# The Shadow Directive

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

Jamie Tran was last seen crossing the intersection at South Congress and Elizabeth, earbuds in, head down, a canvas tote slung over one shoulder with their sketchpad peeking out the top. It was late, but not late enough to explain a disappearance.

The police report would later note that Jamie was “prone to instability” and “possibly in crisis.” That Jamie was nonbinary didn’t make it into the report. That they’d just started hormone therapy? Not mentioned. That they were loved—by a tight-knit group of friends, by a younger sister who idolized them, and by a community that had seen too many candles lit for too many vigils—also omitted.

But Reese Carter remembered.

The former cop had spent the past six months working solo out of a small office in East Austin, cluttered with outdated maps, empty coffee cups, and a corkboard littered with thumbtacks and post-its scribbled in sharp black ink. Jamie's name went on the board beside four others—each LGBTQIA+, each vanished without a trace. No signs of struggle. No calls. No bodies. No answers.

# Reading sample — continued



She’d stopped asking for help from APD after the second cold shoulder. “No pattern,” they’d said. “People disappear all the time.” She knew a brush-off when she heard one. She used to give them herself, back before she understood what systemic neglect actually looked like. Back before her badge felt like a liability instead of a shield.

So she looked on her own.

That night, she returned to the site of Jamie’s disappearance. The light from the taco truck on the corner flickered under the weight of moths. A soft breeze rustled the leaves above, and Reese scanned the streetlight footage she'd managed to bribe from a city contractor.

There was the moment.

00:01:34. Jamie stepped onto the crosswalk. Then, from the far corner of the screen, a black van crept forward with no headlights. Slow. Purposeful. 00:01:41. Jamie paused mid-step. Looked up. 00:01:44. Three hooded figures emerged from the van. No uniforms. No flashing lights. One of them grabbed Jamie in a fluid, rehearsed motion. 00:01:49. The van door slammed. Then darkness.

The camera glitched. By the time the feed resumed, the van was gone. The sidewalk was empty. No screaming. No chase. No witnesses.