. beside a WHITE BOARD tacked with a detailed debrief.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

TechOps goes in first, full sweep, followed by EOD. Once we get the all-clear we'll move in with Commander Ripley and Delta squad. Everything after that is ERT. Let's make this swift and clean, no mistakes, no heroics. Whoever sent us these coordinates wants us there for a reason. Do *not* let your guard down. We get in, we get out, and we make it home to our families tonight. Any questions?

Everyone's quiet and staring dead ahead with eyes of intent.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

Grab a coffee, eat a snack. We move out in ten.

EXT. INTERSTATE 90. BUFFALO, NY. DAY

An assembly of unmarked vehicles dart past a slab of concrete bearing 'Buffalo - City Limit. Pop. 280,000 - Elev. 600ft'.

EXT. HARBOR-VIEW INDUSTRIAL. DAY

The place is a forgotten ghost town of abandoned industrial equipment, sheet metal sheds and looted vehicles. The place is quiet, completely surrounded with badges.

A group of EOD latching onto shields in full PPE hold by a fence on the east side of the lot.

They're flanked by a dozen SWAT who are armed and awaiting orders. Blackwood and Reed are amongst them in full bulletproof holding the rear. Static scratches over walkie com's -

TECHOPS

(over walkie)

Area clear. No sign of threat.  
We'll advise of any movement from  
the sky.

EOD TECH

Copy that. EOD moving in.

They begin to inch their way through an opening in the fence - their sights piercing the building up ahead. A subtle wind whistles past the knee high weeds of this neglected lawn and their hearts jump at a sudden gust of wind that sends the door of a corroded tractor crashing into itself. They deflate and redirect their weapons to the building.

Thunder strikes above and Reed flinches, contrary to Blackwood, who looks to the sky as if his name called upon by the son of man himself. They continue in tight formation and reach a weathered metal plated door.

An EOD tech feeds a wire under the door - a small camera at its end - as another tech retrieves a grainy feed on a small monitor. He watches the live feed carefully.

OFF monitor. A black and white image of the door from inside the building. Seems to be no sign of wires or planted explosives on the door hinges. The wire then levels with the floor and we see no pressure plates or trip wires.

The tech looks long and hard before looking to Commander Ripley and giving the all-go. The tech gestures a signal to all EOD personnel and they quickly retreat. A hefty SWAT member parts the group from the rear and hoists a battering ram -

Beat.

TACTICAL COMMANDER

BPD open up!

BAM! The battering ram crashes into the door and sends it flying open. They storm in, arms ready and aiming ahead.

INT. ABANDONED BUILDING. SAME TIME

They charge into a room that's completely empty. Their mounted flashlights sweep the corners of the building and they quickly find themselves securing the entire space in a matter of seconds.

All eyes zero in to the center of the room where a RED ROTARY TELEPHONE sits beside a LIFELESS BODY. Blackwood and Reed enter the building and notice the men circling the two.

TACTICAL COMMANDER  
Building secured.

Blackwood and Reed move closer and fixate their eyes on a naked man and study him a moment. The body is upside down, ankles wrapped tightly in CHAINS, hanging from a PIPE overhead. From the feet to the rib cage, the body is a dull pale, only turning to a bruised purple from the neck down. His features are swollen and congested, blood settling into the only place it's got left to go.

The men look nauseated, cupping their hands over their faces from the horrible stench the body is exuding. Reed shakes his head, his nostrils flaring. OFF Blackwood, transfixed on the telephone line sitting right beside the body, as if knowing it was coming. Beat.. the phone rings.

The men recoil in fear, their blood pressure shooting through the roof, and survey each other with sharp, quick glances - all eyes falling on the detectives. Blackwood, already expecting it, reaches into his back pocket, slides on a pair of latex gloves and pulls his tape recorder out.

REED  
You sure about this?

BLACKWOOD  
Negative.

REED  
We should get EOD in here. Have them check the line before you pick it up. Could be a bomb.

BLACKWOOD  
Could be our only call. Everyone brace.

They retreat as far as they can, their backs against the concrete walls, crouching and bracing for what comes.

Blackwood inches closer to the telephone, sweating bullets, glancing back at Reed, and as he finally reaches for it, he braces himself, hits RECORD on the recorder and instantly brings the receiver to his ear.

A slow heavy breath hisses on the line. Blackwood listens, both refraining from speaking for a long moment, somewhat a psychological warfare between the two. Then -

DEEP VOICE

That's a lot of guns for a phone call.

The VOICE on the other side of the line is deep and chilling. Blackwood grips the phone tighter.

BLACKWOOD

Yeah well, was hoping to find you here.

DEEP VOICE

Let's not get ahead of ourselves, detective. We're only just getting to know each other.

BLACKWOOD

Is that what we're doing here? You could've just phoned in the station, would've saved us the trouble. Is this how you amuse yourself?

DEEP VOICE

I find the game of chess to be quite exhilarating, actually.

BLACKWOOD

In that case we should grab some coffee and have ourselves a game. I'm not too bad a player myself.

DEEP VOICE

It would be my pleasure to share the board with you, Bruce. After all, you were the United States Junior Chess Champion back in '64.

Blackwood smirks, glances at Reed a second.

BLACKWOOD

You did your research.

DEEP VOICE  
I know you better than you know  
yourself, detective.

Beat. Blackwood thinks.

BLACKWOOD  
What's your name?

DEEP VOICE  
You can call me Son of Sam.

BLACKWOOD  
Alright, Son of Sam. Why am I here?  
What do you want?

SON OF SAM  
I want to help you.

BLACKWOOD  
Is that right?

SON OF SAM  
You've got a mask glued to your  
face that you're refusing to rip  
away, and I want to help you get  
rid of it. Show you your true  
potential.

BLACKWOOD  
Perhaps you should take a hard look  
in a mirror and reflect on those  
words.

SON OF SAM  
The devil is not as black as he is  
painted, Bruce.

BLACKWOOD  
Intelligent chess player poet.  
That's not adding up with the whole  
murderer aspect of things.

SON OF SAM  
Touché. But what really isn't  
holding up is the idea of a man who  
loses his wife and child one day  
and isn't compelled to unleash an  
unholy fist onto the world.

Defeat in Blackwood's eyes. His lip begins to tremble. He's  
fighting tears and trying to conceal it from the men  
surrounding him.

SON OF SAM (CONT'D)

You still there, Bruce?

Blackwood takes a deep breath and brings the receiver back to his ear, somewhat recomposed.

BLACKWOOD

Was it you?

SON OF SAM

What do you think?

Blackwood clears his throat, wipes his nose, his face flushed with red.

BLACKWOOD

(low, seething)

Was it you?

Long beat.

SON OF SAM

No. It wasn't me.

Blackwood exhales a deep sigh of relief.

SON OF SAM (CONT'D)

Now you see, Bruce. You can run as far as the constellations go, but your soul will always be a realm of inescapable hollow. I can help free you from that.

BLACKWOOD

Hell, if you're so inclined.

SON OF SAM

Keep your eyes peeled, Bruce. You and I are smart enough to know not everyone is who they seem to be. The hands of these so called friends and acquaintances of yours are just as filthy as mine.

BLACKWOOD

These mind games, they're are a bit elementary, don't you think?

SON OF SAM

Like I said, I'm only trying to help. I suppose I could lay it all out for you in this moment, but, for my own selfish reasons, I'm afraid that'll have to wait.

BLACKWOOD

Sounds like a pathetic excuse to  
continue killing innocent people.

SON OF SAM

We're all victim to our own vice -  
who's to say one is better than the  
other? Sin is sin. It's  
definitively bad. But good can be  
false. And Travis was no exception  
to the latter.

Beat. Blackwood glances at the the body - Travis.

SON OF SAM (CONT'D)

Jennifer Collins. July 21st, 1995.  
I'm sure a detective as fine as you  
are can put the pieces together.

BLACKWOOD

(glances at Reed)  
Travis Ryder. You killed him?

SON OF SAM

I think this is the part where I  
ask for a lawyer.

BLACKWOOD

Funny. For a man as vile as you  
are, a sense of humor isn't what  
you lack.

SON OF SAM

And what is it that I lack, Bruce?

BLACKWOOD

A mother, father. Maybe both.

The line goes quiet. Blackwood's struck a nerve, and he knows  
it.

SON OF SAM

(singing)

The killer awoke before dawn, he  
put his boots on.. he took a face  
from the ancient gallery, and he  
walked on down the hall.. he went  
into the room where his sister  
lived, and then he paid a visit to  
his brother, and then he walked on  
down the hallway.. and he came to a  
door.. and he looked inside..

Silence. Blackwood listens to deep slow breathing coming from the other end. Then -

SON OF SAM (CONT'D)

(stern)

I'll be seeing you, Bruce.

The call abruptly drops. Blackwood stops the tape recorder and just stands there a moment, unsettled and flustered as he eyes the receiver.

BLACKWOOD (V.O.)

He was watching us. Somewhere out there.

EXT. ABANDONED BUILDING. MOMENTS LATER

The daylight slipping away into a sea of muddy clouds. Blackwood and Reed stand beside each other, watching a pair of paramedics wheel out a BODY BAG on a GURNEY. Blackwood then brings the tape recorder between them and presses PLAY.

SON OF SAM

(on recorder)

That's a lot of guns for a phone call.

He stops the tape.

BLACKWOOD

TechOps cleared the building. There's no cameras or hidden microphones inside. He was out here, watching us from afar.

Reed digests this. They listen to the faint hiss of wind blowing at their feet and look out into the vast desert up ahead with a suspicion sitting deep inside of their eyes.

BLACKWOOD (CONT'D)

There's one thing we know for certain.

REED

What's that?

BLACKWOOD

There was a connection between Travis and our killer. Whether it was transactional or personal, I just don't see how this all ties into Sarah Winslow's death. Why her?

REED

Maybe she was at the wrong place at the wrong time. A "misstep" of fate.

Blackwood looks over him for a second, not really buying it.

BLACKWOOD

We're playing right into his hand. At this rate, we won't be finding him. He'll be finding us. Ironic as it sounds, if we want to get ahead of him, we have to move backwards. There anything else we can get from the broadcast data?

REED

Digital forensics is currently working on identifying the hardware encoder and metadata. It'll tell us which brand of software he was using, also tell us what camera the video originated from. That'll hopefully give us some real insight into who he is, or where the equipment was likely purchased. Could take a couple more days at most.

BLACKWOOD

We'll analyze the tape in the meantime and run his voice through biometrics to see if it matches with anyone in our system. I doubt anything will come back, he's too calculated to know if it was.

REED

Still worth a shot.

They have a moment to relish the gray hues streaking the Buffalo skies.

REED (CONT'D)

You asked him something earlier - you said, "Was it you?" Looked pretty emotional. What was that about?

Blackwood goes eerily still, doesn't respond to Reed, staring dead ahead and getting lost in this bleak, quiet expanse. Long silence. Reed waits and watches him with anxious anticipation.

A moment passes and Blackwood exhales, his shoulder's collapsing, a release of some sort, and holding his sights up ahead as the darkness sweeps the skies, he hands Reed the RECORDER and somberly goes off into the cold dark night.

BLACK.

THE END.