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COLD JUSTICE

Written by

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FADE IN:

**1 EXT. WELL-LIT STREET - NIGHT****1**

We're moving down the street. All is calm.

People are laughing. Drinking.

Then, as we turn a corner--

FLASHING LIGHTS. PANDEMONIUM OUTSIDE A HOSPITAL.

People stream out from the entrance.

Numb to their surroundings. Sirens blare in all directions.

Another busy night.

A police ambulance pulls up, trying to avoid the flurry of people.

Two PARAMEDICS rush to open the rear doors for the patient.

SOPHIA COULTER, 15, lies unconscious on the gurney with restraining belts. Her father, RYAN COULTER, 47, exits, gripping her hand.

She is rushed into the hospital. Ryan follows, keeping hold.

**2 INT. HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY CORRIDOR - NIGHT****2**

Teeming inside. Gurneys rush in all directions. Orders called. Phones ring. Everything is a blur.

PARAMEDIC #1  
Make some room, people!

RYAN  
(looking down)  
You're gonna be okay, baby. I'm here. We're going to take care of you. I love you...  
(to the paramedic)  
How much longer, man?!

PARAMEDIC #2  
Doctor's coming!

Sophia looks dead.

Ryan stares at her arm. It's bright red through the bandages.

That's not the only wound.

Her neck is cut open. Bandaged haphazardly.

He checks her pulse: Not much time.

ORDERLY ARRIVES:

ORDERLY  
(hurriedly)  
What've we got?

A paramedic passes over a clipboard.

PARAMEDIC #1  
Attempted suicide.

DOCTOR  
(to paramedic)  
Get her in room four, stat.  
(to Ryan)  
Sir, you're going to have to wait  
here.

Ryan obeys ... for now.

The paramedics wheel her down the corridor, as the doctor follows them.

Long beat.

Doctor returns.

RYAN  
(agitated)  
Let me see her.

DOCTOR  
You can't right now.  
(beat)  
Go back to the waiting room, or  
I'll call security.

Ryan shoulders them aside and races into emergency.

RYAN (CONT'D)  
Sophia!

DOCTOR  
(from behind)  
Security!

He rounds a corner.

And spots the room: closed door.

He tries the handle. Locked.

Bashes on the door with his arm.

Tries kicking it.

People nearby are shouting at him to stop.

SECURITY ARRIVES:

GUARD

(points a taser)

Step away from the door!

Ryan stops banging, noticing the taser. Suddenly feeling weak. He falls to the ground, back against the doorframe.

Doctor catches up.

RYAN

(to the guard)

What? You gonna shoot me in a hospital?

He gives Ryan a stern look.

DOCTOR

Mr Coulter, you have to calm down.  
You're scaring people.

RYAN

Calm down? How the fuck do you calm down after this shit?

DOCTOR

(calm)

I understand what you're feeling, I do--

RYAN

Don't patronise me! I need to see my daughter!

DOCTOR

(raises her voice)

And you'll be kicked out if you lash out again!

With that, Ryan takes a step back.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

(to the guard)

Keep an eye on him.

Doctor moves on. Ryan looks after a beat, then turns to the guard.

RYAN  
You got a daughter?

The guard shakes his head.

RYAN (CONT'D)  
Then you've got a lot to learn.

GUARD  
(proffers a hand)  
Come on.

Ryan doesn't take it.

CUT TO:

**3 INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - RYAN - LATER**

**3**

sits: utterly defeated. Staring at a medical bill.

It reads: **\$52,392.**

The past few hours have been rough.

He wipes off the tears, and walks to the window opposite.

Chicago is alive. It's lit up for trouble.

He looks at his watch. Still broken.

A long beat.

He can't do anything.

As he stares deep into the window.

But he's looking past it.

Into the night.

The city that's alive - when his daughter lies in darkness.

His face.

Anger.

He pulls out his cell phone. Dials a number.

It rings.

And rings, until...

CLICK.

Someone picks up.

RYAN

I need to call in that favour.  
(looking around)

It's BURNER. A career criminal. Sets up the scores.

BURNER (V.O.)

You've got the wrong number, pal.

RYAN

Cut the shit, Burner.

BURNER (V.O.)

(sighs over the receiver)  
Hello Ryan. I'd say it's been a  
while, but I had a feeling you'd  
call-- sooner or later.

Ryan leans against the window.

RYAN

I need cash.

BURNER (V.O.)

Straight to the point.  
(continuing)  
Why? Civ life got boring for you?

RYAN

I never got bored. I guess it's  
your lucky day.

Beat.

Ryan looks at the sum on the bill.

Being a single father is hard.

BURNER (V.O.)

Can you talk?

RYAN

I can talk. I'm just dealing with  
some shit right now...

BURNER (V.O.)

Bad shit?

RYAN  
That's what I said.

Beat.

BURNER (V.O.)  
And you've still got a short  
fucking memory.

RYAN  
Can it, asshole.

BURNER (V.O.)  
(chuckles)  
You got something to write on?

He takes a piece of paper out of his pocket, as his officer badge falls out. He picks it up, staring at the words. We see what is written: **I'm sorry, dad.** Her final (almost) goodbye.

RYAN (CONT'D)  
(with finality)  
No. Text me. Set up a meet tomorrow  
and find some guys you trust.  
(beat)  
I need a score.

PHONE CLICKS.

ORDERLY RETURNS:

ORDERLY  
You can see her now.

Ryan picks up the badge.

CUT TO:

**4 INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - RYAN - LATER THAT NIGHT**

**4**

Orderly opens the door. It's a standard-issue hospital room, with side rails and an adjustable bed. Ryan stares beyond it. At Sophia, who is hooked up to an IV drip.

He walks to the bedside and sits down in the free chair.

ORDERLY  
She asked for you.

That makes him smile.

RYAN  
(rubs her hands)  
Hey, baby.

SOPHIA

lies on the bed, with a blood pressure cuff attached to her arm. Her neck is covered in bandages.

Her eyes slowly open.

SOPHIA  
(weakly)  
Daddy ...?

RYAN  
Yes, it's me. Your daddy.  
(pause; then)  
I love you.

She coughs.

SOPHIA  
Are you okay?

He doesn't know how to respond. Goes with:

RYAN  
Why-- why did you do this to  
yourself?

SOPHIA  
I ... I don't know.

Ryan looks down.

RYAN  
You talk to me. Please, just-- you  
don't just leave me a note.

SOPHIA  
(neutral; almost  
disappointed)  
Your watch is broken.

RYAN  
(covers his watch;  
smiles)  
Yeah, I'm not one for timekeeping  
these days.

SOPHIA  
(confused; weakly)  
Why?

AND SUDDENLY...

FALLS UNCONSCIOUS.

Ryan looks up.

RYAN  
Sophia...?

He tries shaking her awake.

Feels her carotid pulse.

She's unresponsive.

He rushes out into the corridor.

RYAN  
I need some help here!  
(louder)  
She's not breathing!

Medical staff race to attention.

CUT TO:

**5 INT. DIVISIONS HEADQUARTERS - BULLPEN - NIGHT**

**5**

Over a dozen desks sit in the centre of a busy room. Officers are sat typing, others are walking in and out of it.

A smartly dressed man walks out of a large office. This is SERGEANT DAVID KELSO, 50. Impeccably dressed. Well-kept and clean.

He stares at an empty desk, then approaches an officer.

DAVID  
(looking around; carrying  
a mug)  
Where's Coulter?

OFFICER #1  
He didn't come through.

DAVID  
(sighs)  
Is his partner out?  
(then sips)

OFFICER #1  
Yes, sir. Al is working on the  
Keller case.

DAVID

What's the trouble? The man killed his wife. That's old news.

OFFICER #1

Well, she's badly injured, sir. He's gathering evidence of his culpability seeing as forensics have yet to find a fingerprint.

DAVID

Quite a headache. I say lock 'em all up.

(walks back to office)

When he gets back, tell him to bring Coulter here.

OFFICER #1

Will do.

CUT TO:

**6 INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - RYAN - LATE NIGHT**

**6**

is again surrounded by staff. His hearing is muffled.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

We're going to run some tests...

He digs his fingernails into his arm, trying to brace himself.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

the blood pressure is too low...

He looks up, turning to the window.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

her fatal attempt...

And covers his face in despair.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

to be kept under observation indefinitely.

Just then, a hand touches his shoulder. Ryan glances up, and puts a face to the voice:

DOCTOR

Do you have any questions?

Nothing sunk in.

RYAN  
I'm sorry, what?

DOCTOR  
This is a difficult time, but I  
have to inform you about the  
severity of your daughter's  
condition.

Beat.

DOCTOR  
Before I do so, have you had  
anything to eat or drink?

RYAN  
(shakes his head)  
I'm fine.

DOCTOR  
Can I--

RYAN  
Fuck the food. Just tell me.

The doctor organises her notes, and looks at Ryan.

DOCTOR  
Your daughter is suffering from a  
hypovolemic shock.

His body freezes.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
Despite how it sounds, we've  
managed to get her stable ... for  
now.

RYAN  
W-what does that mean?

DOCTOR  
Well, the blood loss has exceeded  
an amount that we deem problematic  
...

Beat.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
Which could lead to multi-organ  
failure.

The truth hits hard and cold.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
 She's in safe hands, Mr Coulter.  
 (finality)  
 But I need to be transparent here,  
 as it's not looking good. If her  
 pressure drops any further ...

Ryan looks at the doctor.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)  
 (clears throat; measured)  
 We will continue to monitor her  
 condition by administering  
 transfusions for the next couple of  
 hours, but that's the best I, and  
 my team can do.  
 (sympathetic)  
 Listen, from one parent to another,  
 I want you to know that it's easy  
 to go blaming yourself. But  
 whatever you do, don't go chasing  
 shadows. Nothing good can come from  
 it.

Ryan stares into nothingness, soaking everything but nothing  
 into his head.

**7 INT. RYAN'S APARTMENT - RYAN'S ROOM - 3.00 A.M. 7**

He lies in bed, staring at the ceiling.

A fan spins slowly above. Light from the street shines in  
 through the blinds.

He shuffles, and picks up the all-too-familiar note once more  
 from the bedside table.

Thoughts spin around his mind:

Why?

**8 INT. TONY'S COFFEE SHOP - RYAN + BURNER - DAY 8**

sit in a booth next to the window. Outside is morning  
 traffic. Full coffee cups say they've either just arrived, or  
 neither has bothered to drink.

First look at Burner. 50. Face full of lines, long hair,  
 thick goatee. He's been in the game for a while. They lean  
 close and talk low.

BURNER

So, you need a score, huh? You gonna drop a dime on me now you've gone straight?

RYAN

(tired)

I just need your expertise.

BURNER

(dripping with sarcasm)

And afterwards we'll hold hands and walk out into the sunset together, right? Just like the good old days?

(pause)

Why would I trust a cop?

Ryan stares at his full mug of coffee. He doesn't take the bait.

RYAN

(looks at Burner)

Because I'm no rat. You do this one job for me, I'll cut ties, split the take and we'll both go our separate ways.

BURNER

(neutral)

You're a real buzzkill, you know that?

RYAN

Shut up. That okay with you?

Burner looks unconvinced.

BURNER

(considers)

Eight thousand dollars is chump change. Hitting a bank is overkill for what you want, especially if you're planning a quiet exit.

RYAN

Try \$53,000. We ain't working Seven Elevens, okay? We score a bank.

BURNER

Just 'cause you saw a Western, don't make you Butch Cassidy.

RYAN

No, but we've made a clean run of it so far.

BURNER

At least we ain't robbing casinos,  
'cause we burned our ace fifteen  
years back.

RYAN

(slightly annoyed)  
Move on.

BURNER

Don't kid yourself, you're not  
above the law.

(beat; sarcastic)  
Lawman.

RYAN

Hey, enough with the moves. I'm  
thinking about more than just  
myself here.

(nods at his mug)  
Yours is going cold.

Ryan drinks. Burner eyes him, still unconvinced, then pulls  
out a writing pad.

BURNER

(writes on a pad)  
When do you need it by?

RYAN

Next week or so. You still work  
fast?

Beat.

BURNER

(keeps writing)  
I'll see what I can do. Score like  
that, you're looking at two men -  
maybe three.

RYAN

That's doable. Security?

BURNER

(looks up at Ryan)  
You're the one taking the risk.  
It's water off my back. I'll do  
some scouting and contact you.

RYAN

thinks. Then, sees something in the parking lot.

RYAN  
We got company.

Burner looks outside.

BURNER  
(still writing)  
Wrong. 'You' got company.

DOOR - AL MCEVOY, 44. A smart and capable field detective enters, spots Ryan.

RYAN  
(stern)  
Al.

Stops in front of the booth.

AL  
You're needed back.

RYAN  
The hell I am.

AL  
Direct orders. Chief requested to speak to you immediately.

RYAN  
That's gonna be tough, tell him I couldn't care less.

Burner looks at Al, sips his coffee, and looks away again. Nerves of steel.

AL  
Look, I don't ask what doesn't involve me.

RYAN  
He just has a giant chip on his shoulder about something. Come on, man ... don't be a kiss-ass.

People look over at the booth, wondering what the commotion is. Ryan makes a realisation.

RYAN (CONT'D)  
(neutral)  
Yes ... kiss-ass Al. That fits you like a showdown at high noon. Except, you'd lose that duel ...  
(whispered; then)

Every time.

AL  
(wry)  
Always the one with the jokes,  
aren't you?

RYAN  
(blunt)  
Don't be a kiss-ass.

Burner cracks a brief smile, impressed. Al turns to Burner.

RYAN (CONT'D)  
(notices; then clicks  
fingers)  
Oh him? You can talk to him, but he  
may not wanna talk to you.

AL  
That right?  
(to Burner)  
You a friend ... or foe?

Burner stares at Al.

BURNER  
I don't 'ask' what doesn't involve  
me, pal.

AL  
(chuckles; looks at Ryan)  
Guess I walked into that one.

BURNER  
Maybe it's time you walked on outta  
here.

Burner gestures Al to leave with his hand, then takes another  
sip of coffee.

AL  
(to Ryan)  
You coming?

RYAN  
Nah, I'll find my own way.

Al nods, and walks out of the coffee shop.

Shortly after, Ryan grabs his trench coat, and stands to  
leave.

BURNER

They'll come for you, you know.  
Score like this; it'll put you on  
the hot list faster than you can  
think.

(pause)

My advice: stay in your lane.

RYAN

(adjusts his jacket)

Well, maybe that's why I called.

BURNER

For the first time in fifteen  
years.

Ryan is taken aback.

RYAN

I had a daughter to bring up. What  
went down, went down, okay? Life  
threw me on a different path; that  
train never stopped. Get off your  
high horse.

BURNER

That's the kind of lie you have to  
tell if you wanna make it.

Ryan sulks, and sits back down.

BURNER (CONT'D)

Playing lawman has made you soft.

RYAN

Well, you've always been cold-  
hearted.

Burner chuckles.

BURNER

No doubt, but it's kept me alive  
for this long, and we ain't all  
that different. You miss the old  
crew?

No answer.

BURNER (CONT'D)

Well, I do. Guess none of us know  
the time nor the hour.

With that, Ryan stands.

RYAN

I guess not.

BURNER

(rips off a page)

Shopping list. If I'm doing the heavy lifting, then make yourself useful in the kitchen.

(passes it)

Kit yourself out.

Ryan pockets it, walking off.

Burner watches him through the window:

keeping tabs.

**9 EXT. DIVISIONS HEADQUARTERS - CAR PARK - LATER THAT DAY 9**

Full and standing. Officers dressed in navy walk around the station, some entering; others mingling.

**10 INT. RYAN'S VOLKSWAGEN - RYAN - DAY 10**

is sitting behind the wheel. Doesn't want to go in. Not even wearing uniform. He takes Sophia's note out of his pocket, and stares at the writing again: **I'm sorry, dad.**

His mind drifts. She's still there - lying unconscious.

He exits the car.

**11 INT. DIVISIONS HEADQUARTERS - KELSO'S OFFICE - DAY 11**

Beautiful office. Drab view. All signs of order and tidiness inside the room. Files in place. Aggressive traffic noises from outside.

Grey weather hasn't improved much.

SERGEANT DAVID KELSO, 50. Impeccably dressed. Well-kept and clean.

He gestures for Ryan to sit.

DAVID

(stern)

No uniform?

RYAN

It's in the wash, sir.

David looks him up and down.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
My clothes go in the wash too.  
(pause; mocking)  
It's funny, but that's why I keep a  
spare; for these exact moments when  
our dignity is on the line.

He watches him.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Do you have dignity?

RYAN  
I believe so, sir.

DAVID  
You believe so? Is that a  
satisfactory answer to my question?  
(pause; leans forward)  
Try again. Do you have dignity?

Ryan immediately goes with:

RYAN  
Yes, sir.

DAVID  
(fires back; then  
simmers)  
Wrong answer. We've assessed your  
performance these past few months,  
and I'm not happy.

Room falls silent.

RYAN  
My daughter is in the hospital,  
sir.

DAVID  
That is of no consequence to this  
department. Our streets are teeming  
with drug-addled freaks and  
hooligans that must be stopped.  
(beat)  
Do you think you're special, Ryan?

RYAN

With respect, sir ... I don't intend to make a mockery out of you or the department ... I'd hoped you be more sympathetic to my situation.

DAVID

Sympathy? Haven't I shown you more than enough sympathy by allowing you to speak your mind?

RYAN

I'm not an idiot, sir. If you intend to give me an ultimatum, then stop beating around the bush and give it to me straight.

David slides a document across the desk towards him. He picks it up.

Ryan skims through the first page.

It's a generous redundancy package.

He puts it down on the table.

RYAN

Just as I thought.

DAVID

You're not at all surprised?

RYAN

Should I be?

David stops. The eyes chill.

DAVID

You're not the least bit curious as to why?

RYAN

I guess we've all gotta pay for something.

DAVID

Forgive me, but that sounds like an evasion.

RYAN

You think I'm happy about this?

DAVID

I've read your file.

Ryan, starting to feel heated, folds his arms.

RYAN  
You know this whole department is  
full of slackers?

DAVID  
Who's slacking off?

Ryan shrugs it off. He's no snitch.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
Well, I need names ... otherwise I  
can't do my job.

RYAN  
(heated)  
What do you know? ... Is there a  
lotta money in keeping a desk chair  
warm? Must be nice.

DAVID  
You're a small fish, Ryan.

Ryan shakes his head.

RYAN  
What does that make you then?

David smiles. He opens his drawer and grabs a folder from  
inside.

He opens it and takes a photo out--  
chucking it on the desk.

Ryan stares at it. Stunned.

DAVID  
A great white.

It's a CCTV image of himself outside an apartment block,  
along with his wife running in the opposite direction.

This stops Ryan dead cold.

David clasps his hands.

DAVID  
Fifteen years ago you robbed  
Hinsdale National Bank. It didn't  
go well. Your wife was shot in the  
line of fire along with this man.

His finger traces over the third man, masked and dressed in black. Ryan remains silent.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
You can see the date. You can see  
the time. I see you with a big ole'  
bag of money.

Ryan shifts in his seat. He knows damn well it's him.

RYAN  
(neutral)  
I wouldn't know anything about  
that.

David stiffens.

DAVID  
Well, shit, Ryan, I was hoping for  
some honesty.  
(beat; casual)  
Who's the other man?

Ryan smiles it off.

RYAN  
You're grasping at straws, chief.

David stands and walks over to window. He pours himself a coffee.

Ryan watches him, as he takes a sip.

DAVID  
I have my sources.

Beat.

RYAN  
If you think you can blackmail--

DAVID  
(turning)  
Oh, but I can.

David leans against the windowsill, stirring his coffee.

DAVID (CONT'D)  
And I have.

And takes another sip.

Ryan shakes his head. Deciding.

INSERT CUT:

SOPHIA COULTER, 15, lying on a hospital bed, with her father sat next to her.

RYAN

No.

DAVID

No?

And moves to sit back down.

David is reasonable:

DAVID

(taps on the photo)

Listen, this won't go on your record ... I'll make sure of it. But it's a very small price to pay in exchange for your continued freedom.

(beat; then)

And you're right ... there's a lot of power involved if you know where to look.

Ryan tilts his head. David puts a hand out.

DAVID (CONT'D)

You know the drill.

He passes over his gun, but stares at badge, hesitant to part with it.

David dumps them on the photo.

Ryan stares at the badge.

DAVID (CONT'D)

And if you don't play ball, then this becomes easy.

Ryan's eyes flick up. David smirks.

INSERT CUT:

It's fifteen years ago. The city zips past. Ryan drives. Turns to the passenger side. Blood on his face. Gunfire shatters the window.

Ryan looks down. Moves a hand over the scar on his right cheek.

DAVID  
Now, fuck off.

And rises to leave.

Ryan opens the door. David watches him leave.

**12 INT. RYAN'S APARTMENT - RYAN - 7.00 P.M.**

**12**

Lets himself in through the door. Mail on floor. Picks it up.  
He's beat. Throws his coat on the counter.

Hits PLAY on the answering machine.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)  
You have one new message. Message  
one. Left at 5:43 P.M.

BEEP.

BURNER (V.O.)  
I've got a lead. Tomorrow at noon.  
Payphone off Newark and Devon. I'll  
call.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)  
End of messages.

The room is silent. Ryan exhales.

He's waiting for something more.

Walks to kitchen.

**13 INT. KITCHEN - COUNTER - CONTINUOUS**

**13**

It's a mess with dishes piled high. Ryan sighs. It'll never  
get done. Tosses the mail on the counter. Walks to Sophia's  
bedroom.

**14 INT. SOPHIA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS**

**14**

is tidy and pristine, compared to the rest of the apartment.  
He daren't touch anything inside the room.

It's too perfect.

It doesn't stop him from walking inside.

He sits on the bed, contemplating.

Then ...

HIS MOBILE PHONE RINGS.

He looks at the screen. It reads: AL MCEVOY.

Waits for Al to initiate.

AL (V.O.)  
Heard about your redundancy. I'm  
sorry, man.

RYAN  
(tired)  
It is what it is.

AL (V.O.)  
Just can't believe he'd make an  
example out of you.

RYAN  
(confused)  
Can't you?

AL (V.O.)  
(thinks)  
Well, it's still fucked up. Sophia  
taking the news well?  
(no response; beat)  
Is she okay?

Ryan lies, looking around the room. Her name hits like a  
thunderbolt.

RYAN  
(neutral)  
Yeah, she's f-fine. I ain't told  
her about it yet.

AL (V.O.)  
You free tomorrow? We'll shoot the  
shit.  
(chuckles)  
I'll try acting like a human being  
this time.

Ryan weighs up his options.

It's a no-brainer.

RYAN  
No can do.

AL (V.O.)

Okay brother. What's on tomorrow?

RYAN  
(finality)  
I've got an appointment to keep.

PHONE CLICKS. ENDS CALL.

CUT TO:

**15 INT. HOPPER'S BAR - AL - NIGHT**

**15**

stares at his phone, confused.

CUT TO:

**16 INT. SOPHIA'S BEDROOM - RYAN - NIGHT**

**16**

stares with intent.

**END ACT ONE.**