

The Statement

Mystery · 2-character play · 1 woman, 1 either · 12 min · Intermediate · Ages 12+

Three in the morning, in an office at a police station. Commandant Verne is questioning the only person who can confirm the alibi of a man arrested for a burglary. The account is clear, the times fall into place, the details match. Too well, for someone just dragged out of bed.

An office in a police station in a French town, one night in November, a little after three in the morning.

Casting

VERNE (Female role, Adult) 50, police commandant, on night duty, twenty-six years on the job.

CAMILLE (No gender marker, Adult) thirties, according to the suspect, the only person who can confirm his alibi.

SCENE 1

(An office, at night. A table, two chairs, a lamp. In a corner, high up, a camera, its light off. Camille waits on the visitor's chair, a wet coat across the knees. Verne comes in with a file and two paper cups. She puts one down in front of Camille.)

VERNE. Commandant Verne. Sorry to keep you waiting. Coffee. It's bad, but it's hot.

CAMILLE. Thank you.

(Verne sits down, opens the file, picks up a pen.)

VERNE. Surname, first name.

CAMILLE. Roussel. Camille.

VERNE. Date of birth.

CAMILLE. The twelfth of April, ninety-one.

VERNE. Occupation.

CAMILLE. I work for an insurance company. Claims.

VERNE. Claims. You got here fast.

CAMILLE. Your switchboard called me around two. I live ten minutes away. I left the car in the courtyard, downstairs. I hope that's all right.

(A pause.)

VERNE. That's all right.

(Camille looks up at the camera.)

VERNE. It hasn't worked since March. Here we write by hand, like in the old days. Do you want to put your coat on the radiator?

CAMILLE. I'm fine.

(Camille takes a small notebook out of a pocket and puts it on the table, with a pen.)

VERNE. You take notes?

CAMILLE. I write everything down. Otherwise I forget everything.

VERNE. You know why we asked you to come in.

CAMILLE. For Hugo. For Tuesday night.

VERNE. Hugo Sorel was arrested tonight, at half past twelve, outside his flat. On Tuesday night, someone emptied the window of a jeweller's on Rue des Tanneurs. He says he was at your place. You're the only person who can confirm that. So I'm listening. Take your time.

CAMILLE. He got there around nine. There was the cup match, we'd said we'd watch it together, like last year. We ordered a pizza from Chez Nino, downstairs from me, at ten past ten. The large, four cheese, with the stuffed crust. The delivery guy rang at ten thirty-five. There was extra time, then penalties. We lost. Hugo stayed a bit longer, to talk about the last penalty, he couldn't get over it. He left at twelve ten. It was raining. I lent him an umbrella. A green one.

(Verne writes. She stops at a word and underlines it.)

VERNE. Chez Nino.

CAMILLE. Downstairs from me.

VERNE. Twelve ten.

CAMILLE. Twelve ten.

VERNE. And the pizza at ten past ten.

CAMILLE. Yes.

VERNE. Do you know what time I had dinner on Tuesday?

CAMILLE. No.

VERNE. Neither do I. I know I ate something, standing up, in a corridor. Nobody remembers what time a pizza came. Nobody. Except you.

CAMILLE. It's in the app. I checked before I came.

VERNE. Show me.

(A pause. Camille doesn't touch the phone.)

CAMILLE. I delete them. The orders. I don't like people knowing what I eat.

VERNE. You work in claims and you delete your traces.

CAMILLE. Exactly. I know what can be done with traces.

(Verne turns a page of the file.)

VERNE. The large, four cheese, with the stuffed crust.

CAMILLE. Yes.

VERNE. That's what Sorel told me, earlier. The same words. In the same order. The large, four cheese, with the stuffed crust. Do you know how many times I've heard two people tell the same evening in the same words? Never. An evening, you tell it crooked. You start at the end, you forget the delivery guy, you get the match wrong. When it comes out that straight, it isn't a memory. It's a recitation.

CAMILLE. We ate the same pizza.

VERNE. That, I'm willing to believe.

CAMILLE. You want crooked? He spilled his beer on the sofa at half-time. At the last penalty, he had tears in his eyes, he'll never want you to know that. He put on my slippers to go and smoke at the window, and he left in them. That, he didn't tell you.

VERNE. No. That, he didn't tell me.

CAMILLE. Then write it down.

VERNE. I'm writing it. All of it. And I'm also writing that it came back to you when I said it was too straight.

(Verne writes.)

VERNE. Have you spoken to him since?

CAMILLE. No.

VERNE. Not a text? Not a call?

CAMILLE. He's in custody. He doesn't have his phone. You know that better than I do.

VERNE. Ten past ten. Ten thirty-five. You've given me two times, and only two. Both of them between ten and eleven.

CAMILLE. So?

VERNE. So the window was emptied between ten and eleven. And that, I didn't tell you.

(A pause. Camille looks at the camera.)

CAMILLE. It's a coincidence.

VERNE. I have a lot of respect for coincidences. Not at three in the morning.

(Camille takes a sip of coffee and puts the cup down.)

CAMILLE. Commandant. It's three o'clock. I start work at eight. You've got your theory, I can see that. Tell me what to write, and I'll sign.

VERNE. I'm sorry?

CAMILLE. Write it, your theory. I sign, and everyone goes home to bed. You too.

(Verne puts down her pen.)

VERNE. I only write what you say.

CAMILLE. And if I say something else? If I say he left at ten?

VERNE. Then I write ten. And just above it I write that you first said twelve ten. Both stay on the page. In here, we don't erase anything.

CAMILLE. Can you keep me here till morning, for that?

VERNE. No. You're here of your own free will. The door isn't locked, you can leave whenever you like, and nobody will stop you. But if this goes before a judge, what you sign here, you'll say again under oath. And there, lying is called perjury. I'm telling you because it's the law. Not to scare you.

(Camille writes something in the notebook.)

CAMILLE. You don't scare me.

VERNE. Good. I don't have the right to.

CAMILLE. Some people take the right.

VERNE. Some do. Twenty-six years I've watched them at it. They get a signature at three in the morning, they go home happy, and at ten the person comes back with a lawyer. And quite right too. A statement you tear out of someone, I can't do a thing with it. It falls apart in front of the first judge. A false statement, at least, tells me something.

CAMILLE. And what does mine tell you?

VERNE. That someone wants a culprit before morning. Or that someone wants to see whether I want one.

CAMILLE. Everyone in here wants a culprit before morning.

VERNE. One last thing. Twelve ten.

CAMILLE. I told you. Twelve ten.

VERNE. Sorel told me twelve twenty. He signed twelve twenty. I'm the one who typed twelve ten, in my note for the prosecutor, at half past one, with a coffee in my other hand. I saw the mistake when I reread it, I haven't corrected it yet. Twelve ten exists in only one place in the world: in my note, in this file. Sorel has never seen it. You have.

(A long pause. Camille closes the notebook.)

VERNE. There's nobody on the switchboard after midnight. Nobody called you. And the courtyard downstairs only opens with a pass.

CAMILLE. How long have you known?

VERNE. Since the courtyard, I've wondered. Since you said twelve ten, I've known. You're from the Inspection Générale.

CAMILLE. My name really is Camille. Not Roussel.

VERNE. And Roussel?

CAMILLE. Roussel is real. Roussel is asleep at this hour, and will be here tomorrow at nine to tell you about the same pizza.

VERNE. And Sorel? You had him sleep in a cell for your exercise?

CAMILLE. Sorel is a real case. The window is real. Your chief sent me your note at two. Your note, nothing else. In this office, the only lie is me.

VERNE. This is about Aubry.

CAMILLE. Lucas Aubry says that in March, during his interview, the camera was switched off. And that you had him sign whatever you wanted.

VERNE. It was broken. It still is.

CAMILLE. It was repaired last night. It's been recording since you came in with the coffees.

(The camera's little red light comes on. Verne looks up at it.)

VERNE. And that?

CAMILLE. That is someone, somewhere else, watching.

(A pause.)

CAMILLE. Why did you keep going? If you knew.

VERNE. Because the alibi, I already knew it was false. What I wanted to know was whether the person sitting across from me would go as far as signing it. Inspection Générale or not.

(A pause.)

VERNE. Well?

CAMILLE. I'm not the one who decides. I write.

VERNE. Write that I knew.

CAMILLE. That doesn't count in your favour. Anyone who knows they're being watched behaves. Everyone behaves under a red light.

VERNE. I behave when it's off, too. But that, you'll never be able to write down.

CAMILLE. No. Never.

VERNE. And if it's no? If your report says no?

CAMILLE. The disciplinary board. Then a transfer, far from here, to a unit where nobody conducts interviews any more. You know that.

VERNE. I know.

(Camille stands, puts on the coat, puts away the notebook.)

CAMILLE. And Sorel?

VERNE. His alibi is false. Chez Nino is closed on Tuesdays. A yellowed notice, on the door. I read it tonight, on my way back from the jeweller's.

CAMILLE. That, I'll write down.

VERNE. Write down that the coffee was bad, too.

CAMILLE. Good night, Commandant.

(Camille leaves. Verne stays at the table. She looks at the red light. The office phone rings. She picks up.)

VERNE. Verne.

(A pause.)

VERNE. Sorel's witness? Now?

(A pause.)

VERNE. Which way did they come in?

(A pause.)

VERNE. Send them up.

(She hangs up. She sets the second chair squarely opposite her own, throws away Camille's cup, opens the file at the first page. Above her, the red light.)

(Blackout.)



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