

911: HOW CAN I HELP YOU?

TELL ME WHERE YOU ARE

Written by

Joe Murkijanian

Celestial Cinema 323-253-6402

FADE IN:

INT. METRO 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - NIGHT

Rain hammers a black skylight. Beneath it, a cathedral of screens -- a city rendered as light. Incident markers bloom across the digital map like infections. Amber. Red. Red.

SUPER: "10:45 P.M."

Forty consoles in the dark. A dozen staffed. Headsets glow like altar candles.

At the center console: LENA CROSS, 44, sits with the stillness of a sniper. Three screens. Three live calls. Her voice never rises above the hum of the room.

LENA
(into headset)
Put your ear against his chest.
Count out loud with me. One. Two.

INT. WALK-UP APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT - INTERCUT

A YOUNG MOTHER, 20s, kneels over a TODDLER on cracked linoleum, phone on speaker in a puddle of light, rain hammering a dark window. The boy's lips are the wrong color. A high chair lies where it tipped.

YOUNG MOTHER
He's not -- he was eating and then
he just -- three! Four! I don't
know what I'm counting FOR--

LENA (V.O.)
You're counting so I can hear him
through you. Keep going. Is his
belly moving when you count?

YOUNG MOTHER
A little -- a little!

LENA (V.O.)
Then air is getting through and we
have time. Now do exactly what I
say and nothing extra.

The mother nods at a phone that cannot see her, and does exactly that and nothing extra.

Her second screen: a convenience-store camera feed. A man waves a pistol at the register.

On the feed, tiny in the corner of frame: the CLERK's hand below the counter, phone flat, line open -- a nineteen-year-old holding his nerve because a voice in the speaker keeps telling him he can.

LENA
(line two)
Units are ninety seconds out. Stay
behind the counter, hands where he
can see them. You're doing fine.

Her third screen holds an open line flagged CRISIS -- a call she is keeping warm.

LENA (CONT'D)
(line three; softer)
I'm still here, Robert. You don't
have to decide anything while we're
talking. Tell me about the dog
again.

She toggles between lines. No wasted motion. Her console is immaculate -- pens in a row, a stack of yellow call cards squared to the edge of the desk.

A light flashes on the next console. SAMIR PATEL, 26, headset half on, stares at his screen. Frozen. His monitor reads: DOMESTIC DISTURBANCE - CHILD CALLER.

The call timer climbs. Four seconds. Six.

Lena reaches across and keys his line into her own headset. Doesn't look at him.

LENA (CONT'D)
(a different voice
entirely; warm)
Hi. My name's Lena. Are you
somewhere he can't see you? ...
Good. That's exactly right. Stay
there and talk quiet, just like
this.

She marks the address, flags units, hands the call back to Samir's queue with two keystrokes. Samir exhales for the first time in ten seconds.

SAMIR
I was going to--

LENA
You will. Next one's yours.

She returns to line one.

LENA (CONT'D)
Twenty-eight. Twenty-nine. Is his
chest moving? ... Then you just
saved him. The door's about to get
loud. That's ours.

She kills line one. Touches line three.

On the camera feed, the gunman wheels at something O.S. --
two officers flood the frame from the stockroom door. The
clerk drops flat behind the counter. Exactly where Lena
parked her.

Down the row, an OLDER OPERATOR waves for help -- her caller
shouting over a car alarm. Lena leans back in her chair,
listens to the leak from the woman's headset for three
seconds:

LENA (CONT'D)
(to the operator; not
slowing down)
It's his own alarm, his fob's in
the flood water. Tell him to stop
pressing it and the emergency ends.

LENA (CONT'D)
Robert. The dog. Does he sleep on
the bed or beside it?

She listens. Almost smiles. Marks the card WELFARE UNIT - NO
SIRENS.

In the quiet after, she scrubs at her thumbnail with the pad
of her thumb -- the skin there worried raw. A thread of
blood. She wipes it on a tissue, folds the tissue into a
precise square, drops it in the trash.

Behind the glass of the supervisor's office, BENJAMIN HOLT,
58, silver-haired, institutional, watches the floor the way a
captain watches weather.

EXT. DECOMMISSIONED TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - LOADING DOCK - NIGHT

A brick monolith, 1968 municipal gothic, four stories of dead
windows. Cable scars run down the facade like old surgery. A
banner sags over the dock: RESONANT FREQUENCIES -- ONE NIGHT
ONLY.

TESSA CROSS, 19, backs a road case through standing water,
phone clamped between shoulder and ear. Paint-flecked work
gloves. Gaffer tape on her boots.

Through the dock doors behind her: the SWITCH ROOM. Rows of dead ceramic switches climbing into darkness like a mechanical orchard. Cables hang in harvested bundles. Her crew threads microphones up into the racks.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BREAK ALCOVE - NIGHT

Vending-machine light. Lena stands with a coffee she is not drinking, cell to her ear.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED:

LENA
How many exits.

TESSA
You should hear this place, Mom.
The switch room rings like a bell.
I clapped once and it answered me
for four seconds.

LENA
Fire load. Occupancy. Is anyone
from the city signing off on this?

TESSA
We hang mics in the cable vault and
the building plays itself. Copper
in these walls older than you. The
whole thing is an instrument.

LENA
Who else has keys?

TESSA
Four seconds, Mom. Most rooms give
you nothing back. This one answers.

LENA
Tessa. Exits.

TESSA
(beat)
Four. Two chained.
(to someone O.S.)
No -- that goes to the board, don't-
-
(back to phone)
Hold on.

A CLUNK. The phone set down on a road case. Footsteps splash away.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BREAK ALCOVE - CONTINUOUS

Lena stands in the vending light, phone at her ear, listening to her daughter's world sixty blocks away. Laughter. Casters rolling on concrete. A speaker sweeping tone, low to high. Two bars of someone singing.

She listens. And listens. The coffee goes cold in her hand.

Then she hangs up first.

INSERT - PHONE SCREEN: CALL ENDED -- 11:06.

She pockets the phone and walks back onto the floor.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - LENA'S CONSOLE - NIGHT

A lull between storms of calls. Lena opens her top drawer for a pen. Taped inside the drawer lid, where only she can see it: a photograph gone soft at the corners -- TESSA AT NINE, gap-toothed, holding a science-fair ribbon, hugging a man whose face is half out of frame. Lena looks at it for exactly as long as she allows herself. Closes the drawer.

A paper cup of coffee lands at her elbow. Holt, passing, does not stop walking.

HOLT

You forget to eat on doubles.

LENA

I don't forget. I defer.

HOLT

(over his shoulder)

Twenty-two years, same joke.

She drinks the coffee. It is exactly how she takes it. Neither of them has ever mentioned that he knows.

EXT. CITY - TRANSMISSION TOWER - NIGHT

The storm owns the skyline. Lightning forks -- once, twice -- and the third strike takes the tower dead center. The night goes white.

INT. METRO 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Every screen on the floor gasps -- dies -- resurrects. UPS units whine under the desks. A ripple of operator profanity.

Then the storm arrives as sound: every queue on the floor begins to fill. The status wall climbs. CALLS WAITING: 12. 19. 27.

Holt is out of his office before the number breaks thirty, voice pitched to carry without shouting.

HOLT
Storm protocol. Medical priority only. Wires-down goes to the utility line. If it is a tree and nobody is under it, it waits.

The floor becomes a machine -- overlapping half-heard dispatch:

OPERATOR NGUYEN
--is the water inside the vehicle or around it--

OPERATOR ODELL
--do not touch the line, sir, do not touch anything touching the line--

OPERATOR NGUYEN
--yes ma'am, the sirens you hear are going somewhere else, that's what I'm trying to tell you, you called about the sirens--

LENA
--fourth ring of the second alarm, that is a system test, your building is not on fire--

A new call drops into her queue -- a YOUNG WOMAN, hysterical, engine noise.

LENA (CONT'D)
Are you in the underpass? Turn your wipers off and rev the engine once for me.

Over the line: a muffled, gargling REV.

LENA (CONT'D)
That pitch means your exhaust is underwater. You don't have five minutes, you have one. Window down, onto the roof, now -- the car is already a submarine, stop treating it like a car.

Across the floor, Holt catches the diagnosis-by-ear.
Something old and proud crosses his face before the weather
takes it back.

EXT. LOWRY AVENUE UNDERPASS - NIGHT - INTERCUT

A twelve-passenger ACTIVITY VAN, church league decals, sits
stalled in headlight-brown water rising past its rocker
panels. Inside, a COACH and five KIDS in basketball jerseys,
faces at the glass.

COACH (V.O.)
(phone)
--five kids, the water's coming in
the doors--

AT HER CONSOLE: something crosses Lena's face and is gone
before it can be named. Her voice does not change at all.

LENA
How many can swim.

COACH (V.O.)
I -- what? All of them, they're
twelve--

LENA
Then nobody waits for the water to
decide. Windows down while the
power works, biggest kid out first
onto the roof, he anchors for the
rest. Units are six minutes out and
you will be sitting on that roof
laughing about this in five.

ON THE UNDERPASS: windows drop. Kids scramble up into the
rain, big kid hauling, coach pushing -- a chain of hands on a
drowning van.

AT HER CONSOLE: Lena marks the card. Her thumb finds the raw
thumbnail. Presses once. Stops.

Nobody on the floor knows what they just watched her do
twice.

Lena works two queues at once, immaculate under the load.
Holt watches her a moment longer than the others. Old pride.
He returns to the glass.

On the far wall, bolted beside the digital map like a museum
piece: a LEGACY STATUS BOARD. Plastic tiles. Incandescent
indicators. A dead column labeled TRUNK 1 through TRUNK 12.

One tile flickers. Holds. AMBER.

TRUNK 9.

Samir notices. Stares.

SAMIR
That board isn't wired to anything.
I asked facilities my first week.
They laughed at me.

He pulls a binder from under his desk -- DEMOLITION
SCHEDULES. Flips. Finds the page. Reads.

SAMIR (CONT'D)
Trunk Nine. Copper emergency loop.
In service 1968, decommissioned six
years ago. Physical demolition
Thursday.
(reads closer; quieter)
Last logged emergency traffic...
eight years ago. Tonight.

HOLT, passing behind him, does not slow down.

HOLT
It's a storm and it's an old
building. Log it for maintenance
and answer your board.

Samir looks at the amber tile one beat too long. Answers his
board.

INT. METRO 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - LATER

SUPER: "11:13 P.M."

Lena's queue chimes -- wrong. A flat, older BELL rings
underneath the digital tone, like two phones ringing on top
of each other.

Her screen stutters. CALLER ID: WARD, ELAINE -- 4471 HALLORAN
AVE.

The timestamp field reads: 12:13 A.M.

Lena keys the line.

LENA
Nine-one-one. Tell me where you
are.

Static like weather. Then a whisper --

ELAINE (V.O.)
(60s; controlled terror)
He's in my kitchen. He came in
through the yard. 4471 Halloran.
Please.

LENA
Can you get out of the house?

ELAINE (V.O.)
He's between me and the door. He's
not saying anything. He's just
standing there with the light off.

LENA
Does he have a weapon? Can you see
his hands?

ELAINE (V.O.)
Gloves. He's wearing gloves. Oh
God, he's wearing gloves in my
kitchen--

Under the voice: a FREIGHT HORN, long and far away. A DOG
barks twice, close. Somewhere a MICROWAVE ALARM chirps --
done, done, done.

LENA
Units are coming now. Is there a
room with a lock between you and
him? Stay low, stay quiet, keep
this line open.

While the whisper continues in her headset, Lena pulls the
callback number and dials it on her CELL. Protocol.
Verification.

It rings. Once. Twice.

ELAINE (ON CELL)
(bright; present; alive;
TV in the background)
Hello? ...Hello, who is this? It is
very late.

Lena sits with a phone at each ear. In her left ear, Elaine
Ward watches television. In her right ear, Elaine Ward is
about to die.

The same woman. The same voice. One hour apart.

LENA
(into the cell; very
carefully)
Ma'am, this is 911 emergency
services conducting a line check.
Is everything all right at your
residence?

ELAINE (ON CELL)
A line check at eleven at night?
Everything is fine. Honestly--

And in Lena's right ear, the whisper says: "He heard me. He--
"

She flags PRIORITY ONE. The dispatch screen populates -- and
the metadata field pulses at her: RECEIVED 12:13 A.M.

The wall clock reads 11:13.

LENA
(to Samir)
My console's stamping this call an
hour ahead. Log the discrepancy.

SAMIR
(checking)
Not just your console. The server--

In the right ear: GLASS BREAKS. A soft, crystalline collapse.
Three footsteps. Unhurried. Heel-heavy. A GUNSHOT clips the
line into six seconds of roaring static.

In the left ear, over the television: "Hello? Are you still
there? Hello?"

Lena lowers the cell very slowly, the living woman's voice
still coming out of it, small as a coin.

At the next console, Samir has heard enough of it to have
stopped typing. The two of them look at each other over the
divider with the specific silence of people who will never be
able to explain this to anyone who wasn't here.

SAMIR (CONT'D)
(barely)
Log it as what?

LENA
(putting the headset back
on)
As received.

Dead air.

At the consoles nearest Lena, two operators have stopped mid-sentence -- the shot leaked from her headset into the room. The floor holds its breath.

Lena is already dispatching.

LENA (CONT'D)
All units -- shots fired, intruder
on scene, 4471 Halloran. Caller is
down.

The board reshuffles -- six unit icons swing north, peeling off flood calls. At the next row, OPERATOR ODELL half-stands.

ODELL
Those are my wires-down units! I've
got a live one on Fairfax--

LENA
(already re-routing his
call)
Utility crew is four minutes out on
Fairfax, your caller is in his car
and dry. Sit down, Odell.

Odell sits. The floor watches the six icons converge on a quiet house.

EXT. WARD HOUSE - HALLORAN AVENUE - NIGHT

INT. HOMICIDE BULLPEN - NIGHT

SUPER: "11:20 P.M."

A room of empty desks and one lit lamp. DANI RUIZ, 46, night shift by choice, works a cold-case box with a sandwich she isn't eating. A UNIFORM leans in the doorway, radio chattering storm.

UNIFORM
Shots fired on Halloran, six units
rolling, and get this -- dispatch
can't produce the call.

DANI
Can't produce it how? It's a
recording. It's the most produced
thing in the world.

UNIFORM
That's the thing. There's nothing
to produce.

Dani looks at the cold-case box. At the rain on the window. Storm nights, everybody's a detective. She takes her jacket.

Two black-and-whites, light bars strobing the rain. An unmarked sedan noses in behind them. DETECTIVE DANI RUIZ, 46, climbs out mid-yawn -- and the yawn dies as she reads the house.

Dark. Intact. Quiet. A manicured yard. The motion light snaps on as officers cross it, guns drawn on nothing.

The front door opens on ELAINE WARD, 61, bathrobe, reading glasses pushed up into her hair. Furious. Unhurt.

ELAINE

If this is about the Hendersons' alarm again--

DANI

Ma'am. We have shots fired at this address. An intruder in your kitchen.

ELAINE

From who?

Dani looks past her. The kitchen: spotless. The north window: intact. On the counter, a microwave -- its clock blinking after the power flicker. 12:00. 12:00. 12:00.

DANI

(into radio)
Code four. No crime scene.
(to herself)
No crime.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Glass walls. The floor glowing beyond them. Holt holds a deployment printout like a diagnosis. Lena stands. She does not sit.

HOLT

Six units. On a storm night, with flood calls stacking up on the south side. You threw six units at a woman drinking chamomile.

LENA

I heard her die, Ben.

HOLT

You heard a call we can't find,
from a number that never dialed,
stamped with an hour that hasn't
happened.

LENA

Then explain the stamp.

HOLT

Surge corruption. The strike
scrambled metadata across the whole
floor.

LENA

It didn't scramble her kitchen.
Glass on the north window. A
freight spur behind the yard. The
dog next door barks in pairs. I can
smell that house, Ben. I've never
been inside it.

Holt sets the printout down. Aligns its edge with the desk.
An old habit of his that she inherited.

HOLT

You trained half this floor to
trust the board over their gut.

LENA

You trained me.

HOLT

And on my floor the board is the
truth. When the board and a
dispatcher disagree, one of them
gets to be wrong quietly.

(beat)

Guess which.

Holt studies her. Worries wearing a uniform.

HOLT (CONT'D)

Take your break.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - LATER

Holt alone, the floor a lit aquarium beyond the glass. His
desk phone, on speaker, low:

DEPUTY DIRECTOR CRANE (V.O.)
Storm-night overtime is a headline,
Ben. Six units on a phantom call is
a lawsuit.

HOLT
It's handled.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR CRANE (V.O.)
(a pause with history in
it)
Handled like eight years ago
handled? Or handled?

Holt hangs up without answering either question.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - WOMEN'S RESTROOM - NIGHT

Fluorescent hum. Lena runs cold water over her wrists. Re-pins one strand of hair with exact fingers. Looks at herself.

Her thumb finds the raw thumbnail. Presses. Stops itself.

She dries her hands, one paper towel, folded once, and goes back out.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Odell intercepts her at the end of the row, coffee in hand, casual as a toll booth.

ODELL
Six units, Cross. On a hunch. They
write people up for two.

LENA
The Meridian fire. Twenty-nineteen.
You pulled three units off the
board because the smell was wrong
on a clear call.

ODELL
That was different. I was right.

LENA
You were right eleven minutes
before the board was. I signed for
it.
(passing him)
Somebody signed for you, Odell.
That's how this floor works.

Odell watches her go. Drinks his coffee. Says nothing, which on this floor is agreement.

At her console, a status line resolves on screen: WELFARE CHECK - 1123 ALDER - CONTACT MADE, SUBJECT STABLE. A body camera still, auto-attached: a PORCH, an OLD MAN mid-word, a fat dog against his leg like a sandbag.

Lena looks at the dog for one second longer than protocol requires. Files the card.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - LENA'S CONSOLE - NIGHT

She does not take her break. She writes on a yellow call card in draftsman's block letters:

FREIGHT HORN -- DISTANT, WEST. DOG X2 -- EAST, CLOSE.
MICROWAVE ALARM. GLASS -- NORTH WINDOW. FOOTSTEPS X3 -- HEEL-
HEAVY. NO VOICE.

Her cell buzzes: RUIZ.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - PARKED - HALLORAN AVENUE - NIGHT

Rain on the windshield. The Ward house dark in her mirror.
INTERCUT:

DANI

Your caller bakes for the block
watch. She's also thinking about
suing us.

LENA

Is there a rail line behind the
property?

DANI

(a beat; she looks)
Quarter mile. Freight spur.

LENA

A dog?

DANI

Next door. Some kind of terrier.
Barked at me twice. Exactly twice.
Like it was on a meter.
(beat)
Lena.

LENA
Leave a unit. One car, out of the
light, until one o'clock.

DANI
On what?

LENA
On me.

DANI
(beat)
Marcus used to say you could hear a
lie in a dial tone.

LENA
Marcus exaggerated.

DANI
Marcus married you.

Dani watches the house in the mirror. The wipers keep time. A
long moment.

DANI (CONT'D)
One car. One hour. And you owe me a
reason I can put in a sentence.

EXT. HALLORAN AVENUE - NIGHT

SUPER: "12:04 A.M."

A dark cruiser sits under a dead streetlamp, engine off,
windows fogged at the corners. OFFICER BREEM, 30s, slouched
low, nurses gas-station coffee. The radio murmurs other
people's emergencies.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(radio)
Four-Adam-Nine, status.

BREEM
(into radio)
Quiet as church.

Through the rain: Elaine's silhouette crosses the kitchen
window with a mug. Domestic. Ordinary. Alive.

INT. WARD HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Elaine on the phone, TV muttering a weather map, robe cinched
like armor.

ELAINE
(into phone)
Police, Margaret. Guns out, in my
begonias. Some prank caller used my
name and my address -- my exact
address... No, I'm not scared, I'm
itemizing. The begonias alone--

She stops. Looks at the dark kitchen doorway a moment.
Nothing there.

ELAINE (CONT'D)
I should go. It's late.

She does not say why she suddenly thinks so.

Headlights swing up the block -- Breem straightens -- a Volvo
turns into a driveway three houses down. A neighbor with
groceries. Breem settles back.

A CRASH behind the house. Breem is out of the car in one
motion, flashlight up, hand on his holster, moving up the
side yard--

A garbage bin on its side. A RACCOON regards him without
apology and withdraws.

Breem exhales. Walks back through the rain. Behind him, past
the reach of his light, the fence line stands in empty dark.

Rain. The wipers, off, let the world blur.

INT. WARD HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

SUPER: "12:12 A.M."

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - LENA'S CONSOLE - NIGHT

SUPER: "12:09 A.M."

Lena has the yellow card flat under her palm like a playing
card she refuses to turn over. Samir wheels his chair to the
edge of her station, officially on break, unofficially all
in.

SAMIR
Four minutes. If nothing happens--

LENA
Then I'm unemployed and a woman
drinks her tea.

SAMIR
And if it does?

Lena watches the second hand on the wall clock come around like a patrol.

LENA
Then the phone company owes me an explanation.

Elaine sets the mug in the microwave and punches the timer. The blinking 12:00 gives way to a countdown. The turntable hums.

Far off: a FREIGHT HORN, long and low. Next door, the DOG barks. Twice.

EXT. WARD HOUSE - BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

A MAN stands in the rain at the fence line, letting it hit him. Rain shell. Hood. His face is nowhere. Latex gloves.

From a pocket he draws a POCKET WATCH on a plain chain. Opens it. Watches the second hand climb. Closes it.

He moves along the fence, below the arc of the motion sensor - he knows exactly where the light ends. He stops at the north window. Produces a spring-loaded center punch. Sets it against the glass like a pen against paper.

The glass BREAKS -- a soft, crystalline collapse.

He stands at the broken pane a moment, listening to the house the way a technician listens to a line: diagnosing it.

INT. WARD HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Elaine turns. The man steps through the dark doorway. Three footsteps. Unhurried. Heel-heavy.

Behind him, down the hall he came through: the front room TV still muttering, a reading lamp warm over an open crossword, a house mid-thought.

The microwave chirps -- done, done, done.

From his pocket, his gloved hand takes something small and sets it on the counter with ceremonial care. Only then does he raise a suppressed pistol--

A FLASHLIGHT BEAM punches through the broken window.

BREEM (O.S.)
Police! Hands!

The man pivots -- out the doorway, gone. Breem vaults the sill after him. Yard. Fence. Alley. The rain closes over the sound of running.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND HALLORAN - CONTINUOUS

Breem pounds through runoff, light beam slashing. Ahead, the man takes a chain-link fence with terrible economy -- one plant, over, gone -- no wasted motion, a workman's vault.

Breem hits the fence, slips in the runoff, comes up with his light on--

Empty rain. An alley of nothing. As if the night had simply taken him back.

Elaine stands rooted, hands over her mouth. The microwave light revolves, serene.

On the counter, beside her keys: a BLACK TELEPHONE TOKEN. Old brass gone dark. Stamped with a numeral:

60.

INT. METRO 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - NIGHT

Lena stands at her console, one hand flat on the yellow card, listening to Breem's foot pursuit crackle across the radio. It thins. It dies. Lost him.

Her cell -- Dani.

DANI (V.O.)
Attempt in progress. Interrupted.
Your window. Your glass. Your three
footsteps.
(beat)
Lena. What is this?

Lena looks up at the wall clock: 12:14.

LENA
It already happened. An hour before
it happened.

INT. WARD HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Flash photography. Techs dust the sill. The token sits in an evidence bag on the counter, lit like a museum piece. Elaine, blanketed, grips a mug nobody heated.

ELAINE

He put it down like he was leaving
a tip.

Dani stands at the window, looking out along the fence line, at the one dark seam in the yard the motion light cannot reach.

DANI

He walked the only line your sensor
can't see. He's been in this yard
before tonight.

ELAINE

Why me? I review paperwork. Thirty-
one years, I review other people's
paperwork. I have never hurt anyone
in my life.

Dani has no answer. Elaine stares at the bagged token.

ELAINE (CONT'D)

You know what I'd have classified
tonight as? Before it happened to
me?

(a small, awful laugh)

A network failure. Something wrong
in the wires.

Dani photographs the token through the evidence bag.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - PLAYBACK BAY - NIGHT

A darker room off the floor. Racks of servers breathing. Lena pulls the 11:13 call. Hits play.

Six seconds of roaring STORM STATIC. Nothing else. She scrubs the timeline. Static. Static. The file length reads 0:06.

SAMIR

(in the doorway)

That's not corruption. Corruption
leaves teeth marks -- headers,
fragments, half a voice. This is a
clean recording of a call that was
never placed.

LENA
Calls don't unhappen, Samir.

SAMIR
Digital forgets on purpose. It's a feature. Retention purges anything unattached to a case number.

LENA
Then attach it.

SAMIR
To what? There is no crime.

Holt fills the doorway behind him, tablet in hand. The deployment log.

HOLT
Show me the call.

Lena plays him six seconds of weather.

HOLT (CONT'D)
You dispatched six units and staged a stakeout on that.

SAMIR
Sir -- the packet's ingress route. It came in through the copper. Trunk Nine. That loop is dead. It isn't wired to the switch. It isn't wired to anything.

HOLT
Then it's a ghost in a building they're tearing down Thursday, and it nearly put an officer through a fence chasing a man nobody can identify.

LENA
It saved her.

HOLT
(quieter; only to her)
I've protected you for a long time, Lena. I can't file this.

LENA
Don't.

HOLT
After Marcus, you worked doubles for eleven months.
(MORE)

HOLT (CONT'D)
I signed every one, against policy,
because the alternative was you
alone in that house. I know what
you look like when you're drowning
and calling it swimming, Lena. I'm
looking at it.

LENA
(even; lethal)
And I know what you look like when
you're burying something and
calling it protocol. We've seen
each other, Ben. It was never the
favor you think it was.

That lands somewhere Holt keeps locked. He straightens the
tablet against his forearm. An old habit of his that she
inherited.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - SAMIR'S CONSOLE - NIGHT

EXT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - AMBULANCE DOCK - NIGHT

Lena stands under the overhang with the storm two feet away,
a wall of falling water lit sodium-orange. She breathes it
like oxygen is rationed inside.

She dials. This time it picks up.

TESSA (V.O.)
(phone; show noise behind
her)
Mom. It's midnight-something. I'm
working.

LENA
I know. I had a hard call. I wanted-
-

TESSA (V.O.)
You always had a hard call. That
was the whole childhood, Mom. Other
people's hard calls, live, at
dinner.

LENA
(beat; she doesn't defend
it)
How's the show.

TESSA (V.O.)
(thrown, again, by the
surrender)
...It's good. The room's doing
things nobody's heard in fifty
years.

LENA
Then go listen. I'm glad you
answered.

A silence on the line that is almost soft. Then Tessa hangs
up. Lena stands with the rain a moment longer, then goes back
inside.

Dani's photo of the token glows on Samir's screen. He zooms
on the stamped 60.

SAMIR
It's a line tester's token. Techs
used them for coin tests on
payphones -- city issue, sixties,
seventies. My uncle had a jar of
them.

LENA
Who would still carry one?

SAMIR
Nobody. The men who carried these
have been retired for thirty years.

Lena writes 60 on a fresh yellow card. Circles it once.

INT. METRO 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - CONTINUOUS

Lena crosses the floor. At the next row, OPERATOR ODELL and a
colleague are leaned together, talking low. They stop when
she passes. Odell finds something on his screen to look at.

Lena keeps walking. Sits. Takes out her cell. Dials. It rings
through to voicemail -- Tessa's outgoing message is four
seconds of room tone and a beep.

LENA
(into phone)
It's Mom. When the show ends, text
me you're out of the building.
That's all. That's the whole
message.

She hesitates -- then hangs up before the silence can become
anything else.

INT. METRO 911 COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - LATER

SUPER: "1:02 A.M."

The old BELL again -- ringing underneath the digital chime. This time the whole floor hears it. Heads turn. On the far wall, the amber tile burns steady. TRUNK 9.

At his console, Samir quietly stands a battered HANDHELD CASSETTE RECORDER against his monitor speaker. Presses REC. The spindles turn.

Lena keys the line.

SOUND: an engine idling inside a concrete echo. A man COUGHING, wet and slow. And underneath it, looping tinny from a car speaker --

RECORDED VOICE (V.O.)
You have reached the city's
emergency line. Your call is
important. Please remain on the
line.

A sting of hold music. The loop begins again.

MAN (V.O.)
(60s; slurring, fading)
Is this her? Is this Cross?

LENA
This is 911. Tell me where you are.

MAN (V.O.)
Level Four... it keeps saying Level
Four...

Far off in the echo, an automated ELEVATOR VOICE, genteel and obsolete: "LEVEL FOUR." Somewhere a chain-drive GATE ratchets open. Closed. Open.

LENA
Are you in a parking structure? Is
your engine running? Sir--

MAN (V.O.)
(a wet laugh, almost gone)
He said you'd pick up. Tell Lena
Cross... I waited my hour.

The line drops into static. The metadata field pulses:
RECEIVED 2:02 A.M.

The wall clock: 1:02.

Lena has gone very still.

SAMIR
You know that voice.

LENA
Frank Haskell.
(off his blank look)
He sat in that office before Holt
did.

Samir pulls the personnel archive. ON SCREEN: an ID photo
twenty years stale -- HASKELL, FRANK D., DISPATCH SUPERVISOR,
1989-2019. A column of commendations as long as the photo.

SAMIR
Retired with honors.

LENA
(reading the
commendations; flat)
Every one of them.

SAMIR
Who hunts retired dispatch
supervisors?

Lena doesn't answer. Her eyes have gone to the amber tile on
the far wall.

Across the floor, Holt is already coming, and his face has
changed -- because he heard the name too.

Around them, operators pretend not to listen with the skill
of people who listen for a living. The name HASKELL crosses
the floor in whispers, row to row, like weather.

HOLT
Off the console. Now. You're done
until a fitness evaluation says
otherwise.

Lena stands. Deliberate. She locks the workstation -- three
keystrokes, screen to black. She sweeps the yellow call cards
into her bag. Lifts the wireless headset off its cradle and
settles it over her ear like armor.

HOLT (CONT'D)
Whoever is doing this is doing it
to you. That call was addressed to
you by name. You're not the
dispatcher tonight, Lena. You're
the emergency.

LENA
Then somebody should answer.

She crosses the floor -- past the rows of glowing consoles, all the way to the back wall -- and sits down at a dead spare console directly beneath the legacy board. Jacks her headset into the ancient patch panel. Amber light on her face.

She squares her yellow cards on the dead desk. Into her cell:

LENA (CONT'D)
Dani. The old courthouse. The
garage underneath it. Drive.

DANI (V.O.)
What am I looking for?

LENA
A man with fifty-eight minutes
left.

Above her, TRUNK 9 burns.

INT. COURTHOUSE GARAGE - NIGHT

Concrete ramps spiral down into sodium light. A gray sedan descends past stenciled numbers -- LEVEL TWO -- LEVEL THREE -- and noses into a space on LEVEL FOUR. The chain-drive gate ratchets shut somewhere above.

FRANK HASKELL, 67, heavysset, climbs out with a takeout bag and his keys. He walks toward the elevator bank. The automated voice greets him, genteel and obsolete: "LEVEL FOUR."

In the black mouth of the stairwell, something catches the sodium light.

A pocket watch, open in a gloved hand. The second hand climbing.

The watch snaps shut.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BACK CONSOLE - NIGHT

SUPER: "1:04 A.M."

The dead console under the amber tile, alive now with borrowed light.

Lena replays six seconds of the Haskell call off her own memory, eyes closed, one finger conducting the sounds in the air.

LENA
The gate. Ratchet-pause-ratchet.
Chain drive. How many municipal
structures still run chain gates?

Samir drops into the chair beside her with a laptop already open. He has stopped asking whether he is allowed to be here.

SAMIR
Three. Courthouse plaza, the annex,
and the impound on Grand.

LENA
The elevator voice. Genteel. Old.
I've taken twenty years of calls
with that voice in the background.
It lives downtown.

Her cell is propped against the dead switchboard -- DANI on speaker, road noise under her voice.

DANI (V.O.)
I'm two minutes from the plaza
garage. If your man is dying on
Level Four, I'd rather be wrong
fast.

INT. COURTHOUSE PLAZA GARAGE - LEVEL FOUR - NIGHT

Dani takes the ramp too fast, badge out the window at the booth. Level Four: half empty, fluorescent, humming. She runs the aisles. No gray sedan. She jabs the elevator call button--

A MODERN ELEVATOR VOICE, digital and flat: "FLOOR. FOUR."

DANI
(into phone)
Wrong voice. Wrong garage.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BACK CONSOLE - CONTINUOUS

Samir tears through scanned spec sheets -- microfiche-ugly PDFs, elevator maintenance contracts.

SAMIR
Fujitec, eighty-eight. Voice module
got recalled everywhere for
spooking people.
(MORE)

SAMIR (CONT'D)
Only surviving install is... the
annex. The annex garage, Kessler
Street side.

LENA
Dani. Annex. Kessler entrance. Go.

INT. COURTHOUSE ANNEX GARAGE - RAMPS - NIGHT

SUPER: "1:56 A.M."

At the Kessler booth, a NIGHT ATTENDANT starts up out of a
paperback -- Dani's badge is already past his window.

DANI
(gone)
Validate it later!

LEVEL TWO: empty spaces, oil ghosts. She slows for the turn--

DANI (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Talk to me about Haskell. If he
signed your falsified whatever, why
do I want him alive?

LENA (V.O.)
Because dead men are exhibits.
Alive, he's a witness.

DANI
You've thought about which you'd
prefer.

LENA (V.O.)
(beat)
Drive faster.

Dani's sedan corkscrews down the ramps, siren slapping off
concrete. Behind her, a black-and-white takes the turn too
hot -- clips a pillar with a sick crunch of sheet metal. It
limps to a stop, airbag blown.

Dani does not stop. LEVEL TWO -- LEVEL THREE --

INT. GRAY SEDAN - LEVEL FOUR - CONTINUOUS

Fog on the inside of the glass. HASKELL, gray-lipped, one
hand resting on the horn -- too weak now to press it. His
eyes are open, fixed on the black token propped against the
speedometer.

From the speakers, tinny, forever:

RECORDED VOICE (V.O.)
...your call is important. Please
remain on the line...

INT. COURTHOUSE ANNEX GARAGE - LEVEL FOUR - CONTINUOUS

The gray sedan sits alone in the far corner, engine running, windows fogged from the inside. Exhaust pools under the sodium light like ground fog.

Dani is out and running. Through the fogged glass: HASKELL, slumped against the wheel. Doors locked. From inside, tinny and cheerful, the hold loop plays on:

She sweeps the level at a run -- pillar, pillar, aisle -- her flashlight beam swinging across empty windshields, and the genteel elevator voice announces her arrival to no one: "LEVEL FOUR." Far corner. Fog on glass. There.

RECORDED VOICE (V.O.)
(muffled)
...your call is important. Please
remain on the line...

Dani swings her baton. Safety glass surrenders. She hauls the door open, kills the engine, drags two hundred forty pounds of Haskell onto the concrete.

DANI
(into radio)
Medical, Level Four, annex garage,
CO exposure, unresponsive--

She starts compressions. Counts under her breath. On the dashboard, propped against the speedometer where a saint's medal would ride: a BLACK TOKEN, stamped 60.

The hold loop keeps singing. Dani rips the aux cable out of the console without breaking rhythm.

LATER-STYLE BEAT, SAME LOCATION: a CRIME TECH crouches at the sedan's door with a pen light while medics work: door latches zip-tied from inside the panel, window switches dead, a supply line neat as factory work feeding the cabin from the exhaust.

CRIME TECH
Whoever did this serviced the car
like it was equipment. Every
failure's engineered. Tagged,
almost.

SUPER: "2:02 A.M."

Haskell convulses -- coughs -- breathes. Paramedics flood off the elevator. The genteel voice announces them: "LEVEL FOUR."

As they package him, Haskell's hand finds Dani's sleeve. His voice is a ruin.

HASKELL

Tell her... he called me first. Two years ago. Wanted to talk about the girl.

(the worst part)
I hung up on him.

INT. AMBULANCE - GARAGE RAMP - MINUTES LATER

Oxygen mask fogged, monitors chirping. Dani rides the jump seat, notebook out, mercy suspended.

HASKELL

(mask off; against medical advice)
He didn't threaten. He asked for the tape. Just the tape. Said a father should get to hear the whole hour.

DANI

And you said?

HASKELL

Records weren't my department anymore. Which was true.
(the machine chirps; he watches it)
Everything I said that year was true and none of it was honest. Write that down, Detective. While I'm saying it.

Dani writes it down.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BACK CONSOLE - NIGHT

SUPER: "2:12 A.M."

Samir has a lineman's test set clipped to a patch bay, dialing INTO the Trunk Nine pair like a man knocking on a door from the inside.

SAMIR

If the line runs an hour fast,
maybe it runs both directions.
Maybe we can hear forward. Get
ahead of him instead of chasing the
updates.

He listens. Offers her the earpiece. Lena listens: present-
tense storm static. Nothing else. The future does not take
incoming calls.

LENA

It only rings one way.

SAMIR

(the implication landing)
Then we don't have a window. We
have a mail slot. And he decides
what gets pushed through it.

LENA

Write that down. Everything we
learn about this line, on paper, in
order. If tonight ends badly, the
next person starts where we
stopped.

Samir starts a fresh yellow card: RULES. And underneath, in
careful block letters: 1. ONE WAY.

Beneath it, from tonight's evidence, he keeps writing: 2.
SAVES DELETE THE PROOF. 3. HE HEARS OUR RADIOS. He looks at
the third line a long moment, then underlines it until the
pen nearly goes through.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BACK CONSOLE - CONTINUOUS

Lena exhales -- one controlled breath, all she permits
herself. Samir grins like a kid. And then--

The old BELL. The field between them changes.

SOUND floods her headset: water moving through pipe -- a deep
metallic WATER HAMMER -- a big fan turning lazily -- and a
woman's voice, level as a flight recorder:

NIA (V.O.)

(40s; clinical calm)
Female, forty-six, pulse one-forty
and climbing. Water at my waist.
Ambient temp maybe fifty degrees.
(MORE)

NIA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Whoever gets this: I am inside a
rooftop tank and I am narrating so
you can find me.

On Samir's screen, the Haskell call audio -- the choking, the
elevator, the hold loop -- deletes itself, block by block,
like footprints filling with snow.

SAMIR
It's eating the garage call. The
buffer's purging--

He holds up his cassette recorder. The spindles still
turning.

SAMIR (CONT'D)
Not all of it.

The metadata pulses: RECEIVED 3:06 A.M. Wall clock: 2:06.

LENA
(to Samir; to Dani on the
cell; to herself)
He was there. He heard the sirens
come early and he moved to the next
name. Every person we save teaches
him how we're finding them.

INT. WHITE VAN - PARKED - NIGHT

A workshop with wheels. Hand tools sleeping in blanket rolls.
A thermos pours one cup of coffee, no spill, no waste. On the
dash, a scanner strobes with dispatch traffic.

Taped to the sun visor: a school photo. EMILY ROOK, 13, a gap
in her smile she never got to grow out of.

On the doghouse console: a mason jar, a quarter full of black
tokens. Beside it, a hand-drawn timetable on graph paper --
five names in draftsman's block letters. Two are crossed out
with single, ruled lines.

A cassette deck bolted under the dash. A tape inside, its
label worn blank by thumbs. A gloved finger presses PLAY -- a
half-second of a young girl's recorded breath -- and STOPS
it. Rewinds. Does not press play again.

A pencil hovers at the third name. Then moves to the fourth,
and writes a new time beside it.

The thermos is capped. The van pulls out, signaling, five
under the limit.

INT. CRANE RESIDENCE - HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

SUPER: "2:20 A.M."

DEPUTY DIRECTOR CRANE, 60, silk robe over pajamas, stands in a home office with two framed commendations and a putter in the corner. His phone is on speaker; his face is doing arithmetic.

CRANE

Two attempts in one night on two retired emergency personnel is a coincidence, Ben. Three would be a pattern, and patterns have press conferences.

HOLT (V.O.)

There may be a third before dawn.

CRANE

(a long silence)

Which files would a pattern like that touch?

HOLT (V.O.)

You know which files.

CRANE

Then contain Cross, contain the night, and Ben -- the storm ends this before nine a.m. or people who are not me start reading things.

He hangs up. Looks at the putter. Does not putt.

Then he picks the phone back up and dials from memory a number that isn't city.

CRANE (CONT'D)

(into phone; smooth)

Marcus -- no, the other thing's fine -- I need language ready by six a.m. Something with 'isolated incidents' and 'legacy infrastructure' in it. Bill it to the general fund.

EXT. COURTHOUSE ANNEX GARAGE - KESSLER STREET - NIGHT

Police tape sweats in the rain. Beyond it, a local NEWS VAN noses to the curb, mast still down, a SCANNER JOCKEY in the passenger seat chasing frequencies with a coffee and an appetite.

SCANNER JOCKEY
(to his driver; not
looking up)
Garage rescue, rooftop rescue, both
retired city, both in one night,
and dispatch keeps saying the calls
don't exist.
(a slow smile)
Somebody's having the worst night
of their career. Find me who.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - CABLE VAULT - NIGHT

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - SWITCH GALLERY - NIGHT

The show, mid-flight. An AUDIENCE of two hundred stands among the dead ceramic frames in cathedral dark. Contact mics glow like votives along the racks. The building is the instrument: somewhere a performer bows a forty-foot cable run and the whole gallery HUMS in sympathy, felt in the sternum.

The crowd does not applaud. It listens the way people listen in churches and hospitals.

At the FOH board, MOSS, 20s, rides faders. Tessa's station beside him sits empty, her laptop lid glowing with level meters.

Below the performance. A long masonry vault, ankle-deep cable runs, conduit sweating rain. The music above arrives through the floor as a heartbeat.

Tessa crouches at an open junction frame, alligator clips on a dead copper pair, headphones on, a field recorder slung at her hip. She's fishing for ghosts -- room tone, induction hum, the building's voice.

The copper gives her something else.

LENA (V.O.)
(through her headphones;
faint, buried in hiss)
...the pressure, Nia. Tell me what
the water is doing to the walls...

Tessa goes rigid. Rewinds. Plays it again. Her mother's voice. On a dead line. In this building.

INSERT - FIELD RECORDER SCREEN: the waveform, timestamped
03:02:19.

Tessa checks her phone: 2:41 A.M. She doesn't notice the discrepancy. She notices only the voice.

TESSA
(to herself)
You have got to be kidding me.

MOSS (O.S.)
(calling down the vault
stairs)
Tess! Board's showing your vault
feed dropped!

TESSA
(calling up; eyes still on
the recorder)
Copy! Re-patching!

Her thumb hovers over DELETE. Hovers.

She files it instead. INSERT - SCREEN: a new folder name,
typed fast: MOM???

Moss appears at the vault stairs with a cable coil and a
look.

MOSS
The vault feed. You good?

TESSA
(headphones around her
neck; a beat too long)
Yeah. The copper's just... talking.

MOSS
That's the show, Tess. That's
literally the show.

TESSA
(quietly; not for him)
Not like this.

She yanks the alligator clips. The copper goes silent. She
powers the junction frame down at the breaker and climbs back
toward the music, jaw set.

EXT. MIDTOWN OFFICE BUILDING - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

SUPER: "2:52 A.M."

Rain flails across a gravel roof. Fire crew pour out of the stair head into a forest of rooftop machinery -- ducts, condensers, and TWO galvanized WATER TANKS, side by side, identical, each the size of a room.

A LIEUTENANT slaps the first tank. Boom. Slaps the second. Boom. Rain, wind, a big EXHAUST FAN turning overhead, drowning everything.

FIRE LIEUTENANT
(into radio)
Dispatch, two tanks, no access
hatch on either, which one is she
in?!

DISPATCHER (V.O.)
(radio; confused)
Command, we have no record of a
caller at that location--

LENA (V.O.)
(cutting onto the channel)
This is Cross, patched on medical
authority. Lieutenant, disregard
the record and answer me one
question.

FIRE LIEUTENANT
Who the hell is--

LENA (V.O.)
The person who knows which tank. Is
there a roof fan running?

A beat. The Lieutenant looks up at the big lazy blades.

FIRE LIEUTENANT
...Affirmative.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BACK CONSOLE - INTERCUT

Lena, eyes closed, the future call replaying in her memory:
water hammer -- and under it, that lazy rhythmic WHOOSH.

LENA
There was a fan in her call, close
and slow. Kill it and listen.

ON THE ROOF: a firefighter throws the disconnect. The big fan
windmills down. And in the new quiet, small and impossibly
steady:

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK. Pause. KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

The EAST tank.

FIRE LIEUTENANT
East tank! Cut where the voice is!

An angle grinder opens a seam in a fan of orange sparks that the rain keeps killing. Halfway through the cut, the grinder chokes on the wet and DIES. A second grinder is passed hand to hand like a sacrament.

FIRE LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)
(against the steel)
Ma'am, sparks coming through, turn
your face away from the bright!

NIA (V.O.)
(through the steel)
Copy. Face away from the bright.

And she keeps narrating with her face against the far wall of her own coffin, professional to the rivets.

NIA (V.O.)
(through the steel;
through the phone;
clinical)
Water at the sternum. Update for
whoever logs this: eight years ago
I recertified a response time I
knew was wrong. I said the number
they handed me and I said it under
oath.

LENA
(into the line; steady)
Nia. Stay on your vitals.

NIA (V.O.)
These are my vitals. Pulse one-
fifty-five. I'm not saying it for a
jury, Cross. Drowning is very
clarifying. Tell whoever's doing
this: he could have just asked.

AT THE BACK CONSOLE: Lena, eyes closed, one finger conducting the sounds in the air.

LENA
The pressure, Nia. Tell me what the
water is doing to the walls.

NIA (V.O.)
(through tank steel;
through the future and
the present at once)
Bowling them. Inflow's ahead of the
drain. Water at my clavicle. You
have about four minutes of me left,
so somebody should hurry.

The grinder breaks through. Water guns out of the seam.
Gloved hands peel steel--

NIA COLE, 46, paramedic-fit, gray-lipped, pours out of the
tank into six waiting arms, coughing water and still
narrating:

NIA
Airway clear. Hypothermic. Somebody
write down a time.

SUPER: "3:04 A.M."

Zip-tied to the tank ladder at eye level, where she could not
have missed it while she drowned: a BLACK TOKEN. 60.

Nia, shaking under the blanket, looks at it a long moment.

NIA (CONT'D)
(to the nearest
firefighter)
Leave it for the detective. Tell
her he tied it where I'd be reading
it while I went under.

EXT. MIDTOWN OFFICE BUILDING - STREET - NIGHT

Ambulance doors open like a lit stage. Nia, wrapped and wired
to a monitor, waves off the oxygen long enough to talk. Dani
leans in from the rain.

NIA
You're building a list. Save
yourself the whiteboard.
(counting on shaking
fingers)
Ward reviews the report. Haskell
signs it. I swear to it at the
inquest. Saye seals it. Holt orders
all of it.

DANI
That's five.

NIA
(looking at her; the
monitor chirping)
He's going by the paperwork,
Detective. Bottom of the last page
there's a dispatcher's signature.
If I were you I'd already be
driving.

Dani is already driving.

INT. WHITE VAN - PARKED - NIGHT

The scanner murmurs the rooftop rescue traffic. The gloved hand takes up the graph-paper timetable and rules a third clean line: through NIA COLE.

The pencil moves down the list. Stops at the last block letters: L. CROSS. Beside the name, a time is written and circled twice:

INSERT - THE TIMETABLE: "5:13."

The pocket watch is opened, checked against nothing, and closed.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - MOVING - NIGHT

Wipers on high. Dani drives with her phone lit in the cradle. INTERCUT with Lena at the back console:

DANI
Elaine Ward. Thirty-one years
reviewing response paperwork. Frank
Haskell, the supervisor who signed
off on response reports. Nia Cole,
a paramedic.
(beat)
Eight years ago. The submerged
school bus. The Rook girl.

At the back console, Lena has stopped moving entirely. The amber tile lights half her face.

DANI (CONT'D)
Lena. Every one of these people
touched the paperwork on Emily
Rook. You're the common denominator
or you're the audience. Which is
it?

LENA
(a door closing in her
voice)
Later. A list like that -- who's
next on it? Because he already
knows.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - BACK CONSOLE - NIGHT

SUPER: "3:10 A.M."

A light blinks on the dead switchboard -- an ordinary line.
Present tense. Local. Lena stares at it a moment, then keys
it.

ADRIAN (V.O.)
(50s; low, courteous,
tired)
Was Frank worth the officer with
the broken collarbone?

Lena signals Samir -- trace it -- he is already moving.

LENA
He's alive. They're both alive.

ADRIAN (V.O.)
Tonight, yes. Frank got eight extra
years first. His retirement party
had a cake shaped like a headset.
Did you go?

LENA
The tokens. Why the tokens?

ADRIAN (V.O.)
You found a line tester, then.
Good. Ask him what a coin test is.
(patient; a teacher once)
You drop the token in the works,
and the line tells you the truth
about itself. Every name tonight is
a coin test, Ms. Cross. The system
keeps failing it.

LENA
Where are you?

ADRIAN (V.O.)
(almost gentle)
You still think an address makes it
a choice.

LENA
Then tell me what makes it one.

ADRIAN (V.O.)
(a silence; then, quieter
than everything)
Two doors. One hour. Somebody you
answer to watching you pick.
(beat)
You'll understand before the storm
ends. You're the only one who ever
could.

CLICK. Samir looks up from the trace and shakes his head:
payphone. A dead payphone.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Holt at the glass, watching Lena across the floor at her
scavenged console. On his desk phone, a voice mid-sentence --
a DEPUTY DIRECTOR, city administration.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR (V.O.)
--an off-console dispatcher running
her own task force through your
building, Ben. On a storm night.
Contain it or I will.

Holt hangs up. Crosses the floor. Behind Lena, quietly, he
reaches past her and pulls the patch cable out of the panel.
Her headset dies.

HOLT
Fitness evaluation, oh-eight-
hundred. You're escorted off at end
of shift. I'm sorry, Lena. I am
also right.

He walks away. Across the floor, at his own console, Samir
watches the patch cable swing. Then he starts, very calmly,
packing a canvas bag.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - MAINTENANCE ROOM - NIGHT

Shelves of dead technology. Samir unrolls a canvas tool bag:
a BATTERY FIELD HANDSET, olive drab, older than either of
them. Alligator clips. A hand crank.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - PARKED - NIGHT

Rain drums the roof. Dani, phone to her ear, listens to a voice with rank in it.

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ (V.O.)
Ruiz. You will 10-19 with Cross for
evaluation, and that instruction
has Crane's office stapled to it.

DANI
Sir, tonight I have pulled a dying
man out of a car and a paramedic
out of a water tank on this woman's
say-so. Evaluate that.

CAPTAIN VASQUEZ (V.O.)
I'm giving you a direct--

DANI
You're giving me a memo Crane
wrote. When you give me an order
you thought of yourself, I'll take
it like I always have.

She hangs up on her own career. Sits with it for one wiper
cycle. Then puts the car in gear.

SAMIR
Lineman's test set. It doesn't
route through the switch. It
doesn't route through anything. You
clip it to the pair and the pair is
yours.

He opens a wall chase. Finds two copper wires among hundreds,
taped decades ago with a tag gone brown: TRK 9.

He clips on. The handset earpiece fills, faint but alive,
with storm static -- the sound of the future idling.

SAMIR (CONT'D)
Analog doesn't ask permission.

He shows her: a worn button on the handset grip.

SAMIR (CONT'D)
If it rings, hold this down to
answer or the bell just keeps
going. It will be loud. It was
built for men standing on poles in
wind.

LENA
If they catch you helping me, your
probation ends tonight.

SAMIR
(zipping the bag; handing
it over)
You took my call. First hour of my
first shift, I froze, and you took
my call.

She takes the bag.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - AMBULANCE BAY - NIGHT

Diesel fumes and rain-light. Lena moves along the wall, bag
on her shoulder. At the roll-up door, leaning against her
sedan like she has been there an hour: Dani.

A long look between them. Dani opens the passenger door.

Dani's phone lights in her hand: CAPTAIN VASQUEZ. She looks
at it. Declines it with her thumb, in front of Lena, so it
counts as a decision witnessed.

DANI
I was never here. Neither were you.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - MOVING - NIGHT

SUPER: "3:29 A.M."

The city sliding past, drowned in its own reflections. The
canvas bag rides on Lena's lap like a child.

The field handset RINGS.

Not through a console. Not through a headset. The naked bell
of it fills the car -- old, mechanical, wrong.

Lena lifts the handset. Dani pulls over without being asked.

TESSA (V.O.)
(a whisper crushed flat
with fear)
Mom.

Lena's whole body changes.

TESSA (V.O.)
Mom, if you get this -- don't send
them. Do you hear me? Don't send
anyone. He follows the sirens.

Behind the whisper: telephones. Dozens -- hundreds -- of dead
telephones RINGING in waves, near and far, a tide of bells
rolling through some vast dark room.

TESSA (V.O.)
I'm going to stay very quiet now--

LENA
(into the handset;
protocol overriding
physics)
Tessa, where in the building? Give
me a floor, a room, anything--

The whisper doesn't pause. Doesn't hear. It is already an
hour old and an hour unborn, and it goes on without her:

A BLOW -- meat and air -- the whisper cuts.

Static.

INSERT - THE HANDSET: no screen. No metadata. Just the hiss.

LENA (CONT'D)
(into the dead handset)
Tessa.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - PARKED - CONTINUOUS

Lena dials her cell with a steady hand that costs her
everything. It rings. Rings.

TESSA (V.O.)
(live; annoyed; crowd
noise, music, four
hundred people)
Mom. I am literally mid-show.

Lena closes her eyes. Alive. The music thuds. And under the
music, under the crowd -- Lena hears it. The room tone. The
same vast hum that carried the ringing phones.

LENA
I know. I know you are.

TESSA
Is this about the thing on the
copper?

(MORE)

TESSA (CONT'D)
Because if you put yourself in my
building's lines, that is a new low
even--

LENA
How long until you're done?

TESSA
We strike at dawn set. This is my
whole grade, Mom. Half my portfolio
is tonight.

LENA
(the warning rising in her
throat--)
Tessa, I need you to--

She stops. HE FOLLOWS THE SIRENS. An evacuation is sirens.
Four hundred people funneled into the rain is chaos, cover,
opportunity. Every move she makes teaches him.

Lena swallows the warning whole. It costs her more than the
steady hand did.

LENA (CONT'D)
--text me when you're out of the
building. That's all.

TESSA
(a beat; thrown by the
surrender)
...That's all?

LENA
That's all.

Tessa hangs up first. Lena sits with the phone against her
lips.

DANI
Talk to me.

Lena doesn't answer for a block. When she does, it is the
voice she uses on jumpers.

LENA
The last call is my daughter. It's
already attached to her building.
If I send units, I build the future
I just heard. If I evacuate, I
build it faster.
(beat; the new arithmetic)
He's been letting my own system
carry his messages all night.
(MORE)

LENA (CONT'D)
The center, the radios, the sirens -
- it's not my weapon anymore, Dani.
It's his.

DANI
Then where am I driving?

Lena looks at the canvas bag. At the rain. At the city that
has stopped being hers.

LENA
Closer. No lights.

Dani pulls off the shoulder and kills her headlights before
she is fully in the lane. The sedan slides forward into the
dark, ordinary, invisible, one more car in the rain.

EXT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - STREET - NIGHT

The sedan ghosts past the exchange at parade speed. Through
the wire-glass, colored light and shadow-audience. High in a
gallery window, small as a stamp: TESSA, headphones on,
checking cable, alive and lit and sixty feet of brick away.

Lena watches her daughter until the building takes her back.
Neither wave nor brake. The car slides on into the dark.

CUT TO:

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - PARKED - EXCHANGE DISTRICT - NIGHT

SUPER: "3:35 A.M."

A dead-end street of warehouses. Two blocks down, the
telephone exchange glows from within -- the performance
leaking colored light through wire-glass windows. Bass
arrives through the ground.

Dani's radio murmurs her callsign -- her captain wanting a
status. She reaches over and turns it down to nothing.

DANI
That's my pension. So make it worth
the pension. The Rook girl.

Lena looks at the exchange. When she speaks it is in
dispatcher cadence -- facts, in order, no shelter taken in
any of them.

LENA

Eight years ago tonight. A charter bus went through a guardrail into the reservoir with eleven children on it. Every unit in the city was in the water. Every senior dispatcher was on the bus.

LENA (CONT'D)

You want to know what the board looked like. Every light in this city red at once. We ran triage like a war -- airway, bleeding, submersion, in that order, and a whisper from a bedroom on Delft Street was none of those three.

(beat)

At 11:58 a call came in from a house on Delft Street. A girl, thirteen, whispering. Her stepfather was breaking down the bedroom door. I had nothing to send her.

DANI

So you held the call.

LENA

I put Emily Rook on hold for eleven minutes. Then I came back and stayed on the line with her for the rest of it. She hid. She moved. She got a window open. She fought him, Dani. For an hour, first ring to last sound, she did everything right.

(beat)

Units cleared the reservoir at 12:51. They reached Delft Street at 12:58. The bus lost nobody. Seven of those kids went home because of where the units were.

DANI

And the report?

LENA

The report says the delay was a network failure. Equipment. Nobody's judgment, nobody's hour.

(MORE)

LENA (CONT'D)

Holt ordered the change and I signed it, and Frank Haskell countersigned it, and Elaine Ward reviewed it, and Nia Cole repeated it at the inquest, and Julian Saye sealed the record.

DANI

How does that even happen? He orders you and you just--

LENA

Nobody orders you. That's what people never understand about it. Three days after, no sleep, Emily's mother on the news every hour. Ben came to my console with the amended form and he didn't say a word about it. He put the pen down next to my coffee and talked about staffing for ten minutes.

(beat)

That's the whole mechanism, Dani. A pen next to a coffee, and a tired person who wants the week to end. Every cover-up in history is that moment, over and over.

(beat; the cadence finally cracks)

Tessa found my signature three weeks ago. She stopped speaking to me over a piece of paper. She is right about the paper.

Dani absorbs it. The bass thuds through the floor of the car like a pulse.

DANI

Ward. Haskell. Cole. Saye. Holt. That's five.

LENA

Six.

Dani looks at her.

LENA (CONT'D)

He's saved me for last, and mine won't be a murder. A man who leaves tokens doesn't shoot the dispatcher. He puts her somewhere public and hands her a choice. He wants the city to watch me pick.

DANI
(long beat; cop and friend
fighting it out; cop
wins, barely)
When this is over, you testify. The
hold, the signature, all of it. No
lawyer softening it first.

LENA
If Tessa's alive to watch me do it -
- gladly.

Dani is quiet a long moment. Rain on the roof. The bass
through the floor.

DANI
I was patrol that night. The
reservoir. I went into the water
twice.
(beat)
I pulled two of those kids out,
Lena. Eight years I told that story
at barbecues. Nobody ever told me
who paid for it.

The two of them sit with that. Neither offers the other
anything easier.

INT. CITY HALL - RECORDS CORRIDOR - NIGHT

SUPER: "3:42 A.M."

Fluorescents on motion timers wake in sections. JULIAN SAYE,
58, silver and pressed even at this hour, moves fast down the
corridor. Behind him, DEVON, 24, arms full of banded file
boxes, hurrying to keep his pace.

DEVON
The retention office opens at nine.
This could wait four hours.

SAYE
Two people connected to a sealed
matter were attacked tonight.
Nothing connected to that matter
waits until nine. The Rook boxes
come to the Carlyle. My suite, my
safe, my chain of custody.

DEVON
(carefully)
Or we could give them to the
police.

SAYE
The police work for the city.

DEVON
(under her breath;
carrying his boxes)
So did the girl in the file.

Saye takes the top box from her arms without answering and keeps walking. That is the answer.

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - SERVICE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A maintenance cart sits abandoned mid-corridor. A wall panel hangs open on the elevator machine-room riser, a service padlock lying beside it, cut and set down neatly, almost politely.

From the lobby, faint: the elevator chime. Going up.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: "3:50 A.M."

The field handset RINGS in the canvas bag. Lena has it to her ear before the second bell.

SOUND: a soft electric hum. Cables groaning under load, far below. Lobby Muzak, tasteful and distant. A fountain. And glass -- fingertips drumming on glass.

SAYE (V.O.)
(50s; lawyer's baritone,
fraying)
This is Julian Saye. I'm the city attorney. I'm in the elevator at the Carlyle Court and it has stopped between floors and the -- the building is asleep, no one is answering the desk--

LENA
Mr. Saye. Are you alone in the car?

SAYE (V.O.)
(a half-beat too fast)
Yes. Alone.

Lena closes her eyes. Listens past him. Under his breathing: a second pattern -- faster, higher, suppressed.

Somewhere below the car, metal lets go of metal with a groan.
Saye's voice climbs an octave--

SAYE (V.O.)
--what was that, what is it doing--

The line collapses into static.

LENA
(to Dani; already moving)
Carlyle Court hotel. Four-fifty.
And he's lying to me -- there are
two people in that box.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - UNDERSTAGE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:00 A.M."

Beneath the performance. Conduit and brick, the show overhead
reduced to skeleton and thud. Tessa follows a MAN down the
corridor by work light.

ADRIAN ROOK, 52. Gray at the temples. Cardigan under a canvas
work jacket, reading glasses on a lanyard, a plain watch
chain crossing his vest. The kindest face in the building.

ADRIAN
Thirty-one years, I kept current in
these walls. They retired the
copper. Nobody retired the copper
out of me.

TESSA
And the sealed chamber just --
what, waited?

ADRIAN
Everything down here waits. That is
what the building is for.

At a junction shelf, Tessa picks up an antique receiver,
hefting it like found treasure -- and Adrian's hand closes
over hers. Fast. Too fast. Correcting her grip.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
(the warmth gone for
exactly one second)
Cradle first. They crack at the
throat.
(and it returns, gentle as
ever)
Forgive me. Old habits outlive
their jobs.

Tessa laughs it off. Files it anyway.

He unlocks a riveted door with a key from a ring of dozens. Beyond: the SEALED SWITCHING CHAMBER -- a room of black ceramic frames, untouched for decades, beautiful and funereal.

Tessa steps in like a pilgrim. Her hip recorder rides at her belt, red tally light on -- feeding the board upstairs, the way it has all night.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
You sample the dead lines. I heard
it in your installation. Tell me --
have they given you anything back
tonight?

Tessa hesitates. The voice on the copper. Her mother, where her mother could not be.

TESSA
...Something. Yeah.

ADRIAN
(gently; watching her
face)
Then let me show you what this city
buried in its phone lines. And then
you can decide who your mother has
been protecting.

From his jacket, a plastic sleeve: a photocopied CALL DETAIL RECORD, columns of numbers, one row highlighted in careful yellow.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
Sixty minutes of connection,
stamped as eleven. They shortened
an hour of my daughter to the
length of a coffee break. The
original is in a cage in their
archive. Your mother has had eight
years and a key card.

TESSA
If this is real, why me? Call a
reporter. Call a lawyer.

ADRIAN
Reporters need documents. Lawyers
need retainers. I had both, once,
and the city had more.
(gently)
Daughters only need the truth.
(MORE)

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
You and I are the last two people
alive who want the whole hour.

It is the exact wrong thing said the exact right way. Tessa follows him deeper.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - SEALED SWITCHING CHAMBER - NIGHT

Adrian lights a work lamp. The black ceramic frames rise around them. From a shelf, with two hands, he takes an old portable player and a cassette, and holds them a moment like communion.

ADRIAN
The city's version. Eleven minutes.
You should know what they kept
before you decide anything about
anyone.

He presses play. A YOUNG GIRL'S VOICE, tiny in the big dead room:

EMILY (V.O.)
(recorded; a whisper)
--please, he's at the door again--

He stops it. Tessa stands very still among the frames, the first Cross in eight years to hear Emily Rook. She does not know yet that is what happened.

TESSA
Who is she?

TESSA (CONT'D)
Do you have kids?

The question catches him mid-motion, rewinding the tape.

ADRIAN
I have--
(the machine clicks; he
sets it down)
Had. A daughter.
(quietly; the truest thing
he says all night)
The tense is the whole injury.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
Ask your mother. Use her full name.
Emily Rook. Watch her face when you
say it.

He draws the door closed behind them. The lock is very quiet.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - MAINTENANCE ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:08 A.M."

Holt stands at the open wall chase, two SECURITY OFFICERS behind him. He follows the fresh alligator-clip scars on the old pair with one finger. TRK 9.

HOLT
Strip it. Cap it. Nobody touches
this wall until the demolition crew
does.

An officer cuts the clips away. In the chase, the copper pair goes from taut to slack -- a small death.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

In the canvas bag, the faint idle of storm static from the handset earpiece -- stops. Lena pulls the handset out. Dead plastic.

LENA
They cut the tap. We're blind.

DANI
(flooring it)
Then we do the next hour like
everyone else does.

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - MOVING - NIGHT

Rain and wiper-beat. Two professionals recalibrating out loud because silence would be worse.

DANI
Inventory. What do we still have?

LENA
Your badge, barely. My cards.
Samir, until they notice him. And
every sound I've heard tonight,
filed.

DANI
And him?

LENA
He has the whole system. Scanners,
procedure, our habits. He's not
beating the city, Dani. He's
conducting it.

DANI
(beat)
Then we go where the orchestra
can't follow.

LENA
We go quiet. From here on,
everything that matters happens off
the radio.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:13 A.M."

Samir sits benched at an empty console, badge confiscated to a supervisor drawer, a security officer parked ten feet away.

The old BELL rings.

Not through any console. Through the ROOM. The amber tile pulses. Monitors stutter in a wave down the floor. Operators look up like birds before weather. Trunk Nine is ringing with no one to answer it -- a phone made of building.

Samir looks at the security officer. The security officer looks at the ceiling, at the haunted monitors.

In the archive corridor, Holt stops mid-stride and listens to his building ring with a sound it has no equipment to make. For one unguarded second he looks like a man hearing his own house learn to talk.

Samir runs.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - MAINTENANCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

He slams into the room, tears the caps off the copper with his fingernails, clips his cassette recorder leads straight to the pair, jams the earpiece in, hits REC--

TESSA (V.O.)
(through the earpiece;
flat with shock)
--watched you park, Mom. He says
you've been outside for an hour. He
says you already know the address
and it doesn't matter--

Samir's face goes gray. The spindles turn.

TESSA (V.O.)
He's not angry. That's the -- he's
not angry, he keeps checking his
watch like we're early for
something--

A door. Footsteps -- unhurried, heel-heavy -- and the whisper
stops mid-breath.

A GUNSHOT.

Static.

Samir rips the earpiece out. Behind him, the security officer
fills the doorway. Samir holds up one finger: wait -- and
marks the cassette window with a pen. The officer takes his
arm anyway.

INSERT - CASSETTE LABEL, in Samir's scrawl: RECEIVED 4:13.
FOR 5:13.

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - ATRIUM - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:28 A.M."

A boutique atrium, nine stories of ferns and marble hush.
Halfway up, a GLASS ELEVATOR hangs stalled between six and
seven -- a lit aquarium with two people in it.

JULIAN SAYE, 58, silver and creased, tie gone. And pressed
into the corner where the lobby sightline cannot find her:
DEVON, 24, his aide, heels in her hand, terrified of two
different things at once.

Below the car: the shaft service gate stands OPEN on
darkness. The counterweight cables run down into it, and
something small and improvised blinks on the brake housing.

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - ELEVATOR MACHINE ROOM - NIGHT

Motor hum and grease-smell. The brake assembly wears a neat
gray box, wired with a technician's tidiness -- and a scanner
sits on the machine bed, cycling frequencies, patient as a
spider's web.

Lena strides in through the service entrance, phone at her
ear, canvas bag on her shoulder. Dani peels toward the
stairwell.

At the front desk, a NIGHT MANAGER sleeps upright with the
dignity of the profession. Dani's badge, held at his eye
level, wakes him all the way.

DANI
(moving; pointing up)
Fire department is three minutes
out. Kill the elevator bank power --
not that one, every OTHER one --
and open the seventh floor shaft
access.

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - ATRIUM / GLASS ELEVATOR - INTERCUT

LENA
(into phone; looking up at
the lit box)
Mr. Saye. Look down at the lobby.
The woman with the phone. That's
me.

SAYE
Thank God. Thank -- get the fire
department, get--

LENA
They're coming. Now: who is
breathing next to you?

SAYE
I told you, I'm--

LENA
I count two people breathing and
one person talking. The car is
rated for weight I need to know
about, and the man who stalled you
is listening for lies tonight. He
collects them. Who is she?

A long beat. In the glass box, Saye looks at Devon. Devon
looks back -- and steps out of the dead corner into the
light, furious with both of them.

DEVON
(calling down)
Devon Ashe! Two people! He made me
stand in the corner!

The car shifts an inch with the redistribution. Everyone
stops breathing. It holds.

SAYE
(hollow)
The optics. Four in the morning.
You understand.

LENA
Mr. Saye, tonight you are going to
survive telling the truth. Consider
it practice.

Above them, a stairwell door BANGS -- Dani on seven, at the
shaft access, wrestling the maintenance ladder cage open.

DANI
(shouting down the shaft)
Ceiling hatch! Pop the panel, it
hinges toward the cables!

In the car, Devon -- lighter, faster -- goes up first,
boosting off the handrail. Saye baulks at the hatch, at the
drop below the glass floor edge, at the open service gate
under the car like a throat.

SAYE
(at the hatch; frozen)
I can't. The gap. I can see
straight down the--

LENA
(into the phone; even)
Mr. Saye. The drop is not
interested in your reputation and
neither am I. Hands on the frame.
Right knee to the rail. You've
climbed out of worse rooms than
this one -- I've read the
transcripts.

That lands somewhere true. Saye puts his hands on the frame.

ON THE LADDER: Devon, rain from the shaft vents in her hair,
has stopped looking down by force of will.

DEVON
(to Saye; steadying him
without meaning to)
Mr. Saye. Eyes on your hands.
That's it. Hand, rail, knee. Like
billing hours. One at a time.

Saye almost laughs. It gets him onto the ladder.

IN THE MACHINE ROOM: the scanner locks onto the fire dispatch
frequency. Holds.

ON THE LADDER: Saye climbs. Hand, rail, knee. Below him the
stalled car glows like something bioluminescent in a trench.
Devon, above, keeps her voice going like a metronome -- hand,
rail, knee -- billing hours in the dark.

Under everything, continuous now: the car settling on its clamps in eighth-inch increments, each one a metal COMPLAINT echoing down the shaft, a countdown with no numbers on it.

OUTSIDE: three blocks away, a FIRE ENGINE lights up the night, siren opening.

EXT. STREET NEAR THE EXCHANGE - CONTINUOUS

A parked white VAN. In the driver's seat, a scanner on the dash strobing with the fire dispatch. A gloved thumb rests on a phone screen. The pocket watch, open on the dash, second hand climbing.

The thumb comes down.

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - ELEVATOR SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

On the brake housing, the small improvised thing stops blinking.

The car LETS GO.

Six feet of freefall -- Devon on the ladder screams -- and the emergency clamps BITE. The car slams to a stop, canted, glass crazing white across one wall. Saye is half through the hatch, legs kicking over the drop.

Dani goes down the ladder like it owes her money. Gets a fist in Saye's collar. Hauls. He comes out of the hatch onto the ladder cage as the car groans--

--and the cage bracket, overloaded, SHEARS. Dani takes the falling half of the world onto herself: shoves Saye and Devon onto the fixed ladder and rides the broken section down.

She lands in the maintenance cradle at the base of the shaft, one story below. The sound she makes is short. Then nothing.

LENA
(into the shaft)
DANI!

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

Lena comes down the fixed ladder faster than sense, phone clamped in her teeth, still dispatching through it:

LENA
(around the phone)
Officer down the shaft base,
Carlyle Court, tell fire to bring
the basket--

Above her, Saye and Devon -- who could leave, who have every reason to leave -- anchor the broken cage section with their combined weight so it cannot slide further. The cover-up class, holding on.

INT. CARLYLE COURT HOTEL - SHAFT BASE - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:44 A.M."

Lena drops the last rungs into the cradle. Dani is conscious, gray, her wrist a wrong shape, her breath coming in careful sips.

DANI
Go. The van. Cameras had a white
van on Kessler--

Lena is not going. She has Dani's jacket open, hands moving with terrible competence -- the rigid abdomen, the pallor.

LENA
You're bleeding where I can't see
it.

DANI
The van, Lena.

LENA
(to the paramedics pouring
in; not moving her hands)
Internal bleed, radial fracture,
she gets the first bus and I ride
the report later.

TWO GURNEYS away, Saye grabs a paramedic's wrist -- then reaches past him, to Dani.

SAYE
Detective. Room nine-eleven. The
safe. The Rook boxes -- everything
I sealed, the originals, tonight's
combination is my daughter's
birthday backwards.

DANI
(gray; working through the
pain)
You're handing me evidence against
yourself.

SAYE
(looking up at the crazed
glass box hanging in the
atrium)
I've now been inside the thing I
built for other people, Detective.
It clarifies.

Around them the atrium has filled with the hotel's small
hours: GUESTS in robes at the mezzanine rails, phones up and
filming; the NIGHT MANAGER navigating his ruined marble with
a tray of water bottles because it is the only hospitality
left to perform.

He finds Lena. Holds out a small evidence bag he made himself
from a laundry sack: the cut service padlock.

NIGHT MANAGER
Machine room. It wasn't broken. It
was... set down. Like he wanted us
to know it wasn't personal.

LENA
(taking it; looking at the
neat cut)
It's personal. It's just not about
you.
(to Dani; quiet)
I spent eight years leaving the
person in front of me. Not tonight.

Dani grips Lena's sleeve with her good hand. Squeezes once.
Lets go.

Outside, somewhere in the rain, a white van is simply gone.

INT. AMBULANCE - MOVING - NIGHT

Dani strapped and furious, one medic splinting her wrist
while she keeps her radio hand free by force of personality.

MEDIC
Detective, the radio--

DANI
Is coming to the hospital with me,
and so is my phone, and if anyone
sedates me before this night is
over I will remember your face
forever.

The medic looks at her partner. Her partner shrugs: leave it.

INT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - EMERGENCY BAY - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:55 A.M."

Dani, wrist casted to the elbow, abdomen belted with a
compression wrap, argues with an ER DOCTOR who has seen
everything except this particular stubbornness.

ER DOCTOR
The scan shows a controlled bleed.
Controlled means monitored.
Monitored means here.

DANI
Then give me the form.

ER DOCTOR
The form says 'against medical
advice.' It's for people making a
mistake.

DANI
(signing one-handed; not
looking up)
Doc, tonight I met four people who
did the advisable thing for eight
years straight. You should see how
that turned out.

At the bay doors, BREEM waits with her gear bag and her vest,
holding both like a squire.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - NIGHT

SUPER: "4:58 A.M."

Lena walks back onto her own floor like weather coming in.
Heads turn. The security officer moves to intercept and Holt
waves him off from the glass office door.

HOLT
You have five minutes before the
city takes this out of both our
hands.

LENA
Then I'll spend them in the
archive.

HOLT
There is nothing in the archive.

LENA
There's a reel, Ben. Analog backup,
disaster night. You couldn't burn
it -- that's a felony even you
wouldn't file paperwork on. So you
buried it in a locked room and
hoped the building would be
demolished around it.

That lands. Holt's face admits what his mouth won't.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - ANALOG ARCHIVE - NIGHT

A cage door. A keypad older than the digital age it guards.
Inside: steel shelves of tape reels in white boxes, dated in
fading marker.

Lena at the keypad. In her ear, a cheap radio earpiece.
Across the floor, at the maintenance rack, Samir keys the
open channel -- the security officer watching him watch a
dial he isn't supposed to touch.

SAMIR (V.O.)
(over the open maintenance
frequency)
Facilities, be advised, archive
service code is seven-seven-three-
one-nine. Repeat, seven-seven-three-
one-nine.

INT. WHITE VAN - MOVING - CONTINUOUS

The scanner on the dash catches it, clean as dictation:

SAMIR (V.O.)
(through the scanner)
...seven-seven-three-one-nine...

The gloved hands tighten on the wheel. The van changes lanes.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - ANALOG ARCHIVE - NIGHT

The cage opens. Lena walks the shelves, reading dates -- and stops. One white box, spine dated eight years ago. The label, typed: INCIDENT 4471 -- DELFT ST. -- FULL DURATION.

She takes it down. It weighs nothing. It weighs everything.

Walking the shelves to reach it she has passed eight years of white boxes -- storms, pile-ups, the ordinary catastrophes -- and one box with her own name in the log column more times than anyone's. A career of answered nights, filed around the one that wasn't.

Holt is standing at the cage door. Alone. No security. His voice, when it comes, is quieter than she has ever heard it.

HOLT

I didn't alter that record to save you, Lena. I want you to know that before tonight does whatever it's going to do.

LENA

I know why you altered it.

HOLT

Say it anyway. Somebody should finally say it in this building.

LENA

A true report showed the city ran that night at forty percent staffing. Your staffing. Your budget memos, your sign-off, three years running. So you made it a network failure -- and you made the eleven minutes mine. You gave me the guilt like it was a promotion. And I took it, because taking things from you is what I was trained to do.

Holt does not defend himself. That is the confession.

HOLT

The eleven minutes were always going to belong to somebody. I chose the person strong enough to carry them.

LENA

Whose sentence was it? "Network failure." Yours?

HOLT
Crane's. He wrote it. I only signed
the pen out.

LENA
(leaving, reel under her
arm)
She was thirteen, Ben. She was
strong enough. Nobody chose her.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: "5:04 A.M."

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - NIGHT

SUPER: "5:02 A.M."

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - SUPERVISOR'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Holt alone in the red light. On the wall among the
commendations: a framed photograph -- a younger Holt pinning
a medal on a younger Lena, both of them certain of
everything.

He takes it down. Looks at it the way you look at evidence.
Sets it face-down on the desk, squares it to the edge, and
goes out to walk his floor.

Holt walks the rows in the storm-load, a captain's pass
through the gun deck -- a hand on a shoulder here, a queue
rebalanced there. Whatever else he is, the floor steadies
where he walks. He has been good at this for thirty years.
That was always the tragedy available to him.

HOLT
(to the floor; pitched to
carry)
Storm's over the airport. One more
hour, people. Answer what rings.

Lena is ten steps onto the floor when every light in the
building dies.

A breath of pure dark. Then the EMERGENCY REDS rise, and the
floor is a photograph of itself in blood-colored light.

The consoles reboot -- all of them, in unison -- and every
operator on the floor flinches at once, hands going to
headsets: forty headsets filling with the same sound.

Storm static. One hour of the future, hissing into every ear in the room.

One operator stands. Then another. Then the whole floor is on its feet in the red light, headsets held away from their heads like something alive. OPERATOR ODELL crosses himself with the hand still holding his coffee.

Holt comes out of the archive corridor into the red chaos and does what thirty years of command trains into a man: he walks TOWARD the breach. Alone. Waving off the floor.

HOLT (CONT'D)
Nobody follows. Nobody calls it in.
This building handles this
building.

It is the same sentence that started everything, and he says it going through the door.

ANGLES ON THE FLOOR, in emergency red: consoles rerouting one by one, screens dissolving into waterfall static; the digital map of the city stuttering, incidents winking out like a power grid failing; the amber TRUNK 9 tile burning steady over all of it, the oldest thing in the building suddenly the only thing working.

Operators back away from their stations into the aisles, headsets in hand, a congregation evacuating its own church.

Down the back corridor, at the mouth of the old cable vault, a door that has been welded shut for six years stands open on darkness.

At the corridor junction, a SECURITY OFFICER lies folded against the wall -- breathing, chosen unconscious, laid out almost considerately. Lena checks his pulse on her way past. Strong.

Holt is not at the cage. Holt is not at the glass office. On the floor by the vault door: his lanyard, and a BLACK TOKEN, stamped 60.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - MAINTENANCE ROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: "5:07 A.M."

Red light. Samir, alone -- his minder gone to the chaos -- sets the cassette recorder on the shelf between himself and Lena like it might go off.

SAMIR

It rang at four-thirteen. The whole building rang. You were inside the elevator thing and they had my badge and I got the last forty seconds of it.

He presses PLAY.

TESSA (V.O.)

(tinny; flat with shock)
--watched you park, Mom. He says you've been outside for an hour. He says you already know the address and it doesn't matter--

Lena's hand finds the shelf.

TESSA (V.O.)

He's not angry. That's the -- he's not angry, he keeps checking his watch like we're early for something--

The footsteps. The shot. The static. Samir stops the tape.

SAMIR

Five-thirteen. That's when the front passes. I checked the weather service twice.

(barely saying it)
He moved her to the last minute the line works. After that there's no warning. There's no anything. It just... is.

Lena stands in the red light with the reel under one arm and her daughter's recorded gunshot in her ears. Every system she has ever trusted, and every system she built to replace them, arriving at the same address.

LENA

(almost to herself)
He watched me park. I got out of the institution and he watched me do it. There is no off the board. The board is his.

SAMIR

Then what do we--

LENA

Her monitors.

Samir blinks.

LENA (CONT'D)
She's a sound engineer. She's
wearing in-ears, and her belt rig
has been transmitting to her board
all night -- I heard the tally tone
under her call. He took her phone.
Nobody takes the rig off a sound
engineer, it's like taking her
hands.

(the plan assembling
itself in her voice)
Find me her monitor frequency. I
don't need his line. I need hers.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - SEALED SWITCHING CHAMBER - NIGHT

SUPER: "5:09 A.M."

Blackness, and the green firefly of a tally light. Tessa sits
against a ceramic frame, wrists zip-tied in front of her,
blood at her hairline, breathing in careful fours the way you
do when panic is a wall you are bricking up by hand.

In her ears, under the ringing silence: a CARRIER CLICK. Then-
-

LENA (V.O.)
(in her in-ears; very
calm, very close)
Don't answer out loud. Cough once
if you can hear me.

Tessa's breath stops. One cough. Small. Disguised.

LENA (V.O.)
Your rig is still transmitting. I
can hear your room. I've been able
to hear you for four minutes, which
means I heard you counting your
breathing, which means I know
you're hurt and I know you're not
panicking. You're doing everything
right.

Tessa's eyes fill. Everything right. She knows the story
those words come from now.

LENA (V.O.)
Tessa. I have to say a thing and
there's no time to say it well. I
saved seven children that night.
(MORE)

LENA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Then I helped bury the eighth. Both
of those are true, and I have let
the first one excuse the second for
eight years. Your mother did that.
Not the network. Me.

In the dark, Tessa bows her head over her bound hands. When
she speaks it is barely breath, mouth tucked to the rig mic:

TESSA
(a whisper)
Then stop trying to save me alone.

A beat. In the maintenance room, miles of copper away, Lena
closes her eyes -- and lets go of the last thing she was
holding.

LENA (V.O.)
All right. Then listen close,
because half of this plan is yours,
and I'm going to give it to you the
way I'd give it to a professional.
Because that's what you are.

LENA (V.O.)
First term. If everything goes dark
and you hear me say 'sing out' --
you become my eyes. Your voice,
your feedback rig, the whole room.
I will move on nothing but you.

In the dark, Tessa nods at a mother who cannot see her --
then remembers, and coughs once. Yes.

The tally light burns green in the dark. Tessa lifts her
head.

CUT TO:

INT. DANI'S SEDAN - MOVING - NIGHT

SUPER: "5:10 A.M."

Lena drives Dani's sedan through empty streets, borrowed
keys, no lights, the wipers losing their argument with the
rain. The canvas bag rides shotgun. In her ear, two channels
at once -- Samir on the left, her daughter's room on the
right.

LENA
Samir. Give him a parade.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - NIGHT

Red light. Empty supervisor's office. Forty consoles hissing with future static -- and SAMIR, alone at the dispatch master position, probationary badge in somebody's drawer, running the entire storm-wrecked city by himself.

He works two boards. On the first, the real city: flood calls, a transformer fire, an early labor. On the second, an open tactical channel, he builds a fiction:

SAMIR
(into the tactical
channel; dead calm)
All units, staging for entry,
Meridian rail yard, north gate.
Repeat, north gate. Air support
holding at two miles.

There is no staging. There is no air support. There is a scanner in a building across town, listening.

His first board chimes -- real. A MAN'S VOICE, panicked: his wife, the baby, three weeks early, the storm. Samir does not miss a beat between the lie and the truth:

SAMIR (CONT'D)
(first board; the voice
Lena used on him)
Sir, my name's Samir, and the two
of you are about to do this
together, so let's get her
comfortable. You're doing fine.
(second board; dead calm)
All units, hold the north gate
perimeter. No lights.

Between the two boards, a yellow call card. He writes on it, at 5:12 exactly: BABY GIRL. BREATHING. And underlines it twice.

His first board chimes again. UNKNOWN CALLER. Samir keys it.

SAMIR (CONT'D)
911, what is your emergency?

ADRIAN (V.O.)
(a citizen's voice;
helpful; almost bored)
Yes, hello -- I'm near the Meridian
rail yard, and there's a great deal
of police activity at the north
gate? Trucks, men. Should I be
concerned?

Samir's blood stops. There is no activity at the north gate. There is no caller near the rail yard. There is a man with a scanner, testing the lie.

SAMIR
(one heartbeat; then,
beautifully bureaucratic)
Sir, that's a planned interagency
exercise, it's on the city website
under road closures. You may hear a
helicopter. Please don't call this
number about it again, we need the
lines.

A pause with teeth in it.

ADRIAN (V.O.)
Of course. Thank you for your
service, young man.

CLICK. Samir stares at the dead line. Then very quietly places his cassette recorder against the speaker and rewinds it, in case he just heard the voice that hunts his friend.

Then he leans to the tactical channel and, without missing a beat, deepens the lie:

SAMIR
(tactical channel)
Command, be advised, media inquiry
received on the north gate
exercise. Maintain radio
discipline.

A fiction confirming a fiction to a man who called to test the fiction. Somewhere across town, a scanner keeps listening, satisfied for now.

First board again -- an ELDERLY WOMAN, basement flooding, more lonely than drowning. Samir gives her forty seconds he cannot spare:

SAMIR (CONT'D)
(first board)
Ma'am, the water can have the
carpet, it cannot have you.
Upstairs, kettle on, and the city
will be there when it's light. You
did right to call.

He marks the card. Both boards. All night. Alone.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - SWITCH ROOM GALLERY - NIGHT

The performance is over -- load-out done, the building surrendered back to the dark. Dead telephones on the ceramic frames begin to RING. Not all at once: in waves, near to far, futures being weighed and set down again.

ADRIAN stands among them with his scanner, listening to Samir's parade. The rail yard. The wrong side of the city. He checks the pocket watch. For the first time all night, something in his face has to make a decision.

He moves -- and the building tells on him. Boot heels on iron stairs. A gallery door's particular squeal.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - EMILY'S ROOM - NIGHT

A high glass-walled test room off the main switch floor -- and Adrian has made it an altar. Hundreds of salvaged RECEIVERS hang from the ceiling on their cords like black fruit. Two glass-walled chambers flank it: in one, HOLT, bound to a chair, gagged with his own tie. In the other, TESSA, zip-tied, listening.

Tessa's head is tilted. Cataloguing. Her lips move against the rig mic, barely sound:

TESSA
(whisper)
Iron stairs, northeast. Gallery
door. He's coming back down. Forty
seconds.

AND LATER, the whisper again, tracking:

TESSA (CONT'D)
(whisper)
Main floor. He stopped at the
camera. Now the switch panel.
He's... straightening things. Mom,
he's tidying.

Boot heels on the switch floor -- closer -- and then STOPPED. Directly outside her glass.

Tessa freezes. The tally light on her rig burns green at her belt, bright as a flare in the dark room. She tucks her chin, catches the switch with it. The green dies.

The boot heels stand there. Ten seconds of rain and nothing.

Then they move on. Tessa lets her breath out through her teeth, one centimeter at a time, and chins the tally back on.

In the dark, by feel, she takes inventory the way her mother takes calls: the wall receiver, bakelite, cap threads already loosened. The floor conduit, kicked loose at the junction, four inches of play. Her own hands, zip-tied but forward. Assets, in order.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - CABLE VAULT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

SUPER: "5:12 A.M."

EXT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - TWO BLOCKS OUT - NIGHT

Dark units nose to the curb, lights dead. BREEM, rain-slick, meets Lena at the sedan door with the look of a man holding orders he hates.

BREEM

My sergeant wants entry teams. Now.

LENA

He hears sirens, he shoots my daughter early. He hears breaching, same. You hold two blocks out, dark, until you hear me say her name on this channel -- and then you come like the whole city.

BREEM

And if you don't say it?

LENA

(already moving)
Then come anyway, and write everything down.

Lena drops through a sidewalk service hatch into the vault -- into the smell of rain and bakelite and eighty years of voltage. She moves by phone light along the cable runs, following her daughter's whisper like a thread through a maze.

TESSA (V.O.)

(in her ear)

Main switch floor, center aisle. He hung phones from the ceiling, Mom. There's a camera on a stand. Two glass rooms. Mr. Holt's in one.

(beat)

The other one's mine.

Ahead, up an iron ladder, dead phones ring in the dark like a tide coming in.

The route earns itself: a crawl under a collapsed cable tray, rain sheeting through a ceiling scar; a flooded stretch where she wades to the knee, phone in her teeth; a junction where forty dead lines have shed their tags into the water like leaves. She moves through all of it toward the ringing.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - MAIN SWITCH FLOOR / EMILY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Lena steps out among the hanging receivers. They turn slowly on their cords, breathing static.

She stops. Counts, the way she counts everything -- rows, cords, dates -- and gives up somewhere past two hundred. A life's work of answered calls, hung like evidence for the one that wasn't.

Adrian stands at the far end beside the camera stand, a red tally light burning, a knife-switch panel jury-wired at his hand -- one big antique switch, center-off, its two throws cabled left and right to the two glass chambers.

Every hanging receiver wears a small paper tag, dated in draftsman's block letters -- decades of dates. Repairs. Every line he ever brought back to life, hung up and rung out.

He does not look surprised. He looks like a man whose guest has finally arrived.

ADRIAN

The rail yard was a nice touch.
Tell the young man his diction is
very good.

(gesturing, host-like, at
the room)

You know what tonight is. You
dispatched it.

LENA

Eight years tonight.

ADRIAN

To the hour. I checked the forecast
nine times. The storm that brought
her back leaves at five-thirteen. I
built the whole night to end where
hers did -- with you on the line,
and every door in the city closed
but two.

He rests his hand on the knife switch. On the camera, the tally burns. Streaming.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
Left frees Benjamin and puts
current through your daughter's
room. Right frees your daughter and
opens the floor under Benjamin --
the cable pit flooded around four.
The city is watching, Lena. I sent
them the link with their morning
news.

And to prove the wiring is not theater, he rocks the switch a
quarter-inch toward the left throw and back. In the flooded
pit below the grating, the water SNAPS with a mouthful of
blue light. In her chamber, Tessa flinches back from the
walls.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)
Live, both ways. I don't build
props.
 (kind; that is the horror
 of him)
You've had eight years to practice.
Choose.

In her chamber, Tessa is not watching the switch. She is
watching her mother. In his chamber, Holt has gone very still
behind the gag.

And through the whole exchange that follows, Holt's eyes
never leave Lena -- the man who taught her watching her work
a caller off a ledge, except the caller is holding the ledge,
and the ledge is wired to his chair.

LENA
Play her call first.

But first she makes the offer straight, flat, on the record
of his own stream:

LENA (CONT'D)
Or take my counter. Open both doors
and put me in the chamber. I'm the
signature, Adrian. I'm the name you
actually want.

ADRIAN
 (almost kindly)
You were never going to die
tonight, Lena. You're the audience.
Dying is the easy seat.

So. The design confirmed from its own mouth. Lena changes
weapons.

A flicker in Adrian.

LENA

You built her a church. Hundreds of phones. So play her whole hour for the city, Adrian. First ring to last sound. You have it -- a father would have it. Play it and I'll choose with her voice in the room.

A long silence. The receivers turn on their cords.

ADRIAN

The city kept the tape.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)

I wrote the city four hundred letters. I sued twice, pro se, because grief is not a retainer. They redacted my daughter down to eleven minutes and a network failure, and they billed me for the photocopies.

He touches the nearest hanging receiver, steadying its slow turn.

ADRIAN (CONT'D)

Thirty-one years I fixed this city's voice. Every line on this ceiling rang somewhere once -- a kitchen, a hospital, a bedroom on Delft Street. I kept them all alive.

(and the gentleness closes
like water)

The one night it mattered, the city let mine ring out. So tonight the city answers.

LENA

The city kept a tape. Sixty minutes stamped as eleven. You've spent eight years grieving their edit.

From the canvas bag, she lifts the white reel box. INCIDENT 4471 -- DELFT ST. -- FULL DURATION. She holds it up to the camera. To him.

LENA (CONT'D)

I stole the original tonight. Felony theft of the only true thing this city ever recorded about your daughter.

(MORE)

LENA (CONT'D)
It's the one crime I'm proud of.
(beat)
There's a reel player on every test
bench in this building. You
maintained them. Thread it, or
admit you'd rather keep her the way
they wrote her.

Adrian's hand has left the switch. He doesn't notice it has.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - EMILY'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The reel turns on a test-bench player, patched by Adrian's
own steady hands into the hanging receivers. Hundreds of
small speakers, one girl's voice.

EMILY (V.O.)
(13; whispering; scared
and thinking)
--okay. Okay. I put the dresser
thing against the door like you
said. I'm at the window now, it's
painted shut but I have my field
hockey stick, I can break it if I
have to--

LENA (V.O.)
(on tape; eight years
younger)
That's exactly right, Emily. You're
doing everything right. I'm here.
I'm not going anywhere.

EMILY (V.O.)
If I break it he'll hear. So I'm
going to wait until he's at the
door again and break it at the same
time. That's smart, right? Tell me
that's smart.

LENA (V.O.)
(on tape)
That's smart. That's so smart.

And then the tape reaches minute four. And Lena's voice on it
says words she has heard in her sleep for eight years:

LENA (V.O.)
(on tape)
Emily, I have a bus full of
children in the water. I'm going to
place you on hold.
(MORE)

LENA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I will come back to you. I promise
you I will come back.

CLICK.

And the room fills with SILENCE. Recorded silence -- the particular hiss of an open line with no one on it -- pouring out of hundreds of hanging receivers at once.

ADRIAN
What is that.

LENA
Minute four of eleven. Her hold.
I'm not skipping it. Not for you,
not for me, not for the city. This
is the part everyone edited.

They stand in it. The silence has a sound, and the sound is enormous. Adrian's hand finds a ceramic frame for balance.

In her chamber, under the cover of all that recorded nothing, Tessa's hands keep working the receiver cap. The silence Adrian demanded the city hear is the silence hiding his hostage's escape.

Then, on the tape -- the line reopens:

LENA (V.O.)
(on tape; eight years
younger; wrecked and
hiding it)
Emily? I'm back. I'm here now. I'm
so sorry. Tell me everything since
I left.

EMILY (V.O.)
(a whisper with a smile in
it)
I knew you'd come back.

And a little further on, smaller:

EMILY (V.O.)
If it goes bad -- somebody has to
feed Biscuit. He only eats if you
sit with him. Write that down. Are
you writing it down?

LENA (V.O.)
(on tape; steady for her)
I'm writing it down, Emily.

In the present, in the dark of her jacket pocket, Lena's hand closes around a yellow call card eight years soft at the edges. She has never needed to look at it.

The tape rolls on. Emily's breathing changes. The doorknob, on tape, begins to work. Adrian leans toward the sound of it, eight years of nightmare arriving in real time--

And Lena reaches over and STOPS the reel.

ADRIAN

Play it.

LENA

No.

ADRIAN

PLAY IT--

LENA

(absolute)

The last three minutes belong to her. Not to the city, not to you, not to me. I will not spend her death to win a room, Adrian. That's the difference between us tonight, and you're going to stand in it.

The receivers turn slowly on their cords. Adrian looks at the stopped reel, at the woman guarding his daughter's last minutes from everyone including him -- and something in his architecture, load-bearing, cracks.

Lena, in the present, closes her eyes. Eight years, and the sentence still lands like the first time.

Adrian stands among the receivers with his eyes closed, listening to a daughter he has never met -- not this one, not the one who strategized, who armed herself with a hockey stick, who coached her own rescuer. The one who waited exists only in the paperwork.

Tessa, in the glass, is crying and working. Her bound hands have not stopped moving since the tape began -- an antique wall receiver mounted inside her chamber, its cap unscrewed a thread at a time.

ADRIAN

(quietly)

Turn it off.

LENA
She fought him the whole hour,
Adrian. You built a room where she
waits. She never waited.

ADRIAN
(the grief finally louder
than the design)
TURN IT OFF--

Two things happen inside the same second.

In her chamber, Tessa tears the diaphragm from the receiver,
jams it across two bared contacts -- her door lock SNAPS open
in a spit of sparks.

In his, Holt -- who has spent the tape working his chair
sideways, inch by silent inch -- kicks a loose floor conduit
hard into the second circuit. His own lock lets go.

Two doors swing. The binary dies. Nobody chose.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - MAIN SWITCH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

SUPER: "5:14 A.M."

And Holt, tie hanging loose from his neck, does not run. He
walks -- bound wrists and all -- straight into the camera's
tally light, between Adrian and the world, and looks down the
lens.

HOLT
My name is Benjamin Holt. I run
emergency communications for this
city, and I am going to say this
while it still counts as a choice.
(one breath)
Eight years ago Emily Rook waited
eleven minutes on hold and forty-
nine more for units I had chosen
not to staff. I ordered her
response time falsified as a
network failure. Deputy Director
Crane approved the language. City
Attorney Saye sealed the record.
The dispatcher carried the blame
because I handed it to her.
(to the lens; to everyone)
It was never a network failure. It
was arithmetic. My arithmetic.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS CENTER - FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Samir, tears on his face, both hands flying -- routing the stream onto every recording channel the city owns, the 911 archive itself, the one place they can never bury it.

SAMIR
(to the empty red room)
Attached to a case number. Try
purging that.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - MAIN SWITCH FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

Adrian stares at Holt in the camera light. His reason for the knife, the tokens, the hour -- confessing. Freely. On his own broadcast. The design has no next page.

What is left of him when the design goes is only the grief -- and the grief picks up the KNIFE from the bench. The first knife. And turns toward Tessa.

And a telephone rings.

One phone. The hanging receivers sway -- the old BELL, naked, close: the test handset wired to TRUNK NINE, ringing on the bench beside the reel player. Outside the high windows it is still raining. The line is still alive. One more hour of future, offering itself.

Lena looks at the ringing phone. At her daughter, free in the glass doorway, forty feet and a killer away.

The phone rings. Rings. Lena takes the FIRE AXE down from its century-old bracket by the vault door and swings it two-handed through the bench cabling -- through TRK 9 -- copper parting in a gasp of blue.

The ringing stops. Every receiver goes dead at once.

She swings again -- into the master KNIFE-SWITCH panel. The building's last power dies. Camera, work lights, the tally, everything.

Blackness, total. Rain on high windows. For the first time all night, Lena Cross knows nothing about the next hour.

LENA
(into the dark; to her
daughter; calm as a dial
tone)
Tessa. Sing out.

The first term, called in. And out of the blackness her daughter's voice comes back steady, a professional taking the handoff:

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - MAIN SWITCH FLOOR - DARKNESS

Sound is the whole world now.

Adrian moves -- he knows this floor blind, thirty-one years of it -- boot heels on iron, closing on where Tessa's door was.

But Tessa built tonight's sound. Her battery rig shrieks a spike of FEEDBACK from a monitor across the room -- Adrian's steps lurch toward it -- then a second spike behind him. He turns. Turns again.

TESSA
(from the dark; moving;
calling her mother in)
Mom -- center aisle -- ten steps --
there's a bench edge at your knee--

Lena moves through absolute dark on her daughter's voice, hands open, trusting every word. Ten steps. Bench edge. Turn.

Adrian's breathing, close. The knife finds air where Tessa's voice was -- because her voice was a monitor speaker and Tessa is somewhere else entirely--

But he adapts -- he has adapted all night -- and lunges not at the sound but at the space behind it, and his hand closes on CLOTH. Tessa's jacket. She twists, tears free -- her belt rig rips loose and hits the grating, tally light spinning, a green firefly strobing the dark in circles--

Adrian's silhouette turns in the spinning light, hunting.

ADRIAN
(to the dark;
conversational; terrible)
You hear it now, Lena. The whole
hour. No board, no future, nobody
coming.
(moving; hunting)
This is where she lived. Sixty
minutes, exactly here.

LENA
(from the dark; steady)
No. She had me. You have nobody --
and I'm still on the line.

Silence. Then his steps change -- no longer hunting Tessa. Hunting the voice. Lena moves, and the dark room becomes a duel of soundmakers: Tessa's feedback spikes herding him, Lena's footfalls baiting him, Adrian correcting, correcting -- a man conducting his own building against two women who learned to listen in different schools.

A receiver cord catches his shoulder -- a hanging phone swings -- and for three seconds the dark is full of soft colliding bells as the whole ceiling of receivers knocks together like wind chimes at a funeral.

TESSA
(from the dark;
breathless; still
working)
Mom! Green light! He's AT the green
light!

Lena hits him at the waist. They go down together onto iron grating -- the knife skitters -- and the grating ENDS. The open CABLE PIT. Adrian goes over the edge into black water with a flat, final slap -- a crack of skull on a ceramic frame on the way down.

Then nothing. No thrashing. Nothing.

TESSA (CONT'D)
(in the dark)
Mom?!

Silence below. Just water settling.

Lena crouches at the pit edge, listening to Emily Rook's father drown.

One second. Two. Nobody would ever know. The night would balance. Every door in the city closed but one.

LENA
(quiet)
No. You don't get her way out.

She goes over the edge into the water.

INT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - CABLE PIT - DARKNESS

Chest-deep, blood-warm with rain, dark as the inside of a bell. Lena finds him by feel -- hood, shoulders, dead weight -- hauls his face clear of the water, braces him against the ceramic and starts rescue breaths, counting out loud in the dark, the way she has counted for strangers all her life.

LENA
One. Two. Come on. Twenty-eight.
Twenty-nine.

Above, a new light: dawn-gray from the high windows -- and a flashlight beam finding the pit, and DANI RUIZ, arm slung, face gray, hospital bracelet still on, standing at the edge.

DANI
Checked myself out. Don't start.

Behind her flashlight, more lights kindle: TESSA, moving along the gallery rail with a battery work lantern in each hand, setting them down like votives; and HOLT, tie gone, kneeling at the pit edge with the cuffs' keys already off his own wrists, lowering a cable ladder into the water without being asked.

In the water, Adrian convulses -- coughs -- and comes back to the world sobbing before he is fully conscious.

Lena holds him up anyway.

LENA
(to Dani; spent)
He doesn't get to be the last death
of her hour. He answers for the
five he touched. Alive.

Dani works the cuffs one-handed. Outside the high windows, the rain is stopping -- not because anyone chose it. Just weather now. Just morning.

Lena finds her radio in the wet bag. Keys it. Says the two words she promised:

LENA (CONT'D)
(into radio)
Breem. Tessa.
(beat)
Tessa Cross is safe.

And the night arrives all at once -- doors, boots, light sticks, the city pouring into the building like the tide coming back in.

EXT. TELEPHONE EXCHANGE - LOADING DOCK - DAWN

SUPER: "5:45 A.M."

Strobes without sirens. Adrian, blanketed and cuffed, is folded into an ambulance under guard. Breem's units hold a perimeter that no longer matters.

At the tape line, the news van from Kessler Street has found its story at last -- mast up, dish blooming, the scanner jockey talking urgently to a camera in the rain-washed light. Behind him, officers carry banded file boxes from a squad car: the Rook records, traveling in the open for the first time in eight years.

On the dock steps, medics try to separate Lena and Tessa -- two patients, two rigs of equipment, procedure.

Lena's cell buzzes. SAMIR. She answers with her eyes closed.

SAMIR (V.O.)
Floor's standing. Storm queue is
clear. And Lena -- while you were
in there, the city had a baby girl.
5:12. Breathing.

Lena holds the phone against her ear a moment after he stops talking, the way you hold a cup for the warmth.

LENA
Write the time on a card, Samir.

SAMIR (V.O.)
Already did. Underlined it.

Lena is already issuing instructions -- pressure, warming blankets, the order of treatment -- and catches herself mid-word. Stops. Turns to her daughter, soaked and shock-blanketed beside her, and asks a question she has never asked anyone in an emergency in her life:

LENA
What do you need?

Tessa looks at her mother. The unfamiliar shape of it. Considers it like a new piece of equipment.

Then she takes Lena's hand. That is the answer, and Lena lets it be the whole answer.

TESSA
(looking back at the
building; half a laugh,
half not)
I recorded the whole night, Mom.
Every phone in there. My best piece
is evidence now.

LENA
Your best piece saved your life.
Make the next one about anything
you want.

Behind them, first sun off the wet brick of the exchange -- the building drying out, keeping what it heard.

INT. CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY (WEEKS LATER)

INT. COUNTY HOSPITAL - SECURE WING - DAY (DAYS LATER)

A corridor the color of oatmeal. Through an observation window: ADRIAN, restrained to a bed, a uniformed officer at the door, a CHAPLAIN reading aloud from a folding chair.

Lena stands at the glass. She does not go in. From her bag she takes a cassette in a paper sleeve and hands it to the officer.

LENA

For his attorney, when it clears.
It's a copy of his daughter's full
call.

(beat)

It's hers. It was never the city's
to keep.

Through the glass, Adrian turns his head and sees her. Neither of them nods. She leaves him with the chaplain and the tape.

Daylight, wood paneling, a full gallery. Lena at the witness table, no notes. On the dais screens, frozen: Holt's face from the livestream.

The gallery is past capacity; a bailiff props the doors for the overflow standing in the hall. In the second row, unannounced, in civilian clothes: Nia Cole, Elaine Ward, and a young woman with a fresh city attorney's office badge -- DEVON ASHE.

LENA (CONT'D)

Seven children came off that bus
alive because of where our units
were. Emily Rook died because of
where they weren't, and we wrote it
down as a machine's fault so no
person would have to carry it. I
saved seven and I helped erase one,
and this city will not be safe
until it can hold both of those
sentences at once. I could not.
That is my testimony.

COUNCILWOMAN (O.S.)
Ms. Cross -- knowing the outcome,
would you route the units
differently tonight?

The chamber goes very quiet. Lena takes the question like a call.

LENA
No. I'd make the same choice. And
then I'd write down her name
instead of a fault code, and I'd
stand in front of her father, and
I'd say it out loud. The choice was
survivable. The erasing wasn't.

COUNCILWOMAN (O.S.)
And the calls, Ms. Cross. The ones
timestamped ahead of themselves.
The city deserves an explanation.

The gallery leans in. Lena considers the question the way she considered the pantry, the fan, the second breathing.

LENA
The storm did something to an old
line, and the old line is gravel in
a demolition yard now. I can't
explain it. I can tell you what I
did about it: I answered what rang.
That's the whole job, Councilwoman.
That's the part I can testify to.

She rises before the questions are done being formulated. On her way up the aisle she passes Holt -- suspended, lawyered, smaller -- and Nia Cole, and a row of dispatchers in civilian clothes. Samir among them, wearing a permanent badge.

On the chamber screens as she passes: a muted news feed. A courthouse steps shot. A chyron: DEPUTY DIRECTOR CRANE INDICTED -- EMERGENCY RESPONSE COVER-UP. Nobody in the gallery looks at it. Everybody has already seen it.

At the door, a DEPUTY murmurs an offer -- quiet reinstatement, full seniority, all of it going away. Lena shakes the man's hand and does not stop walking.

INT. DISPATCH TRAINING CENTER - DAY (WEEKS LATER)

INT. GALLERY SPACE - EVENING (WEEKS LATER)

A white room, dark for the exhibition. Signage: RESONANT FREQUENCIES: THE EXCHANGE TAPES -- T. CROSS. A standing crowd among hung speakers -- and out of them, the building: rain on wire-glass, the four-second decay, a tide of old bells rolling near to far, transfigured into something between requiem and rescue.

Lena stands at the back, out of the light, listening the way she listens -- eyes closed, one finger almost conducting. On her lapel, a visitor sticker, filled out completely, in block letters.

At the mixing station, Tessa looks up mid-cue and sees her. Sees the closed eyes. The finger.

Tessa hands Moss the fader. Crosses her own opening, through her own crowd, and comes to stand beside her mother. She doesn't say anything. She takes her hand, and they listen to the building together.

The bells roll through the dark room like weather passing.

By the exit, small, easy to miss, a placard on the wall reads: FOR E.R., WHO DID EVERYTHING RIGHT.

A bright room, new consoles, a dozen TRAINEES. On the whiteboard, in draftsman's block letters: TRIAGE MEANS CHOOSING. SAY THE CHOICE OUT LOUD.

Lena walks the rows. On each desk: a stack of yellow call cards.

LENA

You will not save everyone. The system will sometimes make that your decision, and when it does, you will write down who waited and for how long, and you will say it out loud, in this building, on the record. We do not lose people twice here.

She stops at one desk. A TRAINEE, 23, nervous, has squared her call cards to the desk edge without being told. Lena looks at the neat stack a moment.

LENA (CONT'D)

(to the trainee; quietly)
Loosen the stack. You'll be reaching for them in a hurry.

A console chimes -- a live line, patched in for demonstration. An ordinary ring. No old bell beneath it. No timestamp from anywhere but now.

The trainees look at her.

Lena sits. Squares the yellow cards. Puts on the headset.

LENA (CONT'D)
911. Tell me where you are.

She listens.

FADE OUT.

THE END