

THE CRUX OF IT ALL

INT. PRISON CELL BLOCK A

The block is empty and barren. Fluorescent lights luminate off of the limestone floor from the ceiling.

The skinny prison block only holds eleven cells, all on the same side of the hall. The sliding bar doors to all eleven cells are wide open.

A deafening BUZZ rings out and the steel door at the end of the hallway clicks open automatically with a thud.

BENJAMIN ARCHER, (46), steps onto the prison block dressed in orange prison scrubs with 'MAX S' written in blue just above his eight digit prison number. A tall, well-built guard, ANTHONY MORETTI, accompanies him.

MORETTI

He's waiting in your cell.
He'll walk you back down when
he's done with you.

Benjamin nods and walks down towards cell number eight.

Moretti turns and walks back out. The door crashes shut automatically behind him.

Benjamin reaches his limestone cage and steps in to see MITCHELL BRAGGS, well-dressed in a blue suit, sitting comfortably on the cot.

BENJAMIN

You know how many times I came
on those sheets lastnight?

Braggs and Benjamin both smile. Benjamin walks over to his urinal and drops trow.

BRAGGS

Good to see you developed a
sense of humor after all these
years.

Benjamin finishes peeing, pulls his pants back up and turns back around as a serious look washes over his lawyer's face.

BRAGGS

You get the newspaper in here?

BENJAMIN

I could, but I only request books. The world doesn't care what I do in here, and I don't care what they do out there.

Braggs lifts a walkie-talkie from his hip and speaks into it.

BRAGGS

You can send her in.

Braggs clips the talkie back to his belt and stares at Benjamin.

BRAGGS

Arnold Watts. He's the latest edition to this fine institution. He cut a deal with the D.A. He accepted a life sentence instead of death in exchange for confessions to all of his other crimes.

The roaring buzz sounds again and the door down the hall snaps open. Footsteps, wearing heels, click along the limestone floor towards the cell.

BRAGGS

One of those crimes, and ultimately the one that saved his life when it proved to be true, involved a young girl eighteen years ago that he brutally raped and murdered.

Benjamin's eyes grow wide and Braggs nods.

BRAGGS

Your daughter.

Benjamin opens his mouth, in shock, and emotion overcomes him. He falls back against his hard limestone wall.

A middle-aged woman, MELISSA HARGROVE, arrives at the cell and nervously peeks in.

MELISSA

Ben?

Benjamin immediately recognizes the voice and turns to her. He tries to speak, but nothing comes out.

Melissa is almost in tears.

MELISSA

They said you couldn't have any visitors, but they understood.

Benjamin nods and Melissa breaks down into sobs. She slowly makes her way over to Benjamin and weeps into his arms.

MELISSA

I'm so sorry, Benjamin. I am so sorry.

Tears begin to fall down Ben's cheeks.

BENJAMIN

I would have never hurt her, Melissa. Ever.

Melissa shakes her head and only cries harder.

MELISSA

I was so lost. I didn't know what to think.

BENJAMIN

It hurt so bad, the way you looked at me.

Melissa backs away and stares at him.

MELISSA

I am so sorry for that. Ben, I didn't know what to do.

Ben nods and lowers his head, understanding. Melissa wipes away her tears.

MELISSA

I don't know how I could ever make it up to you. I can't imagine what you've been going through all this time.

BRAGGS

Well, Benjamin. The bright side to all this now, is I could talk to the D.A., and with good behavior, you could be out of here in no more than five years.

Melissa looks to Braggs, confused.

MELISSA

I don't understand. Why can't he leave now? He didn't do it.

Braggs looks to Benjamin and waits for him to explain. Benjamin looks at her.

BENJAMIN

There was a fight a couple years back. Just somebody picking on somebody else. I stepped in and helped and, I shoved him down. He fell back and slammed his head against the concrete. He didn't make it.

Melissa puts her hands over her mouth.

BRAGGS

Because the act was in a defensive manner, I can get that charge dropped down to manslaughter, minimum eight years with an extremely good chance of parole in five. Benjamin's behavior as a model prisoner for most of his time in here helps tremendously with that.

BENJAMIN

I could never be the monster you thought I was.

Melissa has to search deep for her words.

MELISSA

You don't know how truly sorry I am for everything I've thought about you for the past eighteen years. It makes me sick, Ben.

BENJAMIN

If I wouldn't have killed that man. If I would be walking out of this jail today, what would you think about me?

MELISSA

What do you mean? I already said I feel terrible.

Now Benjamin has to find the right words.

BENJAMIN

Would you want to start over again? Can we ever have what we had before?

Melissa can only stare for a moment. She begins to slowly break down again.

MELISSA

Ben. That was so long ago. I have another family now.

Benjamin closes his eyes and Braggs lowers his head.

MELISSA

No. We couldn't. I'm sorry. I have to go. I am truly sorry.

Melissa rushes out of the cell and back down the hall.

Benjamin falls back against the wall and slides down to the floor, hurt.

The buzz echoes through the empty block and Melissa's heels click distantly away.

BRAGGS

You can't blame her, Ben. It's been a long time. Imagine what she's gone through.

BENJAMIN

I don't. I could never blame her. It doesn't stop me from feeling sick inside, though.

Braggs stands and helps Benjamin to his feet.

BRAGGS

Come on. You're a popular
person today. Somebody else
wants to have a talk with you.

Braggs leads Benjamin out of the cell and down the hall.

INT. OUTSIDE CELL BLOCK C

Benjamin is lead by Braggs and Moretti.

Warden CURTIS HAYWOOD, a well-dressed middle-aged man,
waits for them.

HAYWOOD

Mr. Archer. How are we doing
today? First of all, let me
express my apologies for
everything you have been
through. I know there's nothing
we or anybody can do to make up
for it.

Benjamin nods as Haywood shoots a friendly glance over
to Braggs.

BRAGGS

Well, this is where I get off.
Mr. Archer. I'll be in touch.

Benjamin and Braggs shake hands. Braggs makes it a
point to hold it for a few seconds longer than
necessary. He nods to the warden and walks off.

HAYWOOD

There might not be anything I
can do to make up for your
misspent time here. But it
doesn't mean I'm not going to
try.

BENJAMIN

I don't understand.

HAYWOOD

I tried talking to the D.A., but he's just being the prick that he is and won't cut you any slack. Mr. Braggs is a great lawyer and did what he could, but you still have to spend a lot more time with us. Arnold Watts is in cell number five, Benjamin. I'm willing to turn my head for ten minutes because I believe you deserve this justice. Ten minutes alone with the man who raped and killed your daughter.

Benjamin, caught off guard, can only stand and ponder for a few moments.

BENJAMIN

What will happen after?

HAYWOOD

All you have to say is you surprised Moretti here. You overpowered him and fought your way inside Arnold Watts' cell. I'll have to slap Moretti with a month's suspension, but he'll be taken care of. You'll have to be punished accordingly, of course, but you'll also be taken care of, here.

BENJAMIN

Ten minutes?

HAYWOOD

Please realize, Mr. Archer. I'm only doing this because this is only what I would want if it was my daughter and I was in your shoes. You know me by now and you know I'm by the book, but eighteen years of wrongful imprisonment. That man wouldn't be breathing after I walked out of his cell, whether I had to spend more time in jail or not.

Benjamin nods.

BENJAMIN

I know beggars can't be choosers. Can I have fifteen minutes with him? I want to talk to him first.

HAYWOOD

Rec is over in about a half hour. The men'll be back in their cell by then.

Benjamin nods and Moretti takes him by the arm.

INT. CELL BLOCK C

Only five cells, all of them open, line this limestone hall.

A similar buzz rings out and Moretti leads Benjamin down to the fifth cell and Benjamin looks inside.

ARNOLD WATTS is a medium-sized, squirellish man in his fifties, his gray hair receding back towards the top of his scalp.

He sits, hand and ankle-cuffed, on his cot. He also wears orange prison scrubs as he stares at the two questioningly.

Benjamin begins to walk in the cell, but Moretti holds out his arm and stops him.

Moretti slides his black hardwood baton out of its holster and lets it fall to the floor.

MORETTI

Oops.

Moretti ignores it, puts his arm back down and begins to walk back down towards the end of the hall.

Benjamin bends down, picks the baton off the ground and walks into Watts' cell.

Fear begins to crawl into Watts' eyes as he stares at Benjamin.

Benjamin reaches out and very roughly pulls Watts' gag out of his mouth.

WATTS

What the hell is this about?

Benjamin grabs Watts by the neck and throws him hard to the ground against the wall on the opposite side of the cell.

Watts just barely misses slamming the back of his head off the urinal.

Benjamin stands over him and stares into his eyes.

Emotion starts to overcome him and tears run down Benjamin's cheeks.

He grabs what's left of Watts' hair and violently tilts his head backwards over the rim of the urinal.

With his head tilted awkwardly back, Watt's Adam's apple juts grotesquely into the air and Benjamin holds the hardwood baton against the large lump.

Watts struggles to escape from Benjamin's grip, but can't.

Watts' eyes grow in horror. The back of his neck smears caked urine along the urinal rim.

Benjamin raises the baton and slams it down on top of the urinal, just above Watts' head.

The porcelain cracks from the force.

BENJAMIN

She was six years old!

Benjamin slams the baton again in the same spot and the porcelain cracks even more. Dust falls into Watts' eyes.

BENJAMIN

SIX YEARS OLD!

Benjamin holds the baton to Watt's throat again and takes a few deep breaths.

Benjamin raises the wooden baton again and this time, takes aim at Watts' prominent Adam's apple.

INT. OUTSIDE CELL BLOCK C

Haywood and Moretti wait patiently.

Finally, Benjamin slowly walks out of cell number five and towards the steel door.

The door opens with the loud buzz and Benjamin walks through. Sweat drips down his forehead and he stares hard-faced at the warden.

He holds the baton to Moretti, who takes it.

BENJAMIN

I'm sorry. There's a little bit
of a mess.

Moretti nods and walks down the hall towards cell five. He examines the end of his baton along the way.

Benjamin continues to stare at Haywood.

BENJAMIN

He pissed himself.

Moretti reaches the cell and looks inside. He looks back out to Haywood.

MORETTI

He's all right.

Haywood nods and stares back at Benjamin.

HAYWOOD

I have to give you credit,
Benjamin. I don't think I could
have walked out of there without
making him pay.

BENJAMIN

I almost didn't.

HAYWOOD

What changed your mind?

BENJAMIN

I'll be fifty-one years old when I get out of here. By that time, I will have spent twenty-three years sitting in my rusting cage. Staring at the same walls everyday. Thinking the same thoughts over and over. Fifty-one years old. The way I see it: I'll have about another twenty years ahead of me when I get out. I loved my daughter and there wouldn't be any better feeling in the world than making her murderer suffer. But I'd rather mourn my daughter out there than in here.

Haywood nods and takes Benjamin by the shoulder, but more as a friend than as an authority.

HAYWOOD

Come on. I'll show you to your pod.

BENJAMIN

Pod?

HAYWOOD

Yes. D Pod. You're not in here for raping a minor anymore, Mr. Archer. You're not a risk from the other prisoners. You've been bumped from maximum security.

Haywood walks Benjamin away from cell block C and towards the minimum security wing of the prison.

HAYWOOD

You'll have cable where you're going. You better start paying attention to what's going on outside, now. You'll be back out there soon enough.

THE END