

formed and it was all we could do to keep it under control. I know this don't look good, but it all happened too fast, so this is where we are.”

“Is he still alive?” The detective continued to interrogate the patrolmen.

“He was a few minutes ago, we called for a bus. They're on the way.”

“Well lets just hope this guy has a long sheet or an outstanding warrant or something. You know the boss and the commissioner made it clear that we don't need any more of this kind of shit in our house. I hope you assholes have been making big dough on the market, you might need it.”

One of the plainclothes policemen then walked over to the spot where Reginald lay almost lifeless. While approaching, he could see the blood draining from his chest onto the sidewalk, the scarlet stream was already beginning to coagulate at the edges. The front of Reggie's sweatshirt was stained by two dark, moist, irregularly shaped circles created by the pints of vital fluid that had already seeped from his chest, each with a small jagged hole in their center. The detective knew that the exit wounds in Reggie's back were probably large enough to stick a baseball into and that he was likely losing blood too fast. There was sporadic up and down movement of Reginald's torso, he struggled to push air into lungs which seemed already full to capacity.

The detective reached down and placed his hand on the old lady's shoulder and said in a calm but authoritative voice, “Ma'am, you have to step back now until the paramedics arrive.”

The old woman snapped her head around and, with piercing eyes focused on the detective, responded with a soft but stern growl through

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tightened lips. “I’m not going anywhere until this boy is safely inside of an ambulance. Do you understand? You people have taken too many of our children, I’m not going to let you have this one. I’ll stay here with him until I know he’s safe, so just go on with your business now and leave us be.” She raised one hand and flittered him away.

There was something about the way she spoke that made the detective obey. His first inclination was to force her into the crowd, but the crowd was already emotionally charged and needed no additional fodder to swell it to riot. He stepped back and continued to stand watch over the two bodies, one huddled over the other.

The crowd was continuing to shout obscenities and threats at the policemen, who maintained control. Within a few more minutes, the paramedics arrived, sirens screaming and lights flashing. The two EMT’s immediately jumped out of the cab when the ambulance stopped and hurried to the rear to grab their gear. They rushed over to the sidewalk where Reginald lay prone on his back to begin their examination and, if the “perp” was still alive, to stabilize him for transport to the hospital. While they did their work, the old lady stood vigilantly at one side, her presence seemed to provide a redeeming infusion of life to Reggie. The detective also stood watch, unsure, pondering the possible events that could unfold. He thought about the two patrolmen whose lives would now be changed because of bad decisions. A bad decision by some petty criminal to cross the line tonight. A bad decision by patrolmen to pursue the suspect in their unit instead of on foot, to stop the first man, first black man that they saw and begin to apprehend him. A bad decision to not look closely at the man and surmise him to likely not be the perp, and worst of all, a bad decision to open fire on an unarmed man.

He looked again at Reginald and saw a clean shaven middle aged face with a slight shadow, a face not unlike his- mature, and even while lying wounded on the sidewalk, poised and confident. He carefully studied him, noticed the small designer logo on the sleeve of his sweatshirt, just above the starched white cuff that created an inch wide band above his wrist, secured by a set of gold cufflinks. The watch, on his right wrist, looked as though it had been purchased at a 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue jewelry shop, several thousand dollars if a dime. His Levis were crisp and sharply creased, probably laundered at a cleaners. He wore clean, light gray ankle socks and a pair of Prince tennis shoes. This clearly was no street thug.

The emergency medical team continued to work at a feverish pace. Reggie could hear them talking, it sounded like they were behind a glass wall, but he heard and understood every word.

“Lets get the gurney and start a pint of O Neg., stat, this guy has lost a lot a blood. I’ll compress these wounds, call ahead to Harlem Hospital, I see one exit wound in his back so the other slug must still be in there, they’ll probably need to cut it out.”

“These punks are worse than animals. They shoot their own kind and leave them to die. This guy looks like he could be a role model for kids, not a victim of some gang banging petty thief.” he continued.

“This guy was shot by a cop, man, didn’t you hear the call, they said one suspect was shot. I don’t know what he did, but he’s having a bad night now. O.K., lets lift him, on one....two..... three, umph.”

Reggie felt disassociated from the buzz of activity around him. He had only slight sensations of pressure when they bandaged him and started the transfusion. His body was totally numb now and he could sense no pain. He felt light headed and sick to his stomach and

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breathing was becoming more difficult. The paramedics placed a mask over his nose and mouth, the breath of pure oxygen made him feel momentarily euphoric. He slowly looked around, still feeling confused, and his eyes connected with the sad, teary eyes of his protector. Dressed in white, she looked like an angel to Reggie, a guardian angel. She walked along, only a foot or so away, while the paramedics wheeled him to the ambulance and lifted him into its rear. They never released each other's eyes until the door was shut. The sirens began again and Reggie sensed the flashing of red and white lights. The van began to slowly pull off, and his body rolled and bumped while it made its way through the Saturday night traffic.

“You know, I hate a full moon on a Saturday night” the attendant, who was in the rear monitoring Reggie's vital signs, said to the driver.

“Yeah, it's the double whammy, Saturday and a full moon means we won't get any rest tonight, and I'll be too tired to poke my old lady when I get in tomorrow morning, man, I like those Sunday morning sleep ins.”

“Well at least you're still getting it and liking it; my old lady has me on a three times a month schedule. By the time I'm doing it, I'm just trying to get it done before she changes her mind.”

They both laughed out loud, and Reggie began to slowly lose consciousness. He had only faint impressions of the sirens in the background, bits and pieces of the jokes that they shared, and the bursts of laughter.