

= Ghost of a Chance ( Homicide : Life on the Street ) =

" Ghost of a Chance " is the second episode of the first season of the American police drama television series Homicide : Life on the Street . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on February 3 , 1993 . The teleplay was written Noel Behn based on a story by executive producer Tom Fontana , and the episode was directed by Martin Campbell . In it Bayliss begins his investigation into the murder of 11 @-@ year @-@ old Adena Watson , Munch and Bolander investigate the unusual death of an elderly man , and Howard insists she is receiving advice about her murder case from a ghost .

The episode marked the first major developments in the Watson case , a major season one story arc based on the real @-@ life slaying of Latonya Kim Wallace . The Wallace case was featured in David Simon 's non @-@ fiction book Homicide : A Year on the Killing Streets , from which the series was adapted . Baltimore Detective Tom Pellegrini , who handled the Wallace case , appears on @-@ screen as a detective in " Ghost of a Chance " . The episode introduced several important supporting characters , including prosecuting attorney Ed Danvers ( ?eljko Ivanek ) , Colonel Burt Granger ( Gerald F. Gough ) , Captain George Barnfather ( Clayton LeBouef ) and Officer Chris Thormann ( Lee Tergesen ) .

The episode introduces the concept of a " red ball " , a high @-@ profile case that draws close media and political attention . The term would be used frequently in future episodes . It was also the first episode to feature a murder in a wealthy rural setting . At the time , most American television police shows focused on crimes in poorer neighborhoods , so " Ghost of a Chance " was noted for demonstrating that murders can take place in various socioeconomic circumstances .

The episode , seen by 9 @.@ 5 million households in its original broadcast , was considered a disappointment due to the drop in viewership from the post @-@ Super Bowl series debut , which had more than 18 million viewers . It received generally positive reviews , and was later featured in a Court TV marathon of the top 15 Homicide episodes . Gwen Verdon was nominated for an Emmy Award for her guest performance as Jessie Doohen , the woman accused of killing her husband of 60 years . The episode , along with the rest of the first and second seasons of Homicide : Life on the Street was released on DVD in the United States on May 27 , 2003 .

= = Plot summary = =

Bayliss ( Kyle Secor ) is the primary detective on the murder investigation of an 11 @-@ year @-@ old girl named Adena Watson . A rookie detective on his first homicide case , Bayliss has difficulty informing the family , while the veteran Pembleton ( Andre Braugher ) remains detached from his emotional response . Much of the homicide department is dedicated to the case , and Bayliss works without the benefit of his own desk . When Bayliss acts weak and indecisive during a department meeting , Gee ( Yaphet Kotto ) angrily orders him to show more confidence . But when a news report by journalist Griselda Battel ( Taylor Young ) discusses Bayliss ' lack of prior experience , Gee resists pressure from his superiors to replace Bayliss , insisting , " That rookie will surprise us all " .

Munch ( Richard Belzer ) and Bolander ( Ned Beatty ) arrive at the scene of a dead man named Thomas Doohen ( John Habberton ) , only to find that the man had only fainted and was still alive . When he wakes up , the man immediately starts arguing with his elderly wife Jessie ( Gwen Verdon ) , who is unhappy with their 60 @-@ year marriage and wishes the man were dead . Later that same day , they respond to the same house to find the same elderly man dead from a heart attack . Medical examiner Blythe ( Wendy Hughes ) classifies the death as a murder because the widow dragged him into the basement and " prayed he 'd stay dead " , but Bolander , himself having recently left an unhappy marriage , defends the widow . Despite the disagreement , Bolander becomes smitten with Blythe , and seeks romantic advice from Munch .

Prosecuting attorney Ed Danvers ( ?eljko Ivanek ) tells Howard ( Melissa Leo ) that if she cannot find more evidence against Ralph Fenwick ( Michael Sheldon ) , who is a suspect in a brutal murder , Danvers will have to plead to manslaughter . The next day , Howard tells her partner Felton (

Daniel Baldwin ) she was visited by the ghost of Fenwick 's murder victim and told where the murder weapon was , but Howard cannot find it . Felton does not believe her , and Howard grows angry when he tells Lewis ( Clark Johnson ) and Crosetti ( Jon Polito ) about the ghost experience . The next day , however , Howard and Felton arrest Fenwick after finding the murder weapon based on advice Felton got from a tarot card reader .

The department continues investigating leads into the Adena Watson case , including an interrogation of a man who lived within walking distance of the scene and was previously charged with murdering a 14 @-@ year @-@ old girl . All of the leads turn into dead ends . While investigating the Adena Watson scene , police find coagulated blood and hair on a piece of metal . Battel witnesses the find , but agrees to hold the information until police authorize it , as long as she gets the story first . She also tells Bayliss about a carry @-@ out store owner who claims to know who the murderer is . The episode ends with an emotional Bayliss attending Watson 's funeral .

= = Production = =

" Ghost of a Chance " was written by Noel Behn based on a story by executive producer Tom Fontana , and was directed by Martin Campbell . It marked the first major developments the story arc of the Adena Watson murder case , which was introduced in the final scene of series premiere " Gone for Goode " and dominates much of the Homicide : Life on the Street first season . The Watson case was based on the real @-@ life 1988 Baltimore slaying of Latonya Kim Wallace , which is chronicled in Homicide : A Year on the Killing Streets , the 1991 David Simon non @-@ fiction book about a Baltimore Police Department , which was adapted into the Homicide series . " Ghost of a Chance " introduced the concept of a " red ball " , which is a police jargon phrase used in the episode to describe the Adena Watson murder . A red ball is a high @-@ profile case that draws such close media and political attention , that it diverts time and attention away from other cases in the homicide department . The phrase , which came directly from Simon 's book , would be used frequently in future Homicide : Life on the Street episodes .

" Ghost of a Chance " introduced several important characters that would be regularly featured throughout the series . Among them were prosecuting attorney Ed Danvers , played by ?eljko Ivanek , and police department bosses Colonel Burt Granger and Captain George Barnfather , played by Gerald F. Gough and Clayton LeBouef , respectively . Ivanek was cast by his long @-@ time friend Fontana , who thought Danvers was written in a dull and simple way , but felt confident Ivanek could " make it a real character " . The episode also introduced Officer Chris Thormann ( Lee Tergesen ) , who would become the center of a significant season one subplot in the next episode , " Son of a Gun " , when he would be shot in the head during a failed arrest . Detective Tom Pellegrini , who handled the real @-@ life Latonya Kim Wallace case and served as the basis for the Tim Bayliss character , appeared on @-@ screen as the police officer who first discovered Adena Watson 's body . Pellegrini , who was still haunted by his failure to solve the Wallace case , specifically asked to be in that scene . During filming , he stayed close to the actress who played Watson , which Secor interpreted as an attempt to make amends to the real Wallace child . Although Pellegrini personally advised Secor on his performance , the actor later said he learned more about how to play Bayliss by watching Pellegrini during that scene than anything else the detective could have told him .

In its portrayal of the possible murder of Thomas Doohen , " Ghost of a Chance " is the first Homicide episode to demonstrate a murder in a wealthy rural setting , rather than an urban or predominantly poorer location ; the episode was noted for demonstrating better than most American television police shows that murders can take place in various socioeconomic circumstances . This is particularly illustrated by Munch 's comment to Bolander , " Ah , green lawns , fresh air , nice houses , this is the place for a murder . " The episode also maintains a common Homicide trait of combining tragedy , like the devastated response by Adena Watson 's family to her murder , with scenes of dark comedy , like Jessie Doohen 's claim that she endured a miserable 60 @-@ year marriage because , " We made a promise we wouldn 't get a divorce until all the children were dead . "

" Ghost of a Chance " marked a development of Beau Felton 's character by identifying not only his trademark bullying nature , but a kinder and sweeter side of his personality . After mocking Howard publicly for her belief in ghosts , he puts in extra effort to find the killer by embracing Howard 's beliefs , much to her appreciation . Howard 's superstitious beliefs reappear in future episodes , particularly the fourth season episode " Heartbeat " , which featured a black cat inspired by Edgar Allan Poe 's short story , " The Black Cat " . A scene in which a busload of rookie police officers straight out of the academy are brought in to investigate the Adena Watson crime scene was inspired by strategies used by real police departments ; the New York Police Department employed exactly the same tactic while searching for the remains of a missing girl in upstate New York in 1987 .

= = Cultural references = =

" Ghost of a Chance " continues a common motif repeated throughout the first season of Crosetti discussing various conspiracy theories about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln , the 16th president of the United States . Crosetti said he believes the killing was arranged by the highest ranks of the Confederate States of America . Crosetti 's fascination with the Lincoln assassination was based on Tom Fontana 's real @-@ life obsession with it . Throughout the episode , Lewis mournfully discussed the then @-@ recent closing of Baltimore 's Memorial Stadium . Fearing it will go to waste , Lewis wants to flood the stadium and turn it into an aquatic theme park .

The song " Hazy Shade of Blue " , by songwriter Tor Hyams , plays while the police raid several neighborhood homes in search of clues and leads in the Adena Watson murder case . The hymn " The Sweet By and By " , written by S. Fillmore Bennett and Joseph P. Webster , plays during Watson 's funeral in the final scene of the movie . Crosetti and Lewis sing the theme song to the children 's show Casper the Friendly Ghost while making fun of Howard about dreaming of ghosts .

= = Reception = =

" Ghost of a Chance " originally aired on NBC in the United States on February 3 , 1993 , marking the show 's debut in the Wednesday 9 p.m. time slot . In its original broadcast , the episode was watched by 9 @.@ 5 million households , according to Nielsen Media Research . The episode received a 10 @.@ 6 rating / 15 share . The rating was considered a disappointment by NBC and the press , coming off of 18 @.@ 8 million viewers in the series debut " Gone for Goode " , which aired immediately after Super Bowl XXVII on January 31 and received generally positive reviews . " Ghost of a Chance " ranked third in its time slot for the night , The time slot winner was ABC 's comedy Home Improvement , which was seen by 19 @.@ 92 million viewers , the highest ever rating for the series. and ranked 60th in prime time shows for the week . " Ghost of a Chance " lost viewers from the first half hour to the second , and the episode dropped 19 % in viewership among the 18 @-@ 49 age group compared to " Gone for Goode " . ABC 's Coach earned 17 @.@ 13 million viewers , while CBS 's In the Heat of the Night earned 10 @.@ 88 viewers . " Ghost of a Chance " also underperformed compared its predecessors in the NBC timeslot , the comedies Seinfeld and Mad About You , which averaged a combined 9 @.@ 87 million viewers .

The episode received generally positive reviews . Danny Duncan of the National Catholic Reporter particularly praised the performances of Belzer , Beatty and Kotto , as well as the police relationship between Pembleton and Bayliss , which he said serves as the source of dramatic tension driving the series narrative forward in the early episodes of the first season . Eric Kohanik of The Hamilton Spectator said the episode continues to demonstrate why Homicide is " the best new series of the midseason " , and praised it for not resorting to " silly car chases ( and ) blazing guns " . Chris Kaltenbach of The Baltimore Sun complimented the episode , particularly the performances of Beatty and Verdon . Ed Siegel of The Boston Globe said he enjoyed both the humor of the episode , such as the Gwen Verdon subplot , as well as dramatic touches , like Bayliss cleaning up the spilled corn flakes of Adena Watson 's despairing mother .

Not all reviews were positive . Liam Lacey said the episode was " not quite as taut " as the debut

episode , particularly criticizing the ghost subplot . Lacey said , " There already appear a few cracks in the show 's engaging facade , including a drift toward the Northern Exposure @-@ style indulgent quirkiness . " Time magazine reviewer Richard Zoglin said the second episode " already seems to be marking time with goofy character diversions " , including Crosetti 's Lincoln conspiracies and Bolander 's requests for a date from Blythe . In 1999 , " Ghost of a Chance " was among a Court TV marathon of the top 15 Homicide episodes , as voted on by 20 @,@ 000 visitors to the channel 's website .

= = Emmy nomination = =

Gwen Verdon was nominated for an Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series her guest performance in " Ghost of a Chance " . It was her second Emmy nomination in the 45th Annual Primetime Emmy Award season alone ; she was also nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series that year for her performance in the series Dream On .

= = DVD release = =

" Ghost of a Chance " and the rest of the first and second season episodes were included in the four @-@ DVD box @-@ set " Homicide : Life on the Street : The Complete Seasons 1 & 2 " , which was released by A & E Home Video on May 27 , 2003 for \$ 69 @.@ 95 .