

WRATH OF GOD

by
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FADE IN

AGAINST WHITE, TITLE CARD:

"The Wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the godlessness and wickedness of men, for though they knew God they neither glorified Him nor gave thanks to Him; therefore God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not be done." -- THE BOOK OF ROMANS

EXT. SUBURBS - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

A gentle snow drifts lazily to the ground. Decorative Christmas lights line yards and houses and seem infinitely brighter under the gray, winter sky.

One house features an elaborate reef upon its front door. CHRISTMAS MUSIC and HARRIED BREATHS build from within.

INT. HOUSE - CHRISTMAS DAY - CONTINUOUS

LIVING ROOM

A decorated Christmas tree. Dozens of unwrapped gifts lie all about. Stockings hang from the mantle above the fireplace, stuffed-to-bursting with goodies. The HEAVY BREATHING grows louder.

KITCHEN

A table set for Christmas dinner, a partially carved turkey as its centerpiece, set for four. One plate is shattered, its contents split down the middle. A chair lays on its side on the floor, a small pool of blood nearby.

STAIRCASE

At the top, a side table lays on its side on the floor. A busted lamp nearby.

BATHROOM

A YOUNG BOY's body hangs over the edge of the tub. Blood everywhere.

HALLWAY

At the far end a WOMAN's body lies in an unnatural position. A vivid red arc of arterial spray on the wall beside it.

BEDROOM

A SILVER DOORKNOB. Reflected upon it, a MAN as he ransacks the room. THUDS and CRASHES of objects being overturned.

The doorknob fills the screen. The Man in the reflection strides toward the doorknob. His BLOODY HAND grasps it, turns it and yanks open the door.

A YOUNG GIRL, can't be more than seven, cowers and cries inside a closet. The Young Girl looks up to him, tears a cascade of terror which streak down her face.

He reaches for her. She SCREAMS.

EXT. POLICE STATION - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

A small town station house. A telephone RINGS.

INT. POLICE STATION - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

The DESK SERGEANT answers the ringing phone. Several uniformed cops stand about and chit-chat as they sip steaming cups of cocoa.

One cop's eyes wander to the front door. He stares ahead. The other cops realize something is amiss and follow his gaze to the front door.

WILLIAM ROGER ATHMAN stands inside the entrance, his clothes and person caked in frozen blood, an AXE clenched tightly in his hands. His face is blank.

The cops stare at him for a moment, confounded. Then the adrenaline kicks in.

The cops pull their side-arms and bark orders as they form a semi-circle about Athman...

COP #1
Freeze!

COP #2
Drop it!

...and a jumbled cacophony of similar commands from the others.

Athman blinks. He glances down at the axe. Lowers it. Drops it. It hits the tiled floor with a CLANK.

Athman's face contorts with anguish. He crumples to a sobbing heap on the floor.

The cops, weapons at the ready, cautiously close in around him.

EXT. CHURCH - CHRISTMAS DAY

CAPTION: Earlier.

CHURCH BELLS RING as churchgoers arrive for the Christmas morning congregation. Several children try their damnedest to ruin one another's Sunday Bests as they lob snowballs at one another.

PREACHER (O.S.)

And he said, "You have no excuse,
you who pass judgment on others."

INT. CHURCH - CHRISTMAS DAY

A packed house. TIMOTHY VICK and his family - SARAH (wife), RICKY (10) and JANIE (8) - are in attendance. As the sermon progresses, Tim gazes out the window, his attention somewhere else - anywhere else - but here.

PREACHER (O.S.)

When you, a mere man, pass judgment
on them and yet do the things they
do, do you think you will escape
God's judgment? Do you show
contempt and no appreciation for
the riches of God's kindness?
And do you not know that by showing
affection for his doings, you will
be led into redemption?

HALLELUJAHs and AMENs from the congregation.

PREACHER (O.S.)

Brothers and sisters, let us bow
our heads and pray.

The congregation bow their heads. Tim checks his watch and returns his gaze out the window.

INT. VICK HOME - DEN - CHRISTMAS DAY

Tim and Sarah enjoy the show as their children tear into their Christmas gifts. Janie beams at the sight of a tea party play set.

JANIE

Wow! Mommy, Daddy, look what Santa brought me!

SARAH

That's great, Janie!

RICKY

I'm so sure. There is no Santa Claus, stupid.

TIM

(stern)

Ricky.

The comment is lost on Janie, who's too occupied with her gifts. Tim gives Ricky a look, "You're gonna get it." Ricky grins and continues with his gifts.

EXT. VICK HOME - BACK YARD - CHRISTMAS DAY

Tim splits wood at a chopping block. Janie peeks her head out the back door.

JANIE

Hurry, Daddy, the fire's going out!

TIM

Coming, sweetie. Go on back inside now before you catch cold.

JANIE

And Mommy says its almost dinner time so hurry your ass up.

TIM

Janie!

JANIE

Well, that's what she said!

Tim scoops up a handful of snow and lobs it at the door, playful. Janie quickly ducks back inside and closes the door. The snowball harmlessly splats against it.

Tim laughs to himself and stoops to collects the kindling.

EXT. VICK HOME - DUSK

As Christmas Day gives way to Christmas Night.

INT. VICK HOME - KITCHEN - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

The family sit about the dinner table, post-feast, stomachs filled. Tim wipes his mouth with a cloth napkin.

TIM

Wow.

SARAH

More?

TIM

One more bite and my stomach's going to explode all over this table.

JANIE

Eww!

SARAH

All right, kids. Back to your toys.
(to Tim)
Wash or dry?

TIM

Give me a minute. Food's got to settle.

SARAH

No way. I gave you a minute last year and it turned into an hour. Up and at 'em.

Tim crosses his arms, plays defiant. Sarah tries to pull him from his seat.

SARAH

Let's go, Dr. Vick. Up!

Tim reaches back and grabs Sarah, pulls her onto his lap. She SHRIEKS, LAUGHS. Tim kisses her about the face.

RICKY

Oh, God.

Ricky and Janie roll their eyes and quickly vacate the kitchen.

TIM

This was a good Christmas.

Tim and Sarah kiss, tender. The PHONE RINGS. Tim, mid-kiss, waves a hand at it. It RINGS again.

SARAH

Go on. I'm going to start cleaning up.

Sarah rises from Tim's lap. Tim gives her a pat on the butt and goes for a wall-mounted phone nearby. He answers.

TIM

Merry Christmas. Oh, Alex. Hi.

How's your --

(pause)

What?

Sarah glances back at him, inquisitive. Tim shrugs.

TIM

What are you talking -- Alex,
you're not --

Tim grows concerned.

TIM

Okay. Okay, I'll do it right now.

Tim quickly hangs the phone up. He takes Sarah's hand and hurries out of the kitchen.

SARAH

Tim? What's going on?

TIM

We have to get out of the house.
Ricky, Janie!

EXT. VICK HOME - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

A pair of police patrol cars sit at the curb, red and blues spinning. Tim, Sarah and the kids huddle together in the front yard.

An unmarked unit pulls into the driveway. LIEUTENANT ALEXANDRA "ALEX" HOPKINS exits the car and approaches them.

ALEX
Anything?

TIM
They're still looking.

ALEX
You guys okay?

Sarah acknowledges Alex with a scornful nod. Apparently, there's a history here.

TIM
Alex, what the hell is going on?
You didn't make any sense on the --

COP (O.S.)
All clear.

The group looks to the front door of the house, where stands a uniformed COP.

ALEX
Nothing?

COP
No, ma'am. Place is clean.

ALEX
I want a watch posted, four point perimeter, rotating. Nobody gets in, nobody gets out. Make it happen.

COP
Yes, ma'am.

The Cop turns back into the house.

ALEX
Tim, I need you to come with me to the station.

TIM
Why?

ALEX
It's important.

Tim glances back to his family, unsure. Alex walks closer.

SARAH
I want some answers.

ALEX
It's best if Tim just comes with
me, Sarah.

SARAH
Since when do you know what's best
for my husband?

ALEX
I'm sorry to cause such a panic
today, of all days. But please
believe me when I say I had no
choice and that for right now,
you're better off not knowing.

Sarah grows angry.

ALEX
Sarah. This isn't about me and you.

Alex holds Sarah's gaze. Sarah remits. She looks to Tim and nods. Tim places his hands on her shoulders.

TIM
I don't know what's going on, but
everything's going to be okay. I
promise.

Tim kisses her on the cheek and walks off with Alex. Sarah stands silently with the kids as they watch their father leave.

EXT. STREET - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Alex's unmarked unit travels along.

INT. ALEX'S UNIT - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Tim drums his fingers on his lap as he watches Alex out of the corner of his eye.

TIM
Well?

ALEX
What?

TIM

Is it a secret why you called me in
a panic and had me clear my house
on Christmas Day?

ALEX

It wasn't panic, it was concern.
And I had a wonderful Christmas,
thanks for asking. I had no choice.

TIM

That's all well and good, but why?

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Numerous CRIME SCENE PHOTOS of the woman, boy and girl from before are spread across the desk. Tim flinches as he scans over them.

Alex sits across the desk from him. She's a hard-core cop, and the photos don't seem to phase her in the least. She pulls a cigarette from her desk drawer, lights up and kicks back.

Tim's eyes remain on the photos during the conversation.

TIM

Those things will kill you.

ALEX

All these years we've known each
other, you've never let a day go by
without slipping that in.

TIM

And you never let a day go by
without ignoring it.

ALEX

Sarah sure seemed happy to see me.

TIM

Let's not go into that.

ALEX

It's been five years, and it was
only once. It's not like we --

TIM

Put yourself in her shoes and ask
yourself if you'd still be angry?

ALEX

But she forgave you.

TIM

It took a long time, and a lot of work. You, on the other hand, she'll always see as a home-wrecker.

Alex flinches at the comment.

TIM

When did this happen?

ALEX

This morning. About the time you were opening the tie Sarah got you for Christmas.

TIM

It was a socket set. Who could do something like this?

INT. MONITOR ROOM

(NOTE: ALL MONITOR ROOM SCENES OCCUR ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT)

Tim and Alex look through a large, two-way mirror into the adjoining Interrogation Room. At a table in that room sits William Roger Athman in an orange jail-bird jumpsuit. Tim and Alex study him.

ALEX

William Roger Athman, investment banker.

TIM

Huh.

ALEX

You know him?

TIM

No.

ALEX

You ever meet him?

Tim shakes his head.

ALEX

Ever seen him before?

TIM
Not that I recall.

ALEX
And you're sure?

Tim eyes her, suspicious

TIM
I don't know him. Never met him.
Never seen him before in my life.
Now, can I go back home to my
family or are you going to tell me
why you asked me to come here?

ALEX
I didn't.
(re: Athman)
He did.

TIM
Come again?

ALEX
Not an hour ago that kindly looking
gentleman appeared at our front
entrance caked in blood and
carrying an axe. After he had what
can only be described as a nervous
breakdown, he said he wanted to
confess to the murder of his wife,
son and daughter.

TIM
You're the cops, that's your job.
What's it got to do with me?

ALEX
He asked for you, Tim. By name.

A beat. Tim's confused.

TIM
Ignoring for the moment the fact
I've never even heard of this guy
before, why the scare? Why have us
evacuate our house?

A beat. Alex seems hesitant.

TIM
Alex.

ALEX

He said if we didn't get you here immediately to take his confession, that your family would be dead by morning.

Tim SCOFFS. He looks away, then back to Alex. She's serious. His eyes wander, stunned.

ALEX

I promise you they're in no immediate danger. You saw my officers there, they won't let anything happen to Sarah or the kids.

Tim leans himself against the wall. It's like the wind has been knocked out of him.

ALEX

They couldn't be any safer if God Himself were watching them. Hey, look at me.

She lifts his chin, looks him in the eye.

ALEX

They're safe.

Tim gazes at her, eyes glossed over. A beat. He nods.

ALEX

The sooner we do this, the sooner we can both go back home and enjoy what's left of Christmas. You with me?

Tim pulls a pen and small notebook from his coat pocket.

TIM

What's his name, again?

ALEX

William Roger Athman.

Tim jots the name down, tears the page from the notebook and slips it into his coat pocket. He reaches into the other pocket for something, but nothing is there.

ALEX

What?

TIM

I didn't know I'd be conducting an interview. I'm not prepared. I need my cassette recorder, I need --

Alex pulls a mini-recorder from her pocket and holds it out for him. She eyes him, coy.

ALEX

You know someone as long as we've known each other, you learn their habits.

Tim, amused, takes the recorder from her. He steps toward the door which leads into the Interrogation Room.

He pauses. Shoots a hesitant look back to Alex.

ALEX

The whole thing's being video recorded, and I'm armed and ready should anything happen.

(winks)

You'll be fine.

Tim nods to her and goes through the door.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

(NOTE: ALL INTERROGATION ROOM SCENES OCCUR ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT)

Tim enters, closes the door behind him. The room is brightly lit by a number of ceiling lamps.

Athman sits at the table, motionless, his attention somewhere else.

TIM

Mr. Athman?

Athman turns his attention to Tim. He stands, hands cuffed and awkward before him, and smiles cordially. He motions for Tim to have a seat in the chair across the table from him. Tim does so.

Tim pops the mini-recorder open, checks it for tape. He closes it, sets it atop the table and presses the "record" button.

TIM

Ahem. Sunday, December 25th. Time
is --

(checks watch)

Seven-oh-seven, p.m. Subject's
name is William --

ATHMAN

Please, call me Bill.

TIM

Subject's name is William Roger
Athman. Mr. Athman, my name is Dr.
Timothy Vick.

ATHMAN

Pleasure.

TIM

Mr. Athman, would you mind terribly
if I asked where you know me from?

Athman glances subtly skyward.

TIM

A phone book, perhaps? You saw my
office's ad in the yellow pages.

ATHMAN

No.

TIM

You attended one of my lectures?
Perhaps we share an acquaintance?

Athman shakes his head, polite.

TIM

Then how?

ATHMAN

It's of no great importance how I
learned of you, doctor. What is
important -- what is of utmost
importance -- is that you hear my
confession.

Tim looks Athman over.

TIM

All right.

Tim gets comfortable in his chair.

TIM
Where would you like to start?

ATHMAN
First, it's important that you know
I loved my family.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - MORNING

Athman descends a staircase which leads into the living room. It's not quite Christmas yet - no tree, no stockings - but the snow which drifts outside the window tells us it's close.

Athman's son, BILLY (9), runs past him. Athman makes a playful grab at him.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
They were the world to me. My son,
Billy...

Athman walks past his daughter, JESSICA (7), who draws at the coffee table. He gives her a wink as he passes her by. She smiles at him.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
My beautiful daughter, Jessica...

Athman walks into the kitchen where his wife, MARY, unglamorous but lovely, washes dishes. He pauses to give her a peck on the cheek on his way toward the back door.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
And my lovely wife, Mary. We were
happy, comfortable. Content.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - BACK YARD - MORNING

Athman chops kindling at a chopping block. Billy approaches.

BILLY
Whatcha doin', Dad?

ATHMAN
We're out of wood for the
fireplace.

BILLY
Can I help?

ATHMAN
Sure. Come here, I'll show you how.

Athman places a fresh block of wood on the chopping block. He stands Billy before it, puts the axe into Billy's hands. He stands behind Billy, manually guides him.

ATHMAN

One hand high, one hand low. When you bring it down, let your high hand slide down to your low hand. That's where the power comes from. Ready?

BILLY

Uh huh.

ATHMAN

One. Two. Three. Go.

Billy raises the axe overhead and brings it down. The axe imbeds itself into the chopping block, a good three inches to the side of its target.

Father and son eye the axe in its place.

ATHMAN

Well. That was...awful.

They share a laugh.

ATHMAN

Come on, let's try again.

They repeat the process. This time, the axe hits the target but doesn't cut all the way through.

ATHMAN

Now you're getting the hang of it.
Again?

Billy nods, excited. Athman squares him up for another go.

ATHMAN (V.O.)

They were my heart and soul. But for the last several weeks I'd been having...some problems.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Athman bolts upright in bed, drenched in sweat, his breath heavy.

He rubs his eyes. Glances down at Mary asleep beside him. She's sound asleep.

Athman lies back down and stares at the ceiling.

TIM (V.O.)
What was the nightmare about?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

ATHMAN
I couldn't remember at the time. I just remembered it being horrific. Terrifying.

TIM
Did you have the same nightmare often?

ATHMAN
Off and on for several weeks. Each time it got worse and worse. It wasn't long after that things began to go badly.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Athman fiddles with his tie before a mirror. Mary enters from the adjoining bathroom in a slip, a dress draped over her arm.

ATHMAN
We're running late.

Mary stands behind him, cranes to check her hair in the mirror.

MARY
This is the first time we've been out in ages. I want to look my best.

She notices Athman's reflection in the mirror. She turns him around, adjusts his tie. Athman looks down at her, worried.

MARY
What?

ATHMAN
I had the dream again.

MARY
The scary one?

Athman nods, almost embarrassed.

MARY

Honestly, Bill, it's just a dream.

ATHMAN

I know, but I'm having it more often lately. I think it's affecting me. Somehow.

Mary finishes up with his tie. He cranes down to kiss her. She avoids it.

MARY

Not now, Bill. I have to finish getting dressed.

She steps aside.

ATHMAN

I don't know why you're so excited. It's only my boss.

EXT. LUXURY APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Fancy and high class. Money lives here. A champagne cork POPS.

EXT. PATIO - NIGHT

Athman, on the patio with his boss, HARRY BECKER, flinches at the sound. His drink splashes in his hand.

HARRY

Whoa. Wound up a little tight there, aren't you, Bill?

ATHMAN

Just been a little tense lately. Christmas rush. It's nothing.

Athman looks out over the tremendous view. Harry sips his drink.

ATHMAN

Incredible view you have here.

HARRY

Suzie likes it.

ATHMAN

And you?

HARRY

I'd be happier paying a grand a month less somewhere else. But, whatever makes the wife happy, you know?

He looks down into his drink.

HARRY

(low)

Whatever makes the wife happy.

Harry clears his throat, puts on a smile.

HARRY

Come on. Couple people I'd like you to meet.

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Athman and Harry enter from the patio. Mary sits off by herself.

A couple, CHUCK and SHERRI, sit on the sofa, drinks in their hands as they chit-chat with Harry's wife, SUZIE.

Athman motions for Mary. She walks over to him.

HARRY

Bill, Mary, I'd like you to meet Chuck and Sherri Moody.

Chuck and Sherri stand. Greetings are exchanged.

CHUCK

So, Bill. I understand you work with Harry?

HARRY

Bill's our top guy. Invested over one point five mil last quarter alone.

ATHMAN

Well, I wouldn't --

HARRY

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Don't let him fool you, this guy is one smooth talker. Could tell you to invest ten grand in shit sandwiches and have you thinking it's a great idea inside a minute.

CHUCK

Shit sandwiches? What's the Dow on that?

ATHMAN

Depends. Got ten grand?

They laugh.

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - LATER

The three couples converse over wine and cheese. Athman's the only person who doesn't have a drink in his hand.

CHUCK

I don't really think this is fair. We're all sitting here three sheets to the wind and you haven't had a single gin and tonic, Bill!

ATHMAN

Oh, I don't drink.

HARRY

You know, that's true. I've known the guy five years and never once has he gone out with the boys for a drink after work. I used to think he was just stuck up.

More laughs. Athman smiles along.

SHERRI

Exciting time of year, isn't it? Christmas, just around the corner...

MARY

You're not kidding. We've been pinching pennies for months. We really want the kids to have a great Christmas.

CHUCK

Oh? Big plans?

ATHMAN

Not really. We usually go to Florida with Mary's parents but this year, we're spending Christmas at home. You know, chest nuts roasting on an open fire, just the family. Right, Mary?

Mary smiles accommodately but seems less than enthused. It goes unnoticed.

ATHMAN

Harry, what about you two?

HARRY

Oh. Uh --

SUZIE

We don't celebrate Christmas.

MARY

Really? Why?

Harry shrinks in his seat, sheepish.

SUZIE

We don't believe in that kind of thing.

MARY

What do you mean?

SUZIE

You know, the birth of God --

MARY

Jesus.

SUZIE

-- right. I mean, come on, right? Jesus? The Messiah? It's all nonsense. The whole idea of Christianity to begin with is just so...puerile. I really don't see how anyone could --

MARY

I'm Christian. Does that mean I'm puerile?

Sudden tension. The others stiffen up.

SUZIE

Oh, no -- I mean, I wasn't trying
to -- I didn't know you were
religious.

MARY

I'm not "religious." I'm
Christian.

ATHMAN

(nervous chuckle)

Honey, I'm sure Suzie didn't mean
any --

MARY

No, I want to hear what Suzie has
to say. Suzie?

Wow, the tension. Suzie searches for something to say. A beat. Chuck to the rescue:

CHUCK

Say, Bill. What about you? Are
you re -- Christian?

Athman shifts in his seat. Mary darts a crooked eye at him.

ATHMAN

I-I generally try to avoid, um --

HARRY

(begs)

Come on, Bill. Are you into The
Big Guy or what?

ATHMAN

I don't really talk about -- I
mean, it makes Mary uncomfortable.

SUZIE

(glass to her lips)

Oh, we can't have that.

Mary shoots Suzie a scornful look.

ATHMAN

Well, I, uh -- my father was a
Pentecostal reverend so I attended
church regularly as a child. But
as I got older I grew away from it.

(MORE)

ATHMAN (cont'd)
Started thinking it was only so
much "lake of fire," "hellfire and
brimstone" nonsense.

(chuckles)
Mary, though, has blind faith. So,
I guess you could say our opinions
on "The Big Guy" differ.

The group laughs uneasily save for Mary, who seems even more offended, and Suzie, who couldn't care less.

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - LATER

Mary, leans her back against a counter, her arms crossed, peeved. Athman fiddles with a bottle of champagne which chills in an ice bucket.

MARY
I can't believe you put me on the
spot like that.

ATHMAN
But I didn't start -- Suzie's the
one who --

MARY
You all but said I was full of shit
for being Christian. You
embarrassed me.

ATHMAN
Can we talk about this later? This
is my boss, I don't want to be on
bad terms with --

MARY
I'm not on bad terms with your
boss. And you may think this is
silly, but I don't.

ATHMAN
I never said it was silly.

MARY
You don't have to say it. You
think it. Do you realize how big
an insult that is to me?

Athman CHORTLES.

MARY
What?

ATHMAN

You're insulted? What about me?
You've had your eye on Harry the
entire night.

Mary stares at him for a moment, offended. She SCOFFS, goes for the door.

MARY

That's right, Mary, just walk away
and ignore the issue.
(under his breath)
Just like you always do.

Mary pauses by the kitchen door. She turns halfway, leers at him.

MARY

Why don't you have a drink, Bill?

She walks out of the kitchen. Athman looks away, disgusted.

TIM (V.O.)

Why did it anger you when she said
that?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

ATHMAN

I'm...I'm an alcoholic.

Tim leans back in his seat, all ears.

ATHMAN

Just like my father was, before me.

TIM

I thought you said he was a
Reverend?

ATHMAN

He was also a hypocrite. I watched
him drink himself into a stupor
every night for as long as I can
remember. And I picked the disease
up from him. It was Mary who
convinced me to dry out.

TIM

Really?

ATHMAN

Told me she wouldn't marry me
unless I kicked the habit. It took
a lot of work, on both our parts,
but we did it.

TIM

How long had you been on the wagon?

ATHMAN

Ten years.

TIM

And did you have a drink that
night?

Athman lowers his head.

ATHMAN

Yes.

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Athman looks away as Mary leaves, disgusted. His eyes fall upon a bottle of champagne in the ice bucket.

CUT TO:

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - LATER

Athman pours himself a sip into a glass. He stares at it.

ATHMAN

I don't know why I did it. I didn't
want to. But I felt compelled.
Like someone else was in control.

He wraps his hand around the glass. Slowly brings it to his lips. Sips it down with a trembling hand - regret on his face even as he does so.

He sits the glass down, pours another, larger sip. He stares at the glass again - fighting the urge, or succumbing to it?

EXT. CITY STREET - NIGHT

Athman's car pulls up to a stoplight.

INT. ATHMAN'S CAR - NIGHT

Athman behind the wheel, Mary in the passenger seat, her gaze directed out the window. They sit in silence. Then...

MARY
I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said
that.

She casts a sideways glance at him.

MARY
You didn't, did you?
(pause)
Bill?

ATHMAN
No.

The light turns green. They drive on.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

ALEX (O.S., FILTERED)
Tim?

Tim glances back to the two way mirror.

ALEX (O.S., FILTERED)
Excuse yourself for a minute.

INT. MONITOR ROOM

Alex, a pair of file folders in her hand, holds the door open as Tim enters. She hands him one of the files.

TIM
What's this?

ALEX
Records check.

Tim leafs through the file.

TIM
Domestic Battery.
(flips the page)
Domestic Battery.
(flips the page)
Domestic -- Jesus.

ALEX

Each charge was filed by Athman's
first wife...

Alex hands him the second file.

ALEX

...Gwynn Athman.

Tim pauses, inquisitive.

TIM

Gwynn Athman. Gwynn -- Athman. You
know, I thought that name sounded
familiar.

ALEX

It should. It was all over the
news twelve years ago.

(off Tim's look)

When they found her body.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

Gwynn's file falls onto the table top. Athman regards it.
Tim takes a seat across from him.

ATHMAN

What's this?

TIM

Mr. Athman --

ATHMAN

Bill.

TIM

-- tell me about Gwynn.

Athman stiffens up.

TIM

Mr. Athman?

ATHMAN

Gwynn was my ex-wife. But she has
no bearing on any of this.

TIM

Tell me anyway.

ATHMAN
(hesitant)
Gwynn was not a nice woman.

TIM
Did you ever abuse her? Hit her?

ATHMAN
No.

TIM
Then why did she file three
domestic battery charges against
you?

Athman smirks.

ATHMAN
Right. The so-called abuse
charges. The judge laughed them
out of court.

TIM
So the charges were fraudulent?

ATHMAN
Yes. They were found without
grounds and summarily dismissed.

TIM
Then why charge you?

ATHMAN
Gwynn was from a very wealthy
family, very much accustomed to
having her way. At the time I
spent my money on booze, so, when
she wanted something I didn't have
the money to get her...

TIM
Right. So why stay married,
especially after three fraudulent
abuse charges?

ATHMAN
When you love someone, Dr. Vick,
you give them the benefit of the
doubt.

TIM
Uh huh. Tell me; when the police
found her body...

Tim watches Athman for a reaction. There isn't one.

TIM

...procedure dictated they come to you first. What was your reaction?

ATHMAN

My wife had been murdered, Dr. Vick. How would you react?

TIM

This isn't about me.

ATHMAN

I was devastated, of course.

TIM

And maybe a bit relieved?

Athman looks down at his hands, regretful.

ATHMAN

Yes.

TIM

Why?

ATHMAN

As an alcoholic my life was already in chaos. I loved Gwynn, but her behavior only made my life that much more chaotic.

TIM

You fought often?

ATHMAN

Frequently, and often excessively.

TIM

Violently so?

ATHMAN

I'm not a violent man, doctor.

TIM

Oh, obviously. I'm sure if I were to ask Mary, she'd tell me the same thing. But I can't ask her, can I?

ATHMAN

You're insinuating.

TIM

Not at all. I'm simply assessing
the information I've been given
thus far.

ATHMAN

No, you're distorting the truth.
And though I can understand your
hesitance to believe me, especially
given the current circumstance, I
can assure you, doctor: I did not
kill her.

Tim studies Athman with an analytical eye.

TIM

The night of the party, you had a
drink. What then?

ATHMAN

I had the dream again.

INT. ATHMAN'S HOME - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Athman bolts upright in bed as though by electric shock.
Breath heavy. Drenched in sweat. Mary asleep beside him.

BATHROOM

Athman, at the sink, splashes water on his face. He calms
himself, forces himself to breath normally.

Something almost inaudible - a WHISPER - catches his ear. He
spins, startled. His eyes dart around the room. Nothing.

The WHISPER comes again.

BEDROOM

Athman enters from the adjoining bathroom. He scans the
room, then leans over Mary.

ATHMAN

(whispers)

Mary. Mary!

She doesn't budge. The WHISPER again, this time louder. It
sounds like numerous voices over-lapping - can't make out
what they're saying.

HALLWAY

Athman peeks his head out the bedroom door and looks down the hall, softly illuminated by the lamp on the table at the other end.

More WHISPERS. He enters into the hallway, tilts his head to hear.

STAIRCASE

Athman approaches, cranes his head to see down the stairs. Nothing but darkness. The WHISPERS, louder still.

LIVING ROOM

Athman silently comes down the stairs, alert, strains to hear the whispers. They come. He walks ahead.

KITCHEN

Athman cautiously enters. The whispers again. Though much louder, they're still difficult to make out.

Athman steps to the back door, peers through the window. He opens the door and steps outside.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - BACK YARD - NIGHT

Athman stands atop a stoop. Ignores the frozen ground beneath his bare feet and the chilled air on his bare chest.

He steps from the stoop and into the yard, his breaths clouds of steam in the air. He takes a few steps, stops by the chopping block.

The WHISPERS, yet again - only this time they don't stop.

Athman's gaze falls upon the axe in the chopping block. It emanates an eerie, almost imperceptible glow, beckons him. Athman stares at the axe, transfixed.

The continuing WHISPERS build to an unintelligible crescendo. Athman presses his hands to his ears. Grits his teeth as he struggles to block the whispers out.

CUT TO:

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Athman's eyes burst open, shocked to find himself still in bed, Mary still sound asleep beside him.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

The family has breakfast. Athman's mind is off somewhere else.

MARY
We're low on kindling.
(pause)
Bill?

Athman turns to her as though in a daze.

MARY
We need more firewood.

Athman snaps out of it.

ATHMAN
Oh. Yes. I'll get it.

He heads for the back door.

BILLY
Can I help, Dad?

ATHMAN
Sure, chief.

Billy hurries to the door with Athman.

MARY
Billy. Coat.

Billy and Athman take their coats from a rack by the door and step outside. Mary steps to the door and watches from the window, a grin on her face.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

Father and son stand at the chopping block, Billy at the ready with the axe, Athman behind him.

ATHMAN
Just like last time. Firm grip.
One at the top, one at the bottom.
Lift --

Billy, anxious, swings the axe back. The blunt end catches Athman in the temple, THUD.

Athman GRUNTS and stumbles sideways, his hand to his head. Billy drops the axe and rushes to his father.

BILLY

Dad? I'm sorry, I didn't mean to!

Athman viciously grabs Billy by the coat and pushes him to the ground - HARD. Billy OOPS, the wind knocked out of him.

The back door bursts open as Mary races out.

Athman looms above Billy, his face contorted with rage. A thin line of blood trickles from the small gash on his temple. His chest heaves, fierce.

Billy writhes on the ground, struggles to catch his breath. Mary inserts herself between them and frantically sits Billy up.

MARY

What is wrong with you? He's your son, Jesus!

Athman blinks to his senses. He struggles to come up with something to say, but fails.

Mary rubs Billy's back vigorously, helps him regain his breath.

ATHMAN

Can I --

MARY

Oh, I think you've done enough.

Mary stands Billy up and walks him back into the house, leaving Athman shocked with himself.

ATHMAN (V.O.)

It was the first time I'd ever laid a forceful hand on either of my children.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Mary storms out of the bedroom and into the hallway. Athman follows behind her. She stops and faces him as they argue.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
I tried to apologize, but Mary
wouldn't have it.

MARY
I don't care! How could you do
that? What is wrong with you?

ATHMAN
I'm sorry! He surprised me, I --

MARY
I'm not talking about just that.
There is something going on with
you, Bill.

ATHMAN
I said I was sorry, what more do
you want?

Mary steps toward him.

MARY
What I want, Bill, is for you to
know that if you ever lay a hand on
either of them again, I will pack
our things and we will leave you.
Do you understand? We will leave
you!

Mary storms off.

ATHMAN
I have never done anything to hurt
Billy or Jessica before, you have
no right to -- you're just
overreacting!

Mary turns...

MARY
Go to hell!

...then continues down the hall. Athman stands in place,
doesn't know what else to do. He looks over to see Billy and
Jessica as they watch sheepishly from their bedroom doorway.

Athman stomps off.

INT. ATHMAN'S CAR - NIGHT

The headlights of passing cars dance across Athman's eyes, reflected in the rear view mirror. Angry, tense.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Athman, bellied up to the bar. Soft JAZZ MUSIC plays over the house speakers. The BARTENDER slides a shot of whiskey before him.

BARTENDER
Bottoms up.

Athman stares intensely at the shot. His eyes plead, "Don't do it." His hand doesn't listen.

Athman takes the shot glass and pauses just shy of his mouth. He takes a moment to smell its aroma. He closes his eyes tightly and slams the shot back, winces as the burn stings his throat.

He sets the glass aside, disgusted with himself. Wipes his mouth with his sleeve. He stares at the empty glass. Motions for another one.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KIDS' ROOM - NIGHT

Athman stands in the doorway of the darkened room. Jessica lies asleep in bed. Billy sits up, his arms around his knees, as he stares blankly ahead.

Athman slowly walks in, takes a seat on the bed by Billy. Billy shrinks away.

Athman, dejected, goes to the door. There, he pauses and glances over his shoulder.

ATHMAN
I'm sorry, son.

Athman continues out the door and closes it behind him, leaving Billy in the dark.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary lies in bed, facing away. Athman slides quietly under the covers, careful not to wake her. He lies back, ready for sleep.

Mary's head moves ever so slightly.

MARY
You've been drinking.

A beat.

Athman sadly climbs out of bed.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Athman lies fetal on the couch, blanket pulled up to his chin. He sobs.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - BACKYARD - DAY

Athman, listless, goes through the motions as he chops kindling. He stoops to collect the wood, places it in a carrier.

He looks up to see Billy a few feet away. He smiles, cautious. Billy doesn't respond.

Athman kneels and picks up another log. He stands up to find Billy a few paces closer.

Athman takes a knee. He and Billy share a quiet look. Billy baby-steps over to him and slowly puts his arms around Athman.

Athman, relieved, hugs him back. Billy takes a step back, touches the wound on Athman's temple.

BILLY
I'm sorry, Dad.

Tears form in Athman's eyes.

ATHMAN
I'm sorry, too, son. I'm sorry, too.

Father and son hug one another. The tear which falls down Athman's cheek belies the sated smile on his face.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

A totally different mood now - much lighter and happier. Athman and the kids cut up at the breakfast table. Mary watches Athman with a wary eye.

ATHMAN (V.O.)

Despite fixing things with Billy,
Mary still didn't seem to trust me
around our children. I avoided
discussing it with her, thinking
she'd forgive me sooner or later.
But...

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

TIM

But what?

ATHMAN

But something happened to make me
not trust her.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - DRIVE-WAY - DAY

Athman shovels snow. An SUV, windows tinted, pulls up to the curb.

Mary exits the passenger side door, then leans into the vehicle.

Athman cranes his neck for a better view but can't tell what she's doing.

Mary steps away from the SUV and waves to the driver as it pulls off. She glances over, notices Athman in the driveway, a subtle look of surprise on her face at the sight of him.

She walks up the drive-way, gives Athman the cold shoulder as she passes him.

Athman watches her as she goes inside. Turns his gaze to the SUV as it disappears down the road. He tenses, the old gears turning.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

Athman's jaw tightens.

ATHMAN

That's when I got the idea that
Mary was cheating on me.

TIM

Did you just assume? It couldn't have been a friend?

ATHMAN

No.

TIM

Why not?

ATHMAN

She didn't have any.

TIM

So your first thought was that she was cheating on you.

Athman looks down at his hands.

TIM

Mr. Athman, had Mary ever cheated on you before?

A beat.

ATHMAN

Once. Four years ago.

TIM

What did you do?

CUT TO:

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Athman and Mary, mid-argument. Athman SLAPS her across the face. Mary clenches her teeth and SLAPS him back.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

ATHMAN

We worked it out.

TIM

What made you sure she was cheating on you this time?

ATHMAN

I wasn't sure.

TIM
So what did you do?

ATHMAN
I decided to find out.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Athman enters, dressed for work. Billy and Jessica eat breakfast. Mary, dressed nicely, hovers about them.

BILLY
Come on, mom. Travis's dad is
going to be there.

MARY
I said no, young man. Now hustle
up, it's the last day of school for
two weeks and I don't want you to
miss your bus.

ATHMAN
Bye, gang. Off to work.

BILLY
That is decidedly unfair of you,
mom.

Mary GIGGLES.

MARY
"Decidedly?"

BILLY
It's a real word.

MARY
Yes, but you're ten! Since when do
you know "decidedly?"

Mary and Billy chatter on, oblivious to Athman. Athman slinks out of the room.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME/STREET - DAY

Athman slides into his car, which idles in the driveway. He buckles up, puts the vehicle in reverse.

Mary peeks through the curtains of the front window, watches him.

Athman backs out and drives off.

Mary looks in the opposite direction.

A school bus pulls up to the end of the driveway.

Mary ushers Billy and Jessica out the front door. The children hurry to the bus and board it. The bus pulls off.

Mary glances up and down the road. Something catches her eye. She smiles.

The SUV from before pulls up to the curb and HONKS.

Mary disappears from the window.

A beat.

The front door opens and Mary, a coat in hand, hurries out.

The hurries down the driveway and climbs into the passenger door. The SUV pulls off.

EXT. STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The SUV cruises down the street. It passes a small, hidden...

TURN OFF

...where sits Athman's car. His suspicious eyes follow the SUV as it passes by.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Athman follows the SUV from a safe distance.

INT. ATHMAN'S CAR - DAY

Athman lowers his visor to partially cover his face. He pulls out a cell-phone and makes a call.

WOMAN (ON PHONE)
Beckers and Rightly, how may I
direct your call?

ATHMAN
Tracy, it's Bill Athman. Um -- I'm
not going to be able to make it in
today.

WOMAN (ON PHONE)
Oh, are you ill?

A beat.

ATHMAN
You could say that.

WOMAN (ON PHONE)
Well, Harry won't be in until after
lunch today, Mr. Athman, but I'll
inform him when he checks in. Hope
you feel better!

ATHMAN
Thanks, Tracy. God bless.

He clicks the phone off and drops it into the passenger seat.
It bounces off and falls to the floor.

Athman leans over and picks it up. He returns his gaze
forward.

The SUV is nowhere to be seen.

Athman frantically scans the street. No dice. He clenches
his jaw and SLAMS the brakes.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Athman's car SCREECHES to a halt.

INT. ATHMAN'S CAR - DAY

Athman stares ahead, intense, hands so tight around the wheel
that his knuckles turn white. He's completely oblivious to
the long line of cars behind him which HONK their horns at
him.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

WHACK! Athman splits a log on the chopping block. He MUMBLES
profanities to himself.

A CAR DOOR SHUTS somewhere in the near distance. Athman's
ears perk up.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - DRIVE-WAY - DAY

The SUV sits at the end of the drive-way. Mary climbs out.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Mary enters, removes her coat, drapes it on the coat rack.

Athman stands and watches her from the through-way which leads into the kitchen. Mary turns and GASPS, surprised to see him.

MARY

Oh, my G -- Bill?

ATHMAN

Hello, honey.

MARY

You startled me. I didn't see your car out front.

ATHMAN

It's in the garage.

Mary casually strolls past him toward the kitchen.

MARY

What are you doing home so early?

ATHMAN

Called in sick.

Mary notices the AXE which hangs loosely in Athman's hand.

MARY

So you went outside to chop wood?
You should be in bed.

KITCHEN

Mary opens the refrigerator, takes out a carton of milk. As they speak, Athman, in the throughway, his back to the kitchen, doesn't even turn to face her.

ATHMAN

Where'd you go, Mary?

Mary takes a glass from a cabinet.

MARY
Just out.

ATHMAN
Just out? With who?

She pours herself a glass of milk.

MARY (O.S.)
With a friend. We went out for
coffee.

She walks out of the kitchen, toward Athman.

ATHMAN
A friend? What friend?

MARY (O.S.)
Please, Bill. Keeping tabs on me?
We've been through this before.

Mary passes him and walks off. Athman stiffens. He looks down at the axe in his hand. His grip tightens around it.

TIM (V.O.)
What was going through your mind at
that moment?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

Athman stares blankly at the table.

ATHMAN
I don't know. Whatever thoughts I
was having felt alien to me. As
though they were someone else's.

TIM
Explain that.

Athman shakes his head.

ATHMAN
Not right now.

TIM
Why not?

ATHMAN
Because you're not ready. Not just
yet.

TIM

Let me be the judge of that.

Athman smirks.

TIM

Is something funny, Mr. Athman?

ATHMAN

Do you judge things often, Dr. Vick?

TIM

Come again?

ATHMAN

I mean, it's your job, right? You listen to people and you pass a judgment on them.

TIM

No, I make a diagnosis.

ATHMAN

Let's not argue semantics. As a psychiatrist you gather information, much like you're doing with me now. You assess that information and come to a conclusion about that person, who they are, why they do what they do. And in doing so, you're passing judgment upon them.

TIM

It's my job. I have a good excuse.

ATHMAN

God said, "You have no excuse, you who pass judgments on others. When you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the things they do, do you think you will escape My judgment?"

(pause)

Do you, doctor?

TIM

Do I think I would escape God's judgment? Yes. If there were a God, I think I would.

ATHMAN
And why is that?

TIM
I might "pass judgment" on you but
I don't do the things you do. I
didn't kill my family, Mr. Athman.

Tim studies Athman's reaction.

ATHMAN
You said, "If there were a God." I
take it you don't believe.

TIM
I'm Agnostic.

ATHMAN
Interesting. Agnosticism is the
belief that the existence of God
can be neither proved nor
disproved.

TIM
Yes.

ATHMAN
Yet just now, without hesitation,
you dismissed the possibility that
there is a God. Does that not
strike you as hypocritical?

TIM
The only hypocrisy I see is that
you said at Harry's party that you
didn't believe in God. But, now
you champion him.

ATHMAN
I don't champion God, Dr. Vick. God
has brought me nothing but pain.
But, now, I believe He exists.

TIM
What changed your mind?

ATHMAN
When He made me kill my family.

OMINOUS music cue.

Tim leans forward, perplexed but intrigued.

TIM

Now why would you think that?

ATHMAN

Because I can see his thoughts.
He's inside me, you see, even now,
at this very moment.

TIM

I see. And His thoughts -- what
are they?

ATHMAN

Oh, he's very angry.

TIM

Why is he angry, Mr. Athman?

ATHMAN

Because we no longer appreciate the
world he's given us. Because we no
longer thank him. Because we no
longer acknowledge his existence.
He's angry, doctor, because he
sacrificed his own son to show his
undying love for us, and we turned
our backs on him. We stopped
believing. And now he's passing
down his punishment for our
disbelief -- one sinner at a time.

TIM

And you...you didn't believe.

ATHMAN

No. And now, I am the example. I
am the evidence of truth. I am the
warning: Believe, or God will
punish you.

TIM

If you're the warning, what does
that make me?

ATHMAN

(dryly)

Next in line.

Tim's eyes narrow as he studies Athman, focused.

TIM

I don't -- what are you saying?

ATHMAN

I'm saying my threat against your family wasn't an empty one.

TIM

Now, you listen to me, Mr. Athman. If anything happens to my family, I swear to God I'll --

ATHMAN

(laughs)

Hypocrisy, once again! Don't you see it? Not two minutes ago you denied God's existence, but now you swear to Him?

TIM

If you're trying to turn my words against me, it won't work.

ATHMAN

I don't need to turn your words against you, Dr. Vick. You're doing just fine on your own.

Tim shakes his head. The nerve of this guy...

ATHMAN

Please understand, Dr. Vick. I have no intention of harming your family. My sole concern is for their safety.

TIM

Then why did you threaten them?

ATHMAN

To protect them.

TIM

Protect them from what?

ATHMAN

You, and your lack of faith.

Tim SCOFFS.

ATHMAN

I'm here because I have to make you believe.

TIM

Believe? Believe what? What if I
don't believe?

ATHMAN

Then your family will die. And it
will be you who kills them.

Tim cocks a wary eye at Athman, completely lost and flustered
-- but noticeably concerned.

ATHMAN

You don't believe me.

Tim's at a loss for words.

ATHMAN

I'm sorry. I knew you weren't
ready. I should have made sure you
were convinced first.

TIM

You honestly think you can convince
me to believe in this -- this --
bull-shit?

ATHMAN

Think? No. Hope.

TIM

"Hope." All right. Let's hear
your indisputable evidence, then,
Mr. Athman. Convince me.

ATHMAN

I can't convince the closed-minded,
Dr. Vick. You need to open your
eyes, and see the signs.

TIM

And how do you propose I do that?

ATHMAN

By understanding that everything I
admit to from here on in was
directed by God's hand. Can you do
that?

TIM

I'll give it a shot.

ATHMAN

You'll need to do more than that.
Now, listen. And believe.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary reads a book in bed. Athman lays beside her, eyes locked on her. She glances over to him.

MARY

What?

Athman continues to stare at her. She sets her book aside.

MARY

(coy)

What?

She grins. Lays down, snuggles up close to him, in the mood.

She kisses his cheek. Caresses his arm. Her fingers slow-dance upon his chest. She nuzzles his neck.

She presses against him. Gently lays him onto his back. She straddles him, a grin on her face. Athman hasn't so much as blinked.

Mary reaches down and guides him inside her. Athman's hands creep up her sides and to the front of her night shirt. He RIPS it open, exposes her breasts.

Mary GASPS, excited. She smiles broadly. Rocks back and forth on him, slowly. Athman grabs her hips tight. Mary leans her head back, into it.

MARY

Oh, God...

Athman thrusts up into her, hard. Mary likes it. He thrusts harder. Harder. Mary nears climax.

Athman's fingers dig into her hips and he thrusts HARD - slow at first, then rapidly. Mary quickly grows uncomfortable.

MARY

Bill...

He pulls down on her hips and pumps his hips, so hard Mary is more bouncing atop him than anything.

MARY

Bill, stop --

His fingernails penetrate the flesh on her hips. She YELPS in pain. She grabs him by the wrists and, frightened, pries his hands from her.

MARY
STOP IT!

Athman lets go. Mary scoots aside, clenches the front of her night shirt closed. Too shocked to speak.

Athman casually rises from bed and walks off. Mary can only stare at him in absolute shock.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Athman stands before the sink. Steam rises from the basin and it becomes apparent that Athman is scrubbing his genitals -- so hard that he winces in pain.

ATHMAN
(mumbles)
...dirty...dirty little whore...

He sobs. Scrubs himself even harder.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - DAY - CONTINUOUS

KITCHEN

Athman sits at the head of the table, stares blankly ahead. Mary, a resentful eye on him, prepares breakfast.

Billy plays a hand-held video game which emits a cacophony of irritating BEEPS and BOINKS. Jessica colors in a coloring book beside him.

MARY
This is the third day in a row
you've not gone to work.

ATHMAN
Yeah.

JESSICA
Daddy? Wanna color with me?

ATHMAN
(absently)
Not right now, dear.

Jessica shrugs, continues about her business. Billy's game continues, BEEP BEEP BOINK.

Athman snatches the game from Billy's hand.

BILLY

Hey!

Athman frantically tries to shut the game off.

ATHMAN

Mom!

MARY

Bill, what the hell are you --

Athman throws the game against the kitchen walls where it SHATTERS. He pushes himself away from the table.

ATHMAN

You want me to go to work? Fine!
I'll fucking go to work!

MARY

(aghast)

Bill!

Athman stomps off.

LIVING ROOM

Athman marches toward the door. He snatches his coat from the coat rack, shoves the door open, then SLAMS it behind him. The force causes a framed picture to fall off the wall.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

The winter sky reflects off its mirror-like exterior.

INT. RECEPTION AREA - DAY

Athman, the front of his coat clenched shut, passes through the area quickly on his way to his office.

The receptionist, a cute little number named TRACY, lowers a phone from her ear.

TRACY

Mr. Athman, Harry's been -- Mr.
Athman?

INT. ATHMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Athman hurries in and quickly closes the door behind him. He pulls the blinds shut on his office window.

He reaches into his coat and pulls out a WHISKEY BOTTLE in a brown bag. He anxiously removes the cap and takes a hefty swig.

Athman GRUNTS as the liquor burns down his throat. He catches his breath, puts the bottle to his lips and chugs back on it so feverishly that the liquor trickles down his chin.

He lowers the bottle, wipes his chin with his sleeve. Leans his head against the window.

His office door swings open. Harry stops in the doorway.

HARRY

Hey, Bill --

Harry spots the liquor bottle in Athman's hand. Athman lowers his head, ashamed.

INT. HARRY'S OFFICE - DAY

Athman sits in a chair before Harry's desk. His half-full liquor bottle sits atop it. Harry sits at his desk, angry but empathic.

ATHMAN

I'm so sorry, Harry.

HARRY

You should be. You've called in every day this week and when you do finally show up, you're drunk.

ATHMAN

I don't know what to say.

HARRY

I do.

Harry leans forward.

HARRY

Go home, man. Get your head right.

ATHMAN

I've got nothing to go home to,
Harry.

Harry rises and goes to his window.

HARRY

Of course you do. Hell, Christmas
is three days away. What about
your kids? What about your wife?

A beat. Athman slowly looks up, suspicious.

ATHMAN

What about my wife?

HARRY

What?

ATHMAN

I said, what about my wife?

HARRY

Am I missing something here?

Athman drunkenly stands to his feet.

ATHMAN

Is that your car I've seen coming
by, Harry? What about my wife?

HARRY

Go home, Bill.

Athman grows angry. He rounds the desk.

ATHMAN

What about my wife, Harry?

HARRY

I don't even know what the hell
you're --

ATHMAN

Are you fucking her? Are you
fucking my wife, Harry?

HARRY

Jesus, Bill. You're drunk. Just
go home, okay? Before you say
something you --

ATHMAN

The first day I called in, Tracy
said you weren't here. Was that
the same day you came to my home?

He grabs Harry by the collar and presses him against the window.

HARRY

Hey!

ATHMAN

Was that the same day you picked up
my wife and fucked her? Was it?

Harry struggles to loosen Athman's grip.

HARRY

Get your hands --

ATHMAN

You fucked her! Didn't you!?

Harry breaks free of Athman's grip and shoves him away.

HARRY

I'm not fucking your wife, man!
(pause)
We just talk.

Athman slow burns. He balls up his fist.

HARRY

Don't --

Athman lunges forward. Harry, desperate, launches a punch to Athman's mouth, POW!

Athman's head snaps back and he drops to his knees.

Harry clutches his fist.

HARRY

Jesus Christ, man! You're crazy!
You're out of your god damned mind!

Athman laughs. Harry's not far off.

HARRY

Get out. You're fucking fired.
And don't you ever come back.

Athman spits blood on the floor. He clumsily rises to his feet, a grin on his face as if he doesn't give half a damn.

Athman straightens his collar, snatches the liquor bottle from Harry's desk and casually strolls out.

Harry leans against his desk, catches his breath.

INT. MOTEL OFFICE - DAY

A CLERK sits next to a walk-up window, nudie magazine in hand. A KNOCK on the window. He looks up.

Athman stands outside the window, a large split in his lip.

ATHMAN

I want a room.

The Clerk eyes him peculiarly.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Athman enters, a cardboard box under his arm. He pulls the blinds. Sets the box on the bed. Takes a seat beside it.

He pulls his cell phone from his pocket, dials.

INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION - ATHMAN AND MARY

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KITCHEN

The wall-mounted phone RINGS. Mary answers it.

MARY

Hello?

Athman opens his mouth to speak. He hesitates.

MARY

Hello?

Mary takes a quick look around.

MARY

(hushed)

Harry?

END INTERCUT TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Athman lowers the cell phone, defeated. He turns it off, absently sets it aside. His hand wanders to the cardboard box and pulls open the top. Inside - a dozen bottles of booze.

He pulls out a bottle, cradles it on his lap. He stares ahead, devastated, as he removes the cap.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
I did nothing but drink for the
next two days.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

TIM
I'm supposed to believe God made
you go on a bender?

Athman cracks a smile, obviously cognizant of the absurdity of his story.

ATHMAN
No. That time, it was all me. I
sat in that filthy room and drank
myself to sleep for two days. I
would have drank myself to death.
(pause)
But God wouldn't have it.

TIM
What did He do?

ATHMAN
He made me go home.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - CHRISTMAS EVE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

LIVING ROOM

Mary and the kids decorate the Christmas tree. The DOORBELL RINGS. Mary goes to the door and opens it. She GASPS and recoils.

Athman stands there, one hand steadyng himself, the other hand wrapped around an empty liquor bottle. Two days of stubble and drunk as hell, the split on his lip partially healed. Basically, he looks like pure hell.

ATHMAN
Hello, angel.

Mary waves a hand before her face to fan away the smell of liquor.

MARY
My God, Bill.

Athman stumbles in. Billy and Jessica stare at their drunken father. This is something they've never seen before.

ATHMAN
Hey, kiddos. Daddy's home.

The children are too stunned to even move.

MARY
Two days. Where have you been?

Athman tips the empty bottle toward her, gives her a look, "Where does it look like?"

MARY
The whole time?

Athman takes a step toward his kids.

ATHMAN
What do we have here? Oh,
decorating the tree? Wow, it looks
beautiful.

He spreads his arms.

ATHMAN
Come give daddy some love.

The kids share a look.

ATHMAN
Come on, now.

Mary inserts herself between them.

MARY
Go upstairs, Bill.

Athman glares at her. He leans forward, tries to kiss her. She tilts her head away.

ATHMAN

What's the matter, baby? Don't you
love me anymore?

MARY

Go. Up. Stairs. Bill.

Athman, ogles her, dejected.

ATHMAN

Ah, fuck you, then.

Mary fights back tears, as well as the urge to slap him.
Athman solemnly turns and shambles to the stair case.

He stumbles on the first step and pitches forward. The empty
bottle in his hand CLANKS on the wooden step.

Stomach-down on the stairs, he turns a pitiful, wounded look
back to Mary.

MARY

Billy, Jessica. Go in the kitchen.

JESSICA

Is Daddy okay?

MARY

Go on, now. Do as Mommy asks.

The kids hesitantly do so. Mary stoops and puts his arm
around her shoulder. It takes a good amount of effort to get
him to his feet. They start up the stairs, Mary struggling
all the way.

ATHMAN

(wasted)

I got this -- I got this idea.
Let's go get drunk. Just get drunk
and then maybe after we can go to
the bedroom. You want to -- you
want to fool around? It's a great
idea.

BATHROOM

Mary leads Athman, still fully dressed, into the shower. As
upset as she is, she remains calm, strong, as she does what
she has to do.

She takes the empty bottle from him and drops it into a waste
basket.

ATHMAN

Hey! I wasn't -- I wasn't done
with that.

Mary turns on the shower -- icey cold water. Athman YELPS as the stream hits him, raises his hands to block it.

ATHMAN

Hey! What the fuck are you -- it's
cold! God damn it! Hey!

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BATHROOM - CHRISTMAS EVE - NIGHT

Athman, draped in towels and shocked sober, sits on the toilet seat, rueful eyes locked on Mary as she tends to his split lip. Tears teeter on the edges of her eyelids.

ATHMAN

I --

MARY

Shut up.

ATHMAN

Say something.

Mary takes a step back, leans against the sink.

ATHMAN

Mary, please --

MARY

You promised. You swore to me,
never again.

Athman lowers his head.

MARY

And what's worse, our children saw.
What on earth could have made you
do this again? All that hard work.
And Harry said...

Athman's jaw tightens at Harry's name.

MARY

...Harry said you attacked him?
You lost your job? What were you
thinking? I give up. This
isn't...

She looks away.

ATHMAN

You broke your promise, too. I saw you leave with him. I saw you.

MARY

What? Leave with who?

ATHMAN

Harry. I saw you.

Mary turns angry.

MARY

You didn't see anything, Bill. You didn't see anything, because there was nothing to see. Is that what this is all about? You think I'm cheating on you?

Athman's look speaks for him.

MARY

I can't do this anymore. I won't.

(pause)

I'm packing our bags. We're leaving. Billy, Jessica and me. I won't let them see you like this ever again.

Athman catches his reflection in the mirror behind Mary. In his reflection, his eyes are pale blue, his irises are white, and tears of blood streak down his face.

A calm seems to come over him. He stares at his reflection, transfixed.

ATHMAN

Wait. Just one more day.

MARY

Why should I?

ATHMAN

Tomorrow's Christmas. Let it be our last day together. Then, you'll be free. You, Billy, Jessica. And me.

(pause)

Promise me.

Mary, fighting back tears, ponders. Then:

MARY

All right, Bill. One more day.
Then, we're going away.

Athman pulls himself to his feet and walks out. Mary covers her face with her hands and sobs.

INT. MONITOR ROOM

Tim leans against the two-way mirror, deep in thought. Alex enters, a cup of coffee in hand.

ALEX

Thought you could use a pick-me-up.

He takes it, nods a thanks.

ALEX

It checks out. I contacted Harry Beckers at home. He confirmed the scuffle and Athman's termination.

TIM

And the affair?

ALEX

Beckers denies it. He didn't sound too solid, but given the circumstances, if it were me I'd be a bit distraught, too.

Tim SCOFFS.

ALEX

What?

TIM

You excuse Becker's attitude when you asked about the affair, and dismiss the possibility that he and Mary were sleeping together?

ALEX

No, I said his state of mind is understandable under the circum --

TIM

Oh, come on!

Tim turns away from her. Alex eyes him, concerned.

ALEX
You believe him, don't you?
(pause)
That little sermon he gave you.
You're buying it.

Tim doesn't reply.

ALEX
Please, tell me you're not seriously considering the possibility that all of this "Wrath of God" nonsense might be for real.

Tim shoots her a hateful look, then again looks away.

ALEX
Tim?

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

Tim sits across from Athman. The mini-recorder cranks along.

TIM
Christmas Eve. You came home after a two day drinking binge. Tell me more.

Athman leans back. His eyes wander off, reflective.

ATHMAN
Mary, she had these -- little things. Idiosyncracies. They say that's what you love someone for; their quirks, their imperfections. Mary had a number of them. More than her share.

Tim cracks a smile.

ATHMAN
She would only eat one thing at a time and then rotate her plate, counterclockwise, mind you, to the next item of food. The shades always had to be either fully open or completely closed. Half-closed would drive her insane. And sometimes when she laughed too hard she'd snort. "Snortle", is what she called it, I --
(laughs)
(MORE)

ATHMAN (cont'd)
-- I always loved that. I imagine
it's much the same with your wife.

TIM
Yeah.

ATHMAN
(laughs)
So you know what I'm talking about,
right?

TIM
(chuckles)
Oh, yes.

ATHMAN
(laughs)
You've been there.
(sighs)
I remember a time when all those
little things drove me so crazy.
But in time you accept them. They
become part of your routine. And
when they're gone, you miss them.

Athman's eyes tear up.

ATHMAN
Mary, the kids...

His lip quivers.

ATHMAN
...I miss them so much.

Athman places a hand to his face and sobs quietly. Tim can
only wait the moment out.

Athman collects himself. Wipes his eyes.

ATHMAN
I'm sorry.

TIM
Would you like to take a break?

ATHMAN
No. No, I'm fine. Thank you.
Please, let's continue.

TIM
What was your state of mind
yesterday?

INT. ATHMAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Mary and the kids hang ornaments upon the Christmas tree. Athman watches them from the doorway which leads into the kitchen, the look on his face indifferent.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
I wanted to be with them, of course. To share in the moments before Mary was to take them away. But I couldn't.

TIM (V.O.)
Why not?

ATHMAN (V.O.)
God was inside me, and I could see what he had planned. But he wouldn't let me warn them. He wouldn't let me do anything.

BILLY
Dad, you want to help?

Athman stares at the proceedings with a cold eye, no response.

JESSICA
Mommy, what's wrong with Daddy?

MARY
Daddy's just tired, honey.

JESSICA
If I gave him a hug would he feel better?

MARY
I don't know, sweetie. You can try.

Jessica goes to Athman and wraps her arms around his waist.

JESSICA
Do you feel better now, Daddy?

No response. Jessica drops her arms and glares up at him. Dejected, she returns to the tree.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

TIM

So you were aware you were going to kill them the day before you did so. That's called premeditation. Murder One, Mr. Athman. The death penalty.

ATHMAN

You say that as though I care what a judge or jury would pass down on me. At this point it's redundant. I've already been made to suffer the most perfect punishment --

TIM

"Perfect?"

ATHMAN

God's wrath, like God Himself, is perfect. He deemed the punishment must fit the crime, and it has.

TIM

How is being forced by God to kill your family a perfect punishment for you lack of faith?

ATHMAN

He sacrificed his son for us and watched him die, so that we would believe.

Athman leans in closer.

ATHMAN

What more perfect punishment than for us to sacrifice our loved ones as He watches, because we didn't?

Tim looks into Athman's eyes, his psychiatrist's skepticism now being fully tested. But something in Athman's eyes -- maybe truth, maybe Athman's conviction -- spooks Tim.

Tim rises and paces, anxious.

ATHMAN

What I've said -- you're beginning to see now, yes?

TIM

No. This isn't right. It can't be.

ATHMAN

It can be, and it is.

Tim spins toward the table and leans upon it. He looks Athman dead in the eye.

TIM

Then you tell me, Mr. Athman. Tell me what God made you do. What he made you watch as he executed his punishment through your hands.

Tim leans forward against the table, intense.

TIM

Tell me about the murders.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Athman bolts upright on the couch, his body washed with perspiration. Now he's more fearful. More on edge. He presses his palms against his eyes.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KIDS' BEDROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Athman watches Billy and Jessica sleep from the doorway. It's hard to read him right now; is he sad, knowing it's their last day together as a family, or are his thoughts more sinister?

Mary passes around him into the room. She wakes the kids gently.

MARY

Billy. Jessica, honey. It's time to get up. It's Christmas.

Billy's eyes pop open. He scampers out of bed and rushes out the door and past Athman.

Jessica's a bit slower to rise. Mary lifts her from bed and carries her out of the room.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Billy, giddy, waits by the Christmas tree. Mary enters, Jessica in her arms. Billy anxiously reaches for a gift.

MARY

Billy, wait for your father. You know he always hands out the gifts.

Mary sets Jessica beside Billy. Athman stops in the throughway between the living room and kitchen, his expression unreadable.

MARY

Bill?

Athman looks to Mary. She motions toward the tree.

ATHMAN

No, I -- I think I'll just watch this time.

Mary, indifferent, divvies up the gifts, much to Billy and Jessica's delight.

Athman plods over to the couch and takes a seat. As he watches the kids, the faintest of smiles grows on his face.

Billy and Jessica tear into their gifts before Mary has even finished handing them out.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ATHMAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Shredded wrapping paper scattered all about. Billy races around the room with a toy gun, spouts uneducated police jargon.

Jessica sits Indian-style on the floor and coos at her new baby doll.

Mary and Athman watch from opposite ends of the couch, Mary all smiles, Athman blank.

A DING chimes from the kitchen.

MARY

Oh, the turkey!

Mary hurries out of the room. The children play on. Jessica glances up at Athman.

She crawls over to his feet, her baby doll under her arm.

JESSICA

Are you having a good Christmas,
Daddy?

Athman looks down to her, her innocent little eyes enough to melt your heart. A forced, uncomfortable smile grows on his face. Jessica smiles back, then hurries off to play more.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - GARAGE - CHRISTMAS DAY

Athman enters through a door which leads in from the kitchen. He quietly goes to his car and opens the door, leans in and reaches under the driver seat.

He pulls out a liquor bottle. Regards it for a moment, tense.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BEDROOM - CHRISTMAS DAY

Athman sneaks in, his shirt pulled tight before him. He closes the door and locks it. Pulls the liquor bottle from under his shirt. Takes a seat on the bed.

He glances to the bedside table -- a picture there of his family during a happier time. He runs a finger across it, lays it down face-first.

His hand fumbles as he removes the cap from the liquor bottle. He puts the bottle to his lip and chugs.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ATHMAN HOME - CHRISTMAS NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

BEDROOM

Athman lies stomach-down on the bed, out cold. His arm hangs off the bed and to the floor, empty liquor bottle in his hand.

A KNOCK at the door.

MARY (O.S.)
Bill? Are you in there? The
door's locked.

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

Mary KNOCKS. Puts an ear to the door.

MARY
Bill, the kids are asking where you
are. Are you there?
(pause)
Bill?

She turns to walk away. The door opens. She looks around to see Athman in the doorway, eyes bloodshot, mouth hanging open. She winces as the smell of liquor hits her.

If she had any hesitations about leaving him, the look on her face says they're gone now.

MARY
Dinner's ready.
(hushed, upset)
Damn you, Bill.

She walks off.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - KITCHEN - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

(NOTE: CHRISTMAS MUSIC PLAYS THROUGHOUT THE SEQUENCE.)

The family sit around the table. Mary has gone all out; the table is packed with all manner of Christmas dinner staples.

The kids, their appetite built from playing all day, are in the middle of a full-scale eating frenzy.

Mary pokes at her food with her fork. Athman, arms at rest on the table, stares blankly ahead. His plate and silverware sit untouched.

JESSICA
After we're done can we roast some
marsh-a-mallows?

Mary looks up from her plate, forces a smile.

MARY
Sure, honey. Billy?

Billy nods happily.

MARY
I'll get the fire going.

Mary leaves the room. Athman, with apparent struggle, breaks his empty gaze and looks to his children.

ATHMAN
Billy? Jessica?

They look over to him. His voice is unsteady, forced.

ATHMAN
Did you have a good Christmas?

The kids nod, their mouths full.

ATHMAN
Daddy loves you. Don't ever forget that. No matter what I may say or do, I love you both so much. You know that, don't you?

BILLY
We love you too, Dad.

Jessica, mouth full, smiles in response.

MARY (O.S.)
Bill, we need more kindling.

Athman stands and moves behind Billy and Jessica. He bends down and hugs them both, kisses the tops of their heads.

He goes to the back door. Pauses. Looks back at the kids. They seem happy. He continues out the door.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - BACK YARD - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Athman closes the door behind him. He stands in the cold for a moment, breathes deep.

He steps down into the yard. Approaches the chopping block, the axe imbedded atop it.

He closes his eyes. His hand trembles as he reaches for the axe, wraps tightly around the handle. He plucks it from the chopping block. Turns toward the house.

He opens his eyes: pupils white, irises pale blue. Bloody tears leak down his cheeks.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - CHRISTMAS NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

KITCHEN

Mary collects dishes from the table and sets them in the sink.

BILLY

What kind of marsh-a-mallows?

MARY

The good kind. The kind we always get.

JESSICA

Cool!

The back door CREAKS off-screen.

BILLY

I like it when they get all black and you bite them and the inside is all gooey.

JESSICA

Me, too.

The BACK DOOR CLOSES. Mary glances over.

MARY

Did you get the kin --

She stops at the sight of Athman, cold, emotionless in the doorway. No signs of bloody tears or discolored eyes. She notices THE AXE clenched tightly in his hands.

She locks eyes with him. And she knows what's about to happen.

MARY

Oh, no.

Athman raises the axe overhead...

MARY

NO!

...and brings it down, SHATTERING Billy's plate in half.

Billy and Jessica SCREAM. Mary, mother's protective instinct on overdrive, rushes to the kids and grabs them, pushes them off.

MARY
RUN! GO!

Athman brandishes the axe and rounds the table toward Mary. Mary turns to run.

Athman grabs her by the hair, yanks her back and throws her down.

Mary bounces off a chair, knocks it over. She falls to the floor face-first. Her forehead SMACKS off the tiled floor.

She lies stunned for a moment. Blood her cracked brow forms a small pool on the floor. Groggy, she rolls.

Athman lurches toward her. She clumsily gets to her feet and stumbles away. Athman follows after her.

LIVING ROOM

Mary forces herself forward. The crack in her forehead paints her brow red with blood. She shambles toward the staircase, steadies herself on the bannister.

Athman follows, vacant. Mary weeps.

MARY
What did we do?!

Mary looks into his eyes. His empty expression terrifies her that much more.

STAIRCASE

Mary scampers up the stairs, Athman calmly in pursuit.

HALLWAY

Mary comes up the steps. She loses her footing, tries to catch herself on the table at the top of the steps, knocks it over. The lamp which sits upon it falls to the floor.

Athman reaches down and grabs her arm.

Mary grabs the lamp with her free hand and SHATTERS it against Athman's knee. Athman YELPS as his leg buckles, catches himself using the axe as a cane.

Mary scampers to her feet. Takes an unsteady step forward. Athman raises the axe and brings it down INTO HER BACK with a sickening THUD.

Mary GASPS and goes still, frozen in place.

Not a breath. Not a sound, save for the faint Christmas music from downstairs.

SCHLUP! Athman pulls the axe from Mary's back. She teeters, then falls face-first to the floor.

Mary painfully pushes herself onto her hands and knees, gallantly crawls excruciatingly forward. Athman limps after her.

Mary falls to her stomach. Athman rolls her onto her back with the end of the axe.

Mary stares up at him. Blood ekes from the corner of her mouth as she voicelessly pleads for mercy.

We see it happen from the other end of the hall: Athman raises the axe, methodic, and brings it down into Mary's neck. Arterial blood jets out and paints a vivid, red arc along the wall.

BATHROOM

Billy cowers in the bathtub, the shower curtain pulled closed. He sobs at the sickening, rhythmic THUD THUD THUD as Athman chops at Mary down the hall.

Then, SILENCE. Billy does his best to stifle his cries.

A beat -- the longest beat you can possibly imagine, the only sound that of the occasional choked sob from Billy. Then...

The shower curtain flies back. Athman stands before the tub, drenched in blood, the axe in hand. Billy SCREAMS.

HALLWAY

A view into the bathroom, partially obstructed by the bathroom door. Billy's SCREAM abruptly stops at the sound of the AXE as it CHOPS HIS FLESH.

Splashes of blood spatter what part of the bathroom we can see. CHOP, CHOP, CHOP. Then silence.

A beat.

The door pulls open and Athman exits the bathroom, machinelike. He scans up and down the hall.

He moves toward the kids' bedroom at the end of the hall. Past Mary's body - he doesn't even regard it.

KIDS' BEDROOM

Athman shoulders the door open from outside. The door swings back, SMACKS against a toy box.

He scans around the room. Marches forward and ransacks it -- overturns the beds, knocks over the dressers, kicks over the toy-box as he searches for Jessica, all the while that cold, emotionless look on his face.

He pauses, his breath heavy. He looks to the...

CLOSET

Its doorknob shiny and reflective. HUSHED SOBS emanate from within.

Reflected in the doorknob, Athman strides toward the door. His bloody hand grasps the doorknob and yanks the door open.

IN THE CLOSET

Jessica sits on the floor, knees to her chest, her face red and moist with tears. Athman reaches for her. She SCREAMS.

KIDS' BEDROOM

Athman pulls Jessica from the closet and drags her to the middle of the room.

JESSICA
Daddy, no!

Athman pushes her to her knees in the middle of the floor, amidst the clutter and debris. Jessica looks up to him with those innocent eyes. Tears pour freely down her face.

JESSICA
Please, Daddy, no...Daddy,
please...

Athman stares down at her, cold, indifferent.

JESSICA

I love you, Daddy. Please, don't
hurt me, Daddy. Please, Daddy, no,
no, no...

Athman raises the axe...

JESSICA

PLEASE DADDY NO!

...and swings.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

An exaggerated CLICK as the cassette recorder stops.

Tim stares off, stunned and visibly shaken. Athman rocks back and forth in his seat as he cries unabashedly.

ATHMAN

Oh, God, why? They never hurt you.
It was all my fault. All I had to
do was believe. Dear God...why
couldn't I have just believed?

Athman continues to cry.

INT. MONITOR ROOM

Tim leans against the two-way mirror, his struggle to remain professional and detached visibly unsuccessful.

Alex stands behind him, more involved with what Tim's going through than Athman's recounting.

A long beat.

TIM

How could he have done this.

ALEX

Because he's crazy.

TIM

No. God.

ALEX

You don't think --

TIM

No man could do something like
this. No man.

ALEX

Yes, he could. And he did.

TIM

No. There's an explanation. A
logical...

Tears form in Tim's eyes. His lip quivers.

TIM

In all my years as a -- I've never
heard of something so black and --
I can't accept that a man is
capable of --

Alex places a hand on Tim's shoulder, her voice low, calm.
Comforting.

ALEX

Man is capable of worse. I know,
I've seen it. And I know the
thought of it upsets you, Tim. You
have a wife and children, I can
understand how it would.

She slides her hand down his arm and to his hand.

ALEX

But a man can do this. Men have
done it. And this man? He did it,
too.

Tim pulls his hand from hers, continues to stare through the
two-way mirror.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

Tim sits across from Athman, deep in thought. Athman stares
at him.

ATHMAN

You believe me. Don't you?

TIM

I don't know. I...

ATHMAN

You think maybe I'm crazy.

TIM
It's a possibility.

A beat.

ATHMAN
But you don't believe I did it of
my own accord. Knowingly.

Tim takes a heavy breath.

TIM
I don't know. What you've told me,
it could be interpreted in a number
of...

Tim glances up. Finds himself looking into Athman's eyes.

TIM
No. I don't think you did.

A beat.

TIM
I'm sorry about your family, Mr.
Athman.
(pause)
Bill.

Athman smiles.

ATHMAN
And I'm happy for yours.

Tim stands, collects himself.

TIM
I'm going to have my secretary set
up an appointment with a defense
attorney. I'll just have a few
more things to go over with you,
then I'll turn you over to
Lieutenant Hopkins.

Athman's shackles CLANK as he stands. He extends his cuffed
hands forward, one open.

ATHMAN
Thank you, Dr. Vick.

Tim takes his hand, shakes it.

TIM

Tim.

Athman smiles to him. Tim turns for the door.

ATHMAN

You forgot something.

Tim turns. Athman nods toward the cassette recorder.

TIM

Oh. Yes. Thank you.

Tim takes the cassette recorder and again turns for the door. He pauses.

TIM

Can I get you anything? A cigarette?

ATHMAN

(joking?)

I could use a drink.

Tim half-laughed at the peculiar remark. He turns again to leave. Gets to the door. Pauses. Wait a minute...

Athman eyes him curiously.

ATHMAN

Tim?

Tim slowly turns to Athman, a look of disbelief on his face.

ATHMAN

Is something wrong?

TIM

(re: the cassette recorder)

It's all right here.

Off Athman's curious look:

TIM

The truth. It's all right here.

Tim hits the rewind button on the cassette recorder.

TIM

You said I need to watch for the signs. I understand now.

(MORE)

TIM (cont'd)
There are things which attempt to
mislead us, confuse us. Make us
not believe.

ATHMAN
Yes! You see the truth!

TIM
I do.

ATHMAN
And now you believe!

Tim hits the stop button on the cassette recorder.

TIM
Yes. I believe.
(pause)
I believe you killed your family.
I've seen the signs, Mr. Athman.
Just not the ones you wanted me to.

Tim hits the play button on the recorder.

BEGIN FLASHBACK MONTAGE

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

When Harry introduced Athman to Chuck and Sherri Moody.

HARRY
Don't let him fool you. This guy
is one smooth talker.

INT. HARRY'S APARTMENT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

When Athman and Mary argued.

ATHMAN
You've had your eye on Harry the
entire night.

EXT. ATHMAN HOME - DRIVE-WAY - DAY

When Mary was dropped off by the unknown driver.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
Something happened to make me not
trust her.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

When Tim questioned Athman about Mary.

TIM

Had she ever cheated on you before?

ATHMAN

Yes.

INT. ATHMAN HOME - DAY

When Athman called Mary from the motel.

MARY

(phone to her ear, hushed)

Harry?

INT. ATHMAN HOME - BATHROOM - NIGHT

When Mary tended to Athman's split lip.

ATHMAN

Let it be our last day together.

END FLASHBACK MONTAGE

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM

Tim shuts off the cassette recorder and circles Athman. As he does so, Athman grows excited, agitated.

TIM

It's all right here. Every thing
you've told me has been an attempt
to shut my eyes to everything
you've told me.

ATHMAN

I -- I don't understand.

TIM

I do. I understand that you're an
alcoholic who went sober after the
unsolved murder of your first wife.

(MORE)

TIM (cont'd)

I understand Mary had an affair on you previously and when you began to believe she was having another affair -- with your own boss -- it drove you to drinking again.

ATHMAN

No, that's not --

TIM

I understand that once you felt certain Mary was having another affair, you began to systematically distance yourself from your family.

Tim leans down to Athman's ear.

TIM

It's so much easier to kill them when you don't care. Just like Gwynn, perhaps?

ATHMAN

Shut up!

TIM

You said yourself, it was your choice to go on a two-day drinking binge. What was that, numbing yourself up? Desensitizing yourself for the bloody chore to come?

ATHMAN

My family was everything to me!

TIM

I believe you loved your family, Mr. Athman. I believe you loved them so much that the thought of splitting them up pushed you to murder.

ATHMAN

I never wanted to hurt them.

TIM

Then why ask Mary for one more day? If what you said was true, if God was about to make you kill them, why not let them get away?

Athman doesn't reply.

TIM

I'll tell you why; because you wanted them there for when you were ready to kill them.

ATHMAN

No!

Tim gets right in Athman's face.

TIM

You executed your family because they were leaving. Say it.

ATHMAN

You're wrong.

TIM

It wasn't God, it was all you. Say it.

ATHMAN

Stop this. Stop it!

TIM

You murdered your wife --

ATHMAN

No.

TIM

-- you butchered your son --

ATHMAN

No, no, no, no, no --

TIM

-- you decapitated your daughter, and you knew what you were doing every fucking step of the way. Say it! You did it all, didn't you? Didn't you?! Say it, you Godless son of a bitch!

ATHMAN

NO-OO-OO!

Athman goes feral. He RAMS Tim with his shoulder. Tim hits the floor hard....

Athman grabs his chair -- heavy, wooden -- and raises it overhead in his cuffed hands. He ROARS as he brings the chair down...

Tim rolls out of the way a split-second before the chair SHATTERS against the floor....

Tim scampers backward until his back is to the wall, unable to go any further...

Athman looms above him, a piece of the broken chair -- a long, pointed, jagged spear of wood -- raised and ready to kill...

Tim locks eyes with Athman. What he sees: Athman's eyes, the pupils white, irises pale blue, bloody tears cascading down Athman's cheek. For sheer impact, think Tom Berenger in Platoon just before the napalm falls.

A SCREAM of pure, unfettered terror rises from deep within Tim's throat.

ATHMAN
For your family.

BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM BLAM!!!

Athman's back and side rip open as bullets tear through his flesh.

Athman drops the wooden spear. It CLANKS on the floor by Tim's feet.

Athman drops to his knees, then his back.

Alex stands in the doorway between the Interrogation and Monitor rooms, smoking .38 extended outward in a textbook two-handed firing stance. She lowers her gun and leans against the door way, catches her breath.

Tim, shaking, looks down to Athman's very much human eyes. No sign of bloody tears. Athman SPUTTERS blood.

Tim leans closer to him.

ATHMAN
Buh...

Tim leans closer still.

ATHMAN
Believe.

Athman slips away.

A beat.

Tim, in shock, curls up on the floor.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VICK HOME - LIVING ROOM - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

NO SOUND. We don't need any for this.

Several Uniformed Cops about the room. Sarah pushes through them to the front door.

She opens it. Tim stands before her, Alex behind him, the look on his face that of a man who's been to the depths of hell and lived to tell about it.

He takes a shaky step forward into Sarah's open arms. He drops to his knees, Sarah lowering with him, and weeps.

Sarah shares a look with Alex. Whatever there was between the two women, they're now past it.

Alex motions for the cops and walks off. Sarah holds Tim tightly as the cops empty out of the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VICK HOME - BEDROOM - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

Tim sits before the window, stares out at the night sky. Light snow falls lazily outside.

Sarah enters the room, a cordless phone in hand. Tim's oblivious to her until she says his name.

SARAH

Tim?

Tim turns to her. Sarah hands him the phone, runs a hand through his hair. She smiles comfortingly, then takes her leave. Tim puts the phone to his ear.

TIM

Hello?

INT. ALEX'S OFFICE - CHRISTMAS NIGHT

ON A TV MONITOR

In grainy black and white, Athman explodes from his seat and bowls Tim over.

The CLICK of a button off screen and the image goes still.
Alex, at her desk, sets a remote control aside.

ALEX
How're you holding up, doc?

TIM (ON PHONE)
A little banged up, but I'll live.
You?

ALEX
Well, you know. All in the line of
duty. I'm watching the tape, Tim.

TIM (ON PHONE)
Did you see it?

ALEX
I've watched it three times and not
once did I see what you mentioned
about the eyes. My advice: doctor,
heal thyself. Chalk it up to shock
and then do your best to forget
about it.

INT. VICK HOME - BEDROOM - SAME

TIM
I suppose you're right.

ALEX (ON PHONE)
Why do you suppose he attacked you?

TIM
In his mind? I'd say to protect my
family from me. Or something.
We'll never know.

ALEX (ON PHONE)
So, uh...did you believe him?

Tim's eyes wander as he contemplates the question. When he
answers, his eyes stare directly at us.

TIM
No. Who would believe a story like
that?

A beat.

Tim turns off the phone and sets it aside. He returns his gaze out the window.

FADE OUT

A FLASH OF ATHMAN AS HE LOOMS ABOVE US, THOSE EYES, READY TO IMPALE US.

INT. VICK HOME - BEDROOM - DAY

Tim bolts upright in bed, drenched with sweat, his breath heavy. He leans forward, catches his breath. Sarah stirs beside him.

SARAH
Baby? You okay?

Tim CHUCKLES, embarrassed.

TIM
Yeah. Bad dream.

A LIGHT KNOCK at the bedroom door. Ricky and Janie enter, both still half-asleep. They climb between Tim and Sarah.

TIM
Good morning.

RICKY
'Mornin', Dad.

JANIE
Daddy, how come you had to go with that police woman last night?

Tim smiles comfortingly.

RICKY
Yeah. Are you okay?

TIM
I'm fine, son. Everything's fine.

SARAH
Well, since we're all up, what do you guys say to a nice, big breakfast?

JANIE
Can we have pam-cakes?

Sarah snatches Janie up.

SARAH

Yes, we can have "pam-cakes." You know what else sounds good? A warm, comfy fire.

She looks to Tim. Tim gets the hint.

TIM

Say, I think I'll go chop some wood.

He climbs out of bed and steps toward the bedroom door. He pauses. Looks back at his family, huddled together on the bed. They seem happy.

SARAH

What?

Tim smiles.

TIM

Nothing.

He walks off.

EXT. VICK HOME - DAY

The morning sun peeks from behind the house. On the street-side mailbox hangs a nameplate which reads:

"DR. VICK, TIM AND FAMILY."

EXT. VICK HOME - BACK YARD - DAY

WHACK! Tim splits a kindling log. He chops the axe into the chopping block.

He stoops and collects several pieces of kindling and places them into a carrier.

Sarah peeks her head out the back door.

SARAH

Tim? Breakfast is almost ready.
Where's the fire?

TIM

Working on it.

SARAH

Work faster! And put your gloves
on before you freeze your fingers
solid.

She shoots him a wink and ducks back inside.

Tim rises, slides his hands into his coat pockets and pulls out his gloves. A slip of paper falls from one of his pockets. He notices it.

He kneels down and picks it up. Written upon the paper:

"W R ATHMAN"

But in Tim's chicken-scratch handwriting, it reads more like "WRATHMAN."

Tim eyes the paper oddly. A slow look of horrified realization grows on his face.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
I am the example.

TIM
Oh, god...

The paper shakes in Tim's trembling hand.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
I am the evidence of truth.

Tim drops the slip of paper and takes a fearful step back from it. The snow blurs the ink on the paper, causes it to blotch.

ATHMAN (V.O.)
I am the warning: Believe, or God
will punish you.

Tim shakes his head. This can't be the truth. Tears form in his eyes.

TIM (V.O.)
If you're the warning, what does
that make me?

ATHMAN (V.O.)
Next in line.

Tim's stunned gaze goes skyward, and he knows -- something terrible is about to happen, there's nothing he can do about it, and his heart and soul shatter because of it.

ATHMAN (V.O.)

...he's passing down his punishment
for our disbelief -- one sinner at
a time.

A calm comes over Tim. He turns his attention toward the axe
in the chopping block. Its silver head emits an almost
imperceptible glow.

TIM (V.O.)

What if I don't believe?

ATHMAN (V.O.)

Then your family will die. And it
will be you who kills them.

Tim steps to the chopping block and plucks the axe from it.
He holds it up, admires it.

ATHMAN (V.O.)

All I had to do was believe.

On the axe, in Tim's reflection, his pupils are white, his
irises pale blue, and bloody tears leak down his cheeks.

ATHMAN (V.O.)

Dear God...why couldn't I have just
believed?

THE END