

39 Speak

Ronnie Jacobs killed his ex-wife, kidnapped his son and won't tell the cops where the boy is until someone-or something-forces him to change his tune.

FADE IN:

INT. OUTSIDE OF INTERVIEW ROOM IN SHERIFF'S OFFICE - EVENING

DEPUTY SCOTT WILLIAMS, a fit man in his mid-thirties, stands outside of the interview room and observes RONNIE, a hard-looking man with a poorly groomed beard, through the one-way glass. RONNIE is leaning his chair back against the wall with his hands folded behind his head. RONNIE's arms are covered in tattoos. He has a large scratch across his face. DEPUTY KATE MALLOY, a short, attractive woman in a khaki uniform, walks up and looks through the glass at RONNIE.

DEPUTY MALLOY

Has he said anything?

DEPUTY WILLIAMS

(Angry)

Not a word. Asshole acts like he's on a paid company break.

DEPUTY MALLOY

Want me to talk to him?

DEPUTY WILLIAMS

I don't know what good it'll do. He definitely has a problem with women though. What he did to his ex-wife, Maggie...I haven't seen a woman's face beaten so badly in all my years as a cop. He shot her in the head when he was done beating her. We still don't know whether he went there to kidnap the boy, and Maggie tried to stop him, or if he killed her and the boy and we just haven't found R.J.'s body. He hasn't said a word since we picked him up. Hasn't even asked for a lawyer. Just sits there with a shit-eating grin. I want to knock that smirk off his face, but Ronnie Jacobs isn't worth losing my paycheck.

DEPUTY MALLOY

Let me talk to him. Maybe the fact that I'm a woman will push his buttons.

DEPUTY WILLIAMS

You might as well. At this point,
(MORE)

DEPUTY WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

we've got nothing to lose. The boy's been gone for at least two days based on the M.E.'s time of death for the mother. We're assuming Ronnie Jr.'s still alive.

INT. INSIDE OF INTERVIEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

DEPUTY MALLOY walks into the interview room and sits down at the scarred wooden table. RONNIE doesn't move or acknowledge her.

DEPUTY MALLOY

(carefully neutral voice)

Ronnie, I'm Deputy Kate Malloy. I'm a parent myself and I gotta tell you, if my ex tried to keep me from seeing my kid...well, I understand that things got a little heated between you and Maggie. Maybe she said she'd never let you see R.J. again, and it escalated from there. We all know you didn't mean to kill her, Ronnie, but you can go a long way to helping yourself with the judge if you tell us where your son is. The D.A. has a deal on paper ready to sign if you help me here.

RONNIE doesn't open his eyes but starts to whistle loudly.

DEPUTY MALLOY

(slightly pleading)

Come on, Ronnie. Little R.J. is out there in the dark somewhere cold and scared. He's wondering where his dad is. Tell us where he is and I promise that I'll bring him to see you so you'll know he's okay. Did you leave him with somebody? They won't be in any trouble. Girlfriend? Friend? Relative? Help me out.

RONNIE puts his chair down and looks at DEPUTY MALLOY with cold, flat eyes and continues to whistle loudly. She flinches, and he begins to laugh.

RONNIE

(sneering)

You think I care about that little shit? Stuck to his mama's titty.

(MORE)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

Whining and crying all the damn time. You're as stupid as that bitch I was married to if you think I give a rat's ass about that boy. For all I know, he ain't even mine. His mama was a whore and got what she deserved. I'm done here.

RONNIE leans his chair back against the wall, closes his eyes and begins to whistle again. DEPUTY MALLOY sighs, stands up and leaves the room.

DEPUTY WILLIAMS

(discouraged)

I warned you. We've got dogs and search teams combing the woods behind the mom's house. If R.J.'s out in those woods alone, I don't know how long he'll last. Cameron's in kindergarten with R.J. so I know...knew Maggie Jacobs. She was a good mom. I don't know how she ever got tied to a loser like Ronnie.

(He runs a hand through his hair and blows out a hard breath.)

This one's hitting too close to home. I hate crimes involving kids.

DEPUTY MALLOY

I know.

INT. HOLDNG CELL WITH A DOUBLE BUNK AND A TOILET - LATER

RONNIE lays on the top bunk with his eyes closed. His cell mate, VICTOR, sits on the edge of his bunk reading a newspaper.

VICTOR

(slightly impressed)

Dude, you're all over the front page of the paper. They got your picture and everything. You really kill your wife?

RONNIE

(bored then escalating to anger)

I don't know what the fuck you're talking about, Victor. Bitch probably ran her mouth to the wrong

(MORE)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

guy. Maggie never did know when to shut her piehole. The cops are too lazy to do their job, so they arrest me for her murder. Stupid cow needed killing for the crap she's put me through the last year. Four hundred bucks a month for support? Bullshit!

VICTOR

Man, that's your wife and kid you're talking about. Anybody ever disrespected my old lady, they'd find themselves saying good morning sweet Jesus by the time I was done.

(Reads the front page of the paper for a few minutes.)

They got search teams out looking for your kid. What is he? Four? Five?

RONNIE

Five.

VICTOR

I got two boys and a little girl. My old lady's pissed at me for getting locked up, but she'll get over it.

(Turns the page of the newspaper. Reads for a minute, then chuckles.)

That Snuffy Smith is a hoot. I've been reading him since I was a kid. Wish I had some hooch to drink myself, but that's what got me here in the first place. Nobody can have a good time anymore without somebody going to jail. (beat) You wanna read the paper?

(He folds the newspaper and hands it up to RONNIE.)

RONNIE

Will it shut you up?

RONNIE snatches the newspaper from VICTOR and sits up on his bunk to read it. His eyes grow wide and he throws the paper down on the floor.

VICTOR
What the fuck is wrong with you?

RONNIE
Nothin'. (beat) Damn horoscope is
fucked up. Just messed with my head
for a minute.

VICTOR
(slight laugh)
Horoscope? Man, that's a bunch of
baloney anyway. Nobody believes in
that crap but little old ladies.
(Picks up the paper and
turns to the horoscopes.)
What are you? Virgo? Gemini?

RONNIE
Taurus.

VICTOR
You will meet an interesting person
who will change your life for good.
(beat) Hey! Maybe I'm an
interesting person. What's wrong
with that?

RONNIE jumps down from the bunk and grabs the newspaper from
VICTOR. He reads it and then thrusts the paper back at
VICTOR. He stabs his finger at the horoscope for Taurus.

RONNIE
(surprised)
That ain't what it said! It said
that I was going to hang for my
crimes and would burn in hell.

VICTOR
I'm looking at it with my own two
eyes. It says you will meet an
interesting person. Ain't nothing
about hanging for no crime. (beat)
It's almost lights out. You're eyes
are playing tricks on you.

RONNIE
Yeah. You're probably right. It's
been a rough couple of days. Cops
haven't let me shut my eyes for
more than a minute before getting
in my face again and asking about
Maggie.

RONNIE jumps back on his bunk and lays down. He shuts his eyes. VICTOR lays down on his bunk and the lights on the cell block go off. VICTOR and RONNIE fall asleep.

MOMENTS LATER

RONNIE wakes up. He breathes out a cold mist. He shivers and pulls his blanket over his body. He tries to shut his eyes and go back to sleep, but he's cold. He sits up and rubs his hands together in an attempt to get warm. A dark shadow flits across the cell. He gives a start and looks around the small space. Not seeing anything, he shakes his head and lays back down. A minute later, his eyes reopen and he sniffs. He wrinkles his nose in disgust.

RONNIE

(annoyed)

What the fuck did you eat? A damn dead rat? Take a crap or something because your ass is stinking the place up.

VICTOR

(In a sleepy voice)

What are you talking about? I don't smell nothing. Go to sleep.

RONNIE

If that ain't you, then what is that smell? It smells like something died in here.

VICTOR

(tired and annoyed)

You must be tripping out from whatever crack you smoked. It smelled like a jail cell an hour ago and it smells like a jail cell now. Dirty feet and funky ass, but nothing dead. Now shut the fuck up and go to sleep, or I'm gonna knock your ass out.

RONNIE

Whatever.

RONNIE rolls over and stares at the wall. He's so cold that he can't sleep. He shivers underneath his sheet and blanket.

VOICE

(whisper)

Ronnie.

RONNIE looks over the edge of the bunk at VICTOR but sees that he's fallen back to sleep. He looks over at the bars to see if one of the guards is walking in the corridor, but sees no one.

VOICE

Where?

RONNIE

(His eyes dart all around the cell.)

Who's there?

VOICE

Where is he?

RONNIE

(on edge)

Victor, quit fucking around.

VOICE

Speak.

RONNIE

(angry)

Victor, I swear to God if you don't stop fucking with me, I will beat you like I beat that bitch, Maggie. By the time I'm done with you, you'll pray I kill you.

VICTOR jumps out of his bed. He grabs RONNIE and pulls him down from his bunk. VICTOR has RONNIE by his shirt collar with his fist pulled back ready to punch him.

VICTOR

I don't know what the hell kind of fucked up mental shit you got running through your head, but if you don't shut up and go to sleep, you'll be praying to me by the time I'm done with your face. Ain't nobody sayin' shit, takin' a shit, or doin' shit.

RONNIE

You didn't hear somebody saying my name?

VICTOR

Nah, man. Ain't but three damn holding cells and one's got a

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

passed out drunk and the other one's empty. Ain't nobody here but us.

RONNIE

(confused)

I swear I heard somebody say my name. It's cold as my Aunt Fanny's snatch in here, too. Damn cheap ass guards turned down the heat.

VICTOR

(Jabs his finger against RONNIE's head.)

Man, that's in your head. You need to get right and tell the cops where you stashed your boy. Wait a minute. Did you kill your boy? You a baby murderer?

VICTOR slams RONNIE against the wall. RONNIE yanks himself away from VICTOR'S grasp and walks away to lean against the bunk.

RONNIE

Get off me! No, I didn't kill him. I ain't saying another word. Last thing I need is a jailhouse snitch testifying in court against me.

VICTOR

I ain't no snitch, but I ain't no baby killer either.

(He points his finger at RONNIE.)

You got something wrong with you. It ain't natural to hurt your own flesh and blood. It's messing with your...what do they call it? Your psyche. That's it. Your psyche's all jacked up because of what you done to your wife and boy. It's making you crazy.

RONNIE

What are you? My shrink? It got cold and then I heard a voice talking to me.

(Snaps his fingers.)

You know what? I bet you it was that bitch cop messing with me

(MORE)

RONNIE (CONT'D)

trying to get me to confess.

(He looks around and starts to talk in a loud voice to the ceiling.)

Deputy Malloy or whoever (beat) do what you want. Play your little games. You ain't getting me to say nothin', so you can go on home.

RONNIE gives a bark of laughter and shakes his head. He climbs back on his bunk and lays back down.

RONNIE

(sarcastic)

Good one. You in on it, too, Victor? Whispering my name. Maybe pulling out a dead mouse to stink up the place. Guards turning down the temperature to make it an ice box. You must think I'm a moron to fall for that crap. You a cop, Victor? A jailhouse snitch? What?

VICTOR

Fuck you. Hey! Guard!

A GUARD walks up and flashes a light into the cell.

GUARD

What?

VICTOR

This guy's out of his head. I think he's coming down off some bad drugs or something. Put me in another cell.

GUARD

What does this look like? Holiday Inn?

VICTOR

Listen, I'm not trying to cause no problems, but he keeps talking about hearing voices and smelling dead things. Dude's crazy. I don't want to wake up and find this joker tripping out and thinking I'm the devil come to bring him home.

GUARD

Alright. We got an empty cell down here, but the toilet isn't working.

VICTOR

I'm good. I just want to get some shut eye.

RONNIE

Ha! You ain't a snitch or cop? My ass. Go home to your nice bed, pig. Your little trick didn't work.

VICTOR raises his middle finger in an obscene gesture as the GUARD unlocks the door and motions him out of the cell.

RONNIE (CONT'D)

(satisfied)

Maybe I can actually get some sleep now. Dumb ass cops think they could run a scam on old Ronnie.

RONNIE closes his eyes and a few minutes later, he starts to snore. His sheet starts to slowly twist into a rope and move around RONNIE's neck. It tightens as unseen hands pull it around his neck like a noose. RONNIE gasps and awakens. His eyes bulge as the sheet wraps tighter and tighter. He claws at his neck in an attempt to pull the sheet away. He gasps and tries to call out for help.

VOICE

(whisper)

Ronnie, where's my boy? Where's R.J.?

RONNIE

(Gasping)

Maggie?

VOICE

Why, Ronnie? Why?

RONNIE

(Croaks)

Mags? Mags, I didn't mean it.

VOICE

Where is he?

RONNIE

He's okay.

RONNIE pulls at the sheet harder in an attempt to get it from his neck. The sheet acts like a noose and pulls RONNIE up off the bunk. RONNIE realizes he is going to die.

RONNIE
(frightened)
He's alive! I swear! I got him tucked into an old trailer outside of town.

VOICE
Tell them.

RONNIE
(pleading)
I will, Maggie. Let me go and I will. I promise.

The sheet loosens from his neck. RONNIE falls, hits the edge of his bunk, then drops to the floor. He gasps and rubs his throat. Slowly, RONNIE stands up and goes to the bars to call the guard.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LATER

RONNIE paces around the interview room mumbling to himself. DEPUTY WILLIAMS and DEPUTY MALLOY watch him through the one-way glass.

DEPUTY WILLIAMS
I think Ronnie has finally cracked.

DEPUTY MALLOY
Have they located little R.J.?

DEPUTY WILLIAMS
Yeah. They're taking him to the hospital for observation. He's a little dehydrated and scared, but he wasn't hurt.

DEPUTY MALLOY
Poor little guy. He has to be terrified. (beat) Mom murdered by his dad. He probably saw everything. What's going to happen to him?

DEPUTY WILLIAMS
Maggie's parents have driven in from Utah. They've been given emergency temporary custody.

DEPUTY MALLOY

I'll sleep better tonight now that R.J.'s been found. Stuff like this makes you really appreciate your children and your family.

DEPUTY WILLIAMS

Me too. I called home so I could hear Cameron's voice.

DEPUTY WILLIAMS and DEPUTY MALLOY observe RONNIE for a minute. RONNIE is still muttering and pacing.

DEPUTY WILLIAMS (CONT'D)

I don't know what's going on with our boy, Ronnie. He's twitching like a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. He started wiggling out in his cell talking about how Maggie won't leave him alone. He spilled R.J.'s location before we could even get him in the interview room.

INT. INSIDE OF INTERVIEW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

RONNIE paces nervously around the room. When the air kicks on, RONNIE jumps.

RONNIE

(scared)

I told 'em, Maggie. I told 'em where he was, so you can leave me the fuck alone now.

VOICE

(whisper)

Never.

RONNIE drops to the floor, buries his head in his hands and begins to sob.

FADE TO BLACK.