

EYES OUT FRONT

"PILOT"

Written by

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COLD OPEN

EXT. MOBILE HOME - EBBING, NORTH DAKOTA - NIGHT

Amber LEAVES scatter the knee-high grass. A light comes on within the shoddy mobile home. We hear a panicked MALE VOICE, speaking as if on a phone call:

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
Hey, man... I think-- I think I
need some help here.

PUSH INTO:

INT. MOBILE HOME - CONTINUOUS

WOOD PANELED walls, a TWIN BED. We DRIFT THROUGH the room as the O.S. voice continues:

MALE VOICE (O.S.)
I don't know what happened. She just
collapsed.

Eventually, the camera settles on the BACK of a MAN, our caller, though we never see his face.

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
But I can't call 9-1-1, and she's
barely breathing.

ANGLE DOWN to see the FEET of a prone WOMAN on the floor. As the voice continues, we PAN the length of her body... holding on her FACE. She's Hidatsa Indian -- long, dark hair partly concealing her features. But through the entanglement, we see her eyes are rolled back, and she foams at the mouth.

MALE VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She tried to stick me with some
shit. I just reacted, and I don't
know what to do. But I need you out
here.

ANGLE BACK ON the man as he seems to listen, then:

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
Yeah. Alright. Just-- yeah, if
you can hurry, please. We gotta
clean this up.

EXT. MOBILE HOME - LATER

A TRUCK is now parked outside. THREE SILHOUETTED MEN lug the comatose woman down the stairs, loading her into the cab. One man pitches keys to another.

SILHOUETTED MAN #1
You drive her's over.

EXT. RIVER - LATER

Moonlight washes the banks. A SEDAN is parked on the beach, facing the water, its driver's door ajar. The same three men drive their shoulders into the back of the vehicle. And with one last mighty HEAVE...

The car floats for a beat, before slowing disappearing beneath the frosty depths.

We PUSH IN on the black water, closer and closer, as the RUSHING CURRENT grows louder, building to a CRESCENDO.

FADE TO BLACK.

END OF COLD OPEN

EXT. FARGO AIRPORT - MORNING

The early days of winter -- flakes swirl, slush coats the pavement.

The arrivals lane is nearly deserted as NICOLE CHASE (25) steps onto the sidewalk, wearing a loud Stone Island jacket. She has dark features, tan complexion, ethnically ambiguous.

Waiting beside an SUV to greet her is JANE CHASE (32).

NICOLE
(re: lack of travelers)
Hope you didn't have to circle.

JANE
What happened to the North Face I sent you?

NICOLE
Only here would it not be enough.

As they embrace:

JANE
Oh, you make everything warmer, you know that.
How was the trip?

Nicole notices GLORIA CHASE, her six-year-old niece, waving from the backseat.

NICOLE
(to Jane, returning wave)
You brought Gloria?

JANE
Yeah, she's all excited. She only recognizes you off FaceTime.

NICOLE
Alright, well, I wanted to get her a gift or something, but I went into Target and I have no idea what's "in," so, if I just give you a hundred bucks, can you just get her whatever she wants?

JANE
She's six, Nicole.

NICOLE
Okay. So what then, like, eighty?

Jane shakes her head, circles to the driver's side.

JANE
She's just happy to see you.

They both climb into:

INT. JANE'S SUV - CONTINUOUS

Gloria bounces with excitement.

GLORIA
Welcome home, Aunt Nicole!

NICOLE
(affecting maternal)
Hey, Gloria! When'd you get so
big?

GLORIA
I'm the second tallest in my class.

Jane shifts into drive, pulls away.

JANE
She got your enthusiasm for
exploring and my coordination. I
don't know what her legs look like
without bruises.
(to Gloria)
Sweetie, tell Aunt Nicole what you
want to be when you grow up.

GLORIA
Veterinarian.

NICOLE
Better save your money.
(off Jane's look)
Oh, no, that wasn't-- sorry. Dad's
voice is so ingrained, sometimes it
still yanks a chord.

JANE
Gloria's gonna work real hard,
aren't you, Gloria?

GLORIA
Mommy says Grandpa used to take you
hunting.

NICOLE
That's right, he did. We used to
go up by Powers Lake. Track elk.

GLORIA
 You wouldn't hurt them, though,
 right?

NICOLE
 Oh, no, they don't feel a thing.
 If you aim at--

Jane CLEARS her throat.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
 (backpedaling)
 -- Er, I mean... it was more
 sustenance than anything.

GLORIA
 I bet Grandpa's happy you came to
 visit.

Nicole studies the desolate, dreary, hinterland. Then,
 almost to herself:

NICOLE
 Something like that.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER

An ashen sky. Snow falls heavier now. Gloria, flanked by
 her aunt and mother, regards a HEADSTONE, BOUQUET in hand.

From a REVERSE we see it reads: "WILLIAM CHASE. 1973-2018."

GLORIA
 (offering bouquet to Nicole)
 You want to leave these for him?

NICOLE
 Go 'head. If I do it, he'll say
 the positioning's off.

Nicole's face is inscrutable - juxtaposed against the tears
 streaming down her sister's face.

JANE
 You think about him everyday. Then
 you look up, and a year's already
 gone.

Nicole rubs her arms for a beat, then:

NICOLE
 Alright, well, I was gonna try for
 early check-in.

JANE

I thought you wanted to see him?

NICOLE

I do. It's just-- being here, this place... it just stains his memory, know you?

Jane SNIFFLES.

JANE

Fine. Fine, Gloria, say bye.

GLORIA

Bye, Papa. See you next time.

Gloria places the bouquet on the grave. As Jane leads the way to the parking lot, Nicole shuffles behind with her niece, hoping to rectify her inauspicious start--

NICOLE

Did he ever tell you about the blue buffalo?

GLORIA

(skeptical)

What? Buffaloes aren't blue.

NICOLE

They are in North Dakota.

GLORIA

You've seen 'em?

NICOLE

Not personally. I went on a bunch of packing trips and not one. But he swore to me they were real. So, maybe with your special vet training, you'll be able to find the one I never could.

Gloria, inspired, chases after her mother--

GLORIA

Mom! Did you know the buffaloes here are blue?! Mom?!

INT. JANE'S SUV - LATER

They pass a sign reading: "Fort Berthold Reservation." The two-lane feeds into New Town, North Dakota.

There are still remnants of a sleepy town, but more recently new buildings have sprouted up, highlighting the economic disparity.

JANE

Since the boom it's grown and grown.
They even put in a Walmart.

NICOLE

And still couldn't find anything
better than a Holiday Inn.

JANE

I told you, you're welcome to stay
with us.

NICOLE

No, hotel's fine. I'll suffer
through the combo shower and bath.

JANE

People keep coming up to me, asking
when you'd be back. You remember
Shabon's mom -- Annette? She's
always tugging at my sleeve.

NICOLE

What, does Shabon need his bail
paid?

JANE

Well, no, it's...
(lowers voice)
Wasn't sure if you heard, but two
or three months ago, Theresa Wolfe
went missing.

In an instant, Nicole detects the path of conversation--

NICOLE

Jane--

JANE

I know! Believe me. I tell
everyone you're not for hire.

NICOLE

I don't work missing
persons... Then why bring it
up?

JANE (CONT'D)

And I told Annette that. I
did... It's not-- it's not
what you think.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Jane, no, I've said this. I'm never gonna be the one to tell a parent I can't find their child.

JANE

This is different. Really. There was-- well, the police found her car in the river, but no sign of her. Annette's only looking for a consultation, you know? Maybe piece some things together.

NICOLE

Piece some things--? Jesus, I'm only here through the weekend.

JANE

Well, I only brought it up 'cause you'd be the one to help.

(short beat, then)

And, I didn't think it'd come to this, but... a while back, they found deposits on Annette's land. Leased it to OTC Oil. So if it's money you're worried about--

NICOLE

-- I'm worried about standing on a porch with a hat in my hand.

JANE

One meeting, Nicole. That's all I ask. Before Theresa, it was Dakota Spears. I mean, the missing girls, it's an epidemic. That's what it is.

Nicole releases out a long, petulant SIGH.

NICOLE

OTC oil... Hope you disclosed my rate.

She stares off - where beyond the town, the stark outlines of pumpjacks line the horizon.

INT. WOLFE HOME - DAY

The door opens onto Nicole, turned a quarter profile, signaling a fleeting visit.

NICOLE

Oh, hi. Uh, I don't know if you remember me, but I'm Nicole Chase. My sister said you wanted to speak.

From a REVERSE, we're met by ANNETTE WOLFE, Hidatsa, mid-40s, heavy crow's feet. She speaks in a disembodied manner--

ANNETTE WOLFE

Yes, oh, right... okay.

Annette disappears inside. Reluctantly, Nicole stamps her boots and follows.

ANNETTE WOLFE (CONT'D)

Let's see, would you like tea or--?

NICOLE

Oh, no, that's okay.

ANNETTE WOLFE

Coffee? Coffee could be good.

NICOLE

I really can't stay long. I know my sister told you I'm an investigator, but I think she might've embellished a little. I really only do infidelity cases, background checks, that type of thing.

ANNETTE WOLFE

(beat, then, re: couch)
She sat right there. You know? Right there. Watching that TV.

NICOLE

Yeah, well I heard about the... accident, and, like I said, I don't work missing persons.

ANNETTE WOLFE

Yes, well, I need a consolation. That's all, a consultation. You'll know, you're from this place.

NICOLE

Not anymore, I--

ANNETTE WOLFE

--I know the odds, truly. But there are things that go unexplained.

(MORE)

ANNETTE WOLFE (CONT'D)

So, please, for the sake of someone to whom peace will never come, I only ask that you try.

NICOLE

(tactful)

Look, I'm sorry, I am. But-- I mean, hasn't it been a while?

ANNETTE WOLFE

(shaking head)

Theresa was a victim of insobriety. But she'd turned. I could see it, she'd gotten better. But the police saw an Indian girl who drove into the river and that was enough.

(then)

And I can-- let's see, I can get you two thousand straight away. Let me...

Annette digs into a drawer, produces a stack of CASH. We NOTICE literal oil splotches on the bills as she hands them over to Nicole. Upon accepting, Nicole's eyes find the floor.

NICOLE

I, uh-- I mean, I can look into it, but I'm only here for a couple days. Is there an incident report or--?

ANNETTE WOLFE

Yes. An incident report. Yes. It's with a man at Indian Affairs.

Nicole nods, uncomfortable with the solemnness before her.

NICOLE

Alright, I'll head over then. Though -- like I said, I don't have much time. So...

She turns to exit, but hesitates.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

And, um... I'm sorry for what happened, by the way.

A beat, then:

ANNETTE WOLFE

When a child goes missing, we all think there'll be some an endless search. I've learned that doesn't apply here, on the Rez. Here, so much gets buried. Everything.

INT. OFFICE - BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS - LATER

Nicole stands in a doorframe, addressing someone O.S.:

NICOLE

Mr. Chavis?

REVERSE to see RED "RC" CHAVIS, (50) feet up at a DESK. He's Chickasaw, with low energy, Oklahoman accent.

RC

Unless they changed the name on the door again.

NICOLE

I was told you have the case file for Theresa Wolfe.

RC

Oh, well, that case's been closed. Come over from the FBI office? Provincial news takes a while.

Nicole takes a seat across from him.

NICOLE

No, I'm an investigator.
(offering hand)
Nicole Chase. I was told you did the preliminary work on the case.

RC

Preliminary? Shit, well, that hurts, don't it?

He opens a FILE CABINET, rifles through.

RC (CONT'D)

How much you know about it?

NICOLE

Not a lot. I flew in this morning only to learn my sister had contracted me out.

He slides over a thin manilla ENVELOPE.

RC

Well, then, you know basically all there is to know about it. Here's the deal: girl, twenty years of age, last seen leaving work in Watford City around 5:00pm. Supervisor said she seemed agitated -- like maybe she was on somethin'. Didn't come home. Few days go by. A jogger comes across a car juttin' out of the river. ID'd it as hers. Ruled an accident. Presumed fatal.

Nicole thumbs through the papers.

NICOLE

Not many angles for optimism, are there?

(sighs, then)

Well, since I'm already on the clock, I'd like to see the crash site if possible. You got anything else going on?

INT. RC'S TRUCK - DUSK

Nicole is shotgun, still skimming DOCUMENTS as they trek down the highway. RC, wheel in one hand, opens a bag of Red Man Chewing Tobacco with the other.

RC

Wanna pinch? Little damp.

NICOLE

That's disgusting.

RC

So, what's with the visit? Always dreamed of seeing North Dakota in the winter?

NICOLE

I grew up on Fort Berthold. Sister and her husband still live here.

RC

Really? What are you? Quarter Arikara?

NICOLE

No, I was adopted. I'm white, I guess, I'm not really anything.

RC

Oh, yeah? Where ya been since?

NICOLE

Army. Long Range Surveillance.

RC

Serious?

NICOLE

That was the reaction at the recruiting office.

(re: phone bill)

Hey, who's this 4484 number? Went dead for a couple months then picked back up again.

RC

That'd be Kevin Hanley. Works on the rigs near Epping. Only guy we interviewed. Apparently, he and Theresa had some fling, I don't know. Guys in the camps come in and out. According to him, though, they hadn't been talkin'. No calls on the 23rd, or leadin' up. Girl's boss said she got off at five. Alibi puts him at a bar in Williston from four to eight-thirty.

Nicole refers back to the phone bill--

NICOLE

Okay, and what about the 4908? Tried her right after she was last seen.

RC

That one we never quite pinned down. Try callin', it'll ring, then hit voicemail. Recorded as one minute calls though, so whoever it was, they never got through.

NICOLE

Anyone tracked her cell?

RC

(derisive laugh)

FBI ain't gonna come in for a native girl who drove herself into a lake. Tribal department's thin.

(MORE)

RC (CONT'D)

We had those type of resources -- tracking cell phones -- they must bring 'em in late at night.

A fire sparks in Nicole--

NICOLE

Yeah? Is that the answer now? Theresa, Dakota Spears. "Sorry, we don't have the resources."

RC

Look, I got a daughter, too. Don't think I don't know the numbers. I'm ashamed. Terrified. All those things. But there's a reality here, I'm saying. A job without a success rate. It were up to me, it'd be all dive teams and search parties.

Nicole pulls out her CELL PHONE, dials.

NICOLE

Starting to see why I got hired.

INT. APARTMENT - PHOENIX, ARIZONA - INTERCUT

JOSAPHAT OLUWA (30), Nigerian-American, plays video games. His phone BUZZES on the coffee table. Without dropping his gaze, he answers on speaker.

JOSAPHAT

Yeah, what's up?

NICOLE

Thought you'd sound more excited.

JOSAPHAT

(checks caller ID)

Holy shit -- Nicole?! What's going on?!

NICOLE

Sorry to bother you like this. But I was wondering if you could track some ping data for me?

JOSAPHAT

Uh, yeah, what? Where are you?

NICOLE

North Dakota. I came up to visit my sister and, well, now I'm working.

JOSAPHAT

I've been meaning to get to Texas.

NICOLE

I know, I'll call you when I get back. I've been-- well, you know how it goes. Civilian life.

JOSAPHAT

Asking for ping data. Sounds like you ain't got it figured out yet. I can get it. Couple days.

NICOLE

Thanks. Thanks, Jo, I really appreciate it. I'll call you.

She hangs up. Registers RC's side-eye.

NICOLE (CONT'D)

Army friend. Good with IT.

RC

Where'd ya serve, anyway?

NICOLE

Can't say.

RC

Iraq, or...?

NICOLE

I just said I can't say.

RC

Soldier to PI. Stands to reason.

NICOLE

S'what my transition officer said. Cheating spouses are an endless business. But at least with pay-by-the-hour motels, the parking lot isn't laced with IEDS.

EXT. MISSOURI RIVER - DUSK

Nicole kneels on the bank as RC looks on. Ice has accumulated along the shores.

RC

Your feet are about where the treads led in. Zig-zagged a little, like she was trying to regain the wheel. Car was submerged somewhat. Hung up there on the rocks.

NICOLE

So she was able to free herself, but couldn't swim thirty feet to shore?

RC

Could be she tried. Body shut down. Late September -- hypothermia's likely. Divers went in. Nothin'. Likely the body got swept into the lake. Never know. Could be she headed this way with intent, you know, then thought twice when she hit the river... Never know how amphetamines'll afflict somebody.

NICOLE

Her mom said she'd been clean.

RC

Yeah, well... Suppose it'd be the first time a teen lied to their parent.

RC releases a long, quivering SIGH.

RC (CONT'D)

Here's the deal: they found meth in the vehicle. Glove box.

Nicole promptly searches the file--

RC (CONT'D)

Ain't in the report. I pleaded with New Town PD to have it redacted. Figured her mother'd been through enough already. Besides the crystal, Theresa had a history of erratic behavior. The ex, Hanley, said he'd tried to break things off when he got back, but she wouldn't have it. Root of all this, I had to guess.

(beat)

Sorry to be the one to tell ya.

(MORE)

RC (CONT'D)

And I'm sorry if her mother had you
caught up. Sometimes... the
truth's so ugly, we'll do anything
to keep ourselves from lookin' at
it. So...

(beat, then)

When you're ready, I'll give you a
ride back.

He heads back toward the road. Nicole stares down at the
snow, then back out over the river. There's a sobering
quality to the frigidness and that, combined with the fast-
approaching darkness, leave her to accept Theresa's demise.