

## Silence Means Violence

by Andrei Ganenco

### Treatment

City. Billy, a 12-year-old boy, walks down the corridor towards his apartment. Sounds of his parents arguing can be heard from behind the door. For a moment, their voices muffle, and Billy opens the door and steps inside. The conflict continues. Seeking refuge from the arguing parents, Billy hides in another room. He crawls under the bed, switches on a flashlight, and starts drawing pictures on a piece of paper. From the adjacent room, the sound of someone knocking on the door can be heard, and the parents immediately fall silent. After a while, Billy, frightened, hides under the bed and watches as an unknown person arranges the bodies of his parents. Billy accidentally drops the flashlight. The killer hears the sound and turns towards the boy.

In another part of the neighborhood, Officer Graham sits in a parked police car in front of a store, waiting for his partner. He signals to him, and Officer Rice emerges from the building, holding a bouquet of flowers and a toy. He gets into the car and asks Graham about the situation. All seems quiet for now. During their night patrol on the streets, Rice ponders about the career path he desires. He wants to make more money for his family and plans to become a detective in the future. In his free time, he assists the Investigation Division to catch a serial killer known as the "Holy Punisher." Rice and Graham receive a message from the dispatcher, reporting a complaint about noisy neighbors. It's a routine situation that requires them to check the call. Graham remains calm, but Rice, on the contrary, has an uneasy feeling. He retrieves his gun and checks for it to be ready.

The officers arrive at the scene. An elderly woman named Dolores informs them about the situation. She lives downstairs and describes the constant arguments between her neighbors upstairs. However, as the officers approach the door, they don't hear any noise. Dolores explains that she called the police because it became suspiciously quiet. It seems like a false alarm, but Rice notices a pool of blood near the door.

Without waiting for backup, the officers enter the apartment. Inside, they see signs of fighting, with two bloody trails leading to a closed door. After checking the area, they burst into the room and discover the bodies of a man and a woman on the couch. A cryptic phrase and religious symbols are written in blood on the wall. The police recognize the handwriting as the one of the "Holy Punisher." They hear a noise coming from under the bed and find Billy hiding there.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Butler sits in a weary state in the kitchen. His shelf displays awards for his outstanding service, and a photograph of his wife and son stands nearby. The Commissioner receives a phone call informing him of the murder. He prepares to go to the station and urgently requests Detective Maxwell to be brought to him.

Meanwhile, Detective Maxwell arrives home. His wife, Grace, is unhappy with the decreasing amount of time he spends at home. Maxwell explains that he has been held up at work, but Grace doesn't believe him. She suspects him of infidelity. Prior to his arrival, she gets a call from a club called "Gomorra," where Maxwell had left his wallet behind. Grace demands for him to show it as proof of his innocence. Maxwell complies with her request. Grace feels guilty and attempts to apologize, but their

argument intensifies, shifting the focus to their son, Tommy. Grace complains that Maxwell doesn't devote enough time to him, while Maxwell believes he is doing everything right. Tommy becomes a witness to his parents' quarrel. Maxwell, advocating for strict discipline, belittles his son's talent for drawing and loses his temper, expressing frustration that Tommy doesn't listen to him. Grace takes the boy to her room. Detective Maxwell learns about the incident and heads to the police station.

At the same time, Detective Sarah Barthel, Maxwell's assistant, is working in the archives department. She is organizing the evidence related to the "Holy Punisher" case. While going through a box of evidence, Sarah notices a Bible and two wooden ventriloquist dummies. As she documents the case of the prime suspect, Oliver Donovan, she reviews the recording of his interrogation on her laptop.

Video recording. During the interrogation, Oliver speaks like a preacher, answering Sarah's questions his life and dreams. Oliver dreams of a world with less evil, specifically mentioning the evil that goes unnoticed by everyone else. Only he can see it because he communicates with the Lord himself. Oliver sees himself as a messenger and intends to eradicate the problem of cruelty in the world by his own means.

Rice and Graham engage in a conversation in the locker room after their shift. Rice wants to show initiative and assist in the investigation, hoping for a promotion if he manages to catch the maniac. Graham heads home, while Rice stays at the station despite being awaited by his wife and child. Sarah receives a message from Rice, informing her about the murder, and she tries to call Maxwell. However, he ignores the call.

Meanwhile, Detective Maxwell enters the observation room where Commissioner Butler is waiting for him. Butler reprimands the detective for his sluggishness and introduces the first and only witness in the "Holy Punisher" case - the little boy, Billy. He is sitting behind the one-way mirror in the interrogation room, huddled in a corner with his knees to his chest. Next to him is Dr. Daniels, who is conducting a physical examination of the key witness.

Butler and Maxwell observe Billy through the mirror. The detective intends to visit the crime scene, but the commissioner orders him to review the report and starts the interrogation immediately. Maxwell doubts his ability to communicate effectively with children, fearing that he lacks the necessary skills. Butler becomes frustrated and reminds him that the case has dragged on for far too long without any significant breakthroughs.

Sarah arrives at the police station and meets Rice. He briefs her on the case and tells her about the witness. Since being discovered, the witness hasn't uttered a single word to anyone. Soon, Sarah and Rice enter the observation room. Maxwell argues with Sarah, but Butler quickly calms everyone down and instructs them to focus on their work. The killer is probably unaware that the bodies have been found. Maxwell must interrogate the witness and analyze the evidence before sunrise to catch the killer off guard. Rice is assigned the task of analyzing the evidence and comparing the results with the data on all the suspects. Sarah is not given this assignment due to her lack of experience. There's one problem - due to the nature of Maxwell's work, there are too many suspects in this case. It will be challenging to investigate them all before dawn.

Dr. Daniels enters the observation room. After examining the witness, he concludes that Billy is in a state of shock and unwilling to speak to anyone. Based on the neighbors' testimonies and the bruises on his body, it's clear that the boy has been subjected to domestic violence. Billy would benefit from specialized assistance, but even with their help, it's unlikely he'll provide any statements. Butler assigns Rice to delve into the evidence, and Maxwell determines the age range of the candidates for analysis. He also suggests bringing in a specialist for the child. Butler agrees and orders him to comfort the boy before the specialist arrives, but Maxwell is not thrilled with the idea. Sarah notices his reaction and offers herself as a candidate. Maxwell is angered by his assistant's audacity, takes the report, and storms off to the interrogation room. Sarah remains with Butler.

Billy sits on the floor, huddled in the corner. Maxwell tries to press him, attempting to intimidate him, but Billy remains silent. Frustrated, Maxwell loses control and flies into a rage, but Butler keeps the situation under control and stops him. Sarah observes Maxwell's failure and realizes that he is hopeless. Butler explains that Detective Maxwell usually plays the role of the bad cop during interrogations. He may get results, but it is unknown how this method will affect Billy. The good cop/bad cop routine seems outdated and ineffective to Sarah. The commissioner recalls how Sarah's father used to play the role of the good cop when they were partners. Sarah pauses for a moment, deep in thoughts, and exits the room. She waits for the elevator in the hallway, remembers about her childhood. Her father often took her to the Investigation Division, preparing young Sarah for her future career as a detective.

In the lab room, Rice examines the suspect files while Gobs, the lab supervisor, works on the evidence. Sarah joins them and starts assisting Rice. Gobs begins to discuss the need to narrow down the list of suspects, as he won't have enough time to examine them all before sunrise. Rice asks why the list is so long, and Sarah explains that it's because of Detective Maxwell's working method. Meanwhile, Maxwell is heating up the atmosphere in the interrogation room. Butler observes him through the mirror and realizes that he is struggling with the task.

Gobs comes out for a moment. Sarah and Rice start talking about parents who abuse their children. Rice admits that he became a father a few hours ago. Sarah is surprised that Rice chose to patrol the streets instead of being there for his wife during childbirth. She accuses him of being career-driven. Rice defends himself, explaining that it's all for the sake of his family. He wants to give them a happy life and works hard towards that goal. Sarah disagrees with Rice's approach and compares him to her own father, who had a similar mindset towards her.

Gobs returns to the room and asks Sarah to mark the most suitable candidates on the list of suspects. Sarah would like to point out Oliver, but he doesn't fall within Maxwell's age range. Rice suggests ignoring Maxwell's instructions, but both Gobs and Sarah advise against it because Maxwell becomes furious when someone doesn't follow his orders. Rice tries to understand why he behaves that way, and Sarah explains the reasons behind his unusual behavior.

Sarah's flashback. When she joined the department, Maxwell had just cracked his famous case. He caught a serial killer red-handed thanks to his police intuition. Due to the nature of Maxwell's work, there were no necessary materials such as reports, testimonies, or forensic results. The commissioner realized that it could cause problems in court. He accused Maxwell of negligence and offered to cover it up to prevent the case from falling apart. However, in exchange for his help, all bonuses

and rewards would go only to Butler. Maxwell didn't want to agree with the deal, but he had no choice. Butler also assigned Sarah to him, offering her help with paperwork, but really wanting to keep himself informed about all ongoing investigations.

On her very first day of work, Maxwell set an impossible task for Sarah - to gather all the data on the serial killer case by the next morning. Sarah couldn't accomplish it, and Maxwell made her the scapegoat for his failure. Over the following years, he suppressed Sarah's initiative and burdened her with nothing but paperwork. He deliberately kept her away from current cases so that she wouldn't report anything to the commissioner. Sarah spent several years organizing cases and processing reports. When she finished that, she approached Maxwell, asking to be involved in the investigation. But all she received in response was Maxwell's anger, and he assigned her the task of interviewing all the psychopaths on his list of suspects. Since then, Sarah has been solely occupied with that.

After listening to the story, Rice starts to have suspicions about Maxwell's methods. No one can explain the success of his previous case. It seems more like luck... or maybe something else entirely. The detective continues the interrogation, asking Billy to write or draw his statements, but Billy remains unresponsive. The detective loses control and threatens the boy with harm. However, Billy remains silent. Finally, Maxwell breaks off and tries to physically force the witness to talk, but the commissioner intervenes at the last moment and stops him.

Gobs tries to decipher the anagram left by the killer on the wall. Rice asks Sarah about Oliver, and she shares with him a strange story that Oliver told her during the interrogation. When little Oliver was living with his parents on a ranch, his father bought a puppy. Everyone liked the pet, but it had a nasty habit of barking after darkness fell. This caused inconvenience for everyone, so to solve the problem, the puppy's vocal cords were cut. It didn't stop barking, but it started doing it silently.

Butler is in the observation room, monitoring Billy. He turns off the surveillance camera in the interrogation room, allowing Maxwell to use more brutal interrogation methods under his own control. Sarah selects a few people to check out and sets the time frame for the investigation. She leaves to inform Butler about the situation and notices the methods used by the detective during the interrogation. She condemns his actions and urges him to stop tormenting the boy. The commissioner agrees and suggests that Sarah take over the interrogation instead of the detective. He needs her to play the role of the good cop as well as her father once did. When Butler and Sarah's father were partners, they both had ambitions to become commissioners. Sarah's birth helped Butler secure the position because her father focused on her education rather than his own career. Sarah agrees and continues the interrogation. Maxwell is outraged, but Butler reassures him.

Sarah's plan is to gain Billy's trust. She tells him a story about a fictional outing with her son Alan. Alan held a grudge against his mother and didn't want to talk to her. But through a selfless act, he silently proved that he still loved her. Billy likes this story; he calms down and shows signs of attention. It seems like he's ready to talk. But just then, just as Sarah receives a loud message from Rice on her phone. Billy becomes frightened and withdraws into himself again. Sarah unexpectedly interrupts her interrogation and leaves the room. In the corridor, Maxwell meets Sarah and tries to put psychological pressure on her. To his surprise, Sarah stands up to him with defiance. Rice meets Sarah in the corridor and shows her the results of the analysis.

He took a risk and checked Oliver, but the result was negative. This information greatly disheartens Sarah.

Rice and Sarah decide to take a break on the rooftop of the police station. They drink coffee and talk about Rice's newborn son. Rice also talks about his father, who abandoned him, his mother, and his brother when he was a child. He still hasn't forgiven him for that. Sarah wants to keep the conversation going and mentions her father. Before his death, he made Sarah promise that one day she would become as great of a detective as he was. Sarah remembers this with sadness. Rice tries to comfort her and asks why Sarah suspects Oliver. Sarah tells him about the first time they met.

Sarah's flashback. As she interrogated the deranged individuals from Maxwell's list, she felt herself teetering on the edge of insanity. When she met Oliver, her work no longer mattered to her. She realized that it was all meaningless and just was rewriting old profiles into new cases. However, Oliver immediately caught her attention. At first, Sarah thought he was just another religious fanatic gone astray. Oliver spoke about his connection with God, claiming to have a rare gift of seeing people through to the core. But then he started naming individuals whom God commanded him to punish. These were the names of the victims of the maniac. Oliver continued his provocation, but he made a mistake. Sarah understood from his words that he was just a fanatic of the "Holy Punisher", someone who gathered information about murders from the news. Sarah's anger flared, and she lunged at Oliver. He didn't expect such a reaction from her and realized that she genuinely felt compassion for people, unlike other police officers. In Sarah, he found a kindred spirit, and he decided to share a story from his own childhood with her.

When Oliver was young, he lived far away from the city with his parents. One day, child protection workers visited their house. In the presence of the guests, Oliver's father acted like the model family man. He was kind, polite, and tried to appear pleasant. Oliver knew it was all just a disguise, and as soon as the workers left, his nightmare would continue. He tried to communicate about his problem using his ventriloquist dummies, Freddie and Maggie. Young Oliver was afraid to speak openly, so he conveyed his message in a veiled manner. He tried to talk about the violence in the house through the dummy's voice. But his plea fell on deaf ears. The workers left without noticing anything suspicious. Since then, Oliver understood that he alone would have to confront his problem.

As Oliver grew older, he voluntarily checked himself into a psychiatric clinic. After leaving, he returned to the ranch and killed his father. The court ruled it as self-defense, and soon Oliver vanished without a trace. Sarah went to the ranch and found Oliver's mother there. After speaking with her, she learned the circumstances of the murder and became convinced that Oliver was the only suspect with a motive. He is most likely the killer.

Rice listens to Sarah's account and unintentionally gives her a clue on how to get Billy to talk. Sarah leaves and asks Rice to wait for her in the room lab. The commissioner and the detective find out that the specialist won't be coming. Maxwell convinces Butler to let him continue the interrogation. Initially hesitant, the commissioner is manipulated by the detective, exploiting his strained relationship with his son. In the end, Butler agrees. Meanwhile, Rice and Gobs investigate another suspect. The result is once again negative. Sarah enters the room with a sports bag

in her hand. She marks a few more individuals on the list and heads to the observation room.

Maxwell prepares for a tough interrogation. Sarah apologizes to Butler and tries to persuade him to give her another chance. The commissioner advises Sarah to keep her emotions and maintain professionalism at work, even though he himself acts differently. Sarah realizes this and blackmails the commissioner under the guise of professionalism. Her trick works, and Sarah replaces Maxwell, who is struggling to keep his composure. The detective is not used to Sarah's unusual behavior towards him, especially in front of the commissioner. However, there is nothing he can do about it, and it annoys him. He vents his anger in a conversation with the commissioner, but Butler won't tolerate such treatment and responds by punching him in the jaw. The commissioner quells his aggression, and the detective dutifully calms down.

Sarah begins her interrogation. She again recalls her fictional son, Alan, and compares him to Billy. Meanwhile, Rice investigates the next suspect, who happens to have the same last name as the detective. This leads Rice to certain thoughts and suspicions.

Billy remains silent, huddled in the corner. Sarah tries to coax him and takes out a child's ventriloquist dummy, Freddie, out of her bag. Sarah speaks to Billy through Freddie, altering her voice. Unexpectedly, the boy responds. Sarah is surprised. She opens her mouth slightly and continues talking to Billy through Freddie. Sarah asks questions in Freddie's voice, and Billy answers, seemingly on the verge of revealing what happened in the apartment. But the dummy's jaw falls off and loudly clatters to the floor. Billy gets frightened and retreats into himself once again. In the next room, the commissioner observes the scene, feeling disappointed, while the detective smirks triumphantly.

Sarah fixes the dummy and once again addresses the boy, but Billy, now terrified, remains silent. So Sarah retrieves another dummy - Maggie. She gives the second dummy to Billy's and calls Maggie using the Freddie dummy. Sarah opens her mouth and, through Freddie's voice, implores Maggie to respond. Sarah looks at Billy, hoping he understands what he needs to do. The boy looks back, inserts his hand into the dummy, and opens its mouth. With a distorted voice, Maggie responds to Freddie's call. Soon Maggie tells what happened in the apartment at the time of the murder. Maggie reveals that there were two men, discussing a trip to the ranch. Left alone, one of them made a phone call to the club. Freddie asks for the name of the club. Maggie's response: "Gomorraah."

The detective angrily watches the interrogation through the mirror. He storms out of the room and retrieves his gun along the way. The commissioner, confused by the situation, fails to stop him in time. Maxwell forcefully kicks open the door to the interrogation room, aims his gun at the corner, and fires. Sarah jumps aside, reaching for her own gun mid-leap. Another gunshot is heard from the corridor. Sarah fires towards the door, the bullet hitting the corridor wall. The body of the detective lies on the threshold of the room, his head shot through. There's a bloodstain on the door. Horrified, Sarah continues aiming at the detective's body. Rice enters the room cautiously, holding a gun. Butler exits into the corridor, where he is met by Gobs, who hands him the results of the data analysis. The paper states that the evidence samples match Detective Maxwell's data. Sarah checks herself, seemingly unharmed. Rice notices a pool of blood beneath Billy; his torso has been shot, and he collapses

to the floor. Sarah and Rice try to apply pressure to his wound, but it's useless. Billy dies.

Parking lot. As morning approaches, the commissioner tries to console Sarah, who is overwhelmed with grief. He acknowledges that she did a good job in finally identifying the killer. But Sarah finds no joy in it, as it came at the cost of the boy's life. The commissioner strongly advises her to take some time off to recover from the shock. While listening to the commissioner, Sarah realizes that Butler once again is trying to take credit for the successful resolution of the case. He recalls the story of the camping trip that Sarah told Billy at the beginning of the interrogation. This same story had been told to him by Sarah's father as a lesson from his own life. However, instead of the fictional Alan, there was a young Sarah in the story. According to Sarah's father, it was during that camping trip that she demonstrated the positive qualities he had tried to instill in her: resilience, discipline, and a willingness to sacrifice for others.

Listening to the commissioner, Sarah recalls how things actually unfolded and what she felt in that moment. The same situation seemed very different to her. It felt more like a painful ordeal. Sarah's father had tried so hard to mold her in his image that he controlled every aspect of her life. He suppressed Sarah's spirit and curbed any initiative she showed. In that situation, the young Sarah was guided not by discipline, but by a simple fear of severe parental punishment.

The commissioner acknowledges Sarah's exceptional abilities and credits her father for them. Sarah has achieved her goal, fulfilling her dream of becoming a detective. But Sarah doesn't see it that way. Her father was never interested in her real dreams. And she hates him for that. Sarah stuns the commissioner with a taser and puts his body in the trunk of her car. She sits in her car and reflects on the events of the previous night.

The crime scene. Oliver and Sarah walk down the corridor. They stop at a door, preparing for the impending murder. It's Sarah's first case, and she is visibly nervous. She checks to make sure the boy is not home. After completing their task, Sarah washes up. She appears agitated, her hands are trembling. At the same time, Oliver is arranging the bodies on the bed. There is a deformed bullet nearby. Oliver hears Sarah approaching and hides the bullet in his pocket. Sarah apologizes for her nervousness; things didn't go as planned, and she had to resort to using her gun. She asks Oliver about the religious symbols he always leaves at the crime scenes. Oliver explains that it's a diversionary tactic, a false trail he sets for the investigation to hide his true motives.

Sarah and Oliver are driving. Sarah is still nervous, feeling like she made a mistake by stepping onto this way. She realizes that Oliver is manipulating her. He wants Sarah to help him execute his plan. Oliver's plan is to rid suffering children of the tyranny of their own parents. He wants to oust Commissioner Butler from his position and promote Sarah, while framing the detective. Sarah is intrigued by the plan, but she realizes that Oliver is driven by personal vengeance. He doesn't care about the fate of the children. Moreover, as he gains power and impunity, he begins to resemble the fanatic he deliberately portrays to the police. Sarah is convinced that he will soon become the same kind of tyrant as his father. Or as her father. Or as Maxwell. Or as Butler.

Arriving at the ranch, Sarah stuns Oliver with a taser. She handcuffs him and collects evidence that she plans to plant on the detective and the commissioner in the morning. Before leaving, she calls Maxwell's wife and introduces herself as a club employee from "Gomorrah."

In the parking lot, Sarah freshens up, takes Commissioner Butler's keys, and intends to go after his car. Rice appears in the parking lot and notices Sarah. He shares his insights with her, piecing together the puzzle. Almost intuitively, the officer is getting close to the truth of what really happened. All this time, Sarah has been manipulating Rice, leading him towards her own objective. She carefully provided him with information, but she didn't anticipate that he would come so close to the truth. Rice plans to go to the ranch to find Oliver. Sarah realizes that sooner or later, the officer will surely expose her. She also sees Rice as a competitor for the commissioner position. She needs to eliminate him along with the others. However, Rice unexpectedly changes his mind. After this night, he has realized what he will become if he continues down the path of careerism. He retrieves a toy and flowers from his car and heads to the maternity ward to join his family. As a parting remark, he hints to Sarah that he no longer holds resentment towards his father. Rice's action forces Sarah to reassess everything that has happened to her.

Sarah arrives at the ranch, unloads Commissioner Butler from the trunk, and stages a fake shootout between him and Oliver. Before shooting Oliver, she explains him where they went wrong and reveals her new plan. This plan cannot be executed by monsters like Sarah and Oliver. She intentionally leaves her fingerprints on the bullet in Oliver's pocket, making it easier for Rice to track her down and get his promotion.

Before leaving the ranch, Sarah turns to Maggie with hope. The dummy answers with Billy's distorted voice. That same voice that Sarah imitated when she testified instead of the witness.

Email: [rocka.job.gan@gmail.com](mailto:rocka.job.gan@gmail.com)