

Casualty of War

by

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FADE IN.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - DAY

A dingy hallway. Discarded soda bottles lie in corners. Paint chips from walls. Everything faded, dull.

TWO FEMALE COPS flatten themselves against the wall, outside a door. Tension distorts their faces. GUNS drawn.

JANICE MITCHELL (30) reaches over, bang on the door.

JANICE

Open up! Police! We have a warrant!

She nods to her partner. Her blond ponytail bobs against her uniform.

MARIA RODRIGUES (35) nods back. Less willowy than Janice, she's short and squat - built like a human tank.

Janice tests the door knob. Unlocked.

The two charge in, and the world switches to slow motion.

INT. TENEMENT APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The door bursts open, reveals a filthy apartment. Clutter on the floor, cracks on the walls.

JANICE (V.O.)

I remember the green army jacket. And a rich aroma; some sort of musky smell.

MALIK WILLIAMS (19) stands dead-center in the mess. African-American. Tall and thin.

JANICE (V.O.)

The kid spun around. He couldn't have been older than nineteen.

Malik plunges a hand into his jacket pocket, lunges at Maria and Janice.

MARIA

Drop the gun!

Janice takes aim, FIRES repeatedly.

JANICE (V.O.)

Of course, I shot him. Twice. Once in his shoulder.

The other, right aside the heart. It's not like I was *trying* to kill him. It just looked like... felt like... it was him or me. And life isn't like in the movies - where I could've played Dirty Harry and targeted his knee.

Malik goes down like a rock.

Janice trains the gun on him. Maria does a quick recon of the apartment. The place is cluttered. But empty.

Maria whips out a radio.

MARIA

Backup needed. Suspect down. 146 Gun-hill Road, Bronx.

Janice searches Malik's pockets, and finds: a TOY GUN.

She hands it to Maria, and gets down low on the floor. Malik's alive - blood spitting from his lips.

Janice holds him, checks his pulse.

JANICE (V.O.)

He strangled on his own blood, fluid filling his shattered lung long before the medics came. And I watched him. Held him, actually - in a small, dirty tenement on Gun-hill Road, Room 34A.

PARAMEDICS and MORE OFFICERS burst into the room.

Malik's not moving anymore. Janice steps back as medics take her place.

JANICE (V.O.)

I remember thinking there really wasn't all that much blood. That the little holes in his shirt were too small to have done too much damage to his lungs.

She looks down as Malik's loaded onto a stretcher. A smear of red soaks the wood floor.

JANICE (V.O.)

Not all that gory. Still, he died. His heart shredded by bullets. Ones that came from *my* gun.

EXT. CURBSIDE - DAY

Janice stands on the sidewalk, flanked by MORE COPS.

SPECTATORS gather, crane their necks to get a glimpse.
Some CHANT as Malik's wheeled out on a gurney.

SPECTATORS

NYPD, KKK. Remove the hood, they're all
the same!

As for Malik, there's not much to see. The sheet covers
his blood spattered face.

Lights flash on the ambulance, parked curbside. The
stretcher's loaded. A straggling PARAMEDIC climbs in,
shuts the doors.

Janice stares at the ambulance as it pulls away.

JANICE (V.O.)

He never tried to say anything. There was
no profound, final statement. Believe me,
I half expected one. One minute I was
holding him, feeling his body shudder.
The next, his breathing had stopped and
my nose told me he had died. He died. And
I never heard him speak a single word.

INT. PRECINCT - DAY

Janice sits at a desk, talks (MOS) to a STAFF SARGENT.
The man jots notes, regards Janice with professional
sympathy in his eyes.

JANICE (V.O.)

His name was Malik Johnson, and he was
pronounced DOA. Another casualty in the
War on Drugs. Some say, killed due to his
race. That's all I needed: to be painted
as the next Derik Chauvin. Though it
didn't take 8 minutes, 46 seconds in MY
case.

The Sargent slides a form over to Janice.

JANICE (V.O.)

We lifted fifteen bags of Bath Salts from
the apartment. As well as needles, rubber
ties, and three grams of PCP. No question
the kid was a dealer. He had a list of
priors - most of them petty theft.

IA confirmed that he'd been "armed" at the time I shot him. So they ruled for "Officer Self Defense."

Janice shakes the Sargent's hand. He sadly watches her leave.

INT. INDOOR TRACK - DAY

Gray walls enclose a rubber track. Janice runs a lap, drenched in sweat. Hair sticks to her forehead.

JANICE (V.O.)
Still, dammit, I'd never killed anyone before. After filing my report, I used three miles around the track to shake off the worst of the adrenaline. Drowned in the shower for awhile. Then left for home.

Janice stops mid-stride. She bends over, huffs to catch her breath.

Then exits. The metal door clangs shut in her wake.

INT. JANICE'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Janice paces her kitchen, dressed in a cotton nightgown. She talks on the phone (MOS).

JANICE (V.O.)
At home, I called my Mom. She saw the news. I reassured her I was safe. And followed that up with a call to the boyfriend. We talked for two whole hours. Almost all of it about the shooting. And - God forbid - what we knew would come next.

In the living room, ANGRY CIVILIANS flash across the TV screen. The news scrawl declares: "Another Police killing. Was it necessary?"

A counter protest group waves signs: "#All Lives Matter".

Janice grimaces, hangs up the phone. Turns away from what she sees.

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Janice crawls into bed, movements old for her age. She pulls the comforter to her chin.

JANICE (V.O.)
I was exhausted, so I went to bed early.
It didn't take long. I was out, almost
immediately.

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Janice opens her eyes, stares at the clock.

JANICE (V.O.)
At two o'clock, I woke up thirsty.
Couldn't get back to sleep.

INT. JANICE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Janice stumbles into the kitchen, eyes half shut.

Barefoot, she shuffles to the refrigerator door. She gropes inside, retrieves a carton of OJ.

JANICE (V.O.)
I remember seeing a movie where a female
cop's attacked in her apartment, on her
way to the john. In the film, she dives
to the floor, pulls a gun from a thigh
holster, and comes up blazing. Nifty
stuff on screen. Whatever writer came up
with it probably even uses that material
for his own fantasies, now and then.

Janice turns around to put the juice on the table.

Finds Malik Johnson sitting there. Two dried pink holes
crust his Eisenhower jacket. He smiles, flashes blood
stained teeth.

Janice drops the carton. It hits the floor with a splash,
soaks her legs and nightgown - through to the skin.

JANICE (V.O.)
But me - I don't keep push daggers near
my pillow, or holsters under my lace
nightie. Like I'd even buy something that
cutesy-cheap.

Malik makes a motion, as if to stand up. Janice grunts,
and stumbles backwards blindly.

JANICE (V.O.)

The apartment had been dark. Who could say I'd seen him clearly enough to make a positive ID?

She stares at Malik, frozen in shock.

JANICE (V.O.)

Though the question was moot. The kid did die, no matter who was in my kitchen. A sick joke by one of his friends? Unfortunately, my gun was out of reach - tucked safely away under my bed. Safe... for HIM, at least.

Janice gropes behind her. She grabs a bowl, and throws it at Malik.

It passes through him, and hits the opposite wall.

Janice stares in disbelief. She grabs a spoon from the sink. She takes careful aim, and chucks THAT at Malik.

It lands between the bullet holes, travels clean out his back.

JANICE

Shit!

She stops and stares - mouth open.

JANICE (V.O.)

There's a phrase horror writers use, called the "fool in the attic". You know, a family moves into a house and hears demonic noises. They go up to investigate - alone and always unarmed. The audience cringes, screams at them not to do it. For the love of God and all that's holy. Please!

Janice stares down at the puddle of orange juice. Then up at Malik. He's still there.

JANICE (V.O.)

I'd swore I'd never be that stupid. Then I decided to not run for the door. Curiosity killed the cat. Maybe it'd kill me, too.

Janice approaches the table hesitantly, ready to bolt.

She settles into a chair, right across from Malik.

JANICE (V.O.)
I didn't touch him. Didn't want to.

Janice picks up a salt shaker, tosses it at Malik. That goes through him, as well. She regards him cautiously.

JANICE
Well, you haven't tried to eat my face.
So there's more gravy about you than
grave. I guess?

No response.

JANICE
Planning to quietly rot in my kitchen?

Malik shrugs silently.

JANICE
You have to have *some* reason to be here.
At least my subconscious thinks so. I
should've taken that Ambien. It's a whole
lot nicer for my dreams.

Janice picks up the pepper shaker. She eyes it, then eyes Malik. Puts the shaker down. Annoyance starts to sink in.

JANICE
You can't play the martyr, Malik. I've
seen your priors.

Malik smiles, a ghoulish expression.

MALIK
What about them?

Janice leans across the table. She backs up and wrinkles her nose as a nasty smell hits.

JANICE
What about them? In 2022, you held up a
convenience store. You got off that one
on a technicality. You've been held on
charges of battery, theft. You aren't
nice. That's what I mean.

MALIK
No-one died. Look at yourself. Don't
deflect. You're the one who killed ME.

Janice glances nervously down at her flimsy nightgown. A defiant look grows on her face.

JANICE

That doesn't make you any less guilty.
You think we *planted* that Amazon
warehouse of drugs we found in there?

MALIK

That shit don't justify what went down.
Lady, you're the gangster. 100% in the
wrong.

Janice stares at Malik, bug-eyed.

JANICE

For shooting you?!?

MALIK

(shrugs)

An innocent businessman, selling my
wares. You busted in, I protected myself.
You do believe in self-defense. Don't you
- Ms... Uh... Officer?

Janice stares daggers at Malik.

JANICE

Drug dealing's hardly harmless. Though
I'm guessing you'd argue that, too?

Malik grins.

MALIK

If you're listening? I'm game.

JANICE

If I do - will you... go away?

MALIK

Yeah. Or when you wake up. Whatever comes
first. But you gotta agree to play.

Janice shoots Malik a cynical look.

JANICE

What's in it for you?

Malik shrugs. Bits of skin flake from his cheek.

MALIK

You killed me less than twelve hours ago.
You at least owe me the time of day.

Janice plucks at the wet fabric of her nightgown, unsure.

JANICE
Promise to leave?

Malik holds up a cold, grey hand.

MALIK
Scouts honor. And I was one. Once. Back
when I was eight.

JANICE (V.O.)
And so I agreed. Whatever it took to get
him out of my kitchen. Besides, he was
starting to seriously smell.

Janice folds her arms protectively across her chest.

JANICE
Fine, I'm listening. Take your best shot.
Figuratively. But make it quick. I'm
exhausted.

Malik nods, the skin on his cheek translucent, laced with
livid spider-web veins.

MALIK
I'll let you start first.

JANICE
How -

MALIK
By answering this: you believe in
freedom?

Janice stares at him, waits for the follow-up.

JANICE
Can you be a bit more specific? Please?

Malik sighs. Air WHISTLES from his shattered lung.

MALIK
I mean, you think people have a right to
live their lives how they want.... doing,
y'know - whatever. As long as they don't
mess with other folks along the way?

JANICE
You mean, as long as they're not as
violent as you've been?

Malik leans back, teeth bared in a ghastly grin.

MALIK

Hey, systemic violence makes certain situations... inevitable. Folks gotta pay the rent. Eat. If there's no jobs, I gotta do something. You seen my street? People are *suffering*. Thanks to the system YOU protect, Officer. Ain't my fault that's where the money is.

JANICE

That's your big excuse? You drug deal as a Good Samaritan? Bullshit. What you sell *increases* suffering. No-one has the right to a "freedom" which makes things worse!

MALIK

(beat)

You so sure about that?

JANICE

Crystal clear.

MALIK

'Kay. Let's run with that, "Officer". You think fucking should be a crime, too?

He leers at Janice. She chokes, tries to process what she's just heard.

JANICE

Excuse me? F... I mean, what?

MALIK

Lady, cop or not, you look...

(gives her the once-over)

Like you're still got thing's going good. And holy-rollers become trad-wives. Not cops. Forgive the profiling, but I'm guessin': if they outlawed pre-marital sex, you'd get pissed. Am I right?

A disturbed look crawls across Janice's face.

JANICE

Of course. You can't legislate morality. What's that got to do with... anything?

MALIK

Even though it *could* be dangerous? You can get HIV. Pass it on.

JANICE

Still. I - I mean, if anyone wants to take that risk, that's their business.

They're the ones who'll have to face the consequences!

Malik looks casually around the room. Bloodshot eyes fall on bottles of liquor on the kitchen counter, tucked discretely in one corner.

MALIK

Nice. You drink J.D.? That stuff rots your liver. It don't play well with your judgement, either.

JANICE

A gift from a friend. I usually drink light beer. And only on days off.

Malik looks at the bottle, then back to Janice.

MALIK

People do stupid stuff when drunk. Sometimes, criminal things. You remember the Killian case you worked on Greenwich Ave?

JANICE (V.O.)

Mentioning Robert Killian? Memories like that... cut deep. I'd made Killian's acquaintance my second year on the force. I'll never forget the case. Though I tried. Hard.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. ROBERT KILLIAN'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A grungy apartment, filled with Salvation Army furniture.

JANICE (V.O.)

Robert Killian was a miserable son of a bitch. A father of two. Kids who should've been removed from his "care" years ago.

ROBERT (42) sits on the couch, glass in hand. Scruffy head to toe, he wears a shirt with the tail pulled out.

The TV blares. A LITTLE GIRL (8) sits on the floor. Tinkers with a hand held video game.

JANICE (V.O.)

Killian didn't have to have his fix just to get through the day.

But whenever he felt he couldn't cope, he
turned to alcohol to solve his problems.
With virulently undesirable results.

Killian looks over at the girl. He stands up, strolls
toward her. He's huge, compared to her tiny frame.

JANICE (V.O.)
I got to know him after he'd lost his
job, and went home to celebrate with a
pack of Four Loko. Lacking a wife, he'd
turned on his daughter instead.

Killian's shadow falls over the girl.

JANICE (V.O.)
He used a table knife to cut her.

There's a knife in Killian's hand. He looks at it, then
back at the girl. She glances up, eyes innocent.

The vision goes mercifully to black.

JANICE (V.O.)
We put him away. She's in a foster home
now, still undergoing therapy for rape
victims. Sick bastard. I wish I could've
turned the knife on *him*.

END FLASHBACK.

Janice leans across the table, snarls.

JANICE
Killian had problems that had nothing to
do with alcohol. What HE did shouldn't
affect ME.

MALIK
It DIDN'T "affect" you? That's cold.

Memory of the horror makes Janice's voice soft.

JANICE
It did affect me. Immensely.
(beat)
But I'm talking about my right to... uh -

Her eyes flit to the bottle in the corner.

JANICE
Drink responsibly.
(whispers to herself)
God, I could use one now.

MALIK

So, you don't believe in Prohibition?

JANICE

Who the fuck cares?!? And no - I don't!
Enough with the games: what are you
trying to get me to say? That I think
folks should be allowed to have their own
lifestyle, as long as they don't hurt
other people, like Killian did? Fine.
Peachy keen. I'm all in.

Malik laughs grimly. Starts to look a little transparent
around the edges.

MALIK

So what's wrong with dealing? All I did
was give people something they wanted. In
this shit-show of a city, it's what some
needed, just to get by.

JANICE

Something that could *kill* them.

MALIK

It made them happy. So what if it killed
them in the long-run? That's their
business. Not yours. Little Ms.
Privileged White Girl.

JANICE

You arguing for legalized suicide, too?

A cold wind whistles through the kitchen. The radiator
kicks on, ticks quietly in the corner. Janice shivers -
glares at her uninvited "guest".

JANICE

It becomes my business when they're so
addicted they knock off a convenience
store to support their habit.

MALIK

Not everybody does. But ain't it nice the
laws have pushed prices so high people
got to rob to get their fix? You know, I
made stuff in my basement, sold it with a
500% mark up. That allowed me to live
large.

(beat)

I mean, until you busted in.

Janice wrinkles her nose as she takes in Malik's
deteriorating smell.

JANICE

Drug dealing's not a victimless crime.
What about children?

Malik tries to pick up a glass of water on the table. His hand goes right through, like it's not there.

MALIK

I never dealt to kids. Too many narcs in the schools. But just 'cause kids don't drink don't make the parents off limits. Same with drugs. So I got an adult-only market. No skin off my damned nose.

Janice stares at Malik. The skin on his face starts to crack. Malik fails to notice - or at least care.

Janice looks wistfully towards the front door of the apartment. Then back at Malik, defensively.

JANICE

You were breaking the law. You can't deny that!

MALIK

So? Why should I care?

JANICE

If you don't have law, you have anarchy!
Is that what people like you -

MALIK

(chuckles)
"People like me"? Watch yourself. Rile you up, it always ends the same. With "people like YOU" saying the quiet part out loud.

JANICE

That's not fair! I'm *not* racist. I mean, "people like you" who break the law!

Flakes of skin peel off Johnson's cheek, onto the table.

MALIK

Hey, I got no beef with *some* government. You got to have something to keep people from stealing my product. Or putting bullet holes in me, and my furniture.

Janice eyes Malik cynically.

MALIK

Assuming you do your job *right*.

JANICE

Enough with the snark. What's your point?

MALIK

That there ain't no reason to respect the law, if what it says is wrong.

JANICE

And you're the one to make that call?

Malik grins. Cracks form at his mouth. A chunk breaks off - exposing blood covered bones and teeth. Flesh hangs from a sinew, drops to the table with a clunk.

MALIK

Don't second guess the people in charge, 'cause they got to know better than you? Good thing some folks didn't feel that way, back during slavery. Or segregation. That's a funny thing to argue, coming from a woman... Like you.

His eyes flick to Janice's naked legs.

MALIK

A hundred years ago, you'd be property. Your husband or your father wants to beat on you, they could. Nothing you could do about it. Legally. Would you have shut up and obeyed?

JANICE

Of... of course not, but...

MALIK

But the law said it was okay. Who are *you* to take morality into your own hands?

Janice shifts in her chair, looks uncomfortable.

JANICE

That was then. This is now. If there's a problem today, we can change it. This is a democracy. We *protect* rights.

Malik belly laughs. Begins to look green around the edges. A bit bloated, as well.

MALIK

There ain't no democracy in the USA. Politicians do as they're *paid*. And, you ever see a lynch mob protect rights? Just 'cause enough people like a law don't always make it right.

Janice studies the exposed veins in Malik's jaw.
Something wriggles under the skin - a maggot?

JANICE

Lemme guess, next you'll be saying you
had a right to shoot me... to protect
your property from getting "confiscated"?

Malik leans back, an innocent look on his face.

MALIK

You said it, not me. Where's the lie?

JANICE

Oh, come on. This is insane!

Outside, a bottle SMASHES on the sidewalk. Its unseen
OWNER CURSES nearby.

Janice looks over at Malik, catches him digging into an
ear with his pinky. He wipes the wax off on his jeans,
beams at her across the table.

JANICE (V.O.)

As much as I hated to admit it, Malik had
a point. Not the way I'd like to hear it.
But for me, *some* of what he said rang
true.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. SQUAD CAR - DAY

A younger Janice sits behind the wheel. Her lips are
pursed, eyes glued to the road. She looks... miserable.

OFFICER KENT D'ANNA (25) has enough excitement for both
of them. He chats with a PROSTITUTE (35) in the back
seat, a cheesy grin on his face.

The prostitute doesn't look happy. Smeared makeup,
tangled hair - a small scratch on one rouged cheek.

KENT

Next time, you should think twice before
beating on the customer. Doubt he's
coming back for seconds. And calling the
cops... Stupid move, don't you think?

The prostitute flips Kent the bird.

PROSTITUTE

Fucking bastard tried to rape me.

Kent flashes a patronizing smile, turns it on Janice.

KENT

You mean he didn't pay? Boo-hoo.

Janice shoots Kent a look. They pull into the precinct parking lot.

JANICE

Kent-

Kent's smile doesn't waver. They exit the patrol car, lead the prostitute in cuffs towards the entrance.

Kent opens the door, waves Janice in with the perp.

KENT

Enjoy, we're bringing him in, too. You two lovebirds can sort it out at the station. Press charges, if you insist.

The door clangs shut behind them. Like a jail cell.

INT. PRECINCT - CONTINUOUS

The door of a holding cell snaps shut. Through bars, the prostitute looks pissed. Janice nods in her direction.

JANICE

You should sit down. They're processing the paperwork now. It'll be awhile before they take your statement.

The prostitute jumps to her feet, glares.

PROSTITUTE

Nice partner you've got. You think he's got your back, bitch?

Janice forces a smile. Leads Kent away from the cage.

As soon as they're out of earshot, Janice hisses.

JANICE

You're a fucking moron, Kent.

Kent shrugs, eyes wide and innocent.

KENT

What?

JANICE

You should remember you're riding with a female cop before you start spewing garbage. Don't joke about rape, asshole.

They talk as they walk. Out of the building - back towards the waiting squad car.

EXT. PRECINCT PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Kent leans against the vehicle's door.

KENT

Hey, all I said was I didn't see the problem. She can look at it as working pro bono.

JANICE

Excuse me?

KENT

You know she's just trumping up charges 'cause the John stiffed her.

He pats Janice on the shoulder. She's not amused.

KENT

Relax. You take things too seriously. I was just having fun.

JANICE

You think it'd be *funny* if I got raped?

Kent turns to Janice, genuine concern in his eyes.

KENT

I'd personally kill the bastard. After I stuffed his balls down his throat.

They settle into the squad car, and pull into traffic.

KENT

But that one? She's just a hooker. And she broke the law. All I did was have some fun.

They drive down the street in silence.

JANICE (V.O.)

It occurred to me later that if I'd been a hooker and Kent had come to arrest me, I would have felt no remorse in swinging a lead pipe at *his* shriveled balls.

Janice stares at Kent, a troubled look on her face.

JANICE (V.O.)

That wasn't hostility at Kent personally. Okay - perhaps it was. He deserved it - that smug son of a bitch. But ever since, I've always seen prostitution laws for what they are: anti-sex, anti-female...

The car passes through a run-down neighborhood. GIRLS line the sidewalk, some of them clearly on the job.

JANICE (V.O.)

And misogynistic as fucking hell. A bunch of male lawmakers telling women what they can and can't do with their bodies. A woman can get forced to sell her time and soul to an office, just to have enough to eat. But she can't rent out the use of other parts? When it comes to fucking, you can give it away all you want - but if you try to make money, they lock you up? Not my thing - never would be - but dictating to other women? I'll never understand - or respect - that view.

Kent grins at Janice, waves for her to smile. Janice shakes her head. Troubled and quite unamused.

JANICE (V.O.)

A few years later, I heard about a prostitute that beat the hell out of a cop trying to arrest her. She'd studied Tae Kwon Do. Busted his nose before they took her down. The judge didn't go easy on her. But I silently cheered when I heard the news.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. JANICE'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

JANICE (V.O.)

Cheering violence against cops? Which makes ME... what? The word "hypocrite" comes to mind. A crazy one, too - that argues with a fucking ghost.

Modern-day Janice stares icily at Malik.

JANICE

Tonight, it was me or you. What you want to say?

MALIK

"I was wrong". That'd be a start.

JANICE

I feared for my life!

MALIK

(chuckles)

Cops always say that.

JANICE

You could've complied.

MALIK

Cops say that too, even when it's not quite true. And you didn't have to bust in.

JANICE

It was my job!

MALIK

People in the bad side of history like that line, too. We ALL got a job to make decisions between right and wrong. And reject jobs that have you killin' people who just are doing what they have to, to survive.

(beat)

Here's another saying for you: "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws."

JANICE

Mmmm. Who came up with that gem?

MALIK

Martin Luther King, Jr. I mean, he was talkin' about segregation, wars. Not drugs in the hood. I doubt he'd like me too much. But the point he made still holds true.

They stare at each other across the table; stony silence. Rigor mortis adds an eerie look to Malik's face.

JANICE

What do you want me to do?

MALIK

Think hard before you put that uniform on again, Ms. Officer.

JANICE
You want me to resign?

Malik shrugs.

JANICE
Or you'd prefer I kill myself out of
guilt?

At that, Malik laughs.

MALIK
Joining me in limbo as homies? No offense
but, no thanks!

Janice glares, leaps to her feet. Circling the table, she
edges around Malik - gives him extra wide berth.

Tidying up to distract herself, she picks up the fruit
bowl. Chucks the salt shaker in. Along with the spoon.

And sneaks a look at Malik's back. Bloody EXIT HOLES
riddle the jacket - a touch wider than the entry wounds.

On impulse, she reaches out to touch his neck. Then pulls
back last second. Retreats to her end of the table.

JANICE
What do you want? Your life back? I
can't.

MALIK
Yeah. What you did won't ever get
reversed. Now, what you do tomorrow?
That's up to you.

JANICE
We had an understanding. We talk. Then
you leave. That's the deal.

Janice edges towards the kitchen counter.

JANICE
Whatever the hell you are, I suggest you
leave. It's either that, or I call my
"friends". Who bring YOU back to the
morgue. Or jail.

Looking down, she picks up her CELL. Then whips right
back around to Malik. Sags.

JANICE
You're... still there.

Malik stands up. Joints creak in odd ways as he moves.

MALIK

Have a nice.. Life. Enjoy that privilege,
Ms. Officer.

He heads for the door and walks right through it. Malik's neck bisects the dead bolts, creating the fleeting impression of decapitation.

Janice bolts to the door.

Tearing it open, she looks both ways down the hall. Finds nothing. Malik's... vaporized.

INT. JANICE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Janice sits at the table, a cup of coffee trembles between cupped palms.

JANICE (V.O.)

After that, I did all the make-work things "rational" people do. I pinched myself. Splashed water on my face. Changed into dry clothes. And kept myself distracted, until the sun rose.

INT. JANICE'S KITCHEN - LATER

Janice paces the kitchen. The washing machine rumbles like an earthquake.

JANICE (V.O.)

I didn't call the precinct. If I had, what the hell would I report? Seriously - COULD I say?

INT. JANICE'S BEDROOM - LATER

Janice climbs gingerly into bed.

JANICE (V.O.)

I got to sleep around 5AM. My dreams... weren't good. Though no ghosts in them, thank God.

INT. HOSPITAL MORGUE - DAY

Dressed in uniform, Janice flashes a badge at an ATTENDANT. He leads her to a vault, built into the wall.

JANICE (V.O.)

The next day, I visited the hospital.
Just to make damned certain Malik was
lying cold and stiff in the morgue.

The attendant opens a drawer. Pulls back the sheet. Yup,
that's Malik.

JANICE (V.O.)

He was. They'd chopped him up already.
After the autopsy, and finding an organ
donor card in his wallet. Though not much
else.

INT. PRECINCT - LATER

Janice sits at a desk, rifles through piles of paper.

JANICE (V.O.)

He had no relatives who resembled him.
One possible, faintly similar match - but
he'd died a years earlier in a car
accident. Try as I might, nothing
tangible could explain my... encounter.

EXT. PRECINCT PARKING LOT - LATER

Janice walks out the door of the building. She waves to
Maria, parked several feet away.

INT. SQUAD CAR - CONTINUOUS

Maria and Janice drive along the street, talk MOS.

JANICE (V.O.)

As days go by, I... just don't know what
to think. I see people in our precinct.
We're supposed to be "serving them". But
they look at US with fear in their eyes.
And I'm starting to understand why.

They drive down a street filled with TEENAGERS and MUSIC.
Janice and Maria stop, lean out the window.

Teens scatter. To them, Janice and Maria are predators.

Maria shakes her head. Starts the car up again. They
drive past GIRLS, dressed in mini-skirts.

JANICE (V.O.)

I see all these "crimes" we're sent to stop. People we're rewarded for keeping in line. And I find myself thinking: why? Violence caused by the high price of drugs and low opportunities. A system of suffering created to punish those who "misbehave" by wealthy people who never see them, but lobby for and write the laws.

(beat)

A day after my "encounter", I didn't call my mother. Or the boyfriend. That bottle of J.D. kept me company - I gave it a bit more of workout than usual that night. No, Malik didn't come back for an encore. But a realization did. They're saying all these things on the news to defend my shooting as "justified". But bottom line: I killed a kid with a toy gun. That was my decision. I didn't have to be there. I was. Was it "worth" it? What for?

The car passes another CLUSTER OF TEENAGERS. They glare at the squad car, wary suspicion in their eyes.

EXT. PRECINCT PARKING LOT - EVENING

The sun sets as the cruiser pulls into the parking lot. Janice waves to Maria - eases out.

As she walks towards the precinct, her face darkens.

JANICE

I'll never tell anyone about Malik's... visit. They'd call in shrinks, diagnose me with PTSD. Maybe even lock me up. Or at least discharge me from duty. Ebenezer Scrooge, I'm not. It only took ONE ghost to turn ME around.

(beat)

Tonight, I'm turning in my uniform. One has a moral decision to disobey unjust laws. I have a moral decision to not ENFORCE them, too.

Janice opens the precinct door. At peace - finally.

FINAL FADE OUT