

= Weeping Willow (Law & Order : Criminal Intent) =

" Weeping Willow " is the tenth episode of the sixth season of Law & Order : Criminal Intent . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on November 8 , 2006 . In the episode , a teenage blogger nicknamed WeepingWillow17 , played by guest star Michelle Trachtenberg , is apparently kidnapped during the filming of one of her Internet videos . Detectives Mike Logan and Megan Wheeler investigate the so @-@ called " cyber @-@ kidnapping " , which they and the public speculate may be an elaborate Internet hoax .

The episode and character was written by Stephanie Sengupta and Warren Leight , and directed by Tom DiCillo . The story and the WeepingWillow17 character were inspired by the lonelygirl15 video blogs on YouTube , which were originally believed the works of a real @-@ life 15 @-@ year @-@ old blogger , but were eventually discovered to be a professionally filmed hoax . The episode received generally positive reviews and , according to Nielsen ratings , was seen by 9 @.@ 8 million households the week it aired , the most viewership for a Law & Order : Criminal Intent episode in six weeks .

= = Plot summary = =

In what appears to be an Internet vlog , a teenage girl nicknamed " WeepingWillow17 " (Michelle Trachtenberg) and her boyfriend Holden (Michael Goduti) are interrupted when two men in masks storm into the room and apparently kidnap them on @-@ camera . Detectives Logan and Wheeler begin investigating the so @-@ called " cyber @-@ kidnapping " , which they and the public suspect could be an Internet hoax . Eventually , the supposed kidnappers release an online video with Willow and Holden tied up , claiming they will kill them both if 100 @,@ 000 people do not purchase their online videos for \$ 1 @.@ 99 each within 48 hours . The news media covers the story , and speculates on the possibility that it is a hoax . Eventually , a video is released in which Willow provides her real name , Lisa Willow Tyler , as proof that she is real . Logan and Wheeler visit her parents , who are elderly farmers that believe Willow is doing charity work in Africa ; the police learn Willow has lied to her family and tried to achieve Internet fame to escape her dull life .

Wheeler suggests responding to the kidnappers " on their own turf " via a video blog . In response to Wheeler 's video , the kidnappers make another vlog and cut off Holden 's ear on @-@ camera to prove they are serious . Although the ear is mailed to forensics and proven to be real , police quickly discover that Willow and Holden placed an online advertisement seeking actors to play kidnapper roles ; they soon identify actor Reggie Luckman (Pedro Pascal) as one of the kidnappers in the WeepingWillow17 videos . Yet another vlog is released , this time with Holden escaping his bonds and shooting one of the kidnappers , before being shot himself by Reggie . Police come to the scene and find Holden alive , along with the dead body of one of the supposed kidnappers named Todd (Trevor Oswalt) . Holden insisted the on @-@ camera shooting was fake , and that Reggie shot Todd over a dispute over money after the video was filmed . Holden says the kidnapping videos started as a hoax , but that Reggie has now actually kidnapped Willow .

Additional live WeepingWillow17 videos are shown online , which police trace to a van in Union Square , where they find Willow and arrest Reggie . During interrogation , Reggie says he did not know Todd was really dead ; he insists he fired a prop gun with blanks to scare Holden into splitting the money from the videos with them . Police soon learn the wadding from a blank was accidentally fired into Todd , and a horrified Reggie faces manslaughter charges . Willow , claiming to have simply been seeking fame as an actress , is released without criminal charges . The episode ends with Logan and Wheeler watching a video of Larry King interviewing Willow on a giant screen in Times Square .

= = Production = =

" Weeping Willow " was written by René Balcer , Stephanie Sengupta and Warren Leight , who served as the show 's executive producer and head writer . The episode was directed by Tom

DiCillo , marking his first time as director with the series ; he would go on to direct the episodes Players , Offense and Last Rites . The story and the character WeepingWillow17 are modeled after Bree , the protagonist from the lonelygirl15 video blogs on YouTube . Originally believed to be a real @-@ life 15 @-@ year @-@ old blogger , Bree was eventually discovered to be a hoax . She was in fact a fictional character played by actress Jessica Lee Rose and created by filmmakers Mesh Flinders and Miles Beckett .

" Weeping Willow " analyzes the concept of 15 minutes of fame during the Information Age from the perspective of the Internet celebrity , one who gains fame through the creation of or participation in a popular website . Leight said of the episode , " Forget about 15 minutes of fame : there are hundreds of people who get their 15 inches of bandwidth , people making names for themselves on YouTube and others This blogging phenomenon has created a certain kind of ' cyberfame , ' people who don 't have to do anything more than put themselves on the Web and catch a cyberwave . We now have a spate of very strange celebrities . " Leight said the episode also focuses on the extent to which one will go to achieve such fame . While the Law & Order shows routinely draw on inspiration from real @-@ life events in an approach the creators call " ripped from the headlines " , Criminal Intent producers referred to this episode as " ' pre @-@ ripping ' from the headlines " , because the script usually took a real @-@ life event (as the lonelygirl15 phenomenon) and added to it a fictional dramatic conflict (the kidnapping) .

The so @-@ called " cyber @-@ kidnapping " portrayed in " Weeping Willow " is believed to be the first such crime ever portrayed on television . While the writers and producers prepared the episode , several district attorneys they consulted said the law was dangerously vague regarding what charges could be filed in the event of such a real @-@ life cyber @-@ kidnapping ; Wright said , " They told me that this is a real problem , that there 's a lag between what 's on the books now and what 's happening out there . " The script also includes a difficulty on the part of the detectives in coping and dealing this new form of cyber @-@ crime and differentiating the truth from the hoax ; Leight said , " Their biggest frustration is trying to understand what 's real and what isn 't . Does this woman , Willow , really exist , and has something happened to her ? Is she playing a character and a game that 's gotten out of hand ? And how do you locate someone in cyberspace ? "

Julianne Nicholson , who plays Det . Megan Wheeler , said " Weeping Willow " was her favorite Law & Order : Criminal Intent episode . She described it as " really different from a lot of the ones we 've done before and very exciting and current . " Nicholson also said she enjoyed working with Michelle Trachtenberg and the other supporting actors , as well as director DiCillo , who also directed Living in Oblivion , one of Nicholson 's favorite movies .

During one of the kidnappers ' videos featured in the episode , a banner is visible advertising the website FreeWillow17.com. The producers of the show set up a real @-@ life website with that domain , containing eight video blogs starring Trachtenberg and the other cast members . The videos were created from video content filmed for the " Weeping Willow " episode , most of which was ultimately not used in the episode . The producers originally also established a mirror site , WeepingWillow17.com , but it is no longer active .

= = Cultural references = =

The WeepingWillow17 videos in the episode are featured on a website called " YouLenz " , a reference to the popular video sharing website YouTube , where the original lonelygirl15 videos were posted . YouLenz also stands in for YouTube in the pilot episode of Smash . Willow 's friend tells police she found her apartment on Craigslist , a popular online classified advertising website . During the first WeepingWillow17 video shown in the episode 's first scene , the song " Fearless " by The Bravery is played .

Ira Whipple (Gary Patent) says , " In cyberspace , everyone hears you scream " , a reference to the tagline of the 1979 film Alien : " In space , no one can hear you scream . " A New York Film Academy professor refers to Holden as a " James Cameron @-@ wannabe " , referring to the American director of such films as The Terminator and Aliens . The vlog in which Holden 's ear is cut off is described by one characters as a rip @-@ off of director Quentin Tarantino , a reference to his

1992 feature film debut , Reservoir Dogs . During an interrogation , Mike Logan sarcastically refers to Reggie as James Dean , the famous actor and American cultural icon . Captain Danny Ross refers to the episode 's shooting as " cyber @-@ Rashomon . Reggie says Holden shot Todd , Holden says Reggie did it and Willow doesn 't even believe anyone 's dead . " This references the 1950 Japanese film Rashomon , in which multiple characters describe vastly different interpretations of the same murder . A poster for Grand Illusion , the 1932 Jean Renoir war film , hangs in Holden 's apartment . In the episode 's final scene , Willow is interviewed by CNN journalist Larry King , host of Larry King Live , which is shown on a giant screen in Times Square .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " Weeping Willow " received a Nielsen rating of 3 @. @ 1 and an 8 share in adults aged 18 ? 49 , translating to 9 @. @ 8 million households overall . The rating was the highest overall viewership for a Law & Order : Criminal Intent episode since " Bedfellows " aired on October 17 , 2006 . The episode received generally positive reviews . Farah Farouque of The Age said although she feels Law & Order : Criminal Intent had largely dropped in overall quality , she described " Weeping Willow " as " very postmodern and very watchable " . Likewise , Todd Thatcher of TV Guide said although the sixth season of Criminal Intent had several episodes he deemed failures , he called " Weeping Willow " one of the " true gems " . Canada 's National Post said " Weeping Willow " had an interesting plot and listed it as a " must see " . David Bianculli , of the New York Daily News , wrote , " The twist is easy to see coming , but Trachtenberg is easy to watch , regardless . "