

JUSTICE

by

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FADE IN ON:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

A FEMALE NEWS REPORTER stands before a distinguished building, a subtle crease in her photogenic brow.

Past her, PROTESTORS wave signs.

One reads: "Justice for Jason!"

Another compares a GUN and CELL PHONE. Underneath in red marker: "These two things are NOT the same!"

The newscaster frowns at a camera, reports.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER

Today, protestors gathered once more outside the Tremont Courthouse on this - the last day of testimony for the second degree murder trial of Bronx police officer Kevin Anderson, charged in the shooting death of sixteen year old Jason Ramsey. Though less high profile than more national incidents, this last week has seen local sentiment run high. Inside the courthouse itself, witnesses describe the atmosphere as tense... but subdued.

INT. COURTROOM - CONTINUOUS

In the first row of the gallery, SOPHIA RAMSEY (40s, African American); sits - stoic and still.

CATIE ALLEN (40s, WoC) fidgets at her side. Points.

CATIE

Here he comes...

KEVIN ANDERSON (30s) takes the stand. White with a buzz cut, he sits ramrod straight in a brand new suit.

His DEFENSE ATTORNEY approaches.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Now, Kevin - we've all tragically seen the video. But with the exception of yourself, no-one in this courtroom was *there*. What we need you to do now is help the jury understand what the night you encountered Jason Ramsey was like. Tell us about yourself, as well.

Kevin looks around the courtroom... avoids Sophia's eyes.

KEVIN

Yessir. Glad to oblige. I've been with the NYPD ten years.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

That's plenty of professional experience. I bet you've seen... quite a bit.

KEVIN

(laughs)

In the South Bronx? I've had my share of scrapes, that's for sure.

Catie's eyes flare. She hisses to Sophia.

CATIE

"Scrapes". That weasily fuc-

SOPHIA

Shhhhh!

KEVIN

But ask anyone I've worked with. I always do stuff by the book.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Including that night, when the call came in?

KEVIN

We responded to the report of a vehicular break-in, off the Grand Concourse-

As Kevin talks, GRAINY VIDEO illustrates his words. Silent street level security camera footage, shot through the window of some store.

KEVIN

When we rolled up, the first thing we saw was two teens. They fit the APB. The age and r- general description. But the minute they spotted US, they bolted.

INTERCUT BETWEEN FOOTAGE AND KEVIN'S TESTIMONY

EXT. BRONX STREET CORNER - NIGHT

On video: JASON RAMSEY and CARL TURNER (teens) loiter on the sidewalk, joke around.

An NYPD cruiser slides into view. Uniformed Kevin drives.

Carl jumps back, pockets *something*. Kevin's partner (ROBERT STENNINGS) waves out the window. Points.

The teens panic. Run.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Then what did you do?

KEVIN

We pursued, of course. My partner Officer Robert Stennings gained on the first one quick. I attempted to apprehend -

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Mr. Ramsey?

KEVIN

Yeah. His accomplice-

Across the room, a weary FEMALE PROSECUTOR barks:

PROSECUTOR

Objection! The word 'accomplice' presumes guilt. No evidence exists that either teen was involved in anything criminal that night.

Kevin shrugs. Clears his throat.

KEVIN

What I meant was, the first "suspect" - Carl Turner - tripped. Pulled my partner down with him.

On video: Rob tackles Carl's waist. The two fall.

KEVIN

The kid busted his nose on the sidewalk. Even from a distance, you could see there was lots of blood. Mr. Ramsey took off into an alley on 176th Street. I followed. No way I could just let him go.

On video: Jason darts down an alleyway, Kevin in pursuit.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

You had no back-up. But were still determined to do your job. Officer Anderson, that's admirable.

KEVIN

Please. Just call me "Kevin". I'm suspended... for now.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Can you describe the alleyway? Take us there, with your words.

EXT. DARK ALLEY WAY - NIGHT

On video: The camera footage splices to a different vantage point; from a rooftop, pointing down.

Kevin fidgets. Suddenly careful with his words.

KEVIN

It was a dead end. Dark. Lots of trash to trip on, if you run and don't bother to look. Despite there being a dumpster *right there*.

(chuckles)

No surprise. This is the Bronx.

On video: Jason races into the alley. Close to hyperventilating, he looks around.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

So you followed the suspect. Then what?

KEVIN

Mr. Ramsey knew he had no-where to go. So he turned around, threw his hands up. I ordered him to step my way.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

You wanted him *closer* to you?

KEVIN

Yeah. To see him in a better light. Get the situation under my control.

On video: Kevin runs into the alley. He points a gun at Jason, barks orders (MOS).

Jason whips around, hands up. Kevin gestures with the gun: "come here."

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

But the situation changed suddenly. How?

KEVIN

You gotta understand the facts on the ground. I heard my partner screaming -

Kevin hesitates. The defense attorney's voice softens.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

This part's difficult. But please give the court every detail. We have to know.

KEVIN

The suspect's phone rang. He jumped. Like... he was reaching for something.

On video: In Jason's pocket, a cell LIGHTS UP. He twitches, startled.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Something?

KEVIN

Quarter backing's easy. Policing's hard. I only had a split second to decide.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

So -

KEVIN

I shot.

On video: Kevin shoots Jason three times. The boy crumples. Still ringing, the phone hits the ground. Blood pools around its glow.

KEVIN (O.S.)

I didn't want him to die. But I had no choice.

Tears pour silently down Sophia's cheeks. Catie hugs her. A small, swift squeeze.

The Defense Attorney's sympathy: all for his client.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Did you fear for your safety that night, Kevin?

KEVIN

I thought he had a gun. Of course!

LATER

Anderson's off the stand, testimony complete.

But Sophia hasn't budged. Catie returns to her side. Her cafeteria coffee steams.

CATIE

Sophie, honey. Here. Drink up.

SOPHIA
No. I'm not thirsty.

CATIE
You can't know when they'll decide. It
could take-

Paper and clothing rustles, as...

A line of JURORS stroll in.

Citizens of every shape, age, race and size. Twelve
solemn faces pivot towards a JUDGE.

JUDGE
You have come to a conclusion on the
charge of second degree homicide?

An older man (ALFRED) adjusts his glasses, reads.

ALFRED
Yes, your honor. We find the defendant -
Kevin Anderson - not guilty.

Catie gasps. Sophia stiffens. SPECTATORS in the back
cheer.

CATIE
Animals.

At the defense table, Kevin grins - fist bumps his
attorney. A middle aged woman cries and hugs him. His
mother, if body language is any sign.

BANG. The judge's gavel shell-shocks the room.

JUDGE
Thank you all for your service. Please,
everyone depart in an orderly fashion.
Respect others in this difficult time.

To Sophia, his voice seems oddly distant.

Everyone but Sophia rise. Catie reaches down for her.
Numb and defeated, Sophie just... stares.

EXT. COURTHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Pro-police and "Justice for Jason" crowds face off,
louder now.

On one side: A poster of Jason's high school picture,
with the caption: "He didn't get to go to his prom".

On the other: a mug shot photoshopped from the same photo. Next to a real picture of a broken nosed Carl. Blackened, swollen eyes: a brutal sight.

The caption underneath: "Blue Lives Matter Too!"

Kevin exits the courthouse. The middle aged woman and his defense attorney flank his sides. The crowd parts like the Red Sea.

The reporter from before shoulders through the mob.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER

Mr. Anderson, a few questions?

Kevin stops.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER

How do you feel?

KEVIN

Vindicated. And free!

"Blue Lives" protestors cheer. The reporter yells.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER

Now all this is over, what do you think you'll do now?

KEVIN

(sighs)

Tonight? Celebrate with family and friends. But first, I plan to appeal my suspension. It's only fair I return to the job I love.

Kevin starts to leave.

But finds Sophia... stands in his way.

SOPHIA

I have a few questions, too.

The shocked crowd falls silent. Sophia's stone faced. Behind her, Catie touches her arm.

CATIE

Not now.

SOPHIA

Yes, now.

(to Kevin)

What family should **I** celebrate with tonight? My son's gone, *Officer* Anderson.

Kevin's mother shoots Sophia a blistering look.

MOTHER

My son was helping protect *your* community. Not loitering at night, like a thug!

The defense attorney slips between the two women.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Mrs. Ramsey, with all due respect...

SOPHIA

Respect? What an interesting word.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

This isn't the time or place.

SOPHIA

You wouldn't let me ask my own questions during the trial. So if not now - when? I lost my son. I deserve to know!

MOTHER

Kevin, let's go home!

The defense attorney herds both Andersons to a car.

Sophia stands like a statue, watches them go.

The crowd surges towards the vehicle, cuts off her line of sight. Catie whispers in her ear.

CATIE

It's time we went home, too.

INT. RAMSEY KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Sophia sits at the table. On a LAPTOP, news clips of the trial loop.

Dinner chills before her, untouched.

Catie sits down opposite. Juggling a bottle of wine and glasses, she elbows the PC aside.

CATIE

You've got to eat something.

SOPHIA

What's this sudden obsession with my digestive health?

CATIE

Girl, I've known you since college. If you don't eat, you faint. And... no way will I let you drink on an empty stomach. Dr's orders, you and I need this - bad!

Popping the cork, Catie pours.

Sophie pushes food and drink away. Catie grabs her hand. Holds on.

CATIE

Hurting yourself won't bring Jason back.

SOPHIA

If I hadn't called him when I did-

CATIE

Stop *doing* that!

SOPHIA

Doing what?

CATIE

That guilt trip. You were a *marvelous* mother for checking in. You always went the extra mile. Don't let them blame the victim this time. Neither you nor Jason did anything to deserve this. That friend of his - what's his name?

SOPHIA

Carl. They've been friends since fourth grade.

CATIE

Said on the stand they ran *because* they were afraid of getting hurt. I believe him. One hundred percent.

Catie grits her teeth, gulps down wine.

CATIE

They broke his nose, for Christ sake. That other cop didn't even get charged! If I saw that, I would've run, too.

Sophia finally breaks down - sobs. Catie hugs her tight.

SOPHIA

I wasn't there for my baby!

CATIE

Shhhh. You tried to bring him justice.

SOPHIA

I failed him there, too!

Catie croons, strokes her friend's hair.

CATIE

That's it. I'm staying with you tonight.
No ifs, ands -

SOPHIA

But...

CATIE

Or buts.

Sophia pulls away.

SOPHIA

No. I need your "butt" gone.

CATIE

Don't be crazy. I'm your best friend.
Since *first* grade!

SOPHIA

I haven't had time to think - for a long,
long time. Not when the hospital called.
Not with all the craziness at the trial.
I need time to myself now, and to
remember Jason on my own.

CATIE

You absolutely, positively, no-second-
guessing sure?

Sophia sniffles. Nods. Takes a few bites of dinner.

SOPHIA

Satisfied?

CATIE

(frowns)
Not really. Did you even chew?

SOPHIA

You have work tomorrow. Shoo.

Catie grabs her bag, reluctantly heads for the door.

CATIE

Call me later?

Sophia fakes a smile - waves her off.

LATER

Sophia lingers at the table. Dinner abandoned, she pours another glass of wine.

Next to the glass: her CELL PHONE.

The wallpaper's a baby-faced pic of Jason, who beams up at her. Sophia traces a finger over his digital cheek.

SOPHIA

Remember when your father died, honey? I promised it'd be you and me against the world. But they took you. So what now?

On the laptop: recordings from outside the courthouse.

Anderson exits the building. Protestors cheer and jeer. The reporter interrupts. Now familiar words play out.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER

Mr. Anderson, a few questions? Now all this is over -

SOPHIA

(mutters)

It's not over. Never will be.

FEMALE NEWS REPORTER

What do you think you'll do now?

KEVIN

Tonight? Celebrate with family and friends. But first, I plan to appeal my suspension. It's only fair I return to the job I love.

At the kitchen table, Sophia winces at her *own* face in the crowd.

SOPHIA

(on the video)

I have a few questions, too.

Sophia groans, switches her laptop to mute.

Scooping up her cell, she scrolls to "Catie", starts to dial. Then stops.

And watches herself confront Kevin in the video.

SOPHIA

(adds words to the visuals)

I lost my son. I deserve to know!

EXT. POLICE PRECINCT - EVENING

Sophia sits in a car, stares at the station house across the street. The sun's setting. 7PM glows on her cell.

She shakes her head, whispers.

SOPHIA

Oh silly, stubborn Sophia... what do you think you're doing?

The precinct door opens.

A few OFFICERS file out. Kevin and Partner Rob (dressed in plainclothes) too.

They laugh, shake hands.

Sophia gasps and slumps low in her seat. Concealed, she watches as Kevin and Rob climb into a car, drive off.

SOPHIA

You're going somewhere to "celebrate", aren't you?

Hands shaking, she slips her car into gear. And follows - far enough back to not be seen.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

More Yonkers than Bronx. A preppy spot with urban vibe.

Sophia parks, watches Kevin and Rob chat up the BOUNCER at the door: a Latino with muscles, tats and a man-bun.

Rob slips the guard cash. Bingo: the two stroll in.

Time for Sophia's move. Taking a deep breath, she steps out of the car, into the night.

The street and pedestrians look seedier, close up. Compared to Sophia's mom clothes, this is *not* her crowd.

She leans against the car, studies the Bouncer.

Who rejects the next MAN in line - and not in a gentle way. The guard pats him down, finds a KNIFE.

Slapping it (flat side down) into the man's palm, the bouncer shoves the would-be partier away.

The two exchange words (MOS). The bouncer slaps his own chest. A gesture: "Go on, try!"

And flashes the man a glimpse of the GUN at his belt. The disgruntled reject flips the Bouncer off, stalks away.

Sophia's eyes grow wide.

SOPHIA
Still... worth a try?

Passing an alleyway, she approaches the Bouncer. Who takes one look at Sophia, sneers.

BOUNCER
Hey there. I don't think *you* wanna be here.

Sophia stammers, fumbles in her purse for cash.

SOPHIA
I... I'm meeting - a friend?

BOUNCER
(laughs)
Trying to hook up? Red Lobster over in Fordham's more your style.

Inside her purse, Sophia's cell RINGS - an old Jazz tune. She jumps. Answers it. Catie's on the other line.

SOPHIA
H...hello?

CATIE (O.S.)
You were supposed to call me, remember?

SOPHIA
I... I know. But you knew I needed time!

The bouncer eyes Sophia, amused.

BOUNCER
Who's dumping who?

Catie's voice grows alarmed.

CATIE (O.S.)
Who's that? Should I come over?

SOPHIA
No! I'll call you back in a hot minute. Promise!

Sophia's voice squeaks. She hangs up.

She and the Bouncer exchange looks. Hasty, Sophia fishes out a twenty - hands it over.

SOPHIA

Here.

He stares at it. Doesn't respond.

SOPHIA

Isn't that enough?

BOUNCER

(shrugs)

Just keep it, lady. Come on in.

He steps aside, opens the door. Sophia slips in quickly - terrified he'll change his mind.

The Bouncer calls after her.

BOUNCER

Stay safe. Friday's a rough crowd!

INT. NIGHTCLUB

Gyrating BODIES. Pounding Hiphop. Cocktails flow.

Sophia meekly wanders through the crowd. She peeks over shoulders. Tiptoes past COUPLES making out.

A crowd of TEENS line a wall. One's a MUSCLED KID in an BLM shirt.

Another resembles Jason. Sophia looks away, near tears.

Straight ahead, she sees:

Kevin Anderson, drinking with FRIENDS. A RED HAired GIRL hangs off his arm. Partner Rob's there, too.

Sophia gulps.

SOPHIA

You literally asked for this, Sophia.
Here goes.

She beelines for Kevin, just as Rob toasts:

ROB

Here's to getting Mr. VIP -

KEVIN

"Very important Patrolman", thank you very much.

ROB

Back where he belongs. On the force!

Rob spots Sophia's approach. His arm droops.

ROB

Uh-oh.

Sophia yells over the music. At that volume, not easy.

SOPHIA

About my questions, "Officer Anderson"-

The girl looks from Sophia to Kevin.

RED HAired GIRL

Is she talking to you?

SOPHIA

You didn't answer me before. Is this a *better* time?

Sophia stops in front of Kevin, face defiant. Her anger starts to rise.

Kevin's jaw drops. He puts down his drink.

KEVIN

Are you stalking me, Ms. Ramsey? I'm a police officer, and that's a felony.

SOPHIA

I thought you were *suspended*. VIP or not!

Kevin leans close, hisses in her ear.

KEVIN

The trial is over. I'm very sorry about your son, but this isn't healthy.

SOPHIA

You're right. My son's death wasn't healthy at all!

The last comment: yelled during a musical pause. The crowd around them falls silent. Stop and stare.

The muscled kid in the BLM shirt blinks. Points.

MUSCLED KID

Hey, is that the cop?

He storms forward. Rob intercepts and stares him down.

ROB

Trust me, that won't work out.

The girl fidgets.

RED HAired GIRL

I'll go get the Bouncer.

KEVIN

No. I'll handle this. Don't.

He grabs Sophia, propels her across the room.

SOPHIA

Let go!

KEVIN

Ms. Ramsey, you started this. I'm taking
US outside.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB

Kevin pulls her out the door. Sophia stumbles, almost
trips. The Bouncer recoils, surprised.

BOUNCER

Mami, you OK?

KEVIN

Mind your business. She's fine.

BOUNCER

(to Sophia)

Is this... Cocha your "friend"?

Sophia's voice shakes, but she stands her ground.

SOPHIA

Not exactly. But we're just talking.

BOUNCER

Then don't talk in front of my door.
You're scaring customers off.

He watches - concerned - as Kevin pulls Sophia to the
alley. Still in the Bouncer's line of sight, but several
feet away.

Whirling on Sophia, Kevin reveals his rage.

KEVIN

What were you trying to accomplish in there? My life's been ruined. And you come to start a scene?

SOPHIA

Your life, "ruined"? My son is dead, thanks to you!

KEVIN

What trial did you sit through? *His* decisions were at fault. What was he doing out there at night?

SOPHIA

Since when is that a crime? It's nighttime now. Are you at home?

KEVIN

Why did he run? And why didn't he comply with orders to stop? I know your kind wants to blame me, but -

SOPHIA

"My kind"?

KEVIN

Don't put words in my mouth! I mean, civilians. People who don't know what it's like to put your life in danger every night. Not knowing if you'll be coming home.

SOPHIA

On the stand... you kept calling my baby "Mr. Ramsey". He was only sixteen. What danger was he to you?

KEVIN

How was I to know?

Sophia's words turn sharp, bitter.

SOPHIA

It was your *job* to know, Officer Anderson. You were so proud of being on the force ten years. But you couldn't tell a cell phone from a gun? It's *your* choices that brought us here. Yet here you are, celebrating that you're free? Thanks to you, I'm not!

KEVIN
(hisses)
Let it go.

Sophia swings to slap him. Kevin blocks.

Behind them, a voice interrupts. It's the kid who looks like Jason. To Sophia, *almost* like an angel, too.

He reaches out.

KID
Hey lady. Do you want someone to call the cops?

Kevin swings around, snarls.

KEVIN
I'm the cops. Touch me and I'll fucking *kill you!*

Kevin reaches in his jacket, for his phone.

BOUNCER
Drop it!

Kevin doesn't. A SHOT rings out from the Bouncer's gun. Anderson crumples, dead before he hits the ground.

Sophia and the kid stare down at the body, stunned. The Bouncer's eyes widen as he spots Kevin's fallen cell.

A crowd grows.

BOUNCER
I... I was sure it was a gun. He said he was a cop, he hadda be armed. And he threatened to kill -

Sophie's face ices over. Numb again, like in court.

Her emotions thaw as she looks at the kid. She grazes the teen's cheek, whispers.

SOPHIA
Go home to your mother. Stay safe for her, please?

On wobbly legs, she turns towards her parked car.

BOUNCER
You can't leave. The cops-

SIRENS wail in the distance. Rob rages at the bar door.
The kid in the BLM t-shirt holds him off.

SOPHIA

I'm - not going anywhere. I just need
to... sit down.

Walking past the Bouncer, she looks him over.

SOPHIA

You play tough, but you've got such kind
eyes. Don't worry about witnesses, we *all*
saw you feared for your life.

The Bouncer grins. Nods.

BOUNCER

Yeah. Pity he didn't comply.

FINAL FADEOUT: