

THE WITNESS

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

AJ, a young man, is laying down on his bed. He is listening to a crime podcast with headphones on. On his wall are various film and television posters and a large flag for a New York university.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)
[...] and they all died tragically.

AJ looks at his phone with a concerned expression.

PODCAST HOST (V.O.)
You know what else would be tragic?
If you didn't check out this week's
sponsor, Yankee Candle. This
holiday, give the gift of peace and-

There is a loud banging on the bedroom door. AJ is startled for a moment.

AJ
It's already time?

There is loud music playing from a speaker in the other room. AJ looks in the mirror on the back of his bedroom door to examine his outfit. He puts a coat on.

AJ (CONT'D)
Good enough.

There is another loud bang on his door which shakes the mirror. AJ laughs and opens the door.

AJ (CONT'D)
Relax! I've been ready.

He opens the door to find his three roommates and best friends, JOSH, EVAN, and NATE, laughing and scurrying around the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

JOSH
AJ, hurry it up old man! I'm trying
to get wasted tonight!

EVAN
Wasted enough to try to fight the
bartender again?

JOSH
That was a one time thing.

All the roommates laugh and grab their belongings to leave.

INT. STAIRS - NIGHT

The group shuffles down the long, narrow stairs of their small downtown apartment building.

AJ
Which place are we going to?

NATE
Papa's Pub again.

JOSH
Whoa. That tone.

EVAN
Nate! Why'd you say it like that?
We love Papa's!

NATE
It's fine. But by subway it's so far away and we always get there after the crowd dies out.

AJ
What if I just drive us? I've never been there so I don't really wanna drink tonight anyway. And I have class in the morning.

JOSH
Yes sir! Let's go AJ!

EXT. PAPA'S PUB - NIGHT

The group pulls up to the bar. It is snowing outside. They look in the bar's windows from the car. It is a large space flooded with many people, some wearing Santa hats and holiday wear.

EVAN
Look at that crowd!

NATE
It does look fun, I'll admit that.

AJ
I'll park the car in the lot around
the corner. You guys can get out
here.

JOSH
Aye aye captain!

There is a large, neon red and green PAPA's PUB sign above
the door. It flickers as the three walk in and AJ pulls off.

INT. PAPA'S PUB MAIN ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER - NIGHT

AJ enters the bar and looks around. The lights are somewhat
dark, and he is unable to find his friends. The music is very
loud. There is a very dim ultraviolet lighting setup, and a
neon spotlight that rotates around the party.

AJ
Have you seen a group of three
dudes walking through here a few
minutes ago?!

MALE PARTYGOER
Yeah man, like every few seconds
there are dudes around here!

AJ
Thanks so much for the help!

AJ continues to walk around asking people. He bumps into a
young woman.

AJ (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, but have you seen a
group of three guys walking around
here anywhere?!

FEMALE PARTYGOER
Yeah! I think they went toward the
bathroom over there!

She points across the large room at nothing specific, just
the direction.

AJ
Thank you!

AJ moves through the large, dense crowd. He bumps into many
people and apologizes many times.

AJ cannot find a bathroom symbol on any of the doors on this side of the room. He goes to a less populated area in the back of the bar. He finds a door and opens it.

INT. NEW ROOM - NIGHT

The door leads to a dark room. There is a long downward staircase in front of him and voices are faintly heard speaking below. There is light at the end of the staircase. He hears the sounds of pipes and water running.

INT. STAIRCASE - NIGHT

AJ slowly descends down the staircase. He listens closely.

MALE VOICE

What should we do? Is there a
another way?

MALE VOICE 2

He needs to go.

MALE VOICE

How are we gonna get him out of
here?

The voices continue speaking as AJ reaches near the bottom of the stairs. His vision is partially obstructed from the ceiling above. From what he can see, it is a rough, rundown bathroom. He sees two men standing with their backs to him holding guns. They are looking at another man on the ground, who is facing AJ's direction. The man on the ground is wet and severely beaten up. AJ cannot see the standing mens' faces, but one of them is bald, with a small bird-shaped tattoo behind his ear. The other has a large, fresh scar on his forearm. The man on the ground looks at AJ.

BALD STANDING MAN

What are you looking at? Who-

The standing men turn around and briefly see AJ. AJ turns back and begins running up the staircase.

SCARRED STANDING MAN

Go! Now!

The bald man trails AJ. AJ runs through the door leading back to the bar and does not look back.

INT. PAPA'S PUB MAIN ROOM

AJ hears a faint sound of a gunshot from below. He finds Evan, Josh, and Nate in the bar and runs with them toward the door.

AJ
We need to go now!

EVAN
AJ! Where have you been bro? You gotta take a shot before we go!

AJ
I'm leaving! I think I just saw someone get killed.

NATE
What did you say?

JOSH
Honestly this place is pretty dead at this point. I've had my fun, though. We might as well leave.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

The four of them run out of the bar. AJ is moving faster than the rest, who are stumbling around the snowy street.

EVAN
Slow down! You're like the Flash!

Nate, Josh, and Evan laugh. The four eventually reach the car. AJ pulls off quickly. The car is stopped at a red light outside the bar. AJ looks in the side mirror and sees the bald man coming out of the alley. The two make eye contact, and the bald man starts walking at the car with his phone out. AJ attempts to pull off, but the snow keeps the car there for a few long seconds. Tension is building. He eventually bursts through the red light.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The group is in the car driving home. AJ is very anxious and tense, looking in every mirror.

NATE
So what were you saying back there?

JOSH

I think he said someone was killing
it on the dance floor.

EVAN

I thought he said someone was
killing his vibe.

AJ

No! I saw someone being killed! In
the bathroom!

The car goes silent for a few moments.

EVAN

Like, murdered?

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAWN

The roommates are sitting in the living room recapping the
night. AJ is recounting his experience. The other three are
sobering up.

AJ

Then the bald man with the bird
tattoo ran after me. And I'm pretty
sure I heard a gunshot when we were
leaving.

NATE

And the other guy had a scar on his
arm? Did you not see their faces?

AJ

Not really. Me and the bald guy
looked at each other at the red
light, but he just looked like
every other bald guy.

JOSH

This is so crazy.

EVAN

Did they see your face?

AJ

I don't know. Maybe a little. But
it's a big city.

The four go to their separate rooms.

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - MORNING

AJ is back in his room.

AJ
What a night.

AJ lays down on his bed. His eyes close for a few moments, when he suddenly hears an object thrown at his window. He looks out the window and sees a large black vehicle pull off. AJ's eyes widen as he looks out the window.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

AJ is in a class in a lecture hall. He is nodding off to sleep every few moments.

PROFESSOR
Excuse me, sir! Please wake up.
Unless this material is too boring
for you.

AJ
I'm sorry, professor.

Class ends and AJ is fully asleep on his desk. He is woken up by a fellow student, SARAH.

SARAH
Are you okay? You were sleeping
like the whole class.

AJ
Yeah, sorry, I just had a long
night.

SARAH
Out partying too hard?

AJ laughs.

AJ
Something like that.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Sarah and AJ are walking together through the city. He is telling her about the night.

AJ
And then this morning, someone
threw something at my window.

SARAH

Are you sure it wasn't just some homeless guy?

AJ

Yeah, they sped off in a car after.

SARAH

My dad is a cop. I don't see him often, but do you want me to bring it up to him?

AJ

No, I don't really want to be involved. The police will find out eventually.

SARAH

Someone has to do something about this.

INT. CAFE - DAY

A few days pass. Sarah throws a newspaper on the cafe table. There is an article with the title "MISSING INDEPENDENT MAYORAL CANDIDATE'S BODY FOUND IN EAST RIVER."

SARAH

Looks like they found him.

AJ

I feel awful. I should've told someone sooner.

SARAH

It's not your fault. But I have been thinking. The bird tattoo, could that mean something?

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

AJ and Sarah are on their laptops looking through databases. They look at books about New York City history. There is a montage of the two researching for hours.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

AJ and Sarah are sitting in the library. Her head is on his shoulder. They both look tired but he is still researching online.

AJ
I think I found something. This article talks about the Ravens in New York.

SARAH
Ravens?

AJ points to his screen.

AJ
Right here, it says the Raven Gang was an underground Italian mob that was raided in the '80s. It says the arrests were easy because of the branded logos on the members' skin.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

AJ is walking Sarah back to her apartment.

SARAH
Do you think the bald man was a Raven? Did he look old enough?

AJ
He could've been. We need to tell the police about this. I don't want to get you involved, so I'll go alone.

SARAH
I get it. But also this has been the most interesting date of my life. Let me know how it goes.

AJ brings her to the front of her apartment building. They smile at each other and hug. She walks in the door and AJ turns around and walks away.

INT. POLICE STATION - THE NEXT DAY

AJ is sitting across from a police officer in his office.

POLICE OFFICER
And why didn't you tell us earlier?

AJ
I was scared. I didn't want to be involved.

POLICE OFFICER

Well. Thank you for bringing this to my attention. You did the right thing today. Does anyone else know about this?

AJ

No.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - EVENING

The roommates are in the living room preparing to go out on the town. AJ is microwaving a meal.

JOSH

Most interesting date of her life? At the library? Okay AJ! You sure you don't want to go out tonight?

AJ

Yeah, I need to study tonight. And I'm still a little shaken from it.

NATE

Well we're definitely not going to Papa's again. I knew that place had bad vibes.

EVAN

And murderers! I still can't believe it. Glad they didn't kill you.

AJ

Thanks, man. Me too. Stay safe tonight boys.

The roommates leave the apartment.

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM - NIGHT

AJ is laying in bed texting Sarah. It is dark, and the phone screen light illuminates on his face.

SARAH (TEXT)

My parents said yes! So sorry you couldn't make it home for Christmas. But we will try to make you feel at home here!

AJ types on his phone.

AJ (TEXT)
Thank you so so much! Thank them
for m-

There is a loud banging on the front door. He does not send the message. The banging repeats every few seconds. AJ creeps out of his room and slowly walks toward the door.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

AJ
Hello? Who is it?

AJ looks through the peephole. There is a man with long, black hair.

LONG HAired MAN
Let me in, please! I have a few
questions for you!

AJ
You can just ask me through the
door, please!

He is banging harder and harder on the door. AJ starts dialing the police.

AJ (CONT'D)
Hello?! There's a man harassing me
at my door! Can you please come
quickly? I was just at the station
regarding-

The police hang up. There are a few moments of silence. Then, there are bird noises outside the door. More specifically, raven noises.

AJ (CONT'D)
Oh I can't believe this. I called
the cops! And they already know
about you!

The long haired man kicks the door down. AJ retreats, stumbles, and falls backward. He begins to stand up, but the man brings out a gun.

AJ (CONT'D)
Woah! I'm sorry! Please, I won't
tell anybody about this. I promise.

The man reaches at his head and takes off his long haired wig. It is the bald man with the Raven tattoo.

AJ (CONT'D)

Oh man. I'm sorry for all this,
bald man.

BALD MAN

What did you just call me?

AJ

Sir! I meant sir. I'm sorry, sir.
Bald man is just how I've described
you. T-to myself! I haven't told
anyone. And I won't tell anyone
about-

The bald man points his gun at AJ. AJ closes his eyes. There is a gunshot. There are a few beats of silence. The bald man falls on AJ. In the doorway are Sarah and her police officer father, who is pointing a gun at the bald man's body. AJ looks at them, relieved.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

SARAH'S FATHER

That was a crazy night, huh AJ?

AJ and Sarah's family laugh.

SARAH

Dad.

AJ

Yes, sir. I still can't thank you
enough for saving me. And for
having me over today. I really
appreciate everything.

SARAH'S MOTHER

It was no problem. I'm glad we
could give you somewhere to go.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

AJ and the family are in the living room watching a movie. Sarah's dad is unloading the dishwasher in the kitchen. AJ walks into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

AJ

Do you need any help with those?

SARAH'S FATHER

No, but thank you for offering,
son.

AJ walks back into the living room to watch the movie. He looks back at Sarah's father. Sarah's father rolls up his sleeves to rinse the dishes. He has the large scar on his forearm. AJ's eyes widen and he freezes. He looks back at the family, then back at Sarah's father. Sarah's father locks eyes with AJ and rolls his sleeve down. A few moments of reflection occur for AJ. He takes a deep breath. He looks back at the family in the living room, and lays back in his chair.

FADE TO BLACK.