

DARKER BLACK

Written by

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UTA  
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FADE IN:

INT. WOOD-PANELED MEETING ROOM

Behind two rows of metal fold-out chairs is a little counter where a large man helps himself to coffee. Behind him a clock marks off the time. It's 9:45.

JOHN STUCKI is an intimidating sort. Handlebar mustache. Navy tattoo on a visible forearm. Short-cropped gray hair. But his polo shirt suggests he can be affable enough when he's not fighting wars. He pours dark joe into a styrofoam cup and begins to add a small mountain of sugar.

The door opens and a thin man in an over-sized suit walks in. DAN TAGGART may be in his early forties, but the lines around his eyes and his sullen demeanor speak to experience with the dark side of human nature. He looks to John and nods.

JOHN

You again?

TAGGART

Always.

Taggart helps himself to a donut from the box of Dunkins sitting beside the coffeepot. He chews it slowly and looks to the wall facing the chairs -- a wall we have not yet seen.

JOHN

They're all the same, you know.

TAGGART

Some one should be here.

JOHN

Buddy, I sure wouldn't come if I didn't have to.

TAGGART

Suppose not.

The door opens again and in walks JESSE in tight jeans and a Black Keys T-shirt one size too small. Her hair is raspberry red from some cheap dye and cut short. Her ears are gaged and her nose is pierced. Her mouth remains pinched in a sullen line. She finishes sending a text on her cell phone and then places it in a sequined denim purse.

JOHN

Hello.

JESSE  
What?

JOHN  
I said hello.

JESSE  
Hi.

JOHN  
Coffee?

JESSE  
No.

Jesse turns her back on the men and takes a seat in the front row, to one side.

Taggart smiles at John and shrugs his shoulders.

Is this an AA meeting? It certainly looks like one.

The door opens again and a clean-cut man in his late thirties enters carrying a book of Sodoku. A handgun rests in a belt holster on his right, a badge hangs around his neck on a chain. DETECTIVE MARK DOUGLAS wears no smile and barely looks at the men as he crosses the room and takes a seat away from Jesse.

JOHN  
Morning. Want a donut?

DETECTIVE DOUGLAS  
I ate. Can we get this over with already?

JOHN  
Couple more minutes.

John leans in close to Taggart so no one else can hear.

JOHN (CONT'D)  
What's his deal?

TAGGART  
He's the cop. I don't think he believes in this sort of thing.

JOHN  
That's strange.

TAGGART  
I don't believe in it, either.

JOHN

Then why the hell do you come?

TAGGART

Probably the free donuts.

When the door opens again, two men step into the small room. The first is in his sixties, with short sandy hair and a beer belly under a dress shirt. The other is a younger, thinner version of this same man. They are GREG, 61, and ERIC STEVENS, 24, father and son.

Greg points his son to a couple chairs near the detective. Everyone watches them, silently, almost as if they are too afraid to ask them if they want coffee. The two men sit with their heads down as if praying.

Two more enter. One is a Catholic priest dressed in his black frock and white collar. FATHER LOUIS is near retirement, a gaunt face with wrinkles. The man with him is dressed in a sharp bronze suit, HARRISON COLE. They see Jesse and walk toward her.

From his chair, Greg Stevens glares at the man in the bronze suit. Beside him, Eric watches, concerned at his father's growing anger.

GREG

What are you doing here, you dumb motherfucker?

ERIC

Dad!

HARRISON

I'm here for support.

GREG

Support?

JOHN

Mr. Stevens...

GREG

What?

JOHN

Doesn't matter who's here. Ain't nothing gonna change what happens. Not now.

Harrison sits behind the Jesse. Father Louis takes a chair beside her and puts a hand on the woman's shoulder.

JESSE

Don't worry. You'll get what you came for, you stupid hillbilly.

GREG

Who the fuck are you?

JESSE

I'm his sister.

GREG

Then fuck you, too.

ERIC

Dad! Please. Just stop.

John walks to a phone hanging on the wall. It's an old phone receiver, bright red, the kind you only see in institutions and government buildings.

JOHN

Please turn all cell phones and pagers to vibrate.

As Harrison and Detective Douglas silence their phones, John lifts the receiver from its cradle.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's time.

He places the phone back on its hook. As he does, we finally see the wall everyone is facing.

The wall is one giant window. An ugly beige curtain is drawn on the other side of the glass. As everyone watches, the curtain parts and reveals...

A bright, sterile room, nearly empty but for a large hospital bed in the middle, upon which a man lays secured by leather constraints. LUCAS WAYNE BLACK is fortyish, ruggedly handsome, and completely calm. An IV has been placed in his left arm.

A black woman in a stylish suit stands beside the prisoner. She looks through the window and nods to John. This is Warden STEPHANIE GRIMES. The witnesses in the gallery can hear her voice as she addresses the man on the bed, but it is a bit muffled from the old government-issue speakers that feed into the gallery.

GRIMES

Lucas Wayne Black, a jury of your peers has found you guilty of the murder of Brenda Stevens.

(MORE)

GRIMES (CONT'D)

The state of Ohio has sentenced you to death by lethal injection. May God have mercy on your soul.

The curtain closes.

JESSE

What's going on?

HARRISON

A medical technician is attaching the line to his IV.

JESSE

Why can't we see him?

HARRISON

It's protocol. They'll open the curtains as soon as they're done.

Just then, the curtains part again.

A long tube has been attached to the IV on Lucas' arm. It snakes behind him through a hole in the concrete wall beside a thin one-way window reflecting back into the room.

GRIMES

Lucas Black, do you have any last words?

LUCAS

I want to confess to the murders of two women. Suzie Richards and Lisa Heatherington. I am a bad man. No doubt about it. And for that, you can have your damned execution. But before you do, I have a few more things I want to say. I did not kill Brenda Stevens. I meant to. But somebody got to her first.

Grimes smirks.

GRIMES

Somewhere out there where we'll never find him, right? One more bogeyman. You like making people afraid. But no one's afraid of you anymore, Lucas.

LUCAS

No. I mean, the her killer is here. Here in the Death House. Here right now. Watching this execution.

Greg Stevens looks at his son, confused.

GREG

What the fuck is he saying?

Everyone fidgets in their seat, looking at each other. This is not supposed to happen. This is not the way the execution is supposed to go.

At the back, John wrinkles his brow as a grin stretches across Taggart's face.

LUCAS

I'm going to talk now. And you're going to let me finish. You're going to let me say what I have to say. Because when I'm done, you'll see who the real killer is.

Grimes is stunned. She looks to the glass, at John.

LUCAS (CONT'D)

I want to start that day I first saw her, Brenda Stevens. She was wearin' these checkered tights under this short business skirt. I'm kind of a sucker for tights. I knew right away she had to be next.