

EPISODE 1

School Shooter

Detectives Davis Starsky and Kent Hutchinson crossed the parking lot of Bay City Hospital and were about to go through the main entrance when Davis' cell went off on vibrate mode in his pocket.

"Hey, Mo," he said as he tapped on video chat. "What's up?"

"Gettin' ready to order lunch here at the gym, and then I got this killer headache, somethin'. Gunshots. Lotsa people. Runnin'. I don't know. Crazy stuff."

"Story of our life," Davis grinned as he nudged Kent with his elbow. "We're always into gunshots, lotsa people, and runnin'."

"I dig. Could be just the movie I streamed last night. But watch your backs today, huh?"

"Always do," Kent said. "Order a pizza. We'll bring Tasha and Tony around the gym for lunch."

"Pizza for *our* crew? I ain't made of money."

"Told you, you should take your psychic gig on the road. Get yourself a reality TV show. *Mo, The Bay City Medium.*"

"Man, I ain't got no gig. What I do ain't fake, and believe me, you don't want this curse."

"We'll spring for the pizza," Davis said. "Later."

Davis tapped off and put his phone away, then they walked through the main entrance of the hospital to meet Tasha Brown and her boyfriend Tony Rayburn for lunch. Tasha was Huggy

Bear's daughter, an RN who worked at the hospital, while Tony was a Phys Ed teacher at the local high school.

As they passed by the ER area, Kent took his brother's arm and said, "Hold on. I think that's Lucky in there."

They walked a little closer, Kent peering behind a curtain to see their other informant friend Lucky sitting on an examination table, her swollen, discolored cheek being treated by a male nurse with an ice pack.

"Lucky?" Kent asked.

The strawberry blonde turned her head away.

"Hey," Davis said as they approached her. "What happened to you?"

She swallowed painfully through a swollen, bruised throat. "Same ole."

"Who?" Kent asked lifting her chin.

"We want his name," Davis said. "Right now."

"No," she said moving her head in the negative. "I'll be all right."

The male nurse gave them a stern look. "Do you mind, Smith and Wesson? It's a little crowded in here. She'll be out of here in a few."

"We'll be waiting just outside the door," Kent told her, then he and Davis walked out into the lobby again, where the blond kicked the water fountain.

"Chill out," Davis said taking his forearm.

"We have to help her."

“I know, I know.”

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About ten minutes later Lucky found them waiting on her in the lobby near the exit.

“Need some info on somebody?” she asked casually, as if to avoid a serious conversation. “‘cause I have customers waiting.”

“When is it going to be enough?” Kent asked as he and Davis pulled her aside to speak in private. “Last month one of your johns sprained your wrist. Month before that another one mashed your mouth. I’m beginning to think you like it.”

She slapped him and he took a few steps away, head down, hands on his hips.

“Talk to her, Dav.”

Davis put his arm around her. “He didn’t’ mean that. What he means is, you’re used to it. You think you deserve it. But you don’t.”

“I know,” she said looking down. “It’s getting worse. I want to get out, but it’s all I know. You know the story. My daddy was my first teacher. After that, I just thought sex was the way I was supposed to relate to guys. Isn’t that what you all want?”

“No, sweetie,” he said stroking her hair. “Not like that. We just want you to know that love’s supposed to feel good.”

Tears came to her eyes as she cupped his cheeks. “I hear your words, Davi, but I don’t feel them.”

Kent walked back to her and wrapped his arms around her. “Let us help you. We’ll find something else for you to do.”

She half-laughed, half-sobbed. “Don’t you think I’ve thought about quitting?”

“I don’t know. Maybe you haven’t thought hard enough. You can’t live like this. Next time, you could be killed.”

“I don’t know if I can go legit, Kent. You can take the girl out of the street, but I don’t know if you can take the street out of the girl.”

“Go to your hotel room, pack your things, and I’ll be around this evening after our shift to pick you up. You can stay with me for a while.”

Tearful, she nodded. He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and dried her wet cheeks.

“You’re worth it, Lucky. You just have to believe it.”

She took his handkerchief and held it almost lovingly to her cheek, smiling from one to the other, then walked through the sliding exit doors.

As they watched her leave, a bright voice behind them said, “Hi, guys!” as Tasha ran up to give each of them a kiss on the cheek.

“Where’s Tony?” Davis asked looking around.

“He said for us to pick him up at school. He’s orienting a new student to his Phys Ed class.”

As they left the hospital and crossed the parking lot toward Davis’ black Mustang with the twin white stripes running down the hood, Tasha abruptly stopped and looked down at her cell phone.

“Oh my God,” she whispered. “Tony’s texting. Somebody’s shooting inside the school.”

“Stay here,” Davis and Kent told her in the same voice, and jumped in the Mustang.

But she didn’t. She jumped in her own car and followed them to Bay City High School.

Kent picked up the mike to notify the dispatcher.

“Control One, this is Unit 6. we just received a text from a teacher at Bay City High School. A gunman is inside. That’s all we know. We are responding.”

En route, Kent reached under his seat for body armor and quickly put it on, then reached under Davis’s seat for his, and helped him put his on too as he drove.

“Think we should wait for backup or SWAT?” Kent asked.

“Not worried about it.”

“You know what Captain Shaw said last time about breaking the rules.”

“We didn’t break. We bent. And we’re gonna bend ‘em some more.”

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The two were first on the scene, no light or siren. They spilled from the Mustang, AR-15’s in hand, Smith and Wesson service weapons left in the trunk, and ran toward the front entrance of the high school, dodging students and teachers trying to escape. They met Tasha’s boyfriend Tony as he ushered a wounded female student from the building. He himself was bleeding from a gunshot to the upper arm.

“Some kid!” Tony panted at Davis and Kent. “Letterman jacket and ski mask! He has a submachine gun! He’s just walking

around shooting at anyone he sees. Principal's dead. I don't know how many others."

"Get to the hospital," Kent said as they meandered through the stream of exiting students and teachers.

As Tony hurried the girl across the parking lot toward his car, Tasha pulled up alongside them in hers and helped them both inside, then drove them toward the hospital.

Planted on either side of the front door, Davis and Kent stood with guns poised.

The sirens of units, ambulances, fire trucks, and SWAT could be heard in the distance.

"Ready, brother?" Davis asked his partner.

"Let's get him."

Davis threw the door open and they went inside, guns up and ready to fire, quiet at first, looking, listening, assessing, taking it all in.

The main hall was quiet. Bloodstains were splashed on the floor, walls, and lockers from the ones who'd made it out.

A few students were huddled under tables in the hall, some ran for other exits, some helped fellow students who were hurt.

One of the boys pointed down the hall. "That way," he hissed to Davis and Kent.

When the pair rounded the corner to find the dead principal on the floor, the armed student wearing a mask and letterman jacket came shooting from a restroom, striking the closest one to him—Davis, who fell back into his brother. Kent caught him as he fired on the shooter, dropping the gunman headless next to the principal.

“Dav,” Kent panted as he sat Davis up and searched him for gunshot wounds. “You okay?”

Davis felt his own body as if to make sure. “Stings a little,” he winced as Kent helped him to his feet and steadied him. “Body armor comes in handy. Everything should be made of this stuff.”

Kent smiled and looked around.

“Over!” Davis said holding up his shield as he and Kent draped their weapons across their backs by the straps and walked through the halls. “Police! It’s okay!”

The halls once full of chaotic noise were now eerily quiet except for the sounds of a few students sobbing.

Reluctant students and teachers emerged from hiding places, classrooms, and offices--some running outside, others too frightened to move, while others tended to the wounded.

The school nurse came from her office, covered in her students’ blood. “We need help. One student is dead in my office. Three others need an ambulance. I don’t know how many more made it out that need medical attention.”

“Help’s on the way,” Kent said as he ran to help her tend to the wounded students.

“Units are here,” Davis told him as he headed for the main doors, holding his hand against the pain in his chest. “Meet me outside soon as you can.”

When Davis ran outside, he met uniformed officers and medics with gear and gurneys on their way in.

Captain Shaw was among them.

“We took him out,” he told her. “But he got two first. Principal and a student. Bunch of wounded, but the school nurse is treating some of them now. Kent’s helpin’ her.”

“Good work,” she said as she went on inside.

Tasha came running up to Davis with her nurse’s bag.

“Tony has a flesh wound,” she panted. “You guys okay?”

When he nodded, she hurried on inside to help in any way she could.

Reporters started to approach the school, but wanting to avoid the onslaught of media, Davis ducked behind a big tree. Shock catching up to him, he leaned over to catch his breath.

Moments later Kent came walking outside, head swiveling to catch sight of his brother. When he saw him behind the tree, he walked over to him, he and Davis hooking their arms around each other’s necks, as if the physical closeness of their bodies could get them through anything.

“High school kid,” Kent whispered tearfully.

“I know,” Davis said patting his back. “I know.”

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Several of the students had captured the gunman’s rampage and Davis and Kent’s intervention on their cellphones, the footage playing on TV and online all day.

The brothers were not keen on the media attention, so it was up to Captain Shaw to give statements to the press and accept any questions, criticism, or praise on their behalf.

They did, however, speak to the families of the slain student and principal and offer condolences, and drove to the home of

the shooter's mother, who had holed up inside her house away from the media.

Ironically, when she saw Davis and Kent displaying their ID's at the back door, she let them in.

She seemed devastated and numb, looking from one to the other with wounded eyes.

"I saw your pictures on the news," she said.

Davis and Kent looked at each other as if they weren't sure what to say. Kent reached out for her arm as if to console her, but then drew his hand back and said quietly, "I'm sorry I had to shoot Seth."

She wiped her nose with a tissue, and Davis finally put an arm around her. "He left us no choice."

"He was on medication. Drugs. I couldn't get him to get rid of the guns. I tried to get him help. The school kicked him out last month. I..."

When she dissolved into tears, Davis moved her to a kitchen chair and sat her down.

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Later Shaw met with her detectives in her office for the rest of the day, to debrief and go over the case with the police chief, the commissioner, and the mayor.

When the long day that turned into a long night finally came to a close, Davis and Kent left the precinct and headed for the hotel where Lucky lived.

Davis took another call from Mo on the drive over.

"My bros all right?"

“Yeah.”

“Sorry I didn’t have more details earlier, man. My visions just come whenever and however they want to. You know that.”

“Don’t worry,” Kent told him. “It isn’t like there’s a manual for psychics.”

“Or snitches. No guarantee, no warranty, no refund. Speakin’ of money. I got this beast of a pizza over here at the gym, cold but tasty. You guys comin’ or what? Tasha and Tony already here. ”

“Gotta be kiddin’ me,” Davis said. “Dude got winged today with a bullet, and he’s ready for pizza. Maybe you both should work with us.”

“On our way,” Kent said.

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They arrived at Lucky’s hotel room and knocked on her door.

“You guys look wiped out,” she said taking their hands and pulling them inside. “It’s so cool what you did today.”

“Told you I’d come for you,” Kent said as he touched her cheek. “Dav and I talked it over tonight. And, well...”

Davis added, “We know you’re a good cook ‘cause you feed us all the time, and so...”

“Here,” Kent said reaching for an envelope in his hip pocket and handing it to her. “We want you to have this.”

She opened the envelope and saw a thick stack of cash— thousands of dollars, then looked from one to the other with her mouth open.

Davis smiled. “Down payment on that donut shop you’re always talkin’ about.”

“Guys, I can’t take--”

“You can,” Kent said.

“And you will,” Davis finished. “All we ask is coffee with the donuts. We’ll be your best customers.”

As she started to cry, Davis put an arm around her while Kent went to her packed suitcases and picked them up.

“Let’s go,” Kent said leading the way to the door. “The start of your new life.”

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Because of the late hour, Mo’s Gym had no patrons except for Davis, Kent, Lucky, Tasha, Tony, and Mo himself.

Mo’s vending room/break room was buzzing with lively conversation when the brothers walked in with Lucky.

“Hey, crew,” Davis said as he picked up a slice from the giant pizza.

Kent pulled out a chair for Lucky at the table, and put a slice of pizza on a paper plate for her, along with a napkin and fork.

“Kent,” Davis said. “Only *you* eat pizza with a fork.” Then looked at Tony: “How’s the arm?”

“Not bad.” Tony smiled down at the bandage around his bicep, and lifted the gauze a little so that Davis could see the wound. “Should be back in class when the school gives everybody the go-ahead.”

Davis lifted his shirt to show the intense darkening bruise left by the bullet impacting the body armor he'd warn. "Check this out."

Kent almost choked on the pizza he was eating with a fork. "What the hell? Why didn't you tell me it was that bad?"

"It's just a bruise."

"Just?"

"So?"

"You said it stung a little. You didn't say you had a hole in your chest the size of New Jersey. You probably have a cracked rib or something."

"I'll live."

As Tasha watched a newscast of the events on her phone, she said, "I still can't believe that happened today. It feels like a dream."

Davis looked at his brother and partner. "Wish we coulda gotten there sooner, saved that principal and student."

"We did what we could," Kent said. "But I do want to go back to the school when it re-opens, talk to the kids and teachers. Not sure what good it would do, but...just let them know we care."

"Yeah," Davis said handing him a bottle of cream soda. "Sounds like a good idea."

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Kent's neighborhood.

An hour later.

As Kent carried Lucky's suitcases to his front door, the porch light of his next door neighbor's house came on, and a pretty Latina named Maria came outside, struggling to carry a garbage can through the doorway, her son of about twelve, Rico, struggling with one right behind her.

"Here," Kent said running to them and taking a can by the handle in each hand. "Let me help."

Maria smiled gratefully and kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you, Kent."

Lucky gave Maria an uncertain look.

"Oh," Kent smiled as he set the cans down on the sidewalk and put an arm around Lucky. "Lucky, meet my next door neighbor Maria Menendez, and her son Rico." To Maria he said, "Lucky will be staying with me for..." He smiled at Lucky. "For a long time, I hope."

During the polite exchange of hellos, he missed the slight look of disappointment on Maria's face.

As Kent started to escort Lucky inside, he said to Maria, "Do you need help with anything else?"

"No, Kent, we're fine. Thank you."

"Hey, Kent," Rico said. "You going to take me fishing next weekend like you said?"

"You bet, kid. See you then."

"Come on," Maria said taking her son by the shoulders and steering him toward the house. "It's way past your bedtime, Rico. You have school tomorrow."

As Kent opened the door for Lucky and carried her suitcases in, Lucky said, "Nice girl."

“Very. Her husband’s locked up for armed robbery, so I kind of keep an eye on her and the kid. There’s this Mentor program we have at the station, so...”

“That’s my man,” she said as she kissed him and put her arms around his neck. “Knight in shining armor.”

He led her to the bedroom. “Are you going to tell me what happened to your face?”

“Not much to tell. Big Rue has wanted me to work for him since the word go, but it’s more than that. He wants me for his own, and, I may be a working girl, but I don’t have a thing for him. I have a thing for you.”

“Correction. You *were* a working girl. And, I have a thing for you too.”

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Bay City Hospital.

Next day.

The media was still covering the school shooting, interviewing students, teachers, survivors, witnesses, and community leaders, and although Davis and Kent cared about the aftermath, they had to take care of whatever came next.

Which happened to be a teenager who had escaped the shooting at school only because he was in the hospital.

"Fourteen-year-old boy with a knife wound to the stomach," the female doctor told the detectives when they displayed their shields to her just outside the boy’s hospital room. "We don't know who did it or why. He isn’t talking."

"Parents here, Doctor . . ." Davis read her ID pin. "Silva?"

**"Father's dead. Mother's on her way over from the laundromat."
Dr. Silva smiled at him. "Haven't I treated you before?"**

**He grinned, flattered she remembered. "Yeah. Last year when
some big sloth cracked me in the ribs while I . . . " His chest
swelled with cocky pride and he dipped his head in mock
modesty. " . . . was arresting him for bank robbery."**

Kent rolled his eyes.

Dr. Silva smiled. "I never forget an open hospital gown."

Davis glanced at her hand and saw no ring. "Interested in a movie tonight?"

"Sorry. Already made plans."

"Raincheck?"

She smiled, a twinkle in her soft brown eyes. "We'll see."

Davis and Kent both watched her sashay from the waiting room.

"See how smooth I am?" Davis said as he nudged his brother's arm.

"Yeah, Smoothie, she fell head over heels for you, didn't she? Let's talk to the boy."

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The boy lay stiffly in his hospital bed, eyes fastened somewhere out the window, hands holding firmly to the sheet partially covering his bandaged stomach.

He was a handsome boy, with emerald-green eyes and a shock of black hair, but his face was ghostly pale and his eyes held the look of a weary old man.

"Hello there," Kent said politely as he displayed his ID. "I'm Detective Kent Hutchinson, and this is my partner Davis Starsky."

The boy did not move or acknowledge their presence. It wasn't new to Kent. Most kids these days didn't like talking to cops. "Can we talk to you?"

The boy didn't respond. Kent saw on his thin throat what appeared to be three small healing burns or scabs. "I didn't get your name."

The boy answered without looking at him. "Joe Foreman."

"And your mother's?"

"Wanda."

Even though Kent could easily find the information in the files, he wanted the boy to talk, even if it were about such mundane details.

Davis sighed, trying not to sound impatient as he took a seat on a stool. Kent's ice-breaking small talk eventually bore fruit, but it was a boring and tedious process. Davis would have preferred to cut to the chase, but he understood that *that* tactic wasn't always the best when dealing with certain victims. Especially quiet, reluctant kids.

"Wanda," Kent repeated. "Where do you and your mother live?"

"Fifteen Baird Avenue in Venice."

"Venice? That's near where I live. I know your house. There's a smiley face sticker on the front door."

Joe's eyes darted halfway toward Kent, but then went back to the window again. "Saw your pictures on the news about the school shooting, but I've seen you guys before that."

"Oh yeah?" Kent asked.

"Yeah," Joe answered. "I've seen you running in the mornings," then waved a hand at the dark-haired detective without looking at him. "And I've seen your Mustang."

Kent looked at his partner and smiled. "Small world, bro," he said, then sat on the foot of the boy's bed. "Where does your mom work?"

"She doesn't. She gets a disability check."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that."

"It's okay. She's depressed or something. Takes pills for it every day. Doesn't get out a lot. Just to the store or to the laundry. Sorta lays around the house and watches soap shows. Except that I don't think she really watches. Mostly she just stares at the TV."

"You and your mother get along?"

Joe nodded.

Davis stepped over to the bed. "Your mom got a boyfriend?"

Kent heard the beginnings of impatience in his partner's voice.

"No," the boy answered. "She's too tired for that I guess."

"Anybody else live with you?" Davis asked.

**The boy shrunk back in the pillow a little when Davis asked,
"What happened to your neck, Joe?"**

The boy laughed a little, his hand going to his throat. "Curling iron. Haven't got the hang of it yet."

Kent knew his partner had been too direct too soon, and wanted to cut the interview before they lost the boy completely. "Dav, we can do this later. He looks tired."

But Davis pushed. "How did you get stabbed, Joe?"

He didn't answer. He had clammed up.

"Were you attacked?" Davis asked.

"No."

"Fight at school?"

"No."

"A gang?"

"No. It was an accident." He laughed again, but this time was even less convincing than the last. "I fell on it."

Davis's eyes suddenly flashed anger at the boy. "You expect us to believe that?"

Kent shot him a sharp look. "Easy."

Davis ignored the look. "Huh, Joe? Okay. Tell us how the accident happened. Tell us how you were just peeling an apple in the kitchen and all of a sudden you just fell on the knife."

"Dav . . . "

"And your neck? Tell us how careless you were when you were curling your hair."

"Davis!"

"Did your mother do it, kid? Because if she did--"

Kent was off the bed and pulling Davis out the door by his arm, taking him halfway down the corridor. "What's with you? He won't tell us anything with your fire-breathing dragon routine and your--"

Kent stopped because Davis was looking down at the floor, hands on his hips.

Kent softened a bit. "What's going on?"

Davis turned and walked down the hall toward the elevator, Kent following.

"Davis, talk to me."

"Hands," Davis said as he pushed the down button on the wall. He was agitated, shifting from foot to foot. "Hands are supposed to love, not hurt."

"Dav--"

"But they scar, and kill, and destroy."

"Not all hands, brother."

"I could understand a stranger doin' it," he said, then suddenly kicked the wall. "But not his mother!"

"I suspect it's her too, but we can't jump the gun. We need more than a hunch to prove it. Especially since he isn't talking."

They looked at each other, Kent reading more from Davis's eyes than he really wanted to, Davis saying more with his look than he ever could with his mouth.

"I had a nightmare about the cult last night," Davis shrugged. "That's all. I just want the kid to tell us so we can put a stop to it."

Kent squeezed his arm. "I'm sorry. If you don't want to handle this one, we can talk to Shaw..."

"No, it's okay."

The elevator doors slid open and a plump, red-haired woman clutching her purse stepped out, trundling past them and going down the hall.

Davis followed her. "You did it, didn't you?"

He didn't have to ask her name to know it was the boy's mother. He knew by her dull, medicated eyes and her sluggish body. Even her tongue was thick with medication when she spoke. "I beg your par--"

Davis took her arm. "I'm not gonna let you see him. Not until the investigation is--"

**Kent grabbed Davis's jacket collar and pulled him down the hall.
"Davis, don't say another word. Get on the elevator--"**

"Let go of me."

"Go down to the station--"

"I mean it, Kent."

**"And run a background check on Wanda Foreman. I'll see if I
can salvage this investigation."**

"Stuff it."

**Kent pushed Davis into the elevator, then ran to catch up to
Wanda Foreman before she could go into her son's hospital
room.**

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**Kent and the woman sat in the waiting room drinking coffee. It
was difficult for him to read her lethargic eyes, her laggard
demeanor. What bothered him the most was that she just sat
compliantly without ever asking about the condition of her son.**

**"Joe's going to be okay," he told her, even though she hadn't
inquired. "Accidents happen all the time. Maybe he'll be more
careful in the future."**

**He watched her to see if she was buying his feigned naiveté. It
was hard to tell.**

**"You're probably wondering why I would be questioning you
about this," Kent told her. "Standard procedure for a hospital to
call the authorities when they get an injury to a child this
serious. Certainly no one is accusing you of anything, Mrs.
Foreman, but the hospital will be keeping Joe here for
observation for a few days, and I am asking you as the**

investigating officer not to have any contact with him until we clear this up. That's standard procedure too. He'll be fine here."

She licked her dry lips with her dry tongue, neither voice nor expression changing when her mouth finally did open and her slow motion words rolled out: "How did Joey say it happened?"

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Davis drove past the Foreman house three different times before deciding to stop.

He parked in front of the nondescript house bearing the smiley face sticker and got out of

the Mustang.

(Nothing different here. Nothing wrong. Just a small white house. Like a lot of the other small houses on this street. A lot like Kent's. Nothing unusual, nothing unique, except for maybe what goes on inside it, and except for the fact that you're walking up to it without a search warrant, Officer, nothing wrong except for that).

Davis tried the front door and found it unlocked.

(What are you doing here? This is illegal, you know. Even if you found something, like what, what exactly are you looking for, even if you found something you couldn't use it, they'd throw the case out of court, just go get a warrant, go get Kent, he was right, you don't need to be doing this case, you don't need to be here, you're going to screw it up, and then what, the kid loses, he'll have to come back home to that monster lady and whose fault will that be?)

Davis opened the door (stay or go, help or hurt, right or wrong) and stepped inside.

The interior of the house was as plain and drab as Wanda Foreman. No pictures on the walls, no flowers, only a couch, a chair, and a TV in the living room.

The kitchen reflected the woman's depression. Stacks of filthy, mold-encrusted dishes filled the sinks and lined the greasy kitchen counters, and overflowed on the stove. Boxes, cans, and packages of half-eaten food were piled on the table, and even the chairs. Mouse droppings peppered the place mats, and roaches were feasting on the leftovers.

Davis went to the small bathroom, which was filthy. The tub's dirty ring looked like it had been there forever, and the sink was full of scum. There was a five-gallon bucket of cleaner water on the floor, which Davis assumed to be their bath water.

With a pencil he swung the medicine cabinet door open and viewed its contents. A stick of deodorant, a toothbrush, and bottles and bottles of prescription medicine.

(She's depressed. She takes pills every day)

Reading the prescription labels, Davis realized Wanda Foreman was more than just depressed. She was probably manic-depressive, maybe even borderline psychotic.

He closed the door again and went to the next room. It had to be a bedroom because of the bed and dresser, but besides those two pieces of furniture, the room was bare. The bed had no sheets, the opened dresser drawers were empty, and no clothes hung in the closet.

He went to the last room of the house. Another bedroom. Her bedroom. And maybe . . . *(no, that couldn't be right, he's too old, too big, maybe, no way, maybe his bedroom too).*

A wave of nausea kept wanting to roil up his body, but he fought it. He had to. He had to understand what he saw before him: The clothes closet which held her clothes and his. The dresser which held her clothes and his. The bed with the rumped, stained sheets. Her nightgown. His boxers. Her red hair on the pillows. His black hair. Pubic hairs in the jar of lubricant on the bedside table.

(What happened to your neck, Joe?)

(Curling iron)

(Sure it was the curling iron, kid? Because after I see her bedroom here, after I see what she does to you, I don't think it was the curling iron, no, not at all, I think those marks on your neck are hickeys)

Davis turned and ran, scrambling out the front door in time to heave into Wanda Foreman's drab, nondescript shrubbery.

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Davis raced up the five flights of stairs of the hospital, no time for the elevator.

(You couldn't tell, Joe, but you wanted somebody to find out, didn't you? You couldn't expose your mother yourself, turn her in, rat her out, because you still love her, God knows why, you still love her even though she's been sleeping with you for years, you probably thought it was a normal thing to do until now, until you got old enough to realize, old enough for puberty, for boy/girl stuff, for something to compare it to, to see how abnormal it all always was, and you felt shame, didn't you, you felt like you were a part of it, like there must be something wrong with you too, she told you she loved you, she told you she was your mother, that you could trust her, but you learned, somehow you learned that it was wrong, that mothers didn't sleep with their fourteen-year-old sons, that they didn't make

you do things that were sick and unnatural, and you wanted someone to know, to find out and stop it, even though you couldn't say it yourself, you wanted the perversion to end, you wanted to stop the pain, stop her, stop yourself, and the only way to get people to notice, to look inside that nasty closet of yours, was to show us in a physical way how much you really hurt inside, you had to let the pain out, so you cut yourself open, didn't you, you stabbed yourself to let it all out, so someone would see)

(Freud, how did you know? Who messed with you when you were a kid?)

"BITCH!" Davis roared as he threw the door open and burst into the hospital corridor.

His chest was heaving madly as he raced toward the woman who stood near the water fountain with Kent.

Kent saw him coming and tried to grab him, but Davis knocked him against the wall and kept going after her, tackling her from behind and grabbing her hair to pound her face into the floor. "YOU BITCH! I KNOW WHAT YOU DID!"

Kent grabbed Davis from behind and shoved him face down on the floor, planting a knee in his back. "Davis! What's wrong with you?!"

Davis's response shocked him. He was crying into the floor. A weak, helpless sound. No fight left.

Kent stared at the woman. "What did you do?"

The woman was rolling over and reaching for her purse on the floor.

Kent's left hand was on Davis's back, while his right pulled out his weapon, aiming it at the woman. "Don't move," he told her. "Don't touch that purse."

But her hand kept going, and Kent could only watch in pale horror as she drew a small pistol from her handbag.

"Put it down," he told her in a wavering voice, but she didn't listen, and as she brought the gun up, toward him or herself, Kent would never know for sure, he had no choice but to pull the trigger.

Davis flinched under Kent's hand at the gunshot, and then the doctors, nurses, security guards, and patients were all running to see what had happened—Tasha too.

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Davis and Kent stood with Joe Foreman, who was dry-eyed, at the pitifully small funeral. Dr. Silva was in attendance, as was Tasha and Lucky.

The minister read a passage from the Bible. "'Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'."

It was at these words that the boy began to sob softly, hand to his forehead, shoulders hunching in grief.

Kent put his arm around the kid's shoulders and squeezed. "It's over, Joe. You'll be all right."

Joe whispered into his hands. "I still love her."

Kent looked at Davis, then at the boy. "I know you do. There's nothing wrong with that. She had the problems, Joe. Not you. She was full of poison and she spilled it into you."

The young teenager wiped his eyes with the tie Kent had loaned him. "I've got nowhere to go."

Davis took a photo from the jacket of his black suit and handed it to the boy. "Yeah, you do. This is your foster family. We'll drive you over there whenever you're ready."

End