

A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY
by
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FADE IN: *

EXT. UPSCALE NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A MAN'S silhouette stands atop a hill, watching FIREFIGHTERS at a burned house below assist a CORONER load a blackened body into a bag. The Man turns mournfully away towards the sleeping city, leaving a trail of blood that falls from his arm.

EXT. BANK - DAY

A secluded branch bank. Three cars at the one open drive-through; a TEEN in a green Mustang, a WOMAN in a purple Grand Am, and an unseen male DRIVER in a black BMW. His leather-gloved hand taps in time to CLASSICAL MUSIC as he watches CHRISTINE, the young teller behind thick bulletproof glass.

CHRISTINE

Thank you, have a nice day.

Teen only snags his money and cranks up his RAP on the STEREO. Annoyed, Driver has to turn up the volume on the portable POLICE SCANNER beside him. The Mustang lurches off. The Grand Am pulls up. The BMW stays put. Driver looks at his watch: 2:29.

INT. BANK

Christine smiles, greets the customer by rote. Above her is a security camera, feeding the image of the Grand Am to a monitor behind her. Only the tip of the BMW's hood pokes into frame.

INT. BMW

Driver checks his watch. It flips to 2:30.

INT. BANK

The red power-indicator light on the security camera fades out. The monitor screen goes black except for the time-stamp.

INT/EXT BANK

CHRISTINE

Thank you. You have a nice day.

The Grand Am drives off. Christine focuses on her computer, offers a greeting as Driver eases the BMW up. We can't quite see his face, but we see him place a round object into the bin.

Christine brings it through, and is puzzled when she takes it out. It's a capped pipe that has one long wire that strings back into the bin, runs outside, and ends at a device in Driver's hand. The device has a button, and his thumb is on it. Her smile turns to horror as she realizes-

DRIVER

Yes, my dear. I'm afraid that is a bomb.

His voice drips with self confidence, his speech eloquent.

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DRIVER (CONT'D)

And this is the detonator. Should I press this button, a charge will be sent to that which you hold in your hand and it explodes. Your bulletproof glass shields me from the blast... but I'm afraid it does nothing for you.

Christine pales. They stare; frightened mouse and maniacal cat.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Tell me, Christine... do your cameras and glass armor still make you feel secure?

He seems positively smug. Christine's hand drifts towards the silent-alarm button beneath the counter.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Now listen carefully. I want you to follow my instructions very closely. First, no pressing any nasty little alarm buttons.

Christine's hand stops just shy of pressing the button.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Am I quite clear on that?

She nods, frustrated. It's as though he's playing with her.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Good. Now I want you to take a bag, and completely fill it from your till.

Christine is taken aback. Driver picks up on it.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Poor Christine is puzzled. Can this nicely-dressed man in a expensive car be nothing more than a simple bank robber?

Her fear grows as he speaks. It's as if he's reading her mind.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

"No," she thinks, feeling that the monster is carefully watching her every move, studying her every reaction. It's something else... something terrible.

He holds the button up well within sight -a silent reminder.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Please, Christine, the task I assigned you.

Christine nods and, quite without thinking, starts to set the bomb down. Driver scolds her as though she were a child.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Ah, ah, ah! We wouldn't want you scampering off.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

DRIVER (CONT'D)

And we certainly wouldn't want to frighten
any of your fellow employees, now would we?

Christine glances behind her. Employees RHONDA and JEFF assist PATRONS while the Manager, MR. CLAIBORNE, yawns at his desk.

Driver begins humming, as if mocking her by being so casual. She picks up some cash and stuffs it into a bag, soft at first then harder with each handful as her anger grows. On one pass her hand hovers over alarm.

Driver only hums, sways a finger as though conducting the orchestra. The pompous bastard! Fuming, Christine jams another stack of bills into the bag. Her eyes narrow.

Christine's finger jams the silent alarm button. She takes her time with the next few stacks. A moment later, Driver stops humming as the police scanner sounds from the passenger seat.

DISPATCHER (V.O.)

Two-Seventy-eight, respond to a silent hold-up alarm at First Security Bank on Twenty-Second, cross of Maple.

Driver slowly turns back to Christine. She places the bag into the bin and shoves it through, not masking her contempt.

DRIVER

Very good, Christine. However, I'm afraid you did not follow my simple instructions.

Christine's anger begins to turn into fear.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

No... nasty... little... alarms.

Christine's fear turns to terror as he holds up the detonator.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

I'm truly sorry, my dear... but you have failed the test.

Christine SCREAMS and tries to throw the bomb away. She doesn't make it. The thick glass crackles from the force of the EXPLOSION but does not break.

Smoke pours from the bin as Driver yanks the dangling wire back inside the car. He shifts into drive and, almost as an afterthought, grabs the bag of money before easing away.

EXT. CITY STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

A police car SQUEALS around a corner and through a busy intersection, emergency lights flashing and SIREN WAILING. Other cars have to brake fast, HONKING in protest.

INT. POLICE CAR

JOHN BURKE, a gruff and crusty veteran cop, hangs on for dear life in the passenger seat as ROBERT PENNEY, a young rookie, places the car into a controlled spin to negotiate a corner.

BURKE
Good Lord, son! Don't get us killed before we even get there!

PENNEY
You don't want them to get away, do you?

BURKE
What I don't want is for you to crash my car over another false alarm!

Penney only weaves the police car in and out of traffic.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Robert, if you don't slow down I swear I'm going to shoot you myself!

EXT. BANK

The police car SKIDS to a stop in the parking lot. Burke and Penney are horrified at what they see. A handful of coughing, bloody and shocked Patrons are exiting the bank through the shattered glass doors.

PENNEY
My god, Burke! This ain't no false alarm!

Penney jumps out.

BURKE
Robert! We need to wait for backup!

Too late. Penney pretends not to hear him and scampers off.

BURKE (CONT'D)
(into radio)
Dispatch, we need EMS and Fire at this location; multiple wounded, some structure damage, unknown cause. Better start the detectives and brass this way as well.

EXT. BANK

Penney sprints forward, overwhelmed. Confused victims stare at him expectantly. He grabs the nearest one, an ELDERLY WOMAN.

PENNEY
Ma'am, what happened here?

But she's too confused, only blubbers incomprehensibly. Blood slides down her face, and Penney looks like he might throw up.

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A bright, shiny red dot suddenly zigzags across the pavement at his feet. Penney turns to find Burke taking cover behind a tree with his pistol out. The red dot is from his laser sight.

Burke motions for Penney to draw his gun, but Penney only looks at the weapon distastefully. FALLING GLASS pulls his attention to the front doors, where Jeff is attempting to exit. Penney rushes forward to help him -which irks the hell out of Burke!

BURKE

Robert! Don't you-

Jeff's head is lowered, and dark patches of blood stain his shirt. Penney gently takes his arm to guide him away.

PENNEY

Can you tell me what happened here?

Jeff raises his head to look up at Penney, and we find that his bloody eyes have been blinded by shrapnel. Penney reels.

PENNEY (CONT'D)

(trying to maintain composure)

Is there anybody still inside?

Jeff nods and Penney walk him over to Burke.

PENNEY (CONT'D)

Burke, take him... there are more inside!

BURKE

Robert, get your ass back over-

But Penney sprints towards the building. Burke yells as he disappears inside, then curses and yanks Jeff to safety.

INT. BANK

Disarray. Smoke, overturned furniture, scattered papers. A ruptured fire sprinkler gushes water over the cracked drive-through window and pools red as it washes off blood.

Claiborne is kneeling on the floor, cradling the head of a severely-injured young woman. He looks up through cracked glasses when he senses Penney there.

CLAIBORNE

She needs an ambulance.

PENNEY

They're on the way.

Penney wants to help but only looks ill. GLASS FALLS from the front door as Burke cautiously enters, his weapon drawn, a thin red beam cutting through the smoke. Once satisfied the scene is safe, he holsters his weapon.

CLAIBORNE

Please, isn't there something you can do?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Burke kneels down to examine her, but he's clearly no doctor.

BURKE
What happened here?

CLAIBORNE
I... I don't know. Christine screamed...
and when I looked, she was holding...
something. It exploded.

BURKE
(to the injured woman)
Okay, don't you worry, Christine... the
paramedics are on their way. You just hang
in there, all right?

Claiborne chokes up as he solemnly nods to the drive-through.

CLAIBORNE
No... Christine is over there.

Burke looks to Penney, who takes the cue and dashes to look over the counter. It ain't pretty. Penney turns away in time to heave his earlier lunch back into daylight. Claiborne looks like he might break down. Burke refocuses his attention by placing his hands on the injured Rhonda.

BURKE
Okay, apply pressure right here. The thing
she was holding, what did it look like?

Claiborne looks like he might slip off into la-la land.

CLAIBORNE
I- I don't know. A pipe, I guess. Wire.

BURKE
Where did it come from?

CLAIBORNE
I... The drive-through, maybe... I don't-
Where's the damn ambulance?

BURKE
They're coming. Look, I know it's hard,
but we need to know what happened here so
we can find the person who did this. But
we need your help. Do you understand?

CLAIBORNE
(straining to think)
I didn't get a good look, Christine...

Penney wipes off his chin, trying to regain his composure. He finds he's looking up and notices one of the security cameras.

PENNEY
What about the cameras?

Burke looks to Claiborne to verify the notion.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

CLAIBORNE
The recorders are in the back.

INT. BANK - BACK ROOM

Three security-camera monitors. On one we see Burke kneeling beside Rhonda; on another, paramedics outside leaping from ambulances; the last, Claiborne and Penney walking down a hall.

Claiborne ushers Penney into the room before squatting in front of a cabinet. His hands are shaking as he fumbles for a key and fights to keep his broken glasses from sliding off his nose.

CLAIBORNE
I'm sorry, I usually don't have much to do with these. It's the assistant manager's job to change the tapes.

He finally gets the door open, and inside sit four time-lapse VCR's. He fidgets with the controls and an angle of the drive-through flickers on the monitors. The time stamp reads 12:40.

PENNEY
That's too early. Fast forward.

Claiborne does, and cars zip along like busy ants. The time-stamp climbs. He punches 'play' when it reaches 2:30. A few vehicles come and go, then our green Mustang with Teen in it. Next is our purple Grand Am with Woman. And then-

Blank. Penney and Claiborne look at each other dumbly.

PENNEY (CONT'D)
Try it again.

They try it again, and are met with the same results.

CLAIBORNE
Maybe it ran out of tape?

PENNEY
I don't think so. Try another angle.

Claiborne punches up a new angle overlooking Christine's work area. They watch as Christine assists the Woman in the purple Grand am. Then, like before, the picture goes blank after her car pulls away. Claiborne rewinds the tape.

CLAIBORNE
I don't understand, we just had these serviced a few months ago.

PENNEY
Wait, pause it there!

The picture freezes, and Penney points to something in the corner. The front end of a BMW is barely in frame.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLAIBORNE
What is that?

PENNEY
That looks like someone who doesn't want to
get his face on camera. Push play, see-

A loud voice behind them makes Penney jump.

SNIPES (O.S.)
What the hell is going on here?

They turn to find two people staring at them from the hall:
BRENDA, a 40ish woman carrying a clipboard, and NATHAN SNIPES, a
middle-age African American man in a jacket and tie. His hands
are on his hips, and he is clearly quite pissed off.

PENNEY
Excuse me?

Snipes strides purposefully into the room. Penney looks to
Claiborne, who only shrugs.

SNIPES
What do you think you're doing?

PENNEY
May I ask who you are, sir?

Burke rushes in just as Snipes flips out a gold badge.

SNIPES
Detective Snipes, CID. Who are you?

BURKE
He's with me, Nate.

Snipes seems even more pissed as he sighs and turns to Brenda.

SNIPES
A damn reserve officer...

Penney flinches. Claiborne looks Penney over suspiciously.

CLAIBORNE
You're not a real cop?

SNIPES
A volunteer cop... a little more than a boy
scout with a badge. What's your name?

Penney is humiliated. The whole room is staring at him.

PENNEY
Robert Penney.

SNIPES
Well, Reserve Officer Penney...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Snipes leads Penney away from the VCR cabinets.

SNIPES (CONT'D)
 Perhaps you were sleeping through your
reserve officer training, but allow me to
 reiterate rule number one at a crime scene.
 (beat, yells)
Don't touch anything!

As if on cue to make matters worse, the VCR tape reaches the point where the screen suddenly goes blank. Snipes is furious.

SNIPES (CONT'D)
 What did you do?

PENNEY
 I didn't-

SNIPES
 What the hell did you do to it?

PENNEY
 I didn't do anything!

Snipes only shoves him towards the door.

SNIPES
 Just get the hell out of here. Now!
 Burke, get your damn weekend warrior out of
 my sight before I shoot him and make him a
part of this crime scene.

BURKE
 Rob, maybe you ought to step outside.

But Penney doesn't need any encouragement, and quickly leaves.

BURKE (CONT'D)
 Anybody ever tell you you're an asshole,
 Nate?

SNIPES
 Anybody ever tell you to keep your riders
 out of a homicide crime scene, Burke?

Burke glares as though he'd like punch the piss out of Snipes. Instead, he turns to chase Penney down. Snipes scoffs.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Burke is driving as Penney hides in the dark corner.

BURKE
 Hell of a thing, wasn't it? Thirteen years,
 I never seen nothing like that before.
 (waits for response, gets none)
 I should have thumped you a good one for
 running in like that. You're lucky there
 wasn't some bad guy waiting inside to
 spray-paint your brains on the ceiling.
 (MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BURKE (CONT'D)

(still no response)

All right, what the hell is bothering you?
You look like a kid who found a mouse turd
floating in his Rice Crispies.

Penney only shakes his head, doesn't want to talk about it.

BURKE (CONT'D)

Are you upset 'cause of what Snipes said?
Look, you can just forget about him, okay?
He don't mean squat.

PENNEY

Easy for you to say. You weren't the one
whose balls he cut off in front of
everybody.

BURKE

Rob, let me explain something to you. Some
cops get their gold shields and go on to
paper-pushing jobs in some stuffy office.
They forget what it's like out here, forget
how nice it is to have someone to watch
your back. I appreciate you, man. You're
out here taking the same risks as I am,
except you ain't getting paid for it. In my
book, that's noble. Don't ever forget that.

(beat)

Besides, you'll be working full time soon
enough. You'll get your chance to show
everybody what your made of.

PENNEY

If I don't fail the damn exam again.

BURKE

Hell, even I didn't get hired on the first
try.

PENNEY

But you at least passed the stinking Civil
Service test.

BURKE

Look, you didn't fail the exam because
you're stupid, you failed because you went
rushing in to it with your head up your ass
-just like back there at the bank. In this
line of work, it ain't about being eager,
Rob... it's about being smart. Rushing in
only gets people killed. You never even
drew your gun, man!

PENNEY

I want to be a cop to help people, not
shoot them.

BURKE

So what happens if you ever have to shoot
someone in order to help someone else?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Penney doesn't know how to answer.

EXT. PENNEY'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

It ain't Trump Towers, but it's got a decent view of the city. Burke's police car pulls up to the curb and Penney gets out, begins gathering his things. Burke tosses him a cell phone.

BURKE
Don't forget this. You want to ride again tomorrow?

PENNEY
Can't... my real job.

BURKE
All right. You need anything?

PENNEY
Yeah, to catch the guy who blew up the bank and shove him right in Detective Dick-head's face.

Burke grins and drives away. Penney stares longingly at the twinkling city lights. He looks to his badge and runs a thumb over the engraving: "Reserve Officer #224."

He turns to the building, stopping at a white van with hissing black-cat head logo: "BLACK CAT SECURITY SYSTEMS - It's bad luck to cross our path."

He tosses his flashlight inside before heading to his apartment, pausing to right one of his neighbor's fallen plastic deer lawn ornaments. He unlocks his door, pausing to look over the city.

INT. BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION - DAY

A hairy butt crack. It belongs to DUKE, a man of 35 who looks like his favorite pastimes include sports, beer, and farting.

DUKE
Jones just needs to keep his ass off the sideline and let the coach do his job, that's all. That's why the boys didn't even make the playoffs... again!

Duke is installing a combination handle on a door. All around him, CONSTRUCTION MEN are SAWING and HAMMERING. Penney is perched on a ladder, installing a video camera. He and Duke both wear Black Cat company clothes.

DUKE (CONT'D)
What combo you want on this thing, Robbie?

PENNEY
2-7-7-5.

Duke adjusts something, then tries the door. It opens only after he punches in the right combination.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

DUKE
2-7-7-5... got it. What's that number?

PENNEY
Allison's birthday.

DUKE
You need to forget her, Robbie. It ain't healthy to obsess.

Penney doesn't acknowledge. He has other things on his mind.

PENNEY
Hey, Duke... tell me something.

DUKE
You're ugly.

PENNEY
Besides that.

DUKE
You smell bad too.

PENNEY
No, seriously. What's the best way to keep one of these from sending out a picture?

DUKE
Whack it with a Louisville Slugger.

PENNEY
Well, yeah, but what if it's out of reach? Behind bulletproof glass or something. How would you do it?

DUKE
Why, Robbie? You thinking about going over to the dark side?

PENNEY
Somebody did something to one yesterday, and it's driving me bugshit because I can't figure out what. I'm supposedly in the business of foiling criminals, but right now I'm the one getting his nuts squeezed.

DUKE
I guess I'd have to go after the power supply. Without electricity, it's just a dumb piece of plastic and silicone. Kind of like the blonde I took out last night.

Penney doesn't laugh. He's too deep in thought.

EXT. BANK - DAY

The sky is dark, threatening to storm. A few CONSTRUCTION WORKERS are about, repairing the scars of the bombing.

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Penney's van pulls on to the lot. Still in company clothes, he pauses a moment to survey the scene. He appears conflicted as he sees himself in his mirror.

PENNEY

You realize that if that detective finds you in there, you're toast. You don't even know what you're looking for.

He starts to leave. The brake lights come on, then the reverse.

PENNEY (CONT'D)

Five minutes, that's all. Just five.

INT. BANK - MOMENTS LATER

Various Workers go about their tasks of repairing damage. A scruffy FOREMAN holding a clipboard stands like an emcee in a three-ring circus. Penney enters, looks around.

FOREMAN

Joey! Get your ass in gear! I want those glass doors up before the rain starts. We've only got a week to do this thing, so you'll stay all night if I say so!
(noticing Penney)

Hey!

Penney freezes, a deer in the headlights. Foreman marches over.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

PENNEY

Um, I'm just here to look at the systems.

The Foreman looks him over, shuffles through his papers.

FOREMAN

Black Cat Security... you ain't on here. Ace Security is who was contracted.

PENNEY

Ace charges too much. But hey, have it your way. Good luck with your deadline.

Penney begins to leave. Foreman hesitates, unsure.

FOREMAN

Hey! Hold up!

He grabs Penney by the arm and leads him back inside.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)

Cheap ass bankers. Okay, as you can see, some asshole blew this place to hell and we get to put it back together. All the king's horses, huh? Okay, the electrical plans are over there, and the main utility room is down the hall.

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CONTINUED:

Penney nods and turns to leave, but pauses.

PENNEY
Um, are there any cops still around?

Foreman eyes him distrustfully over his clipboard.

PENNEY (CONT'D)
I don't want to mess up any evidence or anything like that.

FOREMAN
No. The cops and FBI guys all cleared out a few hours ago, gave us the green light.

Penney nods and looks the place over, unsure where to start.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)
We only got a week, you know...

Penney shuffles over to look at the plans under Foreman's suspicious gaze. After a few moments, Penney heads off down the hall. Foreman shakes his head, clearly displeased. His attention is pulled away as MESSENGER, high thirties, well-groomed and wearing a nice suit, strides through the front door.

FOREMAN (CONT'D)
(sighs, perturbed)
Ah, shit... suits. Can I help you?

INT. BANK - UTILITY ROOM

Penney also sees Messenger, and quickly closes the door. The dusty room is a technological jungle: wires and cables hang vine-like from the ceiling and snake into numerous electrical boxes. Penney begins carefully inspecting each of them.

PENNEY
Phone lines... alarm lines... computer network. Ah, video! No cuts, no splices. No signs of being tampered with. Damn...

He follows them with his hand down to a gray box.

PENNEY (CONT'D)
Video-feed junction box is okay, L-E-D is lit, we've got power. Damn it...

Penney appears defeated. He looks at his watch.

PENNEY (CONT'D)
All right... you win again.

INT. BANK - HALL

Penney opens the utility room door, inadvertently yanking an extension chord out of a wall outlet. A SAW grinds to a stop.

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CONTINUED:

WORKER
Hey! Who's the asshole?

PENNEY
Sorry! I'll get it.

He leans down to plug it back in, and is struck with an idea.

INT. BANK - UTILITY ROOM

Penney rushes back to the junction box and follows the power cord down behind a piece of old plywood. He lifts it and smiles.

PENNEY
You sly son of a bitch!

There, plugged into the wall outlet is a common timer used to turn lamps on and off. The power supply is plugged into it.

PENNEY (CONT'D)
I rack my brains all frigging day... and all you used was a ten-dollar timer from Radio Shack. You sly bast-

The door suddenly opens. Penney wheels to find Messenger looking at him. They stare at each other in mutual surprise. Penney just knows he's busted... until Messenger smiles.

MESSENGER
Sorry, I didn't think anyone was supposed to be in here.

PENNEY
(wary)
I'm just checking the system.

Messenger nods, but makes no attempt to leave. Only stares curiously at the crouched Penney like a cat with a-

MESSENGER
Mouse?

PENNEY
What?

MESSENGER
Well, you're standing in a closet with a terrible expression on your face while looking behind some plywood. I thought maybe you'd found a mouse or something.

Penney shakes his head 'no'. Messenger continues to stare at him with an inquisitive grin, until Penney finally asks:

PENNEY
I'm sorry... I didn't catch your name.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MESSENGER

(extending his hand)
My name is Mr. Messenger... I'm the
assistant manager here. And you are?

PENNEY

(hesitant)
Um, Penney. Robert Penney.

MESSENGER

Nice to meet you. So, what did you find
hiding back there, Penney Robert Penney?

PENNEY

I guess I can show you... I'll need a
credible witness anyway.

He motions Messenger over and lifts the plywood far enough
forward for him to see. Messenger only looks puzzled.

MESSENGER

What exactly am I looking for?

PENNEY

Right there, plugged into the wall socket.
Somebody put a timer on your video feed.

MESSENGER

Layman's terms, please, Mr. Penney.

PENNEY

All the cameras feed into unit called a
multiplexor, which is powered through here.
Cutting off the power would black out their
signal to the recorders, but not kill the
recorders themselves. Smart thinking, but
it doesn't make much sense.

MESSENGER

How do you mean?

PENNEY

Bank robbers usually just put on ski masks,
run in and demand money. But this guy, he
went to a lot of trouble. It almost seems
like he was... I don't know. Something
else. Strange.

MESSENGER

So what do we do? Remove it?

PENNEY

No! Don't even touch it! The detectives
will want pictures, and they'll want to
check for latent prints off it. You
wouldn't want your prints on there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MESSENGER

(impressed)
For a man who installs security systems,
you seem quite knowledgeable on police
procedure.

PENNEY

I'm also a cop. Reserve officer, anyway.

MESSENGER

Really? And this is your full-time job?
Why not the other way around?

Penney shuffles, a raw nerve touched. He's almost ashamed as he
returns to inspecting the lines.

PENNEY

I, uh... I blew the Civil Service Exam.

MESSENGER

I find that hard to believe. You seem
fairly intelligent to me.

PENNEY

I know all the stuff, it's just that I
rushed into it. Got in a hurry and didn't
use my head.

Messenger seems very sympathetic, considerate.

MESSENGER

Well, don't feel bad. We all fail life's
little tests from time to time.

But Penney is too engrossed in inspecting the junction box.

PENNEY

Mr. Messenger, if the man who installed
this timer was in the building at some
point, the security cameras would have
picked him up then, wouldn't they?

MESSENGER

Yes, I suppose they would have.

PENNEY

So if we go and watch the tapes, and look
for someone who enters this room-

MESSENGER

Then you would have your man. Most
perceptive, Officer Penney.

Penney smiles at being called 'officer'. Messenger holds the
door for him and together they head to:

INT. BANK - BACK ROOM

The VCR cabinets are locked tight. Penney looks to Messenger,
who seems quite embarrassed as he searches his pockets.

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CONTINUED:

MESSENGER

I'm afraid I must have lost the key in all the commotion.

Penney's shoulders slump. He was so close...

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

Maybe we could jimmy the lock?

PENNEY

I couldn't do that.

MESSENGER

Don't be silly. You certainly have my permission.

Penney considers, kneels down to inspect the lock. Messenger leans over his shoulder, the proverbial devil on his shoulder.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

Not to mention how good that would look the next time you took your police exam. A reserve officer finding something that the detectives and FBI missed? Think of that!

Penney can't help but like that, actually considers it.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

I'm sure one of these workers would have a hammer or something.

PENNEY

Getting in is easy, I could pick this lock blindfolded. I just...

MESSENGER

I understand. There are procedures to follow.

PENNEY

Right.

MESSENGER

And what will happen, exactly?

PENNEY

I'll call the department. Some detectives and FBI agents will come out and collect the tapes, then go over them one by one and watch hours of boring footage hoping to find this guy.

MESSENGER

And if the tapes don't show anything?

The thought takes Penney by surprise. Suddenly he's concerned.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

After all, the man did manage to shut down all the cameras once.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

It would be a shame to raise the alarm for nothing. Your fellow officers might think you-

PENNEY

Incompetent.

MESSENGER

That would be most embarrassing.

Penney considers it, then digs into his pocket and produces a Swiss Army knife. He removes a tiny pair of flat tweezers from the casing, unfolds a blade, inserts the tip into the lock and rakes the tumblers with the tweezers until the lock gives.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

Impressive.

PENNEY

It's pretty easy, actually.

MESSENGER

I'm certainly glad you're a police officer. I'd hate to imagine what you could do if you ever decided to use your talents ruthlessly. May I?

Penney hands the knife over his shoulder to Messenger

PENNEY

\$59.95 at any hardware store. A million and one uses.

MESSENGER

Not all of which were intended, I'm sure.

Messenger inspects the knife. Engraved on the blade is "R.B.P." Beneath that: "I love you". Messenger points to the three letters and raises an eyebrow.

PENNEY

My initials. Robert B. Penney.

MESSENGER

Well, Robert B. Penney, somebody obviously loves you.

PENNEY

Hardly. The knife lasted a lot longer than the relationship did.

MESSENGER

Let me guess... the dreaded 'M' word?

PENNEY

She hated me being a cop... didn't like the idea of being involved with someone who might not come home at night.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PENNEY (CONT'D)
Part time she could live with, but she said
if I ever tried to go full-time she'd
leave. I guess she meant it.

Penney inspects the VCR's as they hum away. Beneath them is a
library of sixty tapes with dates handwritten on the side.

MESSENGER
Needle in a haystack, wouldn't you say,
Officer Penney?

PENNEY
You could say that.

MESSENGER
Is there anything I can do to help?

Penney digs out the tapes and hands two to Messenger.

PENNEY
Here, we'll split it. Now watch closely...
we're looking for anyone who enters that
electrical room.

Messenger nods and takes the tapes. Penney turns to the VCR's.

PENNEY (CONT'D)
We'll have to shut two of these down in
order to watch these.

MESSENGER
Not a problem. They're just recording us
and the construction workers right now.

Penney ejects tapes from two VCR's. Messenger reaches for them.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)
Here, don't mix those with the others.

Penney hands them over his shoulder and both men insert a tape
into a VCR. Soon they are watching boring time-lapse footage.

EXT. BANK

Rain starts to fall as a "ACE Security systems" pickup pulls
into the parking lot, with ACE TECHNICIAN is at the wheel. He
happily chomps on an unlit cigar... until he sees Penney's van.

ACE TECHNICIAN
Oh, no... you sneaky bastards are not
stealing this job from me!

He parks, adjusts his cap and storms out of the truck.

INT. BANK

Messenger rubs his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MESSENGER

I'm sorry, but I'm definitely going to need my glasses before I watch another second. They're in my office, I'll just be a minute.

Penney nods, and Messenger steps out. Penney watches his tape, transfixed. Until:

SNIPES (O.S.).

What the hell do you think you're doing?

He turns to find Snipes staring at him from the doorway. Beside him is a uniformed OFFICER. Peering over their shoulders are Mr. Claiborne, the Foreman, and a young African American man in a suit. Bringing up the rear is Ace Technician.

FOREMAN

That's him. That's the guy who said he was supposed to work here.

PENNEY

(desperate)
I think I may have found him, Detective.

Snipes puts his hands on his hips, rapidly losing patience.

SNIPES

Found who?

PENNEY

The guy who left the bomb. We're going through the tapes right now to look for him.

SNIPES

Who's we?

PENNEY

Mr. Messenger and me. He said it was okay-

SNIPES

Who the hell is Messenger?

PENNEY

He's the Assistant Manager.

Penney looks to Claiborne for conformation, but Claiborne only shares a confused look with the black man beside him.

CLAIBORNE

I'm sorry, young man... but I'm afraid I don't know any Messenger. This is Mr. Gulley, he is the Assistant Manager.

EXT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

A heavy downpour, lightening strikes and THUNDER crashes.

INT. POLICE STATION - INTERVIEW ROOM

Two Officers peer through a window, grinning and shaking their heads. Inside, Penney sits sullenly at a lone table. One Officer taps on the glass, points to Penney, then inserts his finger into the closed fist of his other hand: "You're screwed".

The two scatter when Snipes suddenly appears. He steps in quietly studying the contents of a folder. He slowly walks around, then settles himself on the desk corner and stares.

SNIPES

What makes you think you're better than me?

(beat, no answer from Penney)

What makes you think you're smarter than me?

Penney only swallows hard as Snipes leans forward.

SNIPES (CONT'D)

I've spent thirteen years in this department. Thirteen years. All that time spent working my ass off to get to where I am. Studying, learning, time in the field. But you... you put on a uniform twice a month at most, and suddenly you're super-cop? Suddenly you know better than me?

Snipes stares hard, daring him to argue. THUNDER RUMBLES outside. Snipes finally stands and shuffles the papers.

SNIPES (CONT'D)

You're damn lucky that bank manager is a nice guy who appreciates what you and Burke did there yesterday. Your ass could easily be up on charges right now. Trespassing, Criminal Impersonation, Theft of Property... Shall I go on?

PENNEY

I didn't take the tapes. The guy-

SNIPES

Yes, I know... the mystery guy took them. The mystery guy who only you saw.

PENNEY

The foreman saw him.

SNIPES

The foreman said he saw a man who came in to solicit building supplies, then left.

PENNEY

Did he actually watch him leave?

SNIPES

I don't give a flying fart if he held the frigging door open for him!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SNIPES (CONT'D)

You weren't supposed to be there in the first place! You are a reserve officer!

Penney swallows hard, feels insulted.

SNIPES (CONT'D)

What happens when we find the perp, and he walks away after his damn attorney gets evidence suppressed because you screwed with it?

PENNEY

I just wanted to help, that's all. I was just trying to find some evidence-

Snipes scoffs, reads from the papers in his hands as he slowly walks a circle around Penney.

SNIPES

You say you saw a timer on the camera junction box... but no timer was found. You say you saw a guy who claimed to be the assistant manager... but no guy was found. You say the two of you went looking through videotapes for the suspect... but guess what, Sherlock? The tapes for today and last week are missing as well!

He thumps Penney's face a few times with the papers.

SNIPES (CONT'D)

Does this look like evidence to you?

The door opens and Burke enters the room, followed by CAPTAIN GARRET, a burly man in his fifties with a southern drawl.

GARRET

That's quite enough, Detective.

SNIPES

Can I help you, Captain?

GARRET

I'm the ranking officer here... I'll ask the questions if you don't mind.

SNIPES

With all due respect, sir... you are a Captain of the Patrol Division. This is a C-I-D interview.

GARRET

This is one of my men, Detective Snipes. Now step aside.

Snipes looks pissed but does as he's told. Garret snatches the papers right out of his hands and settles at the desk. Burke leans back in the corner, arms folded, gives Penney a wink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GARRET (CONT'D)
Officer Penney... you screwed up, son.

PENNEY
Yes, sir. I did.

GARRET
Tried playing detective on your own time,
huh, boy?

Garret eyes Penney good. The man's powerful stare is enough to make anybody want to plea for forgiveness.

GARRET (CONT'D)
Well, I could rattle off about a dozen
articles you've violated, but that would be
about as exciting as a one-rooster
cockfight. And I believe you already know
your dick is in hot water.

Penney nods, he certainly does. Garret leans back in his chair.

GARRET (CONT'D)
I don't know what your intentions may have
been, Officer Penney, but Burke here is
someone who I've known a long time and
whose opinion I trust. He assures me that
your past service to this department has
been... of some merit.

Snipes scoffs. Garret turns his powerful gaze toward him.

GARRET (CONT'D)
You have something to say, Detective?

SNIPES
Yes, I do. I'd just like it on the record
that this reserve officer with so-called
'valuable past service' may have destroyed
crucial evidence in a homicide
investigation. And he also entered the
crime scene under false pretenses to boot!

GARRET
Noted. However, Officer Burke has also
assured me that C-I-D and the FBI spent the
last two days collecting all evidence they
deemed to be of importance.

(grins, tongue in cheek)
Unless you're saying that this reserve
officer found something you boys may have
missed, Detective.

SNIPES
I didn't miss anything!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

GARRET

Very well. As for you, Officer Penney, I advise you to stick to patrol from now on, and let the detectives do what they're paid to do. In the future, if you ever have any suspicions regarding any investigation, you will direct them to the proper authority. Do I make myself perfectly clear on that?

PENNEY

Yes, sir.

GARRET

This particular case is under the jurisdiction of the FBI, but Detective Snipes is our liaison to that office. Any information obtained will go through him. Do you understand?

Snipes glares and silently mouths "don't even think about it".

GARRET (CONT'D)

I am also under the impression that you are considering seeking full-time employment at this department. Am I correct?

PENNEY

Yes, sir.

GARRET

Then it goes without saying you would be well advised to keep your nose clean. Any further deviations from regulations will result in immediate disciplinary action.

Garret stands and leans over the table.

GARRET (CONT'D)

In other words, son, any more screw-ups and you shall be strung up by your gonads -and you can forget ever becoming a full-time officer. Understand?

PENNEY

Perfectly, sir.

Burke opens the door for his captain.

GARRET

Now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me... the misses made some fine fried chicken and mashed taters. And I must say that's a far better sight then all of your ugly faces.

He lumbers out. Snipes snatches up the papers and storms over, stopping only to lean over Penney, their noses almost touching.

SNIPES

Don't even think about knocking on my door. You just stay away from me, understand?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

SNIPES (CONT'D)

If you so much as stick your nose in my business, I'll cut it off and shove it straight up your ass!

He whirls around and storms out the door. Burke calls after.

BURKE

Have a nice day, Nate.

Snipes flips him the bird over his shoulder. Burke grins, then turns to Penney, who is still feeling sorry for himself.

BURKE (CONT'D)

All right, your ass is a little smaller from getting chewed on, but other than that no real harm done.

PENNEY

Sorry I let you down.

Burke walks over and leans down, perturbed by the "woe-is-me".

BURKE

All right, enough of the wounded-pride bullshit. You got thrown... so what? You can sit there in the dirt and feel sorry for yourself, or you can get up, dust yourself off and hop back on.

He stands up and begins to walk out, pausing at the doorway.

BURKE (CONT'D)

By the way, you're riding with me tomorrow.

PENNEY

Burke I really don't-

BURKE

Nope, that's final. I'll pick you up at three. And if you're not ready, I'll dress you myself. Don't think that I won't.

Penney sits alone in the room. THUNDER takes us to:

INT. PENNEY'S VAN - MOMENTS LATER

The rain is coming down so hard that Penney can barely see to drive. His cell phone suddenly RINGS, making him jump.

PENNEY

Hello? Hello?

MESSENGER (V.O.)

Good evening, Officer Penney.

Lighting strikes, causing the line to static.

PENNEY

Yeah?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MESSENGER (V.O.)
Officer Penney, you are a rather difficult
person to reach. I hope all is well.

Penney brakes as the car ahead abruptly stops for a red light.

PENNEY
Who is this?

MESSENGER (V.O.)
I believe the name I told you was...
'Messenger'.

THUNDER rolls from the earlier lightning strike.

PENNEY
Excuse me?

INT. MESSENGER'S BMW

Messenger drives along, talking on his hands-free.

MESSENGER
This is Messenger, whom you met at the bank
earlier today. Officer Penney, I just
wished to call and apologize.

INTERCUT: INT. PENNEY'S VAN / INT. MESSENGER'S BMW

PENNEY
Apologize?

MESSENGER
I 'm afraid I owe you several, really. For
misrepresenting myself, for so callously
using you in retrieving the items I had
returned for, and for my rather abrupt
departure.

Penney doesn't believe it, thinks it's a sick joke.

PENNEY
Very funny. Did Burke put you up to this?

MESSENGER
I assure you I'm not one of your fraternal
policemen. I am indeed whom I claim to be.
Don't be too hard on yourself for being
misled, by the way. People just don't
perceive a man in a suit to be a threat.
Poor Christine included.

PENNEY
(unbelieving)
So you're telling me that you're the one
who murdered the bank teller.

Messenger's light changes and he drives on, casually checking
his rear-view mirror.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MESSENGER

Murdered is a most interesting choice of words, Officer Penney. I was quite correct when I said you were perceptive. Everyone else dismisses the incident as a mere robbery. But you -I must admit you are the only person to have so much as given me a second glance. Well done, I congratulate you.

Penney still isn't convinced, but he is unsure. A HONK from behind tells him the light has changed. He drives on. His cell phone BEEPS and he looks to find the battery is almost dead.

PENNEY

So why her? Was it for the money?

MESSENGER

Money I have. As to 'why her', well, there is a very old saying: when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. I am that teacher. And do not be too hasty to pass judgement upon me... I sincerely hoped not to kill her. But I am afraid poor Christine failed the test. She had every opportunity to come through the lesson unscathed but, unfortunately for her, she chose poorly. So no, I did not kill her... she killed herself.

Penney has to pull the van over to the side of the road.

PENNEY

Who is this, really?

Messenger pulls a left at the next corner.

MESSENGER

Let's just stick with Messenger for now, I like that. Besides, it would take five months to tell you my real name.

Penney's phone BEEPS again, the battery is going fast.

PENNEY

Why are you calling me?

Messenger makes another left.

MESSENGER

As I have already stated, I sincerely wished to apologize. You seem to be a good man, Officer Penney. I disliked having to deceive you.

PENNEY

That's it?

Messenger makes yet another left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MESSENGER

(coy)
Well... perhaps I also wanted to see just how perceptive you actually are.

PENNEY

What's that supposed to mean?

MESSENGER

What that is supposed to mean, Officer Penney, is this: Christine wasn't the first to be tested, nor will she be the last.

PENNEY

You're going to murder another one?

Messenger makes a final left, which brings him back to the street he was originally on. And there's Penney's van up ahead.

MESSENGER

'Murder' again. We really shall have to expand your perception of things. Now, as I was saying, back in the bank you expressed remorse at having failed your police examination. Well, I offer you a chance at redemption. You are a student in search of a teacher. I am a teacher in search of a student. You may even save a life or two in the bargain. But I must warn you... the lessons are hands-on, with absolutely no room for error. Someone's life may be the penalty for failure, perhaps even your own. Are you willing to accept that?

Penney is getting pissed. Surely this is a sick joke. His cell phone BEEPS again... the battery is almost dead.

MESSENGER (CONT'D)

Time is wasting, Officer Penney...

PENNEY

Look, I don't know what you're trying to pull, but I sure as hell don't like it... you sick son of a bitch!

MESSENGER

Then I will take that as a yes. Show me how perceptive you really are, Officer Penney. Let the lessons begin...

Penney's phone dies before he can even reply. He doesn't see Messenger's BMW drive right by.