

Season 3: Episode 13

“From the Files of Detective Mark Schrade”

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how it ends



NETWORK INTRO

Rusty Quill Presents...

STEPHANIE [Voiceover]

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[INTRO MUSIC FADE IN]

MICAH [Voiceover]

This is Micah Jones. You know who we are by now, so I'll spare you introductions.

Here's what you need to know: two years went by and you didn't hear from us. I know some of you thought that we were gone forever, and for that we're sorry. We've done our best to catch you up, and what we've found is a story bigger than us. Bigger than dreams or nightmares. Even bigger than memories.

The time for hiding is over and the only way out is through. We're airing in real time again, and what you'll hear will almost certainly put us in danger, so we need your help.

Share this story far and wide. And don't forget to eat at Jim's. Listen for whispers. They can try to stop us, but they can't stop all of you.

See you on the other side. Thank you for listening.

[INTRO MUSIC FADE OUT]

[SCENE TRANSITION]

AIMEE

What you're about to hear was never meant to be public. That will be evident immediately. It's a series of recordings made by former detective Mark Schrade, the officer first on the scene of Nolan Jones' accident. The recordings are dated from December 1993 through March 2019.

While they were in Nolan's case file, the one Tim Schrade sent to Micah, none of these recordings were a part of the official police report. Since the majority of the audio was made on cassette tapes, Devon digitized and cleaned things up as best as he could. As for the content of these recordings, nothing has been edited or removed. Each entry will be separated by a beep.

Between these recordings and the unofficial photographs I found of Nolan's accident, it's clear that Schrade knew more than we could have possibly imagined. And he lied about everything.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

MARK SCHRADE

December 7, 1993.

I don't know why I'm doing this. Fuck. I shouldn't feel guilty. He threatened me. He threatened my family. What was I supposed to do?

I keep replaying it in my mind. Could have tried to fight him, stop him. Why didn't I? Keep seeing the scene. There was so much blood.

[POLICE RADIO STATIC]

RADIO OPERATOR

Queen 20 Rogers. Two to respond to the 415 male with a gun. Calling Holmes.

MARK SCHRADE

Fuck this.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

January 19, 1994.

Someone left a note on my cruiser. I don't know how I didn't see him do it. I was gone for less than five minutes and I could see my car from my place in line. The note said, "Remember our deal." Yeah. I fucking remember.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

November 5, 1994.

It's a year to the day. I don't know why I'm still feeling so guilty. I mean, I didn't kill the guy. But I could have... maybe there was... I don't know. Doesn't matter.

[sigh]

If I could just get it off my chest, I think I'd feel better, but... who could I tell? Katherine? She'd call me a monster. Delmonte, maybe. He's been my partner since I joined the force. He'd back me up, I think. But I don't know. I can't be sure. Not with this. I don't think I can tell anyone.

It wasn't an honest report. There. I said it. But it's not like I flat-out lied, either. Just wasn't the whole truth.

[FIST SLAMS ON TABLE]

MARK SCHRADE

Why didn't I just call for backup? Could have had anywhere from 5 to 10 officers there in seconds. Would have caught...

[clears throat]

Dreamt I was at the scene again last night. It was just that little girl's face. Blank and in shock. Standing in the headlights, blood on her clothes. And then I wake up.

[pause]

[sigh]

Who am I even talking to? I can't do this right now.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

November 5, 1997.

Been a few years since I made one of these. Didn't think I needed to anymore. It's the anniversary. Four years.

Got another note. It was taped to our front door with my name written on it. Whoever is doing this, they don't just know where I live. They were here, standing on my front steps. The only thing inside the envelope was a photo of Tim, the one that I used to keep in my wallet. I know it was the same picture because the top left corner is ripped. But, there's something written on the back now. "Consider me returning this to be a personal favor."

I don't know what this fucking guy wants, but if I ever see him near my house or Tim I will kill him.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

February 22, 1999.

Had the dream again. Same thing as before. Just her, standing in the headlights staring at me. It's been almost six years now. It's like she's haunting me.

Every time I think I've finally shaken this bullshit, another note pops up and the nightmares start. It's happening again, and at the worst possible time. I have enough shit on my plate with the girl that went missing. It's all over the news.

Not even that, I got to keep it together at home because my son's friend is a mess. God, that kid is such a sob story.

Spends all his time here because his parents can't get their shit together. And now with all this? Where else is he going to go? I feel bad.

Damn it. I need sleep. I'm saying shit I don't mean. I can't talk to anyone. It's fucking exhausting.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
April 9, 2004.

I miss Katherine. I don't... Can't believe she's gone. Why am I talking to this thing?

[pause]

What's worse is that I'm trying to grieve for my fucking wife, and instead I keep thinking about the Joneses. Nolan and his widow, and this whole... Ugh. It's making me think the most horrible shit.

I loved Katherine. But as much as I loved her, and I did, I really, really did. Things hadn't been great for a long time. She was obsessed with work. Always being paged or called away and running off at a moment's notice. I mean, I'm the detective. I should be the one with the tough-to-live-with schedule. She worked in an office. We used to be pretty happy, but somewhere along the way it stopped mattering, I guess. We just focused on other things.

Tim and I were always close. Are close, I guess. Katherine was never very interested in what he was doing. Not until this year. Suddenly she started taking a big interest in Tim's life. More in mine, too. It was almost like she was excited about something, but then...

[SOUND OF DRINKING]

MARK SCHRADE

All that to say, I'm hurting this deeply for someone I haven't felt connected to in years.

And then there's the Joneses. Who, from what I've learned, were basically the perfect family. The perfect.. everything. He could have had a beautiful life if only I... Shit. If I'd done something.

Who knows? Maybe they'd have ended up miserable, too. But here I am feeling sorry for myself, not because I lost my wife, but because my wife and I didn't have anything close to...

[SOUND OF DRINKING]

MARK SCHRADE

[sighs]

That's enough.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

April 10, 2004.

Got a pretty nasty hangover and some regrets. What else is new?

Started going through Katherine's things this morning. Never know how much stuff people have until you try to get rid of it. It's almost like their belongings multiply in the boxes, or behind closet doors. And bam. The person is gone. And you're left to sort through all their shit and it's just fucking endless. Endless clothes, papers, stuff they probably hadn't looked at in years but for some reason never threw away.

Whoever is left behind has to figure out what the fuck to do with it all. I almost decided to throw it all away. Well, after Tim took what he wanted. I saved a few things. But I was about to start tossing things in the dumpster.

[clears throat]

Now, I'm sitting at my kitchen table at 2:00 in the afternoon with a bottle of scotch looking at a pile of shit that makes no sense at all.

[SOUND OF DRINKING]

MARK SCHRADE

I was in our closet, sorting her clothes, figuring out what I could donate. And I noticed something strange about the back wall. It had been cut precisely to make a small crawl space and the door of it was secured with a padlock. There is no way Katherine did the work herself. She had to have hired someone.

She never seemed the type to hide things from me, but... When someone dies it goes one of two ways. One, there is only good in what they left behind. Or two, you find out all their fucking secrets.

Once I got the door open, I found a simple wooden box. It was what was inside the box that has me sitting here talking to this fucking tape recorder. First, the robes. Looking at at least three sets of them in different colors, and they all have these... sashes? Ropes? I don't know what to call them. They look like the regalia people wear to show they graduated with honors at graduation. She was never in a choir, and even if she was, why is she hiding them in a blank wooden box behind a locked door that I never knew about?

But that's not what caught my interest. It was the journals. Probably shouldn't have looked at them. It felt wrong, but... I flipped through one of them to see if any photos or other mementos were tucked between the pages, and I saw my name. Curiosity got the best of me, so I read it.

[PAGES TURNING]

MARK SCHRADE

[reads from journal]

Mark thinks I don't know what really happened the night that man crashed his truck. But I do. We all do. We are monitoring the situation closely.

[BOOK SHUTS]

MARK SCHRADE

Who the fuck is "we"?

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

April 21, 2004.

It's been about a month since Katherine's funeral. When I got home today I found a potted plant had been delivered to my house. So many people sent flowers to our house after she died. The fuck am I supposed to do with them? I get the thought. People don't know how to act when someone passes away. But really, think about it? What is someone like me going to do with a house full of daisies?

Except these weren't daisies or carnations or whatever other flower people send for funerals. It was just a plant. There was no price sticker on the bottom, no tissue paper or whatever it is they wrap the pots in to look nice, so it wasn't from a florist. There was dirt all around the edges. It wasn't potted neatly. It looked ripped from someone's garden, haphazardly packed up.

Then I saw the note.

A handwritten note tucked into the stems. I recognized the handwriting. The card said, "Sorry for your loss. Enjoy the flowers. They're from my garden. I think Katherine would have liked them." It's him. I know it.

I don't know shit about plants, though. That was always Katherine's thing. Something she did with one of her clubs or something. They grew all kinds of plants and herbs. She used to bring them home to tend to them sometimes. But I never paid attention.

I took it to a neighbor who is an expert gardener and she told me she was pretty sure it was nightshade, but I should talk to someone who could confirm it because if it is nightshade, it's toxic, especially to animals.

I went to the library and the librarian gave me a quick tutorial on how to search for information on the internet if the books she suggested didn't have what I needed.

It didn't take more than a minute to find out my neighbor was right.

[sighs]

Nightshade, also known as "Atropa Belladonna," can cause paralysis in dogs and cats in seconds to minutes. Humans, too. The entire plant is toxic, not just the berries. It can cause rapid heartbeat, delirium, vomiting, hallucinations, respiratory failure...

And death.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
July 12, 2007.

I saw the wife. I mean, I saw Ava Jones at ShopRite today. Tried my best to avoid her. It's been... how many years now? Over a decade? But still.

Only had two or three things in my basket, and I tried to put everything away to make a quick exit, but then... Ms. Stewart from the library spotted me. Best I could do was grin and bear it through her game of 20 Questions while keeping my back to Mrs. Jones as much as possible. I'm a fucking coward for avoiding her.

Only thing is... I don't know how much longer I can hold this in, either.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

July 12, 2007. It's 11... 11:43PM.

I had a feeling this would happen. Seeing her, Ava, triggered the nightmares again. Started off the same as it always does: the girl, the headlights, the blank look of shock.

But this time it was different. Instead of just standing there like she usually does... like she did, the little girl, his daughter... she's pointing to something. Took me a minute to follow her hand to where.

Her eyes shift to the left and it dawns on me that there's something behind me. That's what she's pointing to. But no matter how much I want to turn and look, I can't. My eyes are locked on her. The expression on her face slowly started to change from wide-eyed shock to a grimace of pain and then up to a sickenly pronounced smile. Then she opened her mouth as if to scream, and I woke up.

[BEEP]

[HEAVY FOOTSTEPS PACING]

MARK SCHRADE

Uh... February fucking... uh... I don't know. 20-something. It's the middle of the night.

Someone is banging on my front door trying to get in. They are slamming the screen door.

[HEAVY POUNDING ON DOOR]

MARK SCHRADE

Identify yourself. I'm armed.

[POUNDING CONTINUES]

MARK SCHRADE
Hello?

[POUNING CONTINUES]

MARK SCHRADE
I repeat. Identify yourself. I'm an officer of the law and I'm armed.

[DOOR UNLATCHES, SWINGS OPEN]

MARK SCHRADE
Hello? Who's out there?

[DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE]

MARK SCHRADE
If you're hiding, show yourself now. That's an order.

[LOW QUIET LAUGHING]

MARK SCHRADE
What the fuck.

[DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE]

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
[slurring, as if he's been drinking]
August 10th 2013.

Be 20 years in a few months. Everything is different. My life. This town. My family. Been promoted three times. Worked hundreds of cases. Some solved, some not. But this one... Never going to shake it.

Was in Desert Storm. Trained for the worst, trained for combat. And I couldn't stand up to one guy? One guy threatens me and I completely fucking fold? I know I couldn't see him, but I had a gun. I had a Taser. I had a club. I could have done... anything. I

could have done anything and no one would have questioned it. But he threatened me and my family and I... what?

That guy is dead. This family is traumatized and they have no idea what really happened.

[TAKES A DRINK]

MARK SCHRADE

I wasn't even on duty.

[chuckles]

I was off. My patrol was done. I was heading home about to actually be back for dinner on time for once. Wasn't even supposed to be on that road. I don't usually have to go in that direction but I wanted to take it a little slower just to blow off steam before I got home. Katherine and I had a disagreement that morning. Can't even remember what it was about, but... when I left, she was livid. So it was important to me that I come home ready to make up.

Of all nights to avoid 202. Thought a ride through the woods would be good to clear my head. Not that I could see much, but that's not the point.

Fuck. But there I was, driving down River Road when I saw the accident. What was I supposed to do? Ignore it? Keep driving? Radio for someone else to stop?

[pause]

Maybe I should have.

Came around this curve and seen the truck, so I approached it on foot. I saw that the driver was unconscious and sprawled out over the wheel, but he was breathing. Called for an ambulance. From what I could see, it seemed like a one-car accident, like he'd lost control or something. The front of his truck was wrapped around a tree.

To do my due diligence, I looked around the cab of the truck for bottles of alcohol but came up short. There were a few personal items.

The first thing I noticed was an older tape deck Velcro-ed to the dashboard. Had a tape in it. Not sure what made me grab it, but I did. Put it in the trunk of my cruiser before looking for anything else. The next thing I found was a camera. I didn't have an official one on me since, again, I'm off duty at this time. So I use it to take a few photos of the scene. In retrospect, this is a huge rookie move. I shouldn't have touched anything, but I did what I did.

There was just a handful of exposures left on the roll, so I was careful when taking the photos. Noticed something odd, a bloody handprint on the driver's side door. The window was open, rolled down despite the chilly evening, so the fingers curled over the window ledge like they would if someone was grabbing the door from the open window. Made sure to capture that.

Took a couple of pictures of him as he lay there. Talked to him a bit. Told him help was coming. Seemed to wake up for a moment or two and mumbled something. Tried to move his hands, but I told him not to. I didn't want him to further injure himself, but he didn't listen. Shook his left hand a bit, opened some of the fingers and curled them back in a few times.

Was the third or fourth time he did that, I saw what he was holding. It was a piece of black fabric, like a t-shirt or jacket type material. That didn't sit right with me. When I took it out of his hand, he tried to speak. Barely coherent. All I could make out was name: Micah. Then he passed out again.

I made my way carefully around the side of the truck into the passenger side door that was hanging open. I remember thinking it was odd because no one was around.

But then I saw her. Maybe 15 to 20 yards away. She was standing right in the headlights with her back to me. She was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt. I don't know how I didn't see her.

Called out to her and she didn't respond. She didn't react at all, almost as if she didn't hear me so I tried again. Not sure what I even said. Started walking towards her and just as I'm about to call to her for the third time, she starts to turn to face me, slowly.

She didn't turn her whole body, just her head and shoulders turned in my direction. Her eyes were wide and wild looking. It was unsettling.

[sigh]

Listen, I've seen a lot of things. Horrible things. But something about her expression made my blood run cold. She wasn't crying or panicking, like you'd expect a kid in that situation to do. She just looked at me, almost through me. Her silhouette outlined in the lights made her look like she was glowing. I, for some reason, used the last photo on the roll to take her picture. I don't know why.

[sigh]

I tried to get near her, but something told me to keep my distance. I don't know if it was her expression or the way she stood there, how she kept her gaze completely on me. Either way, I kept talking to her and eventually she... got her to get out of the middle of the road. She walked toward the cab of the truck, looked like she was going to climb in. But something stopped her.

I thought I heard the driver say something, but he couldn't hear. He was completely unconscious. But she spoke to him. Barely a whisper, but I was close enough to hear it. She said, "It's okay, Papa Bear. He sees me now."

I have no fucking clue what that meant. But she didn't get into the truck. She just sat down on the pavement right in the broken glass and stared at the ground.

The ambulance arrived a few minutes later. I remember thinking I was grateful for the harsh shrill sirens because they made sense

to me. It was like being snapped back to the real world. Nothing about this accident, this man, this little girl made sense to me. I didn't like it.

When the ambulance took them away, I put the camera in my cruiser. I had every intention of returning it, along with the other photos on that roll, by the way. But, uh...

[clears throat]

I kept looking. Again, I could have... should have just gone home at this point. The tow truck was going to be at least another hour, and I was given the go-ahead to leave from my Captain. He could send someone else out to relieve me since my shift was over, but I found myself offering to cover it before I realized what I was saying.

Something wasn't sitting right with me. Put the camera and fabric in a bag inside my trunk with the tape deck. And then got in my car and moved it so the headlights and my spotlight could illuminate the road better.

I started it up, but then I got out. Grabbed a flashlight and began walking the edge of the road. Followed the tire tracks to where the truck hit the tree. Then I turned around and crossed to the other side of the road. That side had thick brush with fields behind it.

I was only a few dozen feet from the crash when I saw them. There was a second set of tire tracks in the dirt leading to a nearby inlet, like a little gravel spot people used to either drive onto the fields or pull a U-turn on the road. Obviously, it could have been from earlier in the day. You know, just the property owner driving over the dirt before pulling in. But I had a gut feeling that wasn't it so I followed them.

Walked past the brush, a few steps into the field. That's when he fucking got me.

[TAKES A DRINK]

MARK SCHRADE

Everything went dark. I thought I'd been knocked out. Took me a few seconds to realize I had something pulled over my head. He hit me, hard, in the temple and I went down but I think I was only out for a moment or two. Next thing I know, I'm sitting in the passenger seat of a vehicle with my hands zip tied behind my back.

He drove me for... I don't know. 25? 30 minutes? Could have been longer. Tried to count the turns, note the direction. I got pretty far, but lost track somewhere around turn 6 or 7. My head was throbbing.

[TAKES A DRINK]

MARK SCHRADE

Kept asking questions that whole time, but he was silent. It was strange that he didn't gag me. Could yell for help the minute I got a chance. When the car finally stopped, I heard him exit on the side and walk around the vehicle to mine. He threw open the door but didn't say anything, so I focused on everything else. What I could hear, smell. I heard crickets in the wind, and smelled clean woodsy air and dirt. Like we were surrounded by trees.

He went through my pockets. I tried to resist, but he'd tied my hands so tight, like he'd done it before. Made sure I wouldn't be able to wrestle out of them. I could feel him pull my wallet and heard him rifle through it. Didn't touch my gun. That was strange to me, too.

Started to say that he could take what he wants, but then he spoke for the first time. Actually, he laughed first. He fucking laughed at me.

"I don't need your fucking money," he says. Then he starts reading my information off my license. My name, home address. Took my keys. Heard them jingling and clinking together and I felt him slide something small and flat into my pocket. Felt him put my wallet back as well.

He leaned close to my face and said, "Now I know who you are, Mark Schrade. So I want you to listen to me. You saw an accident tonight. A simple, yet tragic accident. That's what you'll write in your report. You'll memorize it and stick to it. Especially if anyone decides to get curious. You didn't see anything else. You understand? And this conversation never happened. Otherwise, I can promise that it will go badly for you."

[TAKES A DRINK]

MARK SCHRADER

That was it. Shoves me back inside the vehicle and slams the door shut. Heard him get in and take off. Again, I tried to count but I lost track. Next thing I remember is coming to my squad car. My hands were untied.

Looked around to re-orient myself, and I realized that my car was parked in that same inlet I had been walking towards when he grabbed me. The lights were off and the brush completely obscured my car from the road. Someone, maybe the same guy, had moved it, hidden it from view.

I reached into my pocket to see what he'd left me with and found that it was the key to my car.

When I finally got in, Katherine was waiting for me. We fought again, made some bogus excuse. She said something about how I took her away from her work. She went to sleep in our guest room and we never spoke about it again.

Just as I was falling asleep that night, I remembered I'd stashed the camera, the film, this tape recorder and that black piece of fabric in the trunk. I didn't even look to see if any of it was still there after the person dumped me back in my car. I ran outside to check and found it all there. They must not have seen me put it away. Small favors, I guess.

Initially, I'd planned to enter it into evidence, but I... kept it. Except the camera. I drove to the hospital that same night and found Ava Jones waiting in her husband's room. He was hooked up to a bunch of machines, but asleep. She was confused when she

saw me enter the room, but I explained who I was. I'd been the one to find her husband. I gave her the camera, told her I found it outside the truck near the side of the road. Thought she might want it back. Kept the original film roll and replaced it with a new one.

As I handed it to her I was afraid Ava would say something. Maybe there were photos on there she knew he took, but she didn't ask. Instead she looked down at the camera and started crying. She asked me if I knew what caused the crash.

[TAKES A DRINK]

MARK SCHRADE

That was the moment the lie began. I heard myself speaking, but it felt like I was watching someone else. I told her that while I waited for the ambulance, I saw a dead fox on the side of the road that looked like it had been hit by a car. I was pretty sure that her husband swerved to avoid hitting it and lost control of his truck.

She started crying heavily when I said it was a fox, even more than she already was. I don't even know why I chose that. Maybe it was because of the fox sticker stuck to the tape deck. I just said what popped in my mind.

She wouldn't stop crying. Kept getting worse and worse. I didn't know what to do, so I set the camera down on one of the chairs and backed out of the room. I thought that would be the end of it.

And here I am, 20 years later. The guilt won't let me be. The memories, the nightmares. I'm being haunted by that fucking night. And by someone else. Someone who's intent on making sure I never forget about it, nor speak of it again to anyone.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

August 13, 2013.

Re-listened to my tape from a couple of days ago. I should probably cut back on the drinking. Either way, it got me thinking about the stuff I saved from that day. Which then reminded me of the box of Katherine's things I'd found after she died, the box from the locked crawlspace.

Her journals with a few scattered notes. Those strange robes. Kind of glossed over them because the journal caught my interest and I guess I just forgot. Probably should have let it go by now, but it was nagging at me so I called the only person who I thought might know something about Katherine that I didn't. Her sister.

Katherine and Abigail had a strained relationship. We saw her once in a while. Sometimes she and her husband did favors for us, but... it wasn't much beyond that. We didn't talk for long. She had some place to be, but she didn't know either.

Something in her tone, though. Gave me the feeling that even if she did know something, she wouldn't tell me. What she did do was give me unsolicited advice. She said to get rid of everything. Throw them in the trash. "People do strange things sometimes, but you shouldn't let it get to you," she said. "All that matters is that Katie is gone." Told me she didn't want me to get worked up about Katherine having hid them.

Sure.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

May 6, 2015.

I'm at the cabin this weekend. Plan to stay a week. Got here about three days ago. Only been here a day, and wouldn't you know it? Card shows up in my mailbox.

We never get mail up here, besides junk. All the bills go to the house to make sure we don't miss anything. The only people who even have this address, as far as I know, are myself, Tim and his wife. But he found it somehow. This fucking guy.

[PAPER FLIPPING]

MARK SCHRADE

It's a greeting card. There's a picture, a drawing of two kids playing Hide-and-Seek on the front. Inside it says, "I can always find you."

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

December 26, 2015.

Ran into Gail Perry at the gym a couple of days ago. She works for the Town of Somerville, and her husband has some big shot job, so they're fairly well known around here, but I don't know her personally. Which made her asking for a favor strange to begin with, but what she asked me to do was even stranger.

Apparently, there was a falling out in her family a while back between Gail and her husband and their son. They haven't spoken to him since 2001. Gail said her daughter occasionally gets postcards from him, but she has no way of contacting him back, as far as Gail knows anyway. She asked me to use my "resources" to help find him. Offered me quite a bit of money to do it, too.

I wasn't sure why she would ask me. Surely, she knew someone else who might help. And given the cash she had to cover the work, I remember thinking she should have hired a PI. Maybe she thinks that's what I am?

I told her I couldn't take her money and it's a long shot. I doubt I'll be able to find him since he'd been gone for so long, and she didn't have any tangible information for me to go on, but... She cornered me on Christmas Eve. What was I supposed to say?

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

November 28, 2016.

Been looking for the Perry kid for nearly a year now and found nothing. That kid does not want to be found. I mean, I knew as much when I agreed to help, but it's still frustrating. Last time I spoke to Gail, I told her I needed more to go on or I was calling it quits. About a week later she called me back and said she had something for me. She explained that she made a trip up to Boston to visit her daughter and while Amelia- that's her name- was running an errand, she looked through her things.

She came across a recent piece of mail from her son sent to Amelia directly. Gail made a comment that she wasn't sure how he'd gotten her address, but she was more focused on what she found. Wasn't a postcard like the others. Instead it was an envelope with some pictures. Photos are mostly scenery, but there was one of him leaning against his van. Gail took photos of them with her phone, so they're a bit blurry but I managed to get a partial plate. May have let his guard down a little too much with this one.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
March 3, 2017.

Got him. Well, closer anyway. Found his last known address, but I... didn't give Gail the info right away. The kid stayed away for this long, there has to be a pretty big reason, right?

Gail never gives me a straight answer when I ask about the falling out. She was downright angry when I pushed her for more details at one point.

So, before I just release this info to her, I'm going to try to pay the kid a visit. He's in Pittsburgh. A bit of a hike, but I think I can make it out there sometime in the next couple of months. After I talk to him and get his side, I'll let Gail know. Maybe.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
June 29, 2017.

Fucking A. I found him. Still in the same place, and I was pleasantly surprised to find out a bit of information I wasn't expecting. Turns out the Perrys and Joneses were close. What is it about New Jersey? Everyone fucking knows everyone. Or maybe it's just this county. Either way, it's awfully convenient for me.

We got to talking. And like his mom, the kid, Brendan, was pretty guarded with the details. But I feel like this situation was more than just your standard issue parent-child falling out. It's the way he talks about them. The little tics he has when he does. I don't even think he realizes he's doing them. White knuckled fists opening and closing. Reminded me of Nolan's... never mind.

His eyes change as well. They get wider. The pupils dilate. It gives him a strange overall appearance. It's a look I've seen on kids who've experienced something horrible. So horrible they bury it.

I respect the kid's reasons for not wanting to be in touch with his parents. And I'm really glad I didn't take Gail's money, to be honest, because I would certainly feel more obligated to give him up. But I won't be doing that.

[clears throat]

There's something else. When we were talking, he mentioned something about a party. And then he... sort of slipped into a daze. He started talking, but nothing made sense. I didn't have my notebook, so I didn't catch it. I barely could make out what he said, but I swore I heard the word "robes." I let him ramble for a moment and waited for him to come out of it.

I knew what I was going to do. We made a deal. The kid has something he's working on. Wouldn't tell me what. When he can get the time, he travels around all different places doing his research. That explains all the postcards the sister gets. He

asked me if I'd vouch for him if he ever needed it. Give a sense of relevance to his interviews. I told him I couldn't let him impersonate an officer, but if he ever called me I'd do what I could. No guarantees. In return, he promised to tell me what he knew about the Joneses.

Couldn't remember much. But would let me know if anything else came to mind. Repeating this all now, I'm honestly not sure which one of us got the shit end of this deal. I'm just glad I can finally stop searching for the kid.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

November 1, 2017.

Tim visited this past weekend and brought my granddaughter with him. He took Katie trick-or-treating around our neighborhood. He wanted her to see how some fancy people hand out full size candy bars to kids. God, that kid looks just like her grandmother.

Katherine would have loved her.

[clears throat]

Tim and I managed to squeeze in a bit of father/son time while Katie was preoccupied with a movie and her candy. Got to talking about when he was a kid. As a joke, I asked him if he and his friends ever raised hell on Mischief Night around here. I knew he did, but I wanted to see if he'd admit it.

At first, he just laughed and said, "Of course not. My dad's a cop." But he couldn't keep a straight face. I mean, I knew he was lying. Really I just wanted to hear what he got into. Compare stories.

Also, apparently Mischief Night is really only a thing in New Jersey, and maybe one other place in the whole country. How the hell is that possible? It's a rite of passage. Are you even a kid if you haven't TP-ed a house or egged a cop car? My cruiser

was egged every year like clockwork. Tim admitted to being the culprit of said eggings several years in a row.

Anyway, he let out a little chuckle. And I asked him what was so funny. And he said he did have one story, but from Halloween night. Made me promise not to ground him.

Tells me one year on Halloween, he swiped a bottle of booze. Which, fine. Whatever. What am I going to do about it now? Says he drank a little bit of it but one of his friends had more than he could handle. This kid Luke that always hung around the house and went places with us.

Seems like a funny story at first, you know? In hindsight. Kid gets wasted, passes out cold next to his bike. Tim said the rest of the group walked into a field a little ways from where they were hanging out. They were just going to let him sleep it off and then head home. Eventually they see him coming towards them with a flashlight, but then he clicks it off and disappears into the trees. They got worried and called out but didn't get an answer. When they couldn't find him, they decided to head home, thinking they would catch up with him on the way and make sure he was all right. They didn't see him again that night, but Luke showed up at our place the next day. So he was fine.

[clears throat]

I didn't think anything of it until Tim mentioned where all that happened. It was right there, same little section of River Road. Maybe 30, 40 yards away. I know it's just... I mean... Kids hang out in those fields drinking all the time, right? Or at least they used to. But I can't shake the feeling that it's connected. Something about the way Tim said Luke walked off. Like he was headed toward them, trying to catch up. But then he just stopped dead in his tracks, turned off his flashlight. Something about that.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

January 8, 2018.

I tracked down Luke. I invited him out for a coffee under the guise of being interested in what he's been up to, but really I... knew I was going to try and get his side of the story out of him.

But when I managed to work around to it, he got dismissive of my questions. The little shit. Practically raised that kid. His parents sure as hell didn't. They were trash. Someone had to show him how to behave, and here he was acting ungrateful?

I gave it another shot a couple days later. Managed to pique his interest by saying I knew about that night and that I had a cold case that may be connected, something he could help me solve.

He asked about the case, but I told him I couldn't say until I had a lot more information from him. He still didn't fully agree. I think I might have screwed it up by telling him not to tell Tim about any of this. But I'm closer than I was before. I can feel it in my gut that he can help me. I got to keep trying.

There must be some way I can get him on board.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADER

February 26, 2018.

Drove to Providence. I wanted to see Micah for myself. Passed by her apartment and saw her carrying a backpack to her car. Was strange seeing her as an adult. I only have that image of her as a child in my mind. But I was seeing someone who moved past that moment, at the very least by aging.

When she got in and started driving I followed her. She drove to a hiking trail about 40 minutes away. I waited until she had a good head start and followed her there, too. More until she made her way through the woods. She moved confidently, like this is something she does often, all alone.

We were alone in those woods. Took her picture. I almost caught up to her at one point. Thought she saw me, but I ducked out of the way quickly. After that, I turned around and walked back the way I came and decided to head home. I don't... I don't know why I did that.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
August 3, 2018.

Give it a little while before asking Luke to help me again. Figured he'd be more agreeable if I gave him some more information. Called and left him a voicemail. He hasn't called back yet.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE
September 14, 2018.

Luke called back and at first it was more of the same. I pressed the issue by saying I was getting somewhere, and to make major headway I needed him to try and befriend someone close to the case. Not in a harmful way. But potentially to get information I couldn't otherwise procure myself.

He flipped out. He said that was a horrible invasion of privacy, that he was horrified that I would ask him to do something like that, and he wasn't interested in helping.

As a last ditch effort, I threw her name out there. Was a Hail Mary, if you will. Like maybe putting a name to case rather than being vague would work better. Luke always struck me as a sensitive kid. Thought I could use that. He stopped yelling and went very quiet. Said he needed to call me back.

About an hour later, the phone rang. It was Luke. Suddenly he's very interested in helping me. Done a complete 180, but I didn't ask why. Doesn't matter, and honestly I don't care. He'll be

able to get close to her. As close as I need him to. They're around the same age so that'll help, too.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

October 27, 2018.

Luke went to Providence and followed the instructions I gave him. He knows where she works and has seen which places she frequents. He's noted that she's often alone.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

November 30, 2018.

Who the fuck are you? Who the fuck do you think you are? You've gone too fucking far this time. It's one thing to threaten me, leaving me taunting notes and shit. But going after my granddaughter is crossing a fucking line. She's a kid. A first fucking grader.

[sighs]

I'm visiting Tim, and I offer to pick up Katie from school today. She came out of the building, she's holding a toy I've never seen. A truck. I asked her where she got it, but then I looked closer at it and I didn't have to hear her answer to know. It's not actually a toy. It's one of those kits for hobbyists to build and paint. Expensive. It's a Chevy, mostly hunter green, but with a gray block painted down the side.

It's Nolan's truck. A perfect replica. From the accident. I asked her again where she got it. Paid attention this time. She said a man stopped by just before I got there. Said he was a friend of her grandpa's and had something he wanted her to give to me. And to tell me "hello" and "see you soon."

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

December 11, 2018.

Luke made contact. He was watching her apartment like he has the past few times he went to Providence. This time, much like my luck, he caught her and her friends as they were leaving the house. He "ran into her" at a bar and chatted. They made plans to hang out soon and get drinks. He mentioned that she has a podcast, too. Maybe I'll give it a listen.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

January 25, 2019.

That little fucking shit. He already knew her. I was suspicious when his attitude about helping me changed, but I was too focused on getting information. He knew who she was the minute I mentioned her name. What's he playing at? He stopped returning my calls. Wouldn't tell me anything the last time we spoke, either. It's a waste of fucking time. I got fuck all nothing from him.

[BEEP]

MARK SCHRADE

March 18, 2019.

I fucked up. I... I fucked up. I listened to her pod... Shit. I have to stop her.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

MICAH

The audio from March 2019 is the last recording we have. There are other things. Notes. Journals. I might share them with you at some point in time. I don't know. We'll see. But there's one journal entry I want to read to you now.

[reads from journal]

I had the dream again. I can't live like this anymore. I have to come clean. I should talk to his widow and daughter and tell them what I know. I should apologize to his daughter for what I've been doing, what I made Luke do. He's already found them. They're in his crosshairs and maybe it's my fault. I should tell them. Warn them. But I can't. I can't let this guy get to me, to Tim, to Katie. They're all I have left.

That entry is dated November 5th, 2019. 26 years to the day after my dad's accident. It's the last entry Mark Schrade ever wrote. It was written within days, or possibly on the day that Mark died.

[SCENE TRANSITION]

[OUTRO MUSIC]

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