

CAT & MOUSE

Written by

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"CAT & MOUSE"

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DREAM SEQ - DAY

The POV of a man (white, 30s) as he stumbles through the woods. Look down: branches and dried leaves CRACKLE underfoot.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. RURAL COLORADO POLICE STATION - NITE

A small, quiet storefront outpost. Through the window, a single lamppost just barely illuminates predawn Main Street, deserted. This could be anywhere in small-town Middle America.

Outside, a patrol car pulls in to park.

THE COLORADO COP (white, male, 30s) lounges, his feet kicked up on one of two beat-up desks. He reads a newspaper -- the headline: FBI CHASES STRANGLER ACROSS 3 STATES.

The police radio crackles fitfully.

A JUNIOR OFFICER enters. He carries diner takeout coffee and pastries, deposits a paper hot cup and a donut on the Colorado Cop's desk.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Mildred says to tell you that you are officially a dumbshit, boss, for taking the night shift your first day back.

The Colorado Cop laughs.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Whaddaya doin' back, anyway? I thought you were gonna take some time off after that conference.

THE COLORADO COP

Oh, I did a little hunting on my way home.

The junior officer nods at the newspaper.

JUNIOR OFFICER

They keep up, feds are gonna end  
up in our neck.

THE COLORADO COP

I sure hope not.

EXT. WOODS - DREAM SEQ - DAY

As before. The unseen man's HEAVY BREATHING -- fear,  
or excitement? -- as he stumbles through the  
undergrowth.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. DINGY MOTEL - NITE

A bare bulb hangs from the low ceiling, sheds sickly  
light on a scrapbook, open on the bed.

The scrapbook is full of lovingly pasted newspaper  
and magazine articles -- the headlines cry STRANGLER  
TAKES ANOTHER VICTIM, 3 WOMEN KILLED, MANHUNT FOR  
SERIAL KILLER, 8 WOMEN DEAD.

THE FAN (white, male, 30s) hums happily as he flips  
through the book, pauses to gaze at magazine and  
newspaper snapshots of smiling women, all white,  
around 30, with long brown hair.

The Fan comes to a blank page in the scrapbook. He  
takes scissors and a clipping from a loose pile on  
the bed and trims the article to the fit the  
scrapbook page. He hums all the while.

EXT. WOODS - DREAM SEQ - DAY

As before. The unseen man's HEAVY BREATHING as he  
comes upon the fully clothed body of a woman (white,  
30ish).

The woman lies on her side in the leaves and dirt,  
her back to the man -- she might almost be asleep.

Half her mane of long brown hair lies along her arm,  
the other half flows down her back -- it has been  
particularly arranged.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. RURAL ROADSIDE DINER - SUNRISE

Deserted except for a bored waitress and THE JOURNALIST (white, male, 30s), who sits at a table near the window, nurses a cup of coffee, smokes a cigarette, contemplates the lightening sky outside.

A portable police scanner on the table crackles.

SCANNER VOICE

Uh, chief, we got somethin' out by the turnoff for the old railroad station. You better get out here.

The Journalist reacts with interest, gathers the scanner and an old leather satchel from the seat next to him, drops some change onto the table, and exits the diner.

EXT. WOODS - DREAM SEQ - DAY

As before. The unseen man's breathing gets faster, shallower as his hand reaches to turn the woman over, look at her face. He begins to roll her over--

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. MOTEL #1 ROOM - MORNING

With a SCREAM, THE FBI AGENT (white, male, 30s) awakens, sits bolt upright in bed. He is drenched in sweat; the sheets are in disarray.

He turns toward the RINGING ROOM PHONE, next to his SERVICE WEAPON and CELL PHONE on the bedside table, slows his breathing, picks up the receiver.

THE AGENT

Yeah?

PHONE VOICE

We found her.

THE AGENT

Shit.

EXT. RURAL IOWA ROAD CRIME SCENE - DAY

Several police cars, red and blue lights flashing, are parked askew on the side of the road.

Local cops stand around, talk, drink coffee from paper cups. The area is otherwise deserted.

The Agent's car -- a basic black rental car, Wisconsin plates -- pulls up among them.

Cops turn to watch him get out of the car.

EXT. WOODED AREA

The Agent, weary and haggard, follows the local SHERIFF through a copse of trees to a taped-off clearing.

SHERIFF

Here she is.

A woman (white, 25-35) lies face down in the dirt, her long brown hair arranged as in the Agent's dream.

THE AGENT

Just like the others.

The Agent stands stock still, looks at her for a moment. He does not approach or bend down to examine her more closely. He sighs.

THE AGENT

He's gone. He's moved on.

He turns to leave.

SHERIFF

Don't you wanna, you know, gather evidence or something?

THE AGENT

A Bureau forensics team is on its way.

EXT. RURAL ROAD CRIME SCENE

The Agent gets in his car. The loitering cops watch him drive away.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The car zips along a lonely road.

The Agent sighs wearily as he drives. He reaches for the radio, turns it on. The CHATTER of a talk show fills the car.

The Agent's fingers drift from the radio to the photo taped to the dash; he caresses the image lovingly. The woman smiling in the photo is white, 30ish, long brown hair.

RADIO VOICE #1

--turning to more serious news,  
it looks as if the Brunette  
Strangler has struck again.

RADIO VOICE #2

You know, the FBI has  
specifically asked the media not  
to make up cutesy names for this  
wacko.

The Agent grimaces at the radio.

RADIO VOICE 1

Right, that's their job. Anyway,  
we're getting reports that the  
local police over in Sheridan  
County have found the body of  
that girl that went missing a  
few days ago.

RADIO VOICE #2

Dumped off the side of the road?

RADIO VOICE #1

That's what we're hearing. In a  
related story, The Blonde  
Antidefamation League has issued  
the following statement: "Who're  
the dumb ones now?"

The Agent switches off the radio in disgust.

The car continues down the road into the distance,  
past a WELCOME TO NEBRASKA sign.

EXT. RURAL ROAD CRIME SCENE

More activity now. Black FBI sedans surround the  
local cop cars. White-jumpsuited technicians hover  
busily around a forensics van. EMS workers load a  
stretcher bearing a body-bagged body into an  
ambulance.

The sheriff confers with a deputy.

The Journalist wanders the scene, notebook at the ready. He approaches the sheriff.

SHERIFF

Get what you need?

THE JOURNALIST

(indicates the feds)

As much as I'm gonna get from this bunch.

SHERIFF

Have you talked to that other guy?

THE JOURNALIST

What other guy?

SHERIFF

Well, he's gone now. FBI agent. One of them profilers. Says he's been tracking the killer since Milwaukee. He showed up in town the morning after she disappeared, left as soon as we found her. Said the killer's moved on.

THE JOURNALIST

Do you know where he went?

SHERIFF

Whichever way the killer went, I guess. He seemed to think he could tell which way that was.

EXT. MOTEL #2 - NITE

A small, rural roadside motel. Its neon light flashes, crackles -- the NO next to VACANCY flickers on and off. The Agent's car is parked outside a room door.

INT. MOTEL #2 ROOM

The TV is on low in the background, shows a news report about the most recent murder. An open pizza box sits atop it, the pizza untouched.

The Agent sits on the bed, receiver of the room phone to his ear, listens.

Forensics reports and crime-scene photos and newspaper clippings are spread all around him.

#### THE PHOTOS

are all of women, 25-35, dead, face down in the dirt, their long dark hair arranged as we've seen.

#### THE AGENT

So, nothing new, then?...  
Right... You'll fax the preliminary forensics report to the local PD in the morning?...  
Good, okay... Yeah.

He hangs up, rifles through the material on the bed until he finds a map of the Midwest and Plains states.

#### THE MAP

Points are marked with red stars -- lines connect them, 10 of them heading west from Milwaukee.

He traces the trail with his finger -- his WEDDING RING glints in the light.

#### THE AGENT

Who are you, you bastard? And where are you going?

#### LATER

The room is darker, the blue glow from the muted TV the only illumination. The Agent lies in bed, talks softly on his cell phone.

#### THE AGENT

--no, not really. The nightmares are getting worse... I know, honey... I miss you, too. God, I miss you. But if I don't do this-- I know. I love you...  
Yeah, I'll call you tomorrow.  
'Night.

He hangs up and closes his eyes.

The gauzy curtains flutter in the breeze coming in the open window, the motel's neon sign hazy through the curtains.

INT./EXT. THE FAN'S CAR/RURAL HIGHWAY - NITE

A beat-up old Ford, Ohio plates, chugs down the highway.

The Fan listens to an oldies station, hums along to "Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair."

EXT. BAR PARKING LOT - NITE

The gravel parking lot is crowded with cars, but the only person around is an attractive young WOMAN (white, 20s) with long brown hair, who gets out of her car.

She stops to check her makeup in her reflection in the window of her car, but the CRUNCH of tires on gravel of another car as it pulls into the lot draws her attention.

THE GIRL

watches the car, O.S., pull up to her. She doesn't know the driver, and looks away again.

She changes her mind and leans in the passenger side window with a flirty smile on her face.

WOMAN

Well, hi there, cutie.

INT. MOTEL #2 ROOM - MORNING

The Agent awakens with a start and a gasp, the sheets twisted tightly around him. He stares at the ceiling. His breathing slows.

INT. DINER - THAT MORNING

The Agent sits at a table near a window that faces the main street of a small Nebraskan town. His uneaten breakfast is pushed aside. He flips through the faxed forensics report, sips coffee as he reads.

The bells over the door JINGLE, and the Agent looks up to see SHERIFF #2 enter the diner. The sheriff looks grim.

THE AGENT

More faxes from the Bureau?

SHERIFF #2

No, sir. You've got everything  
that was sent over.

A dead silence while the sheriff stands before the  
Agent's table. Other diners glance uneasily in their  
direction.

THE AGENT

What's wrong?

The sheriff realizes they're being watched and sits  
down across from the Agent, leans in conspiratorially  
close.

SHERIFF #2

It's uncanny, sir. When you came  
into my stationhouse yesterday  
and asked if any girls had gone  
missing...

THE AGENT

Yeah?

SHERIFF #2

Well, I don't have much truck  
with that profiling stuff....

THE AGENT

But?

SHERIFF #2

We got a report this morning.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

A police car and the Agent's car, parked outside a  
pleasant farmhouse.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM

A woman (white, 50s) sits on a sofa and sobs softly  
as she looks at a photo before he passes it to the  
Agent, who sits across from her in an armchair.

A TV is on in the background, the sound muted. The  
sheriff stands near the door.

The Agent looks at

THE PHOTO

A pretty, smiling brunette, the woman from the parking lot.

THE AGENT

She's very lovely.

WOMAN

She said she was going for a drink with some friends after her shift, but she promised to be home by midnight. She's a good girl -- she'd have called if she was going to be late.

THE AGENT

I understand.

WOMAN

He got her, didn't he? The strangler. He got her.

THE AGENT

We don't know that, ma'am.

WOMAN

She's dead. I know it. Does he make them suffer? Did my baby suffer?

THE AGENT

No, ma'am, he... he doesn't make them suffer.

His attention is distracted by the muted TV: a news report has interrupted the programming.

A news anchor speaks silently as the same photo the Agent holds appears on the TV screen.

The report switches to a field reporter, who stands outside a house... outside this very house.

The Agent rises and hands the photo back to the woman, moves toward the door.

The sheriff shuffles uncomfortably.

THE AGENT

(whispers)

You called the press before you told me?

SHERIFF #2  
My sister... she works at the  
radio station...

THE AGENT  
Jesus.

EXT. FARMHOUSE

The Agent walks to his car, dogged by the TV REPORTER  
and cameraman. He ignores them.

TV REPORTER  
Is she another victim of the  
Brunette Strangler? How long  
before you expect to find her  
body? What is the FBI doing to  
find him? What can you tell us,  
Agent?

They reach his car, the reporter still on his heels.

THE AGENT  
You're giving him what he wants.

He gets in the car and peels off. Tires angrily kick  
up gravel.

EXT. RURAL NEBRASKAN ROAD - LATER

Several police cars parked askew, lights flashing.  
Cops back off the road lead dogs on leashes through  
the underbrush off both sides of the road.

The Agent talks to several deputies.

THE AGENT  
He doesn't spend much time with  
them. Her car is parked at the  
bar up the road?

The deputies nod.

THE AGENT  
Then she'll be within a couple  
of miles of there. You've got  
people searching the road south  
of the bar?

DEPUTY  
Yes, sir.

THE AGENT

She won't be far off the road.  
And she'll be among trees or  
some sort of undergrowth.

FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD - LATER

The sun is lower in the sky. Police cars are everywhere. Dogs BARK in the distance. The Agent, alone, leans wearily against his car, talks into his cell phone.

THE AGENT

--yeah, well, there's another one. Officially she's still just missing, but... No, I know she's dead... This guy, he's in my head... I know it scares you, sweetie. I'm sorry... How can I leave? Finding this guy is the only way to get him out of my head--

DEPUTY

(in the distance)

Here!

THE AGENT

Shit. They just found her. I gotta go, honey... Yeah, I wish I was, too. I'd give anything just to... Yeah, me, too... Bye.

The Agent watches the cops descend on a stand of trees, where one cop waits with a dog.

THE AGENT

Fuck.

INT. POLICE STATION - NITE

The station bustles with more activity than it has probably ever seen. Deputies confer with FBI agents, town officials chatter nervously. A TV in the background is tuned to a news channel that reports on the latest murder.

The Agent confers with the sheriff.

THE AGENT

I'll tell you what I've told everyone else at this point. He has almost certainly moved on. But on the off chance that he hasn't, you should stake out her funeral and then her grave.

SHERIFF #2

Why's that, sir?

THE AGENT

I know it sounds contradictory, but this guy feels remorse. That's why he lays them out like he does: he wants them to look pretty when they're found.

SHERIFF #2

Pretty?

THE AGENT

I know it sounds odd.

SHERIFF #2

So why the stakeouts?

THE AGENT

He may feel the need to apologize to her for what he did. And keep an eye on the mother. He may want to express his sympathies to her as well.

SHERIFF #2

Right.

THE AGENT

The Bureau team will give you specifics.

An FBI ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (50s) interrupts, pulls the Agent aside.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Are you okay? You look like hell.

THE AGENT

I'm okay.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Don't make me think letting you do this Fox Mulder renegade bullshit was a bad idea. You've got enough of a rep after DC.

THE AGENT

We've got an army of agents pounding the pavement and running down leads from Chicago to Denver. Are they any closer to finding this guy than I am?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

(reluctant)

No.

THE AGENT

All right, then. This is good. I needed to do this. And it's working. I think I'm getting closer to him.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Eleven damn dead girls... you'd better be getting close.

THE AGENT

Yes, sir.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

And watch what the hell you say with cameras around.

THE AGENT

You don't need to remind me, sir.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Jesus, you've looked better.

THE AGENT

I'm fine. Really.

EXT. POLICE STATION - SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET

A mob of reporters and TV cameras huddle around the doorway, spring to life as the Agent exits the station.

The Fan, disposable camera at the ready, hovers in the background. The Agent catches the Fan's eye just before the mob descends upon the Agent.

The Agent unsuccessfully tries to fight his way through the press. He ignores their shouted questions till he loses sight of the Fan.

## REPORTERS

(simultaneous)

How long before he strikes again? / Where is he going? / Why is he doing this? / There are reports that he may have known his victims-- / Tell us about the DC serial case--

The Journalist pushes his way toward the Agent.

## THE JOURNALIST

You told local news that the killer wants publicity, but that's not true, is it?

The Agent stops in his tracks and stares at the Journalist but says nothing.

After a moment, the Agent pushes his way toward his car again. Camera lights blind him.

## EXT. WOODS - DREAM SEQUENCE - DAY

As before: The POV of the Agent as he stumbles through the woods. Look down: branches and dried leaves CRACKLE underfoot.

HEAVY BREATHING as he comes upon the fully clothed body of a woman.

She lies on her side in the leaves and dirt, her back to the man -- she might almost be asleep.

Half her mane of long brown hair lies along her arm, the other half flows down her back -- it has been particularly arranged.

His hand reaches to turn her over, look at her face. He begins to roll her body over--

END DREAM SEQUENCE

## INT. MOTEL #2 ROOM - NITE

The Agent shoots up from the bed with a SCREAM.

He looks around the room, awakens to reality, and sinks back to sit on the bed, his head in his hands.

IN THE BATHROOM

The Agent stands in the shower under the heavy spray, lets it pound him.

Is he crying, or is his face just wet from the shower?

IN THE ROOM

The Agent packs up his belongings -- clothes, notes on the case.

A news report plays on the TV.

TV NEWS ANCHOR  
--controversial special agent,  
from the FBI's Investigative  
Support Unit, the "profilers"  
popularized by the film "The  
Silence of the Lambs" -- also  
headed the FBI's task force on  
the recent DC Child Killer  
case...

On the TV screen, the Agent's ID photo appears beside the anchor, and next to it, a mugshot of the DC Child Killer.

TV NEWS ANCHOR  
Though 18 DC-area youngsters  
were savagely raped and murdered  
before the perpetrator was  
tracked down by the FBI, the  
case is considered a triumph of  
profiling.

The report cuts to a clip of the Agent, who looks only slightly more rested and relaxed than we've seen him yet, on a Sunday morning news talk show.

THE AGENT (ON TV)  
I don't think there's any doubt  
that this offender would have  
continued his spree if not for  
the FBI's efforts.

EXT. MOTEL #2

The Agent loads his bags into his car. The motel's neon light flashes behind him.

He turns to consider the road running past the motel. He looks one way up the road, and then the other way, weighs his options.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The Agent drives through the inky darkness.

INT. PRISON INTERROGATION ROOM - FLASHBACK - DAY

The DC CHILD KILLER (white, male, 30s), handcuffed, stares down at the table. The Agent sits across from him.

The Agent slowly pushes, one by one, a series of photos in front of the Killer.

THE PHOTOS

Brief glimpses of terribly gruesome crime-scene photos -- each of a child stabbed scores of times.

THE AGENT

Did it make you feel better,  
making them suffer?

The Killer says nothing.

THE AGENT

They hurt you, didn't they?  
Maybe not these particular kids,  
but kids are all the same,  
aren't they?

The Killer says nothing.

THE AGENT

They're cruel. They tease.  
Little bastards. I understand.

KILLER

They had to die. I had to show  
them.

THE AGENT

Yeah. But why the rapes?

The Killer hangs his head, silent again.

THE AGENT

Did they make fun of you? You wet yourself, didn't you? They pulled your pants down and laughed. They laughed at your little-boy dick.

KILLER

Not so little now.

THE AGENT

No. You showed them.

OBSERVATION ROOM

From behind a two-way mirror, two agents videotape the interrogation. They whisper so as not to be picked up on the video.

AGENT #1

Jesus.

AGENT #2

Christ almighty. He's as bad as the wackos.

Through the glass:

KILLER

Now they know.

THE AGENT

Now they know.

END FLASHBACK

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD - DAWN

The Agent drives, rubs his eyes. He looks like he hasn't slept in years.

He reaches for his cell phone, on the passenger seat, dials a number.

THE AGENT

It's me, honey. Did I wake you?... I'm sorry... I just needed to hear your voice... You're the only one who understands me...

The Agent's car continues along the road. The sun rises behind him.

EXT. ANOTHER SMALL TOWN MAIN STREET - LATER THAT MORNING

Cars are parked diagonally along the street in front of the shops, including a diner.

The Agent's car pulls in to park next to a green, old-style VW Beetle with Illinois plates.

INT. DINER

The diner bustles with breakfasters.

The Journalist, at a table in the corner near the window, chows down with gusto. Through the window, he see:

THE AGENT

get out of his car and head for the diner.

The Agent enters, glances around for a table, doesn't notice the Journalist.

The Agent moves to sit at the counter.

A waitress approaches him expectantly.

THE AGENT

Coffee.

MINUTES LATER

The Agent sips his coffee, studies a local map.

The Journalist approaches him from behind and takes the counter seat next to him.

THE JOURNALIST

So, what brings you to this neck of the woods?

THE AGENT

What?

THE JOURNALIST

Bad pun, huh? Neck of the woods? Gallows humor -- it's the only way to survive a job like this.

THE AGENT

Are you following me?

THE JOURNALIST

Hey, I was here first. Are you following me?

AT THE JOURNALIST'S TABLE - MINUTES LATER

The Journalist takes a copy of HEADLINE magazine from his satchel, pushes it across the table to the Agent.

The cover is a montage of happy, smiling photos of the victims of the strangler, with the coverline CUT DOWN IN THEIR PRIME.

THE JOURNALIST

I'm with "Headline" magazine.

He speaks in hushed tones, aware of the bustle around them.

THE AGENT

Not a rag, then.

THE JOURNALIST

Five Pulitzers last year, one of them for me. Come on, I'm not some vulture from Eyewitness News. This is an important story--

THE AGENT

That the media is fucking up.

THE JOURNALIST

So help me to tell it right. Why did you tell that TV reporter that the killer wanted publicity when you knew that wasn't true?

THE AGENT

Because I didn't like the way they were handling the story. How did you know it wasn't true?

THE JOURNALIST

I've been covering the story since Milwaukee. Since the first murders there. I've covered serial killers before. I think I know how this guy's thinking.

The Agent flips through the magazine, stops at the story on the killings. Several spreads are full of happy photos of the victims.

THE AGENT

This is good, actually. It's the kind of coverage I'd have asked for.

The Journalist slips a mini tape recorder onto the table and pushes the Record button. The Agent doesn't notice.

THE JOURNALIST

Why? What's good about it?

THE AGENT

This guy kills in a blind, sudden rage, but then he's remorseful. Dumping a body on the side of the road usually indicates disdain, contempt for the victim, like they're garbage. But the way he arranges them, almost like they're sleeping...

THE JOURNALIST

Like they're sleeping?

THE AGENT

It's like he can't deal with the fact that they're dead.

The Agent is practically mesmerized by the photos in the magazine.

THE JOURNALIST

Yeah...

THE AGENT

So if we can play up the sympathy for the victims, humanize them, make them more real for him, we might make him feel bad enough to crack, do something stupid, turn himself in, even.

THE JOURNALIST

Why would you try to direct the coverage? How do you know he'll read it?

THE AGENT

Oh, he'll be following the media coverage. He'll be obsessed with it.

The tape recorder CLICKS off, and the Agent looks up, startled.

THE AGENT

What are you doing?

The Journalist fiddles with the recorder, turns the tape over.

THE JOURNALIST

My job.

The Agent snatches the recorder away.

THE AGENT

How did you end up here? How did you know I'd be here?

THE JOURNALIST

Instinct. He's here, or he's been here.

THE AGENT

Do you know where he's going?

THE JOURNALIST

How did you manage to be on the scene of the last murder before he even struck?

The Agent is angry but silent for a moment, then rises and tosses the recorder back to the Journalist.

THE AGENT

I don't want to see you again.

He stalks out of the diner.

IN THE CORNER

The Fan watches him leave.

INT./EXT. THE FAN'S CAR/RURAL ROAD - LATER

The Fan's old Ford chugs along the road. The Fan rests his elbow on the open window while he drives and hums to himself, the breeze in his hair.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NOON

An attractive WOMAN (white, 25-35), her long brown hair pulled back in a ponytail, jogs along the side of the road. She pays more attention to the scenery than anything else.

The GROWL of a car passing her O.S. hardly disturbs her, but the sound of it stopping ahead of her makes her look toward it.

HER FACE

as she approaches the car and stops cautiously at the passenger side window.

WOMAN

You're a long way from home. You lost?

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - RURAL ROADSIDE - SAME DAY

With a start, the Agent, in the driver's seat of the parked car, wakes from a catnap.

EXT. RURAL ROADSIDE

The Agent paces near his car, upset and shaken.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The Agent talks on his cell phone as he drives.

THE AGENT

I don't know how to explain it, honey. It's like... No, more like I can just feel where he's going. Like we're both using the same compass keyed to the same sick magnetic north... I can't even imagine what his final destination might be. He probably doesn't have one in mind... Right. I can only tail him, sometimes a step ahead, sometimes a step behind... No, you're right, it's never been like this before. This is weird. It's... Yeah, it's scaring the shit out of me.

The Agent drives past an abandoned and derelict farmhouse.

A green VW Beetle is on the side of the road, broken down. Smoke roils from its engine.

The Journalist stands next to the Beetle, tries to flag down the Agent's car.

THE AGENT

What?... I can't just leave in the middle of an investigation... Yeah, maybe, when this one's over...

The Agent looks back at the Beetle in the rearview mirror, then glances around at the surrounding countryside: nothing for miles, and nary a passing car but his own.

THE AGENT

Look, honey, I gotta go... Yeah, we'll talk about it later.

He hangs up, puts the phone on the passenger seat, and turns the car around.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR, NEAR THE BEETLE

The Agent makes the U-turn to come up beside the Beetle.

The Journalist sticks his head in the passenger-side window. He doesn't yet realize it's the Agent's car.

THE JOURNALIST

Hey, can you--  
(recognition)  
Oh.

THE AGENT

Get in.

The Journalist climbs in, picks up the phone.

THE JOURNALIST

We could call for a tow truck.

The Agent takes his phone from the Journalist and puts it in his jacket pocket.

THE AGENT

The next town is just a few miles down the road.

THE JOURNALIST

Oh. Okay.

The Journalist sees:

THE PHOTO

of the woman taped to the dashboard.

EXT. SMALL TOWN #3 MAIN STREET

More small-town Americana: shops, a diner. The Agent's car pulls in to park near the police station.

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR

THE AGENT

I'm gonna check in with the local PD.

The Journalist looks lost. He glances up and down the street: no service station.

THE AGENT

They can probably recommend a towing service.

INT. POLICE STATION

The station is small and quiet -- this is a sleepy town. The Agent and the Journalist enter.

The POLICE CHIEF (30-40s) holds up a finger to indicate he'll be with them in a moment. He bounces his baby in his arms while his wife looks on, smiling.

The Agent, melancholy, watches them...

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - MORNING

The faces of the Agent and his WIFE -- the woman in the dashboard photo -- are close as they make love urgently. They are close to orgasm. Their passionate moans erupt into laughter as they climax.

MINUTES LATER

They lie, exhausted, entangled in the sheets and each other.

The Agent smiles, laughs gently, as he caresses his wife's skin, kisses her shoulder, nuzzles her neck, buries his face in her long brown hair.

THE AGENT

So, do you think we did it this morning?

WIFE

Give your boys a chance to swim upstream, would you?

The Agent grins and mimes glancing at a wristwatch.

WIFE

Don't be disappointed if it doesn't happen right away. It can take months, and we've only just started.

THE AGENT

I can't wait.

They kiss, slowly, romantically.

IN THE KITCHEN

The Agent and his wife bustle around the kitchen, prepare breakfast, take every opportunity they can to touch and caress each other in passing.

The phone RINGS and the Agent picks it up.

THE AGENT

Hello?

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUED

The Agent watches as the Police Chief hands the baby back to his wife, kisses them both, and escorts them to the door, then turns at last to the Agent and the Journalist.

POLICE CHIEF

Now, what can I do for you gentlemen?

The Agent flashes his ID.

THE AGENT  
I'm with the FBI.

INT. DRUGSTORE - LATER

The Agent peruses the newsstand, picks up the tiny local weekly newspaper, the dailies from Lincoln and Omaha, and the weekly national newsmagazines. All blare the strangler story with lurid headlines like KILLER STALKS MIDWEST and STRANGLER AMONG US.

The Agent carries the periodicals to the checkout counter.

The TEENAGE CHECKER gawks at him in awe.

TEENAGER  
You're that FBI agent. I saw you on TV.

The Agent pushes the magazines and papers toward the teen.

THE AGENT  
How much?

TEEN  
You're like "Silence of the Lambs." That was a cool movie.

The Agent slaps a \$10 bill on the counter, gathers up his reading material, and stalks away.

TEEN  
Hey, man, can I have your autograph?

EXT. MAIN STREET

The Agent stands on the sidewalk outside the drugstore, takes in the laid-back ambience of the town.

A dog lazes on the sidewalk outside a shop, yawns in the sun.

A single stoplight flashes yellow in one direction, red in the other, at the town's only intersection.

The Fan's beat-up Ford rolls by.

The Agent, alert and expectant, strolls slowly toward his car, still parked down the street near the police station.

The Ford rolls by him again, moving in the other direction, more slowly this time.

The Agent locks glances with the Fan, who looks away nonchalantly and casually picks up speed.

The Agent considers this for a moment, then dismisses it.

DOWN THE STREET - MINUTES LATER

The Agent approaches his car. A tow truck towing the green Beetle stops nearby.

The Journalist climbs down from the cab. He waves to the driver as the truck continues on its way.

The Agent watches the Beetle as the Journalist approaches.

THE AGENT

You know, for a while the Beetle was the serial killer's car of choice.

THE JOURNALIST

You're kidding?

THE AGENT

No. Ted Bundy's was tan.

The Journalist laughs uncomfortably.

The Police Chief's car stops behind the two men, and the chief, in the driver's seat, beckons them.

POLICE CHIEF

We've got something.

THE AGENT

Already?

INT./EXT. THE POLICE CHIEF'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The car speeds along the road past the abandoned farmhouse, where the Beetle had broken down earlier.

The Agent, in the front passenger seat, watches the house zoom by, exchanges a glance with the Journalist in the backseat.

THE AGENT  
Where are we going?

POLICE CHIEF  
Hospital.

THE AGENT  
She's alive?

INT. HOSPITAL - PRIVATE ROOM

The Agent, tense and nervous, rushes into the room.  
He sees:

A BLOND WOMAN

The woman (white, 18-22) lies in the bed,  
unconscious. Her face is badly beaten.

He relaxes, lets out a sigh.

The Journalist and the Police Chief enter behind him.

THE AGENT  
She's not one of his.

The Police Chief is taken aback by this abrupt pronouncement.

The Journalist is ready with his tape recorder.

POLICE CHIEF  
How can you tell?

THE AGENT  
She doesn't fit the victim  
profile, for one thing.

POLICE CHIEF  
Maybe he's not so picky as you  
think he is.

THE AGENT  
No. Look.

The Agent steps up to the bed, lowers his voice,  
indicates the ligature mark around her neck.

## THE AGENT

Our guy uses his hands, not a wire or a rope or anything. And apart from the cause of death, they're not injured. He's charming, attractive -- he gets real close to his victims without raising any suspicion. Whoever attacked this girl came from behind -- that's how you strangle with wire -- because he knew talking to her would do no good. Our strangler is confident -- this guy isn't. He's got some kind of deformity or a stutter that turns women off. But look at this--

The Agent indicates the girl's hands, which are scratched and bruised.

## THE AGENT

She was able to fight back, so this guy's not real big or strong. Chief, look for a skinny guy, 20s, not very attractive, whom she recently rebuffed. He's your man.

The Police Chief is dumbfounded. The Journalist grins.

## THE AGENT

This is just a coincidence. But he's here, our man. I feel it.

## INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

The Agent strolls purposefully along a corridor near the children's ward.

Children LAUGH in a room he passes. He stops to watch:

## TWO KIDS

chatter happily to each other from their beds.

## INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - MORNING

As before: In the kitchen, the Agent picks up the RINGING phone.

THE AGENT  
Hello?

VOICE  
We've got a bad one.

THE AGENT  
How bad?

VOICE  
The worst. Can you come down to  
the scene?

THE AGENT  
It's here?

VOICE  
In DC.

EXT. PLAYGROUND - FLASHBACK - LATER

Intense police activity: many cops, uniformed and plainclothes, stand around. Flashing lights of police cars everywhere. Eager TV cameras hover at the edges of the scene.

The thickest cluster of cops and FBI agents stand around a child-sized form, covered with a sheet, on the ground near the swingset.

The Agent approaches the body.

THE AGENT  
What have we got?

A forensics agent bends down to uncover the child.

The Agent's face contorts in horror.

THE AGENT  
Jesus God.

He can say nothing else for a long moment.

THE AGENT  
Was she raped?

FORENSICS AGENT  
Looks like every orifice.  
Including a couple he made  
himself.

THE AGENT  
Christ almighty.

Again, a long, horrified silence.

THE AGENT  
A guy who gets off on something  
like this isn't going to stop at  
one.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. MAIN STREET - THAT EVENING

The Journalist leans against the Agent's car, still  
parked near the police station, talks on his cell  
phone.

THE JOURNALIST  
--this guy is great. Save the  
cover -- this is gonna be huge.  
MIND OF A CRIMINAL, MIND OF A  
COP. Hello, Pulitzer number 2...  
Don't worry, I'll get him to  
talk...

He sees the Agent exit the police station and head  
for the car.

THE JOURNALIST  
--naw, we're talking movie  
rights for this one, it's that  
hot...

The Agent is close now, within earshot.

THE JOURNALIST  
Right. So. Thanks. Gotta go.

He hangs up the phone and grins at the Agent.

THE JOURNALIST  
Sticking around?

THE AGENT  
He's here.

THE JOURNALIST  
Gimme a lift to the motel?

The Agent considers him for a long moment.

THE AGENT

I just want to make one thing clear: We're not going to be friends. We're not going to be pals. Got it?

THE JOURNALIST

Look, I know you got fucked by the media in DC. I don't care about sensationalism. I just want to tell your story.

THE AGENT

I don't have a story.

THE JOURNALIST

How you do this. Why you do this. How it affects you. Don't you think the public has a right to understand this?

THE AGENT

Nobody else has to understand me.

THE JOURNALIST

You enjoy what happened with those vultures back in DC?

The Agent opens the driver's side door of the car.

THE AGENT

Get in.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD - DUSK

The car zips along the darkening road.

The Journalist holds his tape recorder while the Agent talks.

THE AGENT

You know how athletes talk about being in the zone, and artists talk about following their bliss?

THE JOURNALIST

Yeah.

THE AGENT

Well, this was my bliss,  
thinking like serial killers.  
Sick, huh? It was like a game.  
It never used to bother me. I  
just got in the zone, got into  
the minds of madmen, and then  
went home for dinner.

THE JOURNALIST

So what happened?

THE AGENT

DC happened. I'd seen horrible  
things before, but those kids...

THE JOURNALIST

That was a bad one.

THE AGENT

You don't know the half of it.  
The worst details were never  
released publicly. He tortured  
those kids...

A long, uncomfortable, silent moment passes.

THE AGENT

No more now.

INT. THE AGENT'S OFFICE - FLASHBACK - NITE

Files and papers overflow from chairs, the desk, the  
windowsill.

Crime-scene photos of dead children, victims of the  
DC Child Killer, are arrayed on a bulletin board on  
one wall.

Series of shots:

A) the Agent half-leans, half-sits on his desk,  
considers the photos

B) the Agent stands before the bulletin board, peers  
closely at one photo, then another

C) the Agent sits in a chair near the board, head in  
his hands

LATER

The Assistant Director sticks his head into the Agent's office.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Go home, would ya? Remind your  
wife what you look like.

The Agent stands near the board again, sighs.

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK

The Agent closes the front door in the foyer. The living room beyond is lit.

His wife stands across the room near a window, looks out into the darkness beyond.

IN THE LIVING ROOM

The Agent comes up behind his wife.

A half-empty glass of wine dangles from her hand.

Weary, he wraps his arms around her from behind and lays his head on her shoulder. She smiles.

They both stare out into the wooded yard, just visible in the night.

ON THE COUCH - LATER

The Agent's head rests in his wife's lap. He dozes fitfully, mutters unintelligibly in his sleep.

His wife sips from her freshened glass of wine, strokes his hair, shushes him gently.

He calms into a peaceful sleep.

END FLASHBACK

INT. MOTEL #3 ROOM - NITE

The room is dimly lit. The Agent, still fully clothed, lies in bed on his side in the same pose he took with his wife on the couch. His cell phone is at his ear.

THE AGENT  
Talk to me. Just... talk to  
me...

EXT. WOODS - DREAM SEQUENCE - DAY

As before: The POV of the Agent as he stumbles through the woods. Look down: branches and dried leaves CRACKLE underfoot.

HEAVY BREATHING as he comes upon the fully clothed body of a woman.

She lies on her side in the leaves and dirt, her back to the man -- she might almost be asleep.

Half her mane of long brown hair lies along her arm, the other half flows down her back -- it has been particularly arranged.

His hand reaches to turn her over, look at her face. He begins to roll her body over--

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. MOTEL #3 ROOM - MORNING

The Agent, asleep in his clothes on the bed, awakes with a start to a POUNDING on the door.

THE AGENT

What?

POLICE CHIEF

(through the door)

Agent? We really need you, I'm afraid...

THE AGENT

(to himself)

Christ.

EXT. THE ABANDONED FARMHOUSE - DAY

Police cars, lights flashing, huddle near the house. The Police Chief's car and the Agent's car are parked nearby.

The Police Chief, the Agent, and the Journalist approach a taped-off area in front of the house, near a stand of trees. Local deputies hover in the background.

POLICE CHIEF

A real estate agent showing the property to some prospective buyers found the body about an hour ago. They turned her over, I'm afraid, thinking she might still be alive.

A woman -- the jogger -- lies face-up in the dirt, her face blue, her neck bruised, her long dark hair undone from her ponytail.

The Agent, distraught, cannot speak for a moment.

THE AGENT

No one reported her missing?

POLICE CHIEF

I know her. Her husband is in the Navy -- when he's at sea, she's on her own. No one would have missed her for days, probably.

THE AGENT

You called the Field Office in Omaha?

POLICE CHIEF

They're sending your team.

MINUTES LATER

The Agent stands to the side, unable to take his eyes off the dead woman.

The Journalist approaches him, tape recorder at the ready.

THE JOURNALIST

So do what you did in the hospital yesterday. Tell me about this guy.

THE AGENT

He'd never killed before Milwaukee, but he's been building to it.

The Agent folds his arms, stares at the dead woman for a long moment.

THE AGENT

It takes time to get comfortable with the idea of killing someone. So he's probably early to mid 30s. He's white, because serial killers rarely kill outside their race. He's intelligent, charming, operates well in society. He has a responsible job, he could be married or in a relationship. He'd be the last person his neighbors would suspect of murder. Of serial murder.

THE JOURNALIST

Do you know that for sure?

THE AGENT

Not with 100 percent certainty, but--

THE JOURNALIST

How accurate are your profiles?

THE AGENT

They're usually dead on. I'd be surprised if he deviated much from this description.

THE JOURNALIST

Thirty-ish, smart, blends in. You just described both of us.

THE AGENT

I didn't say he'd be easy to find.

The Agent approaches the dead woman, bends down, and just barely touches her hair, almost stroking it.

THE AGENT

The weird thing is, he doesn't take souvenirs.

The Journalist comes up behind him.

THE JOURNALIST

Is that unusual?

THE AGENT

Yeah, really unusual. They typically take something -- a lock of hair, a piece of clothing or jewelry -- something as a memento of the encounter.

THE JOURNALIST

Why? Why do they take it?

THE AGENT

They'll use it to masturbate--

THE JOURNALIST

Masturbate?

THE AGENT

Yeah, that's pretty common, actually. They just want a reminder of the satisfaction they got from committing the crime itself.

THE JOURNALIST

So why wouldn't this guy take a souvenir?

THE AGENT

I dunno. Maybe he's not getting the satisfaction he's looking for.

THE JOURNALIST

Maybe his souvenirs just aren't obvious.

THE AGENT

Could be. Maybe it's something he brings with him to the scene, uses somehow in the murder, and takes away again.

THE JOURNALIST

Maybe he takes photographs.

LATER

The Agent and the Journalist walk toward the Agent's car.

Several black FBI cars and the forensics van pull into the yard.

THE AGENT

They'll be here a while. We can set up shop in the police station.

THE JOURNALIST

You're staying here in town? Two bodies back you were gone before your people even arrived.

The Agent turns his head this way and that, as if listening to something only he can hear.

THE AGENT

He's still here.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The car heads back to town, the Agent at the wheel and the Journalist in the passenger seat.

THE JOURNALIST

How do you know he's still here?

THE AGENT

I don't know. Maybe he's moving with me. Maybe if I stay in one place for a bit he'll show his hand. I don't know. I just know I need to get him out of my head soon.

The Journalist taps the photo of the Agent's wife taped to the dashboard.

THE JOURNALIST

She's not one of the victims.

THE AGENT

My wife.

THE JOURNALIST

Ah. Is she why you're so obsessed with this case?

THE AGENT

Obsessed?

THE JOURNALIST

You don't look like you've slept in a month.

THE AGENT

I sleep okay.

THE JOURNALIST

So it's just a coincidence that  
your wife fits the victim  
profile to a T?

THE AGENT

I guess it is.

(beat)

When I saw that woman dead in  
the park, back in Milwaukee--

THE JOURNALIST

That was the second victim,  
right?

THE AGENT

Right. The first was in the  
alley, the second in the park.

THE JOURNALIST

Right.

THE AGENT

Anyway, when I saw her, all I  
saw was long brown hair. She was  
just... there, you know, like  
she was sleeping, and all I saw  
was my wife lying there. That  
doesn't sound very professional,  
does it?

THE JOURNALIST

It sounds human.

THE AGENT

So why are you obsessed with it?

THE JOURNALIST

Obsessed?

THE AGENT

Or are you just chasing another  
Pulitzer?

THE JOURNALIST

That's my job.

INT./EXT. AGENT'S CAR/MAIN STREET

The Agent's car pulls onto Main Street near the police station.

THE AGENT

Shit.

The police station is surrounded by news vans and satellite trucks.

THE AGENT

The circus has arrived.

TV NEWS CLIP

INT. NEWS STUDIO

TV footage of a newscast:

NEWS ANCHOR

--as DC continues to reel from the horrifying rape-murders of its youngest, most vulnerable citizens. Meanwhile, a shocking development today as one of the FBI's lead investigators in the case was caught on tape joking about the perpetrator while other agents laughed.

Report cuts to bouncing, jostling video footage -- from a camera held to disguise the fact that it's running:

A group of oblivious FBI agents stand around another playground crime scene, small, white-draped, child-shaped lump on the ground nearby.

THE AGENT

Can you imagine the kind of sad, sick --BEEP-- we've got here? Maybe if Disney made porn these --BEEP--ers could get off at home.

The gathered agents laugh.

Back to studio:

NEWS ANCHOR

Outraged parents' organizations demanded that the agent, one of the FBI's top profilers, be removed from the case immediately.

Video clips:

ANXIOUS PARENT #1

This is outrageous! Has he ever lost a child? Does he realize the pain that his thoughtlessness inflicts?

ANXIOUS PARENT #2

I think we deserve to have someone with a little more sensitivity to the situation heading up the investigation.

Back to studio:

NEWS ANCHOR

We caught up with the agent in question outside his Quantico office.

Video clip:

The Agent surrounded by a bouquet of microphones.

THE AGENT

I'm sincerely sorry for any pain I've caused the families of the victims in this case. I'd never have said such a thing if I'd known the camera was on. We are not insensitive to the magnitude of the crimes we investigate. But the fact is that black humor is what allows us to keep the distance and objectivity we need in order to deal with horrors like this day after day, and to eventually catch this killer.

Back to studio:

NEWS ANCHOR

The FBI issued a statement echoing the agent's apology but stating unconditional support for, quote, "one of our best."

End video clip.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - THE AGENT'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - NITE

The Agent's personal car, Virginia plates, pulls into the driveway of a darkened house on a wooded hillside.

An SUV, Virginia plates, is neatly parked near the house.

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE

The Agent closes the front door quietly. The house is dark.

IN THE UPSTAIRS HALL

The Agent stops quietly at the bedroom doorway to see his wife asleep in their bed, her back to him.

IN THE BEDROOM

The Agent, stripped to his shorts, climbs quietly into the bed.

He lies down, faces away from his wife, tries not to disturb her.

She stirs and rolls over to lay her hand on his arm.

WIFE

I saw the news.

THE AGENT

You know that I'm... You know.

WIFE

I know. What is this, eight?

THE AGENT

Nine.

WIFE

I'm sorry.

THE AGENT

He left her on the school playground for the other kids to find this morning.

WIFE

God.

THE AGENT

How else can you process that  
kind of information and still  
stay sane?

She snuggles closer to him, his back still to her,  
and curls her arm around him.

She caresses his chest, kisses his shoulder gently,  
consoles him.

WIFE

I know why you have to be gone  
all the time, but I wish you  
didn't.

He says nothing.

Her touch grows more sexual, more urgent.

He closes his eyes as if in pain. He still does not  
turn to face her.

WIFE

Remember what we talked about?

THE AGENT

Of course.

She continues to caress him.

WIFE

We can't wait forever.

He shrugs her hands off.

THE AGENT

For Christ's sake, not now,  
please.

WIFE

Okay.

She draws back to her side of the bed and turns her  
back on him once again.

END FLASHBACK

INT. MOTEL #3 ROOM - NITE

The room is dimly lit. The Agent lies in bed, talks quietly on his cell phone.

THE AGENT

Remember what we talked about?... I'm sorry we got interrupted... Of course I still want to, it was just, then... I know, and you were great, you're the best... No, I wouldn't let you do it all alone... This'll all be over soon, I can feel it. And then I'll come home.

INT. RURAL COLORADO POLICE STATION - DAY

A slow day. The bored young officer flips around the TV. Every channel he flips to shows the same scene: the funeral of the jogger victim.

The Cop watches out of the corner of his eye while he reads the newspaper -- headline: STRANGLER VICTIM TO BE LAID TO REST.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Golly, I love that satellite. CNN, MSNBC, FOX, BBC and the Spanish news station -- 400 channels of the same thing.

THE COP

Try the paper.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Same difference.

THE COP

Try the funnies.

Flip, flip, flip: angles on mourning townspeople, local cops, the Feds, the grieving widower in his Navy dress uniform.

THE COP

Wait. Go back.

The younger cop flips back just in time for a closeup:

THE AGENT AND THE JOURNALIST

off to one side of the cemetery, talk and survey the scene.

THE COP

Huh.

JUNIOR OFFICER

What's that, boss?

THE COP

That's the profiler who ran the conference in Milwaukee.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Busy guy.

THE COP

Yeah.

Flip, flip, flip: a minister, a coffin, flowers.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Say, you get that game mounted, from your little hunting trip after Milwaukee?

THE COP

It's not really the mounting kind.

JUNIOR OFFICER

Gonna have to show me sometime.

THE COP

You bet.

EXT. CEMETERY

As seen on TV. The whole town seems to have turned out for one of their own.

The periphery of the gathering is ringed by satellite trucks. Local cops keep the press at a distance.

The Journalist stands with the Agent, not far from the graveside ceremony.

The widower tosses a handful of dirt onto the lowered coffin.

The Journalist wears a 35mm camera around his neck, snaps the occasional picture of the scene.

The Agent scans the crowd suspiciously.

THE AGENT

He's here, goddammit. I know  
he's here. I can practically  
taste him.

THE JOURNALIST

They haven't had much luck at  
other funerals, have they?

The Agent looks away, searches the crowd.

The Journalist snaps a discreet picture of him.

THE AGENT

They didn't have my eye there.

THE JOURNALIST

How do you pick out a guy who  
blends in?

THE AGENT

I'll know him when I see him.

The Agent watches as the dazed widower greets the  
mourners who come forward to pay their respects --  
one of which is the Fan.

The Agent, riveted, watches the Fan shake the  
widower's hand.

The Fan walks a few steps away, then turns and snaps  
a photo of the widower and the open grave.

THE AGENT

(to himself)

He takes photographs...

THE JOURNALIST

What?

The Agent is off. He sprints across the cemetery.

The Fan, startled, sees the Agent heading his way,  
looks around, and bolts straight toward the mob of TV  
cameras.

Local cops and other agents, their attention drawn by  
the commotion, race toward the Fan.

The Agent is on the Fan first. He knocks the Fan to  
the ground right in front of a dozen videocameras.

The Fan's disposable camera flies from his hand and lands in the grass.

A hundred flashbulbs erupt at once, and a chorus of reporters' voices demand information.

The Fan, spreadeagled on the ground, grins weakly as the Agent snaps cuffs on him.

THE FAN

You got me.

REPORTERS

(simultaneous)

Is he the Strangler? / Can we  
get a statement, Agent? / What  
tipped you off? / What's he  
wanted for?

The Agent drags the Fan to his feet.

A cop hands the Agent the disposable camera.

THE AGENT

Gee, I just wanted to ask him  
where he got this nice camera.  
We'll be more comfortable  
talking down at the station.

The Fan looks back over his shoulder to smile at the news cameras as he's led away.

INT. POLICE STATION

The grinning Fan sits by himself, not at all upset by the shackles that cuff both his hands to a chair in a far corner.

A bulletin board near him is covered with crime-scene photos of the dead jogger.

Cops and FBI huddle on the other side of the room.

The Agent confers with the Police Chief and the Assistant Director.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

He hasn't asked for a lawyer?

THE AGENT

No. He hasn't said anything at  
all. But he's enjoying this.  
He's really enjoying this.

POLICE CHIEF

What made you think he might be our guy?

THE AGENT

The camera. No one but media takes pictures at a funeral... except maybe our killer, as a souvenir.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

We're running his prints, and we'll have his car soon. We'll know everything there is to know about him by morning.

THE AGENT

We need to know... The killer had to have known the first victim, back in Milwaukee. This didn't start out as a spree, and she wasn't picked at random. We have to find a connection, if there is one, between her and him to make this stick.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

We're on it. You, I'm ordering to take the night off.

THE AGENT

Sir--

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Get outta here.

Behind them, the Fan eyes the crime-scene photos on the bulletin board with relish. He shouts from across the room.

THE FAN

Hey! Can I have one of these when you guys are done with them?

EXT. HONKY-TONK BAR - NITE

The blare of a jukebox oozes out into the night.

The Journalist's Beetle pulls into the crowded parking lot.

INT. HONKY-TONK BAR

A comfortably blowsy hangout, busy with a friendly local crowd and loud with jukebox tunes.

The Agent, dressed more casually than his typical dark suit, sits at the bar, nurses a whiskey. He's a tad more relaxed, taps his toe to the music a little. But hunched over his drink, he exudes an aura of don't-touch-me, and the stools are either side of him are empty.

He watches the pretty BARTENDER (white, female, 30ish), her long brown hair tied into a ponytail with a bright red silk scarf.

She catches his eye and smiles at him.

He looks away, down into his drink.

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - NITE

The Agent closes the front door in the foyer. The living room beyond is half-dark.

His wife is curled up on the couch, a glass of scotch in her hand and a half-empty bottle on the coffee table in front of her.

NEAR THE COUCH

His wife watches without expression as the Agent, standing over her, picks up the bottle and considers it ruefully.

THE AGENT

Again?

She shrugs.

THE AGENT

Why?

WIFE

I'm just... keeping myself company. You haven't touched me in weeks. A girl's gotta stay warm somehow.

THE AGENT

I know. I'm sorry.

WIFE

I know.

THE AGENT

I just... can't. If you'd seen what this guy does to those kids... Not that I'd want you to see...

WIFE

That's not gonna happen to our child... if we ever get there.

THE AGENT

No, it's not that--

He pauses uncomfortably.

THE AGENT

I can't even think about-- When I see what gets this guy hard--

She watches him sympathetically.

THE AGENT

It makes me sick to my stomach, just thinking about-- I can't... I just can't...

He stares helplessly at his wife, but she says nothing.

THE AGENT

It's not you.

WIFE

I know.

She sips from her drink.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HONKY-TONK BAR - CONTINUOUS

As before. The Agent takes a sip from his still half-full glass. The Journalist takes a stool next to him at the bar.

THE AGENT

How's the Bug?

THE JOURNALIST  
Blew a belt. Now it's good as  
new.

The Bartender approaches.

BARTENDER  
(to Journalist)  
What's your poison, sweetheart?

THE JOURNALIST  
Corona.

BARTENDER  
(to Agent)  
Top you up, honey?

The Agent shakes his head.

THE JOURNALIST  
So, do we have him?

The Agent waits for the Bartender to step away.

THE AGENT  
You haven't covered serial  
killers before. You'd have known  
about souvenirs. I follow the  
media on all our cases -- I've  
never seen your name before.

THE JOURNALIST  
Oops. Found out.

THE AGENT  
Did you even win a Pulitzer?

THE JOURNALIST  
It was for political coverage.  
My series on "Machiavelli in the  
Modern World."

THE AGENT  
So why this story?

The Bartender returns with the Journalist's beer,  
flashes a flirty smile at both men.

She steps away to attend to another customer.

The Journalist takes a long, slow swig from his beer.

THE JOURNALIST

The first victim, back in Milwaukee... she was my sister.

THE AGENT

What? We looked. We couldn't find any relatives.

THE JOURNALIST

Different last names. She took our stepfather's -- I didn't. We weren't really in touch for the last few years.

The Agent stares down into his drink.

EXT. MILWAUKEE ALLEY - FLASHBACK - NITE - RAIN

Neon lights reflected in puddles. Behind a dripping Dumpster and near a slick brick wall, a woman, dead on the wet ground, posed like the others, as if asleep.

END FLASHBACK

INT. HONKY-TONK BAR - CONTINUOUS

As before: the Agent and the Journalist at the bar.

THE JOURNALIST

Why was she different?

THE AGENT

What?

THE JOURNALIST

My sister. She was killed there in the alley and her body was left there. The others have all been dumped in the woods, but they weren't killed there. Why was she different?

THE AGENT

I think... He didn't intend to kill her, your sister. I mean, he didn't plan it -- it was an impulse, sudden. The posing, afterwards--

THE JOURNALIST

The posing?

THE AGENT

He was sorry. He just wanted them to look nice.

THE JOURNALIST

Not sorry enough to turn himself in, though.

THE AGENT

No. He ran. He was scared, maybe. Not of being caught, but at what he'd done.

THE JOURNALIST

So why did he kill again? Maybe he was scared because he enjoyed killing and wanted to do it some more?

THE AGENT

Maybe. Or maybe... I know this sounds perverse, but the subsequent killings may have been a way of atoning for that first murder.

THE JOURNALIST

Atoning? By killing again?

THE AGENT

Imagine this: Something your sister does enrages him, and he kills her impulsively. This shocks him, so he runs away, calms down. He's not a killer, he tells himself, that wasn't like him at all. And to prove it, he'll interact with women who look like your sister, just to show himself that he's not driven to kill them, too.

THE JOURNALIST

But he is.

## THE AGENT

He is. He sweet-talks them, maybe, he charms them, but they don't react the way he expects them to -- maybe by just not being your sister. When they fail to be what he needs them to be, he gets angry and kills them in a rage. And then he's remorseful again, tries to hide them.

## THE JOURNALIST

He doesn't hide them too well, though, does he? You keep finding them.

## THE AGENT

It may be more a matter of hiding the truth from himself than from anyone else. He'd probably be relieved to be caught, because that'd stop him from killing again.

## THE JOURNALIST

That doesn't sound like the joker with the camera back at the station.

## THE AGENT

No, it doesn't.  
(beat)  
I don't think it's him.

## LATER

The place has nearly emptied out.

The Journalist and the Agent still sit at the bar.  
The Agent swallows the last of his whiskey.

The Journalist waves the Bartender over, tipsily waggles his empty beer bottle at her -- he's already had more than a few.

## THE JOURNALIST

One more for the road.

## BARTENDER

I think you've had enough, honey.

She winks at the Agent, still at the bar next to the Journalist.

BARTENDER

Least you made up for him. I've never seen a man make a single drink last so long.

The Agent tips his empty glass at her in an apologetic salute.

THE AGENT

Nothin' personal, ma'am. An agent must be fit for duty at all times.

BARTENDER

(nods at Journalist)  
He's not fit for much right now. How 'bout a nice cup of coffee for the road, boys?

THE JOURNALIST

Sounds good.

THE AGENT

Not for me, thanks.

The Agent stands, leaves a generous tip on the bar, makes for the exit. He nods to the only other patron still left in the bar, a drunk in a corner, who nods back tipsily.

THE JOURNALIST

Guess I'm out, too, then.

BARTENDER

Oh no you're not. You're not getting behind a wheel in that condition -- police chief'd have my license. Sit your butt down while I brew us up a pot.

The Bartender shoots a coy look back at the Journalist as she heads for the coffeemaker, and he grins back at her.

The Agent, at the exit, makes note of their flirtation.

EXT. MOTEL #3 - NITE

The Agent fumbles with the key in the door to his room.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - THE AGENT'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - NITE

The Agent's personal car pulls in near the SUV, which is parked at a crazy angle.

INT. FOYER OF HOUSE

The Agent closes the front door. The living room beyond is half-dark.

His wife is curled up on the couch with a glass and a bottle.

He heads up the stairs, doesn't acknowledge her.

His wife silently raises her glass to him, doesn't move from the couch.

END FLASHBACK

INT. MOTEL #3 ROOM - NITE

The Agent lies on the bed, curled up in despair, his cell phone to his ear.

THE AGENT

Honey, are you there?... Please  
pick up... Please...

Silence. He closes the phone and closes his eyes.

INT. RURAL COLORADO POLICE STATION - MORNING

The Colorado Cop watches TV news:

A video clip of the dramatic arrest of the Fan at the funeral cuts to an anchor and a pundit.

PUNDIT

I mean, this is sensational  
stuff. This nutjob was  
absolutely taunting the cops and  
the feds, showing up at the  
funeral like that--

ANCHOR

If this is the guy. We don't know that yet.

PUNDIT

Oh, this freak is the guy...

As the debate continues, the Colorado Cop turns away from the TV, remembers:

INT. MILWAUKEE LECTURE HALL - FLASHBACK

The small auditorium is filled with law enforcement officers in uniforms from all over the U.S.

The Agent is at the lectern on the stage. Projected slides of a gruesome crime scene illuminate the wall behind him.

THE AGENT

--one of the most important things to learn is to trust your instincts. Use the senses, the intuition you've developed through years of dealing with scumbags.

A ripple of laughter through the audience.

THE AGENT

When that little bell goes off in your head, the one that says "This is the guy," listen to it. More often than not, that little voice knows what it's talking about.

The Colorado Cop, in the audience, listens attentively.

END FLASHBACK

EXT. IMPOUND YARD - DAY

The Agent and the Assistant Director walk through an improvised impound yard behind the police station.

White-jumpsuited FBI technicians swarm over the Fan's old Ford -- one of them looks up at the Assistant Director and shakes his head.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

We're just not finding anything we can use. Between that and the Ohio speeding ticket--

THE AGENT

Are we sure he got that ticket on the same day as the second Milwaukee murder?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

No question. He gave the ticketing officer a hard time and got a free trip to the station for it. He was fingerprinted.

THE AGENT

Shit.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

He was absolutely in Cincinnati on the same day our second girl was getting strangled in Milwaukee.

THE AGENT

This guy just likes getting arrested.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

We're gonna have to let him go.

THE AGENT

I was starting to have my doubts about him anyway.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATER

The Agent stands on the steps of the station, surrounded by cameras and microphones. The media huddles around him as close as they can.

THE AGENT

--was released a few hours ago. Not only could we find no evidence whatsoever to tie him to the strangling spree, we have conclusive proof of his whereabouts at the time of one of the murders, and he was nowhere in the vicinity.

The flurry of shouted questions. One wins out.

REPORTER #1

How close is "nowhere in the vicinity"?

THE AGENT

He was several states away, in a county lockup.

Again, shouted questions run together, until:

REPORTER #2

What was he in jail for?

THE AGENT

He was arrested on a nonviolent misdemeanor charge. This man is not, I repeat, not a danger to anyone.

More shouts, then:

REPORTER #3

What about the reports that he had some sort of scrapbook of the stranglings?

THE AGENT

That's true, but he appears merely to be a crime buff, and not a criminal himself.

More shouted questions.

THE AGENT

There's really nothing more to say about this person. He is not a suspect.

More shouted questions.

THE AGENT

But I would like to say something to the real killer. If you're watching, I want you to know that I understand that you're sorry for what you've done, that none of it was meant to happen. I know what you're going through, and I want you to know that you can trust me. Come talk to me, and we'll make everything all right.

The Agent pauses for a moment to gaze sympathetically into the cameras while the reporters shout at him some more.

THE AGENT

I have nothing else.

He turns and enters the police station.

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

The TV in the station cuts away from live coverage of the Agent's press conference. Cops and agents near the TV wander away, discouraged by the turn of events.

The Agent enters.

The Journalist sits on a desk, turns away from the TV. He rises and sways from sudden vertigo. His hand shoots to his head as he winces in pain.

THE AGENT

One too many last night?

THE JOURNALIST

About ten too many, I think.

THE AGENT

I guess a pretty bartender is good for business. Or are you always the hard-drinking type of journalist?

THE JOURNALIST

She was cute, wasn't she?

The Agent says nothing.

THE JOURNALIST

So, do you really think the killer was watching that?

THE AGENT

Oh yeah. He's following the news, wondering how close we're getting.

THE JOURNALIST

That's pretty twisted.

THE AGENT

Sometimes these guys even try to ingratiate themselves with the investigators, really try to get the inside scoop.

THE JOURNALIST

You mean like by making friends with the cops?

THE AGENT

It's been known to happen.

THE JOURNALIST

Jesus.

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - FLASHBACK - MORNING

The Agent, dressed for work, sits on the edge of the bed, watches his wife sleep. She lies on her belly, her head turned away from him. He strokes her long hair.

She stirs but does not turn to him.

WIFE

Mmmm?

THE AGENT

They found him.

WIFE

Hmmm?

THE AGENT

He's a paramedic, the sick bastard. There was another kid this morning, and God, he responded to the 911 call. Started asking all sorts of questions of the cops on the scene, and they knew my profile and they got suspicious. He hasn't even asked for a lawyer.

WIFE

Does this mean I get my husband back?

THE AGENT

Absolutely. I have to go help them with the interrogation, but I'll be home tonight.

WIFE

I'll be here.

He bends over her, kisses the back of her head, strokes her hair. Then he rises to leave.

At the door, he looks back at her.

THE AGENT

He smiles. His eyes shine with love.

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

THE JOURNALIST

So what happens when this guy does turn himself in, and trusts you to take care of him? You gonna be pals with him?

THE AGENT

I'm gonna throw his ass in jail. And then I'm gonna help the prosecutors in Wisconsin and Iowa and Nebraska convict him and put him behind bars for as many years as possible.

THE JOURNALIST

So he gets to live?

A phone RINGS in the background.

THE AGENT

Maybe not. Nebraska has the death penalty.

THE JOURNALIST

But there's no guarantee he dies.

THE AGENT

No.

POLICE CHIEF

Agent?

The Agent turns to see the Police Chief, who holds a phone receiver toward him.

POLICE CHIEF

There's a call for you, sir.

INT. RURAL COLORADO POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

The Colorado Cop holds the phone receiver to his ear.

THE COLORADO COP

Agent, I'm calling from the Holyoke, Colorado, sheriff's office over in Phillips County.

INT. POLICE STATION - CONTINUOUS

THE AGENT

(on the phone)

That's not all that far from here, is it?

THE COLORADO COP

(over the phone)

No, sir, it sure isn't. Just a short hop over the border.

THE AGENT

What can I do for you?

THE COLORADO COP

It's more what I can do for you, sir. I saw on the news that you had to let your suspect go. I think I may have some information pertaining to the case.

THE AGENT

What've you got?

THE COLORADO COP

I'd much rather speak to you in person, sir. Would you mind if I took a drive over to you?

THE AGENT

Not at all.

THE COLORADO COP

I'll see you soon, then.

THE AGENT

All right.

THE COLORADO COP

Oh, and sir, I really enjoyed  
your profiling seminar in  
Milwaukee. It was very  
enlightening.

THE AGENT

Glad to hear it.

The Agent hangs up the phone.

A young officer bursts into the station.

YOUNG OFFICER

It's her-- down at the tavern--  
oh God, she's dead like the  
others!

The Agent snaps around to glare at the Journalist,  
who's stunned.

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - MINUTES LATER

The Agent drives toward the honky-tonk, the  
Journalist beside him. The flashing lights of police  
cars precede and follow them.

THE JOURNALIST

God, I must have been the last  
one to see her alive.

THE AGENT

Yes.

THE JOURNALIST

She was... God, she was like my  
sister.

THE AGENT

How?

THE JOURNALIST

My sister, she was always taking  
someone under her wing, taking  
in strays. Men, I mean. Guys  
with broken hearts, she could  
just pick 'em out, she just  
wanted to take care of them.

THE AGENT

And you were the stray last  
night?

THE JOURNALIST

I guess. I mean, no! Jesus, I  
didn't kill her!

THE AGENT

Didn't kill who? Your sister?

THE JOURNALIST

Yes! No, I didn't kill her. Or  
the bartender. Christ.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The Agent's car, in the middle of a line of FBI and  
police cars.

Lights strobe, sirens wail.

They speed along the road, followed closely by a  
fleet of satellite news trucks.

EXT. HONKY-TONK BAR - MINUTES LATER

The parking lot is rimmed with police and FBI cars  
and evidence vans, not treading on any possible  
evidence in the lot itself.

One lone civilian car -- the Bartender's -- is parked  
in a far corner of the lot.

A line of cops in the road keeps the swarming media  
at bay.

NEAR THE BAR

A wooded area stretches out behind the building. The  
young officer who burst into the police station leads  
the Police Chief, the Assistant Director, and the  
Agent around the back of the bar, into the trees.

THE AGENT

Who found her?

YOUNG OFFICER

I-- I did, sir.

THE AGENT

What happened?

YOUNG OFFICER

I drove by earlier and saw her car in the lot, so I figured I'd stop and say hi. Figured she was opening up for the day. She-- she kinda liked me.

EXT. HONKY-TONK BAR - FLASHBACK

The young officer tries the door of the bar, but it's locked. He knocks, hard.

YOUNG OFFICER

Anybody home?

SIDE OF THE BAR

The young officer walks around the side of the building, toward where the Bartender's car is parked.

Her red scarf lies on the ground next to her car. He picks it up.

YOUNG OFFICER

What the...?

He sees footprints on the ground, steps back to avoid trampling them. He follows them around to the back of the building. The footprints enter a path into the trees.

END FLASHBACK

ON THE PATH

The Agent, the Assistant Director, the Police Chief, and the young officer walk down the path.

YOUNG OFFICER

She's just back here. Watch those prints there.

THE AGENT

You have the scarf?

The young officer pulls it from a pocket and hands it to the Agent, who caresses it.

THE AGENT

He's getting sloppy.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

He's getting more daring. He's  
got a real taste for it now.

YOUNG OFFICER

Here she is.

The Agent stares at:

THE BARTENDER

posed in death on the ground, like she's peacefully  
asleep, like the other victims.

THE AGENT

Why didn't you call it in? Why  
didn't you use your radio to  
call us out here? Why'd you race  
back in your car?

YOUNG OFFICER

I-- I don't know, sir.

The young officer bursts into tears.

IN THE PARKING LOT

The Journalist leans against a squad car, talks to a  
local cop.

The Agent strides toward them from behind the bar,  
the Police Chief and the Assistant Director at his  
heels.

THE AGENT

(to the cop, nodding  
at the Journalist)

Arrest him.

COP

What?

POLICE CHIEF

What?

The Police Chief looks to the Assistant Director for  
confirmation. The Assistant Director looks to the  
Agent. The Agent nods.

THE AGENT

Do it.

No one moves. The Journalist is stunned into silence.

The Agent swings the Journalist around bodily, seizes the Journalist's wrists, and slaps cuffs on him.

THE AGENT

You're under arrest for the murder of 13 women.

The Agent leans in over the Journalist's shoulder and whispers in his ear.

THE AGENT

I'm gonna call my wife and tell her that it's over, and that I'm coming home. And you're gonna get a needle in your arm.

The Agent shoves the Journalist toward the cop.

THE AGENT

Get him out of my sight.

The Agent stalks off toward his car.

INT. THE AGENT'S OFFICE - FLASHBACK - NITE

The Agent has the phone receiver to his ear while he pulls down DC crime-scene photos from the bulletin board. The phone on the other end of the line rings.

WIFE

(over the phone)

Hello?

THE AGENT

(on the phone)

It's over. It's done. I feel like I've been freed.

WIFE

Oh, sweetheart, that's wonderful.

THE AGENT

What're you doing?

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

The wife unpacks groceries from a bag. She has the phone jammed between her shoulder and ear.

WIFE

Oh, I've been out buying some  
stuff for a little celebration  
tonight.

She sips from a nearly empty glass of wine as she  
finishes unpacking and surveys her shopping.

WIFE

Damn.

INT. THE AGENT'S OFFICE

THE AGENT

What is it?

WIFE

Oh, I just forgot something.  
I'll have to run back out.

THE AGENT

Race you home?

WIFE

Mmmm. Hurry, my love.

The Agent closes his eyes in sheer delight at the  
sound of her voice.

END FLASHBACK

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The Agent drives. Fast.

He flashes on:

EXT. BEHIND THE BAR - FLASHBACK

The Bartender lies dead on the dirt path, looking  
like she's asleep.

END FLASHBACK

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

He drives. Faster.

He flashes on:

EXT. MILWAUKEE ALLEY - FLASHBACK

The Journalist's sister, dead on the wet ground,  
posed as in sleep.

END FLASHBACK

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

He drives, furious, going nowhere.

INT. SQUAD CAR

The cop drives, the Assistant Director in the  
passenger seat. In the back, the Police Chief and the  
Journalist, his hands cuffed behind him.

The Assistant Director turns to look at the  
Journalist.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I guess he just couldn't bear to  
look at you for another minute.

THE JOURNALIST

He said he was gonna call his  
wife. Maybe that's what he went  
to do.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

You misheard. His wife died last  
month. Car wreck.

THE JOURNALIST

What?

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

He drives, terrified.

He SLAMS on the brakes and the car fishtails to a  
stop, half off the road, with an enormous SQUEAL of  
rubber on asphalt.

He grips the steering wheel, knuckles white, and with  
a considered deliberateness, opens his mouth to

SCREAM...

EXT. HILLY VIRGINIA ROAD - FLASHBACK - NITE

The POV of a driver slowing as the car approaches a rain-slicked curve in the road. Flashing lights of emergency vehicles hidden around the curve cast weird shadows in the woods off either side of the road.

AROUND THE CURVE

The Agent's personal car comes to a stop, blocked by police cars and fire trucks in the road.

A cop approaches the driver's side of the Agent's car.

COP

You may want to detour around, sir. We've got a pretty bad accident here.

The Agent flashes his badge.

THE AGENT

I live just over the hill. What's going on?

COP

SUV went off the road. Speeding. Looks like she was drinking, too.

THE AGENT

She?

COP

Local woman, about 30. Maybe you know her--

The Agent is out of his car. He dashes through the emergency vehicles, their flashing lights in his face. He ignores the cries for him to stop from cops and EMS workers.

He comes to the edge of the road, where he sees:

A MANGLED SUV

His wife's, crashed against a tree.

Her body-bagged body is loaded onto a stretcher.

A strangled CRY catches in his throat as he stares at the scene in anguish.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

His scream dies. He sits perfectly still, barely breathing.

LATER

The Agent talks into his cell phone.

THE AGENT

Dammit, where are you? Jesus, answer the phone...

INT. SQUAD CAR

As before.

THE JOURNALIST

His wife died a month ago, and he's out here, working?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Too bad for you, huh? If he hadn't insisted on giving his seminar in Milwaukee as scheduled, even after... Well, then he wouldn't have been there to get on your tail right from the start.

THE JOURNALIST

Wait... He was already in Milwaukee before the murders started?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Yeah. Your dumb luck, asshole.

INT. POLICE STATION

The Agent and the Assistant Director confer.

THE AGENT

I don't want to do this here. Omaha, maybe, the Field Office. Somewhere... My ground, not neutral territory like this place here.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Are you sure it's him? Where's your evidence?

THE AGENT

Intuition. Instinct. I don't know.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Agent--

THE AGENT

We always suspected that the killer knew the first victim back in Milwaukee. He's her brother. He didn't come forward after her murder. He weaseled his way into the investigation. He's been tracking me. I thought I was following him, but--

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

All right. We'll arrange for a car, get him back to Omaha.

THE AGENT

No. Let me take him. On my own.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I can't let you--

THE AGENT

Have I ever-- I've never been wrong, have I? I've never let you down.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

No.

THE AGENT

Let me do this. Let me work on him. I-- I need to understand why... I need to understand him.

EXT. POLICE STATION - A LITTLE LATER

The Colorado Cop pushes his way through the mob of reporters and cameras outside the station.

INT. POLICE STATION

The Agent leans wearily against a desk in the back of the station. The Police Chief approaches.

POLICE CHIEF

He's ready.

THE AGENT

Thanks.

POLICE CHIEF

I don't wanna go all jurisdictional on you, Agent--

THE AGENT

You'll get him back. I promise. The Bureau appreciates your cooperation.

The Agent looks up to see:

THE COLORADO COP

enter the front door.

INT. MILWAUKEE LECTURE HALL - FLASHBACK

The seminar has ended. The Agent, at the lectern, is surrounded by a mob of eager cops, including the Colorado Cop, who hang on his every word.

THE AGENT

Would we have caught the DC Child Killer if he hadn't barged his way into our investigation? Sure, yeah. These guys, they get cocky -- they think they can taunt the cops with their cleverness. He was escalating, getting more daring. It was only a matter of time.

Shouts from the cops. One gets through.

COP

Let's us buy you a drink.

THE AGENT

Great. Lead on.

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE STATION

As before.

THE AGENT

Let's take him out the back way.  
The press is going wild out  
front.

He rises and moves toward the back door, away from  
the Colorado Cop, who stands near the front door,  
looking lost.

EXT. BACK OF POLICE STATION

The Agent ducks the Journalist, hands cuffed behind  
him, into the backseat of his car, passenger side.  
The Assistant Director slams the door.

THE AGENT

My cell phone's not working.  
I'll try to call you from the  
road somewhere.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Just get yourself and him to  
Omaha in one piece.

THE AGENT

He'll be fine.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

He's not the one I'm worried  
about.

INT./EXT. THE AGENT'S CAR/RURAL ROAD

The car pulls onto the paved road from a dirt track  
several hundred yards away from the police station.  
It drives away in the opposite direction from which  
the press face.

The Agent meets the gaze of the Journalist in the  
rearview mirror.

THE JOURNALIST

I didn't do this. I didn't kill  
my own sister.

The Agent says nothing, and drives.

LATER

The Agent and the Journalist trade glances in the mirror. Silence hangs heavy in the air.

The Journalist stares out the window at the rural nothingness passing by.

THE JOURNALIST

You were in Milwaukee before my sister was killed, weren't you?

THE AGENT

I was giving a seminar on criminal profiling. Ironic, isn't it?

THE JOURNALIST

Are you always one step ahead of the bad guys?

THE AGENT

I caught you, didn't I? And soon I get to go home.

The Journalist watches the Agent caress the photo of his wife taped to the dashboard. The Journalist looks away, out the window.

THE JOURNALIST

Oh my God... You told me you saw my sister's body in the alley...

THE AGENT

Did I?

EXT. MILWAUKEE ALLEY - FLASHBACK - NITE - RAIN

Neon lights reflected in puddles. Behind a dripping Dumpster and near a slick brick wall, a woman, dead on the wet ground, looking like she's sleeping peacefully.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

THE AGENT

Yes, of course I saw her. I've seen all the victims.

THE JOURNALIST

But you can't have seen have my  
sister dead in the alley. The  
local PD didn't call you in  
until after the second murder in  
Milwaukee, when they suspected  
they had a spree killer on their  
hands. You can't have seen her  
unless... Oh my God.

THE AGENT

Be quiet.

THE JOURNALIST

We're not going to Omaha, are  
we?

THE AGENT

Of course we are.

THE JOURNALIST

Denver's closer.

THE AGENT

I prefer Omaha.

THE JOURNALIST

I can't believe this is  
happening.

The Agent stares at him in the mirror and says  
nothing.

THE JOURNALIST

You're gonna pin this all on  
me... and you're gonna get away  
with it.

THE AGENT

Shut up.

THE JOURNALIST

What will it be? I resisted  
somehow, right, and you had to  
shoot me? Or maybe I tried to  
escape? I'll be dead and the  
case'll be closed. And you'll go  
home. Home to your empty house.

THE AGENT

Shut the fuck up!

THE JOURNALIST

Oh Jesus. Why? Why did you have to kill her? She was a good person. She just liked people too much. Is that why you killed her?

The Agent stares forward, at the road, for a long silent moment. Then:

THE AGENT

Your sister... she was a whore.

THE JOURNALIST

What?

INT. MILWAUKEE BAR - FLASHBACK - NITE

A down-to-earth working-class watering hole, the kind that cops and firemen hang out in.

The gang of cops from the seminar, including the Colorado Cop, raise a toast to the Agent, in the middle of the rowdy bunch. A good time is being had by all.

The Journalist's SISTER sits off in one corner, watches the cops and the Agent.

THE AGENT

(voiceover)

Was she a cop groupie? Yeah? Did she always hang around cop bars? They're good places to find guys who're fucked up.

LATER

The bar is quieter, emptier. It's late.

Two last stragglng cops bid farewell to the Agent, who now sits at the bar. He waves goodbye to them, at the door, and notices the Sister, in the corner.

She smiles at him. He returns the smile.

LATER

The Agent and the Sister sit together at the bar, talking.

The Agent fingers his wedding ring; she notices; he shrugs and says something to her; she gasps and places a sympathetic hand on his arm.

THE AGENT

(voiceover)

She knew exactly how to zero in on a man's weaknesses. Liked people? She played them.

LATER

The Sister leads the Agent by the hand toward the bar's exit.

EXT. MILWAUKEE ALLEY - FLASHBACK - NITE - RAIN

The Sister pulls the Agent into an overhang in the alley, to get out of the light rain. The street beyond the alley is deserted -- they're completely alone.

She pushes him up against the wall, playfully, and he doesn't resist.

She kisses his mouth lightly. He doesn't kiss her back but doesn't move to get away, either.

She lifts his hand up to her waist, the other to her breast, and presses herself against him, drapes her arms around his neck.

THE SISTER

I can help you feel a little better...

She kisses him, softly. He gives in to it, returns the kiss -- then removes her arms from his neck, breaks the kiss.

THE AGENT

No.

But he doesn't seem to mean it. She laughs and kisses him again, more demanding this time.

THE AGENT

(voiceover)

She looked so much like my wife...

He returns the kiss again, matches her intensity, hands now on her shoulders -- then breaks the kiss again, more forcefully.

THE AGENT

No.

She thinks it's a game, and attacks him violently, kisses him ferociously. He responds in kind.

His hands move to her neck.

His hands massage her neck passionately.

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The Agent stares at the road ahead.

EXT. MILWAUKEE ALLEY - FLASHBACK - NITE - RAIN

Neon lights reflected in puddles.

Behind a dripping Dumpster and near a slick brick wall, the Sister, dead on the wet ground.

She lies on her side, facing the wall -- she might almost be asleep.

Half her mane of long brown hair lies along her arm, the other half flows down her back.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The Agent, remembering...

INT. THE AGENT'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - FLASHBACK - MORNING

The Agent stands at the door of the bedroom, on his way out to interrogate the DC Child Killer. He gazes lovingly at his sleeping wife.

HIS WIFE

her back to us, deeply asleep.

Half her mane of long brown hair lies along her arm, the other half flows down her back.

It is the same pose as all the murder victims.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Silent tears running down the Agent's face. He meets the Journalist's gaze in the mirror.

THE AGENT

I never saw her again. They  
wouldn't even let me see her  
body...

The Journalist says nothing.

The Agent takes his cell phone from his jacket pocket, punches numbers.

The Journalist sees:

THE PHONE

has no power -- its screen is dead.

The Agent throws the phone onto the car floor.

THE AGENT

Fuck!

THE JOURNALIST

You killed all those other  
women. Why did you kill them?  
All those beautiful women who  
looked like your wife?

THE AGENT

No. No.

THE JOURNALIST

Yes. You did.

THE AGENT

I looked at them and I saw her.  
She was the only one. The only  
one. I tried... I tried... No...

THE JOURNALIST

You killed them. You killed them  
all.

THE AGENT

No... Oh God what have I done?

THE JOURNALIST

And you killed the bartender  
last night. You came back and  
you killed her. You killed her.

THE AGENT

I... No, no...

EXT. HONKY-TONK BAR - FLASHBACK - NITE

The parking lot, deserted but for the Bartender's  
car.

The Agent holds the door of her car open for her,  
pinning her between him and the car.

They kiss, deeply, passionately.

His hand reaches to her hair, loosens her red scarf  
to let her hair flow free.

He lets the scarf fall to the ground as he wraps his  
arm around her waist, pulls her body against his.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

THE AGENT

No...

THE JOURNALIST

Yes. You killed her. You're in  
the zone, all right. You sick  
fuck. You've been doing this for  
so long you've become one of the  
monsters. Oh Jesus. Jesus.

THE AGENT

No... No, I didn't. You did it.  
You killed them. I don't know  
why. But you're going to prison  
and I'm going home. I'm going  
home.

THE JOURNALIST

You killed them. You killed them  
and you're so fucked up you  
don't even realize it.

THE AGENT

No...

INT. POLICE STATION - FLASHBACK

The Agent sees the Colorado Cop near the front door, looking lost.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

THE AGENT

No...

INT. MILWAUKEE LECTURE HALL - FLASHBACK

In the crowd of admirers around the lectern, the Agent exchanges a grin with the Colorado Cop.

INT. MILWAUKEE BAR - FLASHBACK - NITE

Series of shots:

A) the cop party dwindles, the Agent explains something with pointed vehemence to the Colorado Cop, one of the last stragglers

B) the Agent at the door of the bar, arm around the Journalist's Sister, looks toward the back of the bar and locks gazes with the Colorado Cop, who comes out of a back room

END FLASHBACK

INT. POLICE STATION - FLASHBACK

The Colorado Cop makes eye contact with the Agent.

END FLASHBACK

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

The Agent stares out the windshield at the unbroken stretch of empty road ahead.

THE AGENT

No...

The Agent meets the terrified gaze of the Journalist in the mirror.

THE AGENT

No...

The Agent takes his hands off the wheel and reaches under his jacket for his service weapon.

EXT. RURAL ROAD

The Agent's car wavers across the dotted yellow line and comes to a stop in the middle of the road.

A GUNSHOT

Splatter of red across the rear window.

A long beat.

A pounding comes from the rear passenger side of the car.

The door is kicked open by the Journalist.

The Journalist stumbles away from the car, unsteady on his feet, struggles to regain his balance while handcuffed.

INT. THE AGENT'S CAR

The Agent's right hand, covered with blood and brain matter, lies on the passenger seat. It still loosely grips his service weapon.

His fingers twitch once.

The Agent's eyes, his head leaned back in his seat, stare sightlessly into nothingness.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - LATER

Cops and feds wander an area surrounded by police and federal cars, lights flashing.

In the distance, the Agent's car is in the middle of the road. Paramedics load his body-bagged body onto a stretcher.

The Journalist, now uncuffed, is comforted by a paramedic.

The Assistant Director and the Police Chief huddle together, shocked.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I knew he was going through a rough time, but I don't believe this. That reporter... he was the suspect, goddammit! Can we believe him?

POLICE CHIEF

Why would he have eaten his gun if not...?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

My God, he was... he was one of the good guys.

POLICE CHIEF

He did seem... more than distracted. Tormented. But then, I didn't know him before...

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I was starting to wonder... He wasn't seeing things clearly. I just thought it was too much work too soon after his wife...

POLICE CHIEF

We'll never know why he did it now.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Why did he end it like this?

POLICE CHIEF

It was his only way out.

PRESS AREA

Cameras and reporters, corralled behind the police line. The Colorado Cop talks into microphones.

REPORTER

You're way out of your jurisdiction, officer--

COLORADO COP

I had some suspicions that I needed to share with the authorities in charge of the case. But... well, they're moot now. It's over.

INT. AIRPORT CONCOURSE - A FEW DAYS LATER

The Journalist, travel bag over his shoulder, strolls through the concourse.

A newsstand features racks of HEADLINE magazine. He picks up a copy:

THE COVER

shows the Agent's ID photo, blown up and grainy, with the coverline "MIND OF A COP, MIND OF CRIMINAL."

The Journalist flips through the issue with a grin on his face.

THE JOURNALIST

Hello, Pulitzer number 2.

He pays for the issue and continues toward his gate.

He grins.

INT. POLICE STATION - FLASHBACK

The Assistant Director and the Journalist pore over the Agent's backup material: the map with the red line heading west, forensics reports, crime-scene photos.

The Journalist picks up crime-scene photos:

The jogger, her body dumped like a ragdoll in the undergrowth, arms and legs at odd angles.

The Bartender, thrown like rubbish in the trees.

The Sister, her body in a broken heap behind the Dumpster.

None of the women look like they're sleeping -- none have their hair arranged in any particular way.

The Assistant Director eyes the photos, shakes his head.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I never knew what he was talking about, "The killer lays them out so pretty."

THE JOURNALIST

There's something there we don't see.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

His guilty conscience, I'd say.

END FLASHBACK

INT. AIRPORT CONCOURSE - CONTINUOUS

The Journalist's grin widens.

INT. MILWAUKEE LECTURE HALL - FLASHBACK

The Journalist stands at the rear of the auditorium during the Agent's seminar, reads a copy of USA TODAY: the headline blares "TRAGEDY FOR FAMED FBI AGENT."

END FLASHBACK

EXT. MILWAUKEE ALLEY - FLASHBACK - NITE - RAIN

The Journalist peeks into the alley from the sidewalk, watches:

The Agent and the Sister come together, kiss, push apart, again, again.

The Agent's hands caress her neck for a long moment, while they kiss.

The Agent pushes her away, violently.

THE AGENT

No!

She lands on the ground, shaken but unhurt, while he stalks away, out of the alley, and is gone.

THE JOURNALIST

looks at the "Sister" sitting on the ground.

His breathing quickens. He covers his mouth in horror as his eyes widen.

THE JOURNALIST

(to himself)

Oh...

The Journalist approaches the "Sister," helps her up, pulls out his business card while she straightens herself out.

THE JOURNALIST

Miss, you don't know me, but I'm from "Headline" magazine...

Series of shots:

- A) the Journalist strangles his "sister"
- B) the Journalist stares at her body on the ground; his look of horror changes to one of excitement
- C) the Journalist drags her body behind the Dumpster
- D) the Journalist takes a photograph of the body

END FLASHBACK

FLASHBACKS

Series of shots: the Journalist's POV from the driver's seat of his VW Beetle:

- A) the girl in the tavern parking lot smiles in the passenger-side window at him
- B) he drives slowly past the jogger, pulls over to stop in her path
- C) he watches the Bartender exit the honky-tonk into the deserted parking lot

INT. AIRPORT CONCOURSE - CONTINUOUS

The Journalist's grin grows even wider as he approaches his gate. On a TV at the gate:

TV NEWS CLIP

The Colorado Cop, surrounded by reporters.

COLORADO COP

I had some suspicions that I needed to share with the authorities in charge of the case.

FLASHBACKS

Series of shots: the Colorado Cop's POV as:

A) he sees the Journalist lurking in the rear of the Milwaukee lecture hall

B) he looks beyond the Agent leaving the cop bar with the Sister to see the Journalist in a far booth

C) he sees the Journalist talking to the Agent in TV news coverage of the jogger's funeral

END FLASHBACKS

INT. AIRPORT CONCOURSE - CONTINUOUS

The Journalist, on line at the gate, watches the TV:

TV NEWS CLIP

INT. NEWS STUDIO

The Agent appears on archive footage of the Sunday morning news talk show we've seen previously.

THE AGENT

There are monsters in the world,  
but the kind of monsters I catch  
don't particularly scare me.  
What they do is horrifying, but  
it's predictable, and so we can  
find them and stop them. It's  
the monsters that we never even  
know about, the ones that are  
uncatchable, that scare me.

END CLIP

The Journalist smiles at the pretty, young FLIGHT ATTENDANT with long brown hair who takes his ticket.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

Heading home, sir?

THE JOURNALIST

I am.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT

(flirty)

And was your trip to Nebraska  
for business or pleasure?

He considers this for a moment.

Both. THE JOURNALIST

FADE OUT