

EYES OUT FRONT

"PILOT"

Written by

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COLD OPEN

EXT. MOBILE HOME - EBBING, NORTH DAKOTA - NIGHT

Amber LEAVES are scattered among knee-high grass. A light comes on within the shoddy double-wide. 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.

We 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.)
It's, uh-- I can't explain, but
you'll see when you get out here.

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

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
I can't call 9-1-1, and I can't--
uh, look, she...

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. And I just reacted, and I-- I
don't know. I don't know. But I
need some help, man.

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

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
Yeah. Alright. Just-- if you can
hurry, please. Alright.

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.

EXT. RIVER - LATER

Moonlight lies over the water. A SEDAN is parked on the beach, 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 neon 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 flight?

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

NICOLE
(to Jane, returning wave)
Wish you told me Gloria was coming.

JANE
Oh, yeah, well, she's all excited to see you.

NICOLE
Yeah, it's just-- I wanted to get her a gift, but I have no idea what's "in" or whatever, so, if I 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
A veterinarian.

NICOLE
Better save your money.
(off Jane's look)
Er-- sorry. I didn't-- that was Dad speaking through me.

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)
-- 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. You know?

Nicole rubs her arms for a beat, then:

NICOLE
Yeah. 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 only stains my memory of him.

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, the hotel's fine. I'll suffer
through the shower and bath combo.

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 who has 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--? Jesus, I'm only here for the weekend.

JANE

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. She leased to OTC Oil. So if it's money you're worried about... 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. Really.

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. Um, 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, 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 and background checks, that kind 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

A consultation. That's all I need, a consultation. And you'll know for certain. You will, you're from this place.

NICOLE

Well, not anymore, though--

ANNETTE WOLFE

--Look, there are-- you must understand, there are things that continue to go unexplained. So, please, okay, please, I only ask that you try.

NICOLE
 Right. Well...
 (tactful)
 I mean, hasn't it been a while?

A beat, then:

ANNETTE WOLFE
 I know the odds. I know Theresa
 was a victim of insobriety. But
 it'd turned, really. 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 just...

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... okay. Um-- 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! 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 there then.
 Though -- like I said, I don't have
 much time. So...

She turns to exit, but hesitates.

NICOLE (CONT'D)
 And, uh... 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 an endless
 search. That's what we think.
 (MORE)

ANNETTE WOLFE (CONT'D)
I've learned that doesn't apply
here, on the Rez. So much gets
buried here. For me, it was
everything.

INT. OFFICE - BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS - LATER

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

NICOLE
Mr. Chavis?

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

RC
Unless they changed the name on the
door again.

NICOLE
I was told you have the case file
on Theresa Wolfe.

RC
Oh, well, that case's been closed.
You 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
some 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
to learn my sister'd hired me out.

He slides over a thin manilla ENVELOPE.

RC

Well, then, you know basically all there is to know. That'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'. She never come home. Few days go by. A jogger spots her car juttin' out of the river. 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
Where ya been since?

NICOLE
Army. Long Range Surveillance.

RC
Serious?

NICOLE
That was the reaction at the
recruiting office.
(re: phone bill)
Who's this 4484 number? Went dead
for a couple months then picked
back up.

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 prior. 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 run a ping for a
native girl who drove herself into
a lake. And the tribal
department's thin.
(MORE)

RC (CONT'D)

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

A fire sparks in Nicole--

NICOLE

Yeah? So is that the default 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 -- 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, what, yeah? Where are you?

NICOLE

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

JOSAPHAT

I've been meaning to get to Texas.

NICOLE

I know, I'll call you when I get back. It's, uh-- well, you know how it goes. Civilian life.

JOSAPHAT

Sounds like you ain't got it figured out yet. But, yeah, I can ping data. 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 boots are about where the
treads led in. Zig-zagged a
little, like she'd lost the wheel.
Car was hung up there on the rocks.

NICOLE

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

RC

Could be she tried. Body shut down.
Late September -- hypothermia's
likely. Also likely the body got
swept down 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)

Deal was, 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. 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.
And I'm sorry if her mother had you
caught up. Sometimes...

(MORE)

RC (CONT'D)

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 studies the snow, then looks 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.