

*PIECES*

by

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FADE IN:

**EXT. HOUSE - MORNING**

A steady stream of white smoke rises from the chimney of a large country home. Christmas lights and garland everywhere. Wire-frame reindeer, inflatables on the grass -- completely done up.

A white SUV, POLICE CREST on its side, in the driveway. Next to it, the frosted windshield of a black luxury car.

**INT. HOUSE - MORNING**

Exemplary Americana motif. Dark wood furnishings, area rugs on polished wooden floors. Festive stockings from a mantle above a crackling fireplace.

FISCHER, 5, in pajamas, wide-eyed and kneeling beside a Christmas tree that could've easily been trimmed by Martha Stewart. He shakes a large box.

FISCHER

What is it, mommy?

CLARA, 38, sits on the sofa across from him -- disheveled morning hair, tired half-moon eyes -- still on her first cup of coffee.

CLARA

Open it and find out, honey.

Fischer tears furiously at the paper. A flash bulb *POPS*, then a shutter *CLICK*.

Alongside Clara, behind an expensive digital camera, is JAKE, 41. A big fella in a flannel shirt and jeans, a boyish face beneath the stubble, tries to capture the moment.

He adjusts the lens, moves closer.

JAKE

Over here, Fish. Big smile.

CLARA  
He *is* smiling.

JAKE  
Come on, buddy.

Fischer whips around, flashes a goofy grin, right back to tearing paper. Too quick for a good shot.

Jake groans, gets to his feet. He takes a box from beneath the tree and returns to Clara.

FISCHER (O.S.)  
Daddy! *Trains!*

JAKE  
Wow. I see that.

FISCHER  
Can I open them?

CLARA  
I think you got a few more left under there.

FISCHER  
Aww...

Fischer continues his search.

Jake places a beautifully wrapped present on Clara's lap, sits next to her.

Her anemic smile matches her sarcastic tone...

CLARA  
Can't wait to see what this one is.

JAKE  
Oh, just open it.

She rips a single strip of paper, her suspicions confirmed -- a coffee maker. She glares at Jake.

CLARA

I don't drink coffee. I like tea.  
Does this brew tea?

JAKE

Coffee and espresso. Top of the line,  
though. I'm sure it can make tea.

Clara turns her attention back to Fischer.

JAKE

Fine, I'll bring it back.

CLARA

Don't bother. I'm sure *you'll* be able  
to use it.

She points to a tall box.

CLARA

Let me guess... My new vacuum cleaner?

Jake rises abruptly, yanks his DUTY JACKET from a nearby chair. He eyes her with contempt, slips the jacket on, PATS the pockets.

JAKE

It's bagless, you know? Wind tunnel.

CLARA

*Ooooh...*

(beat)

I thought you were quitting.

JAKE

I am.

The door closes behind him.

**EXT. HOUSE/FRONT STEPS - DAY**

Jake looks out on a soft pink sky behind bare tree branches.

He taps a cigarette from his pack, lights it, inhales deeply.  
The quiet, the cold air. Peaceful.

High above the tree tops... a lone HAWK circles endlessly.

Jake watches it, transfixed, when --

*CRASH!*

Glass shatters from inside the house -- the cigarette falls to the ground -- he bolts through the door...

**INT. HOUSE - DAY**

Jake frantically scans the room.

JAKE

What the --

He stops dead in his tracks when he sees...

A GUNMAN hunched behind the sofa, a wiry arm wrapped around Clara's neck. Face taut, eyes wild, the dawning of a beard only a teenager could grow -- meet TYLER WELLS, 29.

Clara's eyes dart to Fischer...

The whimpering boy chews on a TOY HAMMER, tears streaming down his cheeks.

TYLER

(trembling, unfocused)

I don't wanna hurt nobody. I just want the valuables.

His Appalachian accent just slight enough to turn the word "don't" into "dawnt."

Jake shows his hands. He inches closer. Tyler's gun aimed right at his head.

TYLER

I said don't move!

JAKE

I just want the boy. That's all.

Tyler eyes Fischer... back to Jake. A quick nod.

JAKE

Come here, son.

Clara, frozen with fear, huddled on the sofa.

Fischer glances at her. Helpless. Terrified.

CLARA

It's okay, honey. Just do as your  
father says.

Fischer goes to Jake. Careful, careful...

Jake's narrowed eyes examine the fresh-faced gunman. He takes  
Fischer's hand, holds it tight.

JAKE

Fischer, walk slowly to the kitchen  
and stay there. You do that for me?

The boy shakes his head, reluctantly releases Jake's hand and  
shuffles around a corner into the --

KITCHEN

The back door is open, shards of glass scattered along the  
linoleum floor.

LIVING ROOM

Tyler lets-off Clara, stands, gun leveled at Jake.

TYLER

The valuables.

JAKE

(hands out, calm down)

Okay... okay.

Jake warily slides a few feet to the HALL CLOSET. He opens the  
door, reaches in, pulls down a METAL BOX from the top shelf.

JAKE

Here it is. I'm just gonna put it down  
and get what you want.

(MORE)

JAKE (cont'd)

Then you can go.

Clara glimpses Tyler -- his gun hand trembles noticeably.

JAKE

(to Fischer)

How you doin' in there, buddy?

FISCHER (O.S.)

I'm okay, daddy.

JAKE

That's good. You just stay right where  
you are.

Jake crouches, takes a key from his ring and opens the box. Cool as a cucumber, he rises -- a black NINE MILLIMETER gripped in his hand.

He angles it at Tyler. Confident. Steely-eyed. He's done this sort of thing before.

JAKE

Drop your weapon. Do it now.

CLARA

Jake! No!

JAKE

I said drop it!

Tyler smartly does as he's told.

JAKE

Clara, go in the kitchen.

She wastes no time, rushes into the --

KITCHEN

Grabs Fischer, holds him tight.

CLARA

Shh. Everything's alright, honey.  
It's okay. Mommy's here...

The boy bites down hard on the plastic hammer, fixes his eyes on an odd shaped GLASS SHARD on the floor.

LIVING ROOM

JAKE

I want you to listen to me very, very carefully.

(makes a circle with  
the gun)

Turn around, get on your knees... Do it... Good boy. Now lace your fingers behind your head.

He gets behind Tyler, gun to the back of his neck with one hand while the other frisks him. He switches hands. Repeats.

JAKE

Stand up.

As Tyler rises...

TYLER

Sir, I didn't wanna hurt --

JAKE

-- Shut up.

Jake reaches in his coat and pulls out a pair of handcuffs.

JAKE

Put your hands behind your back... Put your -- That's it.

*CLICK, CLICK.* Tight.

Jake picks up Tyler's gun, inspects it briefly, slips it in his pocket.

TYLER

I just wanted...



JAKE

(furious)

-- Wanted to what? Scare the living  
shit out of my family? On Christmas  
day!

Jake shoves him to the sofa.

Clara pokes her head out, her voice soft but insistent...

CLARA

Jake...

(off the gun)

Put that thing away.

He reluctantly pockets the gun.

Tyler hangs his head, tries to hide his face through a mess of  
black hair.

Fischer looks out from the kitchen, runs to his mother.

FISCHER

Mommy, is that man crying?

She shrugs.

JAKE

Feeling guilty, I'm sure.

CLARA

Jake, shouldn't you call this in?

JAKE

What? Disrupt Rick and Shirley from  
their doughnuts? I'll bring him in.

(beat... to Tyler)

I know you, don't I? Brought you in on  
D.U.I. a couple months ago. That was  
you, right?

TYLER

Yes, sir. That was me.

JAKE

I can only assume you're drunk now.

TYLER

(insistent)

No, sir. Not anymore... Wife said she'd leave me if I ever liquored up again. Haven't had a drop since. That's the God's honest truth.

JAKE

(smirks)

You're not very bright. Didn't notice the police car out front?

Tyler shifts uncomfortably...

TYLER

(softly)

I came from around back. I never did this before...

Jake snickers. *Yeah, right.*

CLARA

You're married?

TYLER

Yes, ma'am. Seven years.

(long pause)

I have a son, too... Right about your boy's age.

Clara SIGHS, clutches her son.

CLARA

Why on earth are you here, sir? You should be home with your family.

TYLER

Wells, ma'am. Tyler Wells.

FISCHER

Mommy, did he have a real gun?

JAKE

It's an Airsoft gun, right?

TYLER

Yes, sir. They look real but only shoot plastic pellets.

JAKE

Where'd you get it?

TYLER

I'm ex-military. Me and some other fellas do training exercises over in Lebow. Kinda like... therapy.

JAKE

Your therapy include this type of behavior?

He sinks low into the couch, releases a troubled sigh...

TYLER

They laid me off. Been about a month now. I... I didn't wanna ruin Christmas for my family. I've put them through so much already... I thought I could...

JAKE

I'm touched.

Tyler turns his head, glimpses something under the --

CHRISTMAS TREE

Amidst the other presents -- a BOARD GAME. Two cartoon figures on the box, a caption above them reads "SOCIAL SKILLS."

Next to that, a PUZZLE -- large, multi-colored foam pieces.

Tyler lifts his head. Realization sets in. He knows this. He knows this all too well.

TYLER

Your boy? Is he..?

Clara presses her lips together, acknowledges.

TYLER

My boy, too. They thought he was mildly retarded at first. Said there wasn't anything they could do for us.

JAKE

What are we havin' a conversation here? I think it's time we left. There's gonna be alot of paperwork.

TYLER

I'm sorry I busted up your Christmas, ma'am. I made a very bad decision.

JAKE

You think? Let's go...

CLARA

Wait...

(grabs the coffee maker)

Do you and your wife like coffee?

TYLER

Yes, ma'am, we do.

CLARA

Here, Jake. Hold this for him. You and your wife have a very merry Christmas, okay?

TYLER

Oh, thanks, but I --

JAKE

Excuse me, what are you doing? You know how much that thing was?

CLARA

As a matter of fact I do. I almost bought it for you. Now let him have it.

Jake marches to the tree, returns with a bag of boxer shorts.

JAKE

While you're at it take these. She knows I like briefs.

Clara folds her arms.

CLARA

You look better in boxers.

JAKE

I *feel* better in briefs.

CLARA

Fischer, get mommy that big box over there, please?

Fischer drags it over. Jake watches on, incredulous.

CLARA

A Bub-Lo-Matic Soda System. Nothing says "I love you" more than a Bub-Lo-Matic Soda System.

JAKE

You *love* root beer... Fine. What about this?

Jake seizes a porcelain Irish Wolf Hound from under the tree, fires a look at Clara.

TYLER

Maybe we should just be off, sir...

JAKE

Shut up.

CLARA

That dog is made of Spanish porcelain.

JAKE

It looks like a third grade art project gone wrong. What am I supposed to do with this?

She wisely holds her tongue. Fischer tugs at her shirt.

FISCHER

Mommy, can I go play in my room?

CLARA

Yeah, go ahead.

He scampers off.

CLARA

You're not giving him that dog.

He holds it out.

JAKE

Oh, is that what this is? A dog -- ?

*CRASH!* It slips from Jake's fingers and shatters on the floor.

JAKE

Oh shit...

Clara GASPS, covers her mouth.

CLARA

That belonged to my father...

JAKE

Clara, I'm sorry.

She bends down to pick up the pieces. Jake joins her.

CLARA

I got it. *I got it!* Just... get out of here.

JAKE

Clara, I...

CLARA

*Get out!*

Silence. Jake backs off, takes Tyler by the arm. Clara on the floor, in tears.

She lifts her head, wipes her face...

CLARA

You give those to your wife now. And  
take care of that boy of yours, okay?

TYLER

I will, ma'am.

JAKE

(to Tyler)

Come on.

They go quietly out the door.

**EXT. FRONT YARD - DAY**

The two men trudge across the lawn. Jake pops the hatch on his  
truck, puts the gifts inside, pauses, looks skyward.

No soft pink glow -- just winter white. No circling hawk --  
just tiny snowflakes falling silently.

*CLICK, CLICK.* He unlocks Tyler's cuffs and...

TYLER

You -- Wait. You're not takin' me to  
jail?

A beat, finally...

JAKE

No...

TYLER

I don't know what to say.

JAKE

Don't... say anything. You'd probably  
make me wanna put these back on you.

TYLER

Yes, sir...

FRONT DOOR

Fischer races out, frozen grass crunching below his sneakers. There's something under his arm.

FISCHER

Daddy, wait!

JAKE

Fish, go back inside. You're gonna freeze out here.

He whispers in Jake's ear -- *Yeah, okay. Okay.*

Tyler watches on, warm breath hits cold air.

FISCHER

This is for you, mister. For your little boy. Mommy said it was okay.

It's the puzzle, the one with the big foam pieces.

Tyler gazes at the box. A rigid, half-smile creeps upon his face. He clears his throat, takes a knee.

Fischer digs into his pocket, unfolds a piece of construction paper.

FISCHER

I drew this for you.

INSERT: DRAWING

Three crayon stick figures -- mommy, daddy, boy -- holding hands under a bright yellow sun.

BACK TO SCENE

Tyler squeezes a tear, the words don't come easily. Nobody's ever given him anything this beautiful.

TYLER

(softly)

Thanks, buddy.



Fischer races back to the house.

JAKE

Fish! Tell your mother I'm --

But he's gone.

JAKE

... sorry.

(a long beat)

Ready?

TYLER

(wipes his face)

Yeah.

Jake opens the car door, pushes Tyler's head down.

JAKE

Sorry. Habit.

Jake goes around the other side, gets in. The slam of the door breaks the otherwise peaceful still of the morning.

JAKE (O.S.)

Your wife doesn't like soda, does she?

FADE OUT.