

THE FOLLOWERS

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Dense thicket under a yellow moon, alive with the sound of crickets and toads. A rustling in the brush and...

A GIRL (17) stumbles into the clearing, face covered with dirt, sweat and dried blood, holding a CINDER BLOCK.

LAKE NEWPANA

Eerily still, water like glass.

The girl drops her burden. She kneels, kisses a dainty silver CROSS from around her neck, and takes a rope from her pocket. She ties one end to the cinder block.

The other end she fits around her neck.

She lifts the heavy block, and trudges into the water. When it reaches her chin, she stops and gazes skyward.

With her remaining strength, she lifts the stone high.

Then drops it.

Her head is jerked under, bubbles rise to the surface, and after a moment stop. BEAT. Everything goes dead quiet until...

The girl's foot breaches the surface, thrashing and kicking. A final remnant of desperation.

The intensity wanes. The thrashing stops. Her foot stiffens above the rippling water, then...

It quietly submerges.

EXT. HOUSE - MORNING

Upper middle class and professionally landscaped. A POLICE CRUISER sits next to an SUV in the driveway.

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - MORNING

BILL DOWNING (42), carefully inspects his reflection in the mirror. He's going gray. It's noticeable. Not the man he once was, but far from out of the game.

He sighs, slips on a jacket, MILLTOWN SHERIFF emblazoned on its sleeve. Takes a PILL BOTTLE from his pocket that reads: FOR PAIN AND STRESS.

Shakes out two caplets, swallows them dry, caps the bottle, pockets it. He whirls around.

No one there. He looks at his bed.

The sheets are wrinkled, and the pillows off-center. He goes over, smooths out the sheets, rearranges the pillows.

He leaves the room, revealing a framed photo on the dresser of him and his WIFE on some vacation somewhere. They look happy.

A WEDDING RING sits next to the picture.

HALLWAY

A gray Stetson on his head, Bill peeks into another

BEDROOM

On the bed, his son JAMES (16), plays a video game. His hair's a mess, and his slight frame barely fills out his pajamas.

BILL

Gonna wish your old man good luck?

James doesn't look up.

JAMES

Good luck, old man.

BILL

You know, you should go help your mother unpack. I don't want her doing everything herself.

(beat, no answer)

(MORE)

BILL (cont'd)

Now.

James sighs, drops the game controller.

LIVING ROOM

Littered with moving boxes.

Hands on hips in a blue MATERNITY BLOUSE is JESSICA (36), midnight black hair flowing along her shoulders, and quietly determined to clean this mess.

Bill hurries down the stairs as she lifts a heavy box.

BILL

Come on. Stop, stop. James is coming
down to help.

She picks it up anyway, places it on a table and starts to unload its contents.

JESSICA

I'm pregnant, not paralyzed.

Bill glances around the room. Still a lot to be done.

BILL

So, you don't like wearing your
wedding ring while you work?

She unwraps dishes from paper, doesn't lift her gaze.

JESSICA

Out being cleaned.

BILL

Don't you think it's time, Jess?

Now she stops, looks him in the eye.

JESSICA

Time for what? Another affair.

BILL

Oh, Christ. Why you gotta bring that
up for?

She turns away, Bill edges closer.

JESSICA

You brought it up.

BILL

It's been eight months. You and James
wouldn't have moved out here if you
didn't wanna--

THUMP, THUMP, THUMP on the

STAIRS

James losing his balance and tumbling down the steps, but just
as quickly righting himself.

JAMES

I'm all right.

JESSICA

You okay, honey?

JAMES

I'm fine, Mom.

BILL

I gotta go.

(to James)

Come here. Gimme a kiss.

JAMES

Aw, come on, Dad...

Bill plants a kiss on his forehead.

BILL

I love you, buddy. I'll see you later.

James holds up two fingers.

JAMES
Increase the peace.

BILL
Bye, Jessica.

Quietly, without looking up:

JESSICA
Bye.

Bill hesitates. He wants more from her, but he's not getting it today. He crosses the room to the front door, opens it and slips out.

Jessica turns, goes to speak just as the door shuts.

EXT. FRONT PORCH - HOUSE - MORNING

Bill shuts the door, leans against it and exhales.

BILL
Dammit.

INT. POLICE CRUISER (MOVING) - LATER

Bill at the wheel, sips coffee from a styrofoam cup. A low rumble is heard. Bill squints out the windshield.

A CAR approaching from the opposite direction, engine racing. Getting louder. Clearly speeding, and WHOOSH!

The car zips past.

Bill checks his rearview, then his watch. No time today.

EXT. SPEEDING CAR - CONTINUOUS

Jungle green CHALLENGER. Hot car. Even hotter occupant.

MICHELLE SWEENEY (30s), fury bottled in a hot mess of a woman, screaming profanities at the top of her lungs.

She pounds the steering wheel, auburn hair with streaks of orange shooting out the open window like primed flames.

The car swerves, rights itself, and barrels down the highway.

Seriously gone.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

A modest stone building, not much bigger than a double-wide. Two cruisers parked out front.

Bill pulls in.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Bill enters. Two cluttered desks, two obsolete computers and a stuffed filing cabinet.

Seated at one of the desks is OFFICER TERRY MULROY (30s), sheened straight features, a perpetually distasteful look on his face.

MULROY

Don't you know what knocking is--?

BILL

Excuse me?

OFFICER BRIAN KENNEDY (20s), with that straight-from-the-academy appearance, draws water from a cooler.

A door at the back of the station swings open, a toilet FLUSHES and out-going, big ol' country Sheriff PAUL JOHNSON (60s) waddles out.

JOHNSON

Bill. Thought I heard someone come in.

(shakes Bill's hand)

Good to see you again. Boys, this here's your new Sheriff, Bill Downing.

Mulroy and Kennedy snap to attention.

Kennedy races over to shake Bill's hand, while Mulroy just gives a slight nod.

BILL

Where's the rest of the crew?

The three men laugh.

JOHNSON

You're lookin' at it, son. Not even a secretary. Though Patty Hanson works dispatch part-time when she's not at church.

Bill, taking it all in.

BILL

I see.

JOHNSON

Well, come on, Bill. We'll talk in my office.

Johnson and Bill enter another room, close the door. Kennedy sits at his desk, glances over to Mulroy, who's fidgeting with a pen.

KENNEDY

What's with you?

Mulroy looks up.

MULROY

Job should've been mine.

INT. OFFICE - POLICE STATION - DAY

Files and folders on Johnson's otherwise neat desk. Family pictures, citations on the walls.

Johnson plops on a worn leather seat as Bill finds a folding chair and drags it over.

JOHNSON

You and the missus settled in?

BILL

Getting there. Movers came in yesterday. Still a ways to go.

JOHNSON

No doubt. I'll give you Tom Sweeney's number. He's the Pastor of our church. He can probably rustle up up some folks to help you if you need it.

BILL

Thanks.

Johnson sighs, gazes lovingly around the office.

JOHNSON

I still can't believe this is it. I sure am gonna miss this place.

BILL

Thirty-five years is a long time.

JOHNSON

Thirty-seven. Longer than I've been married. The time came and went like a fart in a fan factory.

(leans in)

So, what about you?

BILL

What about me?

JOHNSON

I read you were on mandated psych leave. What was that all about?

Bill shifts in his seat.

BILL

It's in the profile. I'm sure I didn't get this job without you doing your due diligence.

JOHNSON

Supposin' you tell me.

Johnson waits for an answer. Sizing him up.

BILL

I shot a woman over in Roanoke.
Judgement call. It was dark, she
reached in her coat. Christ, she
could've had anything in there.

JOHNSON

She was pregnant, right?

BILL

(hesitates)

Yes, she was.

Johnson blows out through pursed lips.

JOHNSON

Yeah, well, nothin' to be ashamed of.
You were doing what you were trained
to do.

Bill shakes his head, remembering.

BILL

She just flew off the handle. There
was a whole crowd gathering. They were
getting ready to lynch me...

FLASHBACK

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Late. Low hanging tress, and darkened sub-standard houses.
It's the wrong side of town.

A crowd on onlookers surround a frazzled black WOMAN (30s),
beligerent, as she screams:

WOMAN

Pigs! Y'all don't know your place!
What y'all doin' here? Huh? For what?
For what?

Bill, gun drawn, a safe distance away, pulsing blue and red lights flaring on his face.

BILL

Ma'am, you need to step back. Now!

WOMAN

You don't tell me what to do!

She reaches into her jacket.

BILL

Ma'am, don't do that! Ma'am!

Bill squeezes off a shot. It catches her in the shoulder as a CELL PHONE drops to the pavement.

The wound only serves to enrage her further. She WAILS, and charges.

A struggle ensues. She tries to wrestle Bill's gun, but the pistol finds its way under her chin, and...

BLAM! The deafening report shatters the night. A fine mist of blood, skull and hair shoots upward.

Bill stumbles back, another OFFICER breaks his fall as the woman crashes to the ground.

And the FACES in the crowd. One-by-one. They're in complete shock. Angered. Not again.

The faces of Bill's fellow OFFICER - almost the same.

END FLASHBACK

Bill picks his head up, looks Johnson in the eye.

BILL

Why she did that I'll never know.

Johnson nods.

JOHNSON

The main thing is you came out of it none the worse for wear. You just did your job, Bill.

BILL

(not convinced)

Yeah.

JOHNSON

Well, the good news is you're not likely to run into any of that here. We're a pretty quiet community. Fender benders, parking tickets and fishing permits.

The phone on the desk RINGS. Johnson raises his finger to Bill, and picks it up.

JOHNSON

(into phone)

Milltown Police. Ted? That you? All right, all right. Slow down. A what? You're shittin' me. Christ almighty...

Bills watches on intrusively.

JOHNSON

(into phone)

No, listen to me. Ted, Ted! Stay right where you are. Ya hear me? Stay right there and don't call anyone else.

Johnson slams the phone.

JOHNSON

Fuck!

BILL

What is it?

Johnson takes another gander around his office - the citations, the pictures, the memories.

He looks directly at Bill.

JOHNSON

There's a body out by the lake.