

TELL

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Chapter One

It was Saturday night when the cops came to our house. Actually, it was 2:00 AM, so technically that made it Sunday morning. The doorbell rang twice before I heard my mother's slippers feet shuffling along the upstairs hall and down the stairs. I pressed the mute button on the TV remote and listened through my bedroom door to muffled voices in the front hall below. I heard my mother

wail. It was a terrible sound, like an animal being tortured. Her voice got higher and higher and she said, “No, no, no” over and over, louder and louder. I got up off my bed and went downstairs.

There were two people in the front hall. They were cops. One of them was a woman. She was trying to steer my mother into the living room where she could sit down. My mother was crying. She kept saying, “I don’t know what I’m going to do without him.”

“Mom?” I said. “What’s wrong? What’s the matter?”

The two cops looked at me. The female cop managed to get my mother seated on the couch in the living room. The male cop introduced himself. “I’m Detective Antonelli,” he said. “I’m afraid we have some bad news.” He paused and looked at me.

“David,” I said. “I’m David.”

“We have some bad news, David. It’s about your father.”

“You mean Phil?” I said. Detective Antonelli gave me a look. “He’s not my father,” I said. “He’s my

stepfather.” Then, because I knew how it would look if I didn’t ask, I said, “Is he okay? Did he do something?”

My mother was sobbing in the living room.

Detective Antonelli pulled me aside. When he spoke, he kept his voice low.

“Is there anyone else in the house, David? Do you have any brothers or sisters? Any other relatives staying with you?”

I shook my head.

“What happened?” I said. “Where’s Phil?”

“I’m afraid he was shot and killed a couple of hours ago,” Detective Antonelli said.

“What?” I said. “How? Why?”

“We’re not sure about all the details. It looks like it might have been a robbery.” He was looking closely at me now, probably because it was so late and I was still wearing jeans and a T-shirt, not pajamas. “Did you just get home, David?”

“I was watching TV up in my room,” I said. “I guess I fell asleep.” I turned to look at my mother in the

living room. The woman cop was talking quietly to her. My mother was shaking her head and moaning softly. I looked at Detective Antonelli again. "I should see how my mom is," I said.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions first, if that's okay," Detective Antonelli said. He was talking softly and being polite. But I had the feeling that he would ask his questions even if I said it wasn't okay. "Why don't we step in here?" he said. He nodded toward the dining room, which was across the hall from the living room.

We went inside and sat down at the dining-room table.

"When was the last time you saw your stepfather?" he said.

"What?" I don't know what I had been expecting him to ask me, but it sure wasn't that.

"I mean, was he home today?"

"Yes," I said.

"But he went out at some point?" Detective Antonelli said.

"He left right after supper," I said. "He went to play poker with some friends."

"Do you know where?"

"At Jack's place," I said. I explained that Jack Tower was a friend of Phil's.

"What about you and your mother?"

I stared at him. Why was he asking about us?

"Was your mother home all night?" he said.

"Yes," I said.

"Were you home with her?"

I had to fight the urge to turn to look at my mother again.

"I was out for a couple of hours," I said.

"Where did you go?"

I shrugged. "Just out, you know? Walking around."

"Were you with friends?"

Geez, why was he asking about me?