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Update: 13/3/18. It's currently on offer: 0.99p in the UK, \$0.99 in the US (I think) - and \$2.99 in Canada. It's the same price for Killman Creek, too! Loved. This is. Book.Damn. This ends with a cliffhanger that I haven't seen coming, although I probably should have. I feel like doing a re-read, already. The story is told in the first and third person perspectives - though, the third person for the prologue, then he switches to (Gina/Gwen) from a first-person perspective. Gina Royal thinks she has a fairly normal/average life: until one day, this image will not be destroyed, after she goes to pick up her children, Brady and Lily, from school. Normally she was home at three o'clock in the afternoon, but her husband, Mel, was in an emergency at work, so she ended up doing a school run. On the way home, however, she notices that her street has been cordoned off: there are three patrol cars behind the barricade with flashing lights and an ambulance and a fire truck, further down the street - and worse, there is a maroon-colored SUV parked halfway into his garage, courtesy of a drunk driver who crashed into it - while trying to hand it in the parking lot. Her husbands are a workshop. A patrol officer walks up to her car and she appears and tells him her house, forcing the officer to reach for his firearm. The detective (Salazar) is called and she is ordered to get out of the car, quickly handcuffed, asked a few questions before being led to the garage; where she gets to see first hand her husbands extracurricular activities. His work is handiwork. She's screaming. Years later, she uses the alleged name, Gwen Procter, who is the fourth, false identity card she used - and her son and daughter are now named: Connor and Atlanta (Lannie for short). Her new home is on Lake Stillhouse, which was once an expensive gated community. Because of the crimes of her husbands, and after being acquitted of having any involvement in his little hobby; she had to move from place to place, change her name several times, since not everyone believed she was innocent (how could she not know?), so she gets trolled, receives death threats and is in constant fear for her own and her children's lives. She gets help with new identities and places to relax, which safe, from one of the people who trolled/went after her -- and his? It's called Absalom. Anyway, they are not friends, and she pays him for his his She checks what she says about her in various forums, on a daily basis, which she calls: Sick Patrol. Assessing the threat level and ensuring that no one knows who is located and where they are is its main objective. She owns a firearm, too. Unfortunately, it's not long before the body is found floating on a lake that bears a resemblance to her handmade husbands; which makes her the prime suspect. In sum: I liked the main character, Gwen (Gina), she has a strong personality. Because of her story, she doesn't know who she can trust; especially her own judgment. To think I didn't know who she could trust either. Her son keeps forgetting things (which can put them in danger) and her daughter has developed an attitude problem, so she has that to deal with, too. I'll definitely be reading the sequel, Killman Creek, someday. ... More Top Reviews Of Gina Royal's latest Best Reviews is the definition of a medium-shy Midw... Suggested PDF: The Morganville Vampires, Volume 4 by Rachel Caine pdf Author: Rachel CaineOriginal Title: Stillhouse LakeBook Format: Kindle EditionNumber Of Pages: 301 pagesFirst Published in: July 1st 2017Latest Edition: July 1st 2017ISBN Number: B01MFGX5GISeries: Stillhouse Lake #1Language: EnglishAwards: Goodreads Choice Award Nominee for Mystery & Thriller (2017)Main Characters: Gina Royal/Gwen Procter, Sam Cade, Javier Esparza, Kezia Claremont, Detective Prestercategory: thriller, mystery, fiction, thriller, mystery thriller, suspense, seductionFormats: ePUB(Android), audible mp3, audiobook and kindle. The translated version of this book is available in Spanish, English, Chinese, Russian, Hindi, Bengali, Arabic, Portuguese, Indonesian/Malaysian, French, Japanese, German and many others for free download. Please note that the tricks or techniques listed in this PDF are either fictional or claimed to be the work of its creator. 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Gwen Gwen what's like to worry about your kids. Gwen investigation unearths new suspects... and the victims. As she follows every sinister guide, the touches of mystery grow more disturbing. Because the closer Gwen is, the closer she is to the threat that looms home. In a city that closed its ranks against Gwen; her partner, Sam; and her children, there is no more daring enemy than the Bellden family - paramilitary, criminal, powerful and vindictive. As the personal vendettas face the Gwen investigation, she is ready to fight in both fights. But is she prepared for the fact that it could affect everyone she loves? Amazon Charts and USA is today a bestseller. Gina Royal is the definition of a middle-shy Midwestern housewife with a happy marriage and two adorable children. But when a car accident reveals her husband's secret life as a serial killer, she has to remake herself as Gwen Procter - the ultimate warrior mom. With her ex now in prison, Gwen has finally taken refuge in a new home on the remote Lake Stillhouse. While still a target of stalkers and internet trolls who think she has something to do with her husband's crimes, Gwen dares to think that her children can finally grow up in peace. But just as she begins to feel at ease in her new identity, the body appears in the lake, and threatening letters begin to arrive from an overly familiar address. Gwen Procter must keep friends close and enemies at bay to avoid exposing or watch her children fall victim to a killer who gladly torments her. One thing is for sure: she has learned to fight evil. And she'll never stop. Genre: Mystery Similar Books by Other AuthorsCity of the Lost (Rockton, book 1) Kelley ArmstrongA Terrible Beauty (Katie Maguire, book 1) Graham MastertonThe Darkest Evening (Faith Stanhope, book 9)Anne CleevesThe Girl in Cabin 13 (Emma Griffin FBI Mystery, Book 1)A J Rivers Used Availability for Rachel Kane's Stillhouse Lake Amazon Charts, USA #1 She Investigates a Cold Case With Which No One Can No Longer Go to a Place no one else. Despite the tormented past still haunting her, Gwen Procter is trying to move forward. Until a new job gives her a goal: the cold disappearance of a young man in Tennessee. Three years missing, no evidence. Just Ruth Landry, a tortured mother in limbo. Gwen understands what it's like to worry about your kids. Gwen investigation unearths new suspects... and the victims. As she follows every sinister guide, the touches of mystery grow more disturbing. Because the closer Gwen is, the closer she is to the threat that looms home. 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Stillhouse Lake was a finalist for the Goodreads Choice Award, the Thriller Writers International Award and the 2018 Killer Nashville Award. Gwen fights with vigilantes from the Internet, the anger of the victims of her ex-husband. She is looking for some relief in a new cold case to investigate: the disappearance of a young man. But as chaos swirls in the ever-expanding sinking pool, there is no safe place anymore... For all of them. USA-AmazoN- NindieboundBooks-A-MillionUK:Amazon UKWaterstonesFoyles BITTER FALLSCHAPTER 1GWEN When my personal phone rings, I check the caller ID. The power of habit. There are only six people in the world, I take calls from this number. Of course it's Sam Cade. A little bubble of heat explodes inside me as I press the button and lift the phone to my ear. Hey, stranger, I say. Hey, myself, he replies. I hear a hoarse tone in his voice too. Oh, the subtext. It's so sexy. What is going on? Right now? Absolutely nothing, - I say and yawn. It's three thirty in the morning and I sat in this cold rented car for three hours, not counting the quick dash to the shop down the road for urine and giant coffee I'll regret. I'm waiting for my boyfriend to make a move. Going to what to do? You're not going to tell me? It sounds ridiculous. Well, you know. Not until I'm sure. Anyway, you're late. Or early. What is it? Just get some paperwork ready for the day, he says. The kids are still sleeping soundly, by the way. I checked. My children are my life, and he knows it. Sam is also well aware that he is one of a very select group of people I trust with my children. My daughter, Lenny, is in a difficult sixteen-feels like twenty. My son, Connor, is too old for his age at thirteen and too young for him at the same time. It's not easy to deal with people, my children. There's no reason why they should be. They have spent half their lives now with the terrifying knowledge that their father was a serial killer, and with the same heavy burden that people unfairly hate them by association, want to protect them from the world. I can't, of course. But I still want to try. Will you be home until six? He asked me, and I sigh. Okay, fair enough. Do you want me to wake Lenny up when I'm gone? I can't trust her to hear the alarm and get Connor too. I'll text and let you know when I'm on my way. I want my kids to sleep. They should be at seven, but an extra hour of sleep for a teenager like ten for me. None of them will want to get up, and even more so to go to school, but they are used to facing unpleasant situations. I'm flabby giving up home school to them. Their lives will be incredibly difficult, given our family history. I want them to learn how to handle this now, rather than hit eighteen as protected little porcelain dolls. There are monsters. The advice made us all some good. I started the kids in personal therapy for a few months and then together, while Sam and I met with another counselor as a couple. Now we do it as a family every two weeks and I dare think it's all right... Better. Were it not for the fact that the city itself closed the ranks against us, I'm not quite sure what tipped Norton residents to utter dislike; maybe it was Sam's unintentional but ongoing feud with a bunch of drug dealers, but powerful people on the hill. And some of them I brought on myself, agreeing to do a TV interview. The situation has become completely toxic. This caused even more media attention to rush into the tranquil backwaters of Stillhouse Lake. I thought I was doing a good deed, but it was like unloading a dump truck ten days of garbage on my head. Internet trolls are back, relentless and ghoulishly joyful as ever. I'm never sure what they get from trying to ruin my life, but I'll give them so much: they're dedicated. I recently found a post on a bulletin board that said their goal is to drive my kids to commit suicide live on camera. The level of sociopathy that takes goes up to eleven, but no mistake, it's there. And, worryingly, it's not that rare. That's who we deal with on a daily basis. I don't like to call them monsters; they are just bored, angry, empathy-free people for no reason who see me as a target for their rage. After all, I was married to Melvin Royal, the notorious serial killer. He killed women for fun, so I must have been responsible for that, too. No, the swarm of trolls are not monsters. I know monsters. I ran into them down, including Melvin.I kill monsters. You'd think they'd keep that in mind. I talk to Sam for about half an hour, I'll in comfort and warmth and deep spiral need to feel it with me, but we both know it happen right now. Thanks to the gated town of Norton is basically shunned by us, his construction work has dried up and he has to go to get a job. This means more overlap to be together. It's a quiet time. I've almost never been unlucky, and today today Different. I'm going to go in the front door and drop the alarm. Connor got up and sat at breakfast, nibbling a piece of toast. At the age of thirteen, he put on a growth spurt that took me by surprise. He filled his shoulders and chest. He has height, too. But Connor doesn't look good today. He fell off his shoulders. The dull, dark shadows in his eyes. Sam cooks eggs at the stove. He flashes me warm, quick smile and shrug, messages received and recognized. Sam's in his thirties, a little older than me. Average height, average weight, blond hair. A beautifully symmetrical face that looks more youthful, depending on its mood and light. And I love it completely. It still surprises the hell out of me; what right should I love a man this solid, is that good? How does he love me? It's a mystery I don't think I'll ever solve. Hey, baby, I say. He barely reacts. What happened? Connor's not answering. It looks pretty zombieified, which is partly an hour and partly something else. Sam is in charge of it. He says he woke up sick. Sick, I repeat. Again the stomach? He nods and nibbles on tiny toasts. He's got dark circles under his eyes, and he needs a haircut. I keep intending to take him for one, and it seems to me that he looks halfway neglected right now. He has a favorite threadbare sweater I told him to throw away, paired with distressed blue jeans. Add ragged hair to this, exhausted eyes. . . If you sat it on the corner with the WILL WORK FOR FOOD sign, it would absolutely get donations. You don't want to go to school? I ask him and get another non-verbal agreement. How about going to the doctor? This time it's negative. I'm pressing the back of his hand against his forehead. He doesn't have a fever. Baby, I'm sorry, but you know you need to either go to the doctor or go to school. I can't just let you stay home. You've missed enough days already. He gives me a miserable look, but still doesn't say a word. He just dropped the toast and goes back to his room. I look at Sam, and he holds his hand in a gesture I don't know. If I had to guess, I'd say bullies,' he tells me. Connor has dealt with them for years. Connor is also moving around town. He might be looking forward to leaving the bullies in the rear, but he's settled in now. He must face them endlessly in sight. I may be wrong, but -- But you probably aren't, I'm sighing. Ok. Save my balls? Got it. I knock on Connor's door and make it easier. He sits on the edge of the bed, looking at the floor with socks that he has not yet put on his hands. I'm a ved, and he's not mad, so I closed the door. Me. Sam thinks they're bullies, I say. He's right? A slow nod. Can you talk to me about it? I'm not sure what he will be, but he finally does, in a voice so rusty it hurts. I'm just... It's hard. He's right. I get abuse and threats daily in my email. On social media. Even sometimes by mail directly to our address. But at least these people are at a distance. Connor comes face to face with his bullies every day. And he can't escape. I feel an irresistible burst of rage, frustration, anguish, making my pulse beat hard in my temples. Although I want to protect him from pain, there's not much I can do. Stick to your decision. He has to learn to cope with it as he grows. Wrapping him in my arms and protecting him from the world, he can't give him the armor he needs. Teach him how to protect himself... It will keep him safe when I'm not there. Honey, I know. I am sorry. I can talk to the principal, make sure he knows they have to back off. . . Mom. No. If you do anything it will be worse. I took a deep breath. So what do you want me to do? Nothing, he says. Just like -- He doesn't finish it. His voice is receding, but I know what he wanted to say. As always. It must seem that way. Although he knows how much of my life I dedicate to protecting them. It hurts, but I tolerate it. I'll be fine. I can make you an extra appointment with a consultant, if you-He puts on his socks, then his shoes. Calm, methodical movement, how important it is, it gets it right. Of course. His voice is soft now. Alarmingly empty. Whatever it is. It's scary anything. It's a steel door slapped in my face. I'm used to getting this from my daughter, not Connor. But he grows up, becomes his own man. I'm no longer his hideout. Now I'm in his way. It hurts. I have to take a breath from the cold that cuts through me. Who is this? I ask him. He doesn't stop at tying his shoelaces. Why? What are you going to do, beat them? . I say. It really is. I hear a very real shiver in my voice at the end. So is he. He's looking up fast. I can't read what's on his face and he turns his head again so fast that it's a blur. It was easier when we moved, he says. When we shouldn't have just taken it. I know. Do you want to move? I thought you liked being in one place. Yes, I mean, I like the idea. He just sits back with a sigh, but doesn't look at me. I'm going to Reggie's house after school, remember? He says it like we've already agreed on it. We didn't. But I just nodded and let him go. My son must feel like he has something to look forward to. Call When do you get there? I'm doing it. Not an order. He looks relieved. Of course, Mum. He gets up. I think I should eat something. That's a good call. I want to hold him, but I see he doesn't want to. My heart aches for him. I'm so afraid the whole world is going to hurt him, but I can't stop the whole world. I know I can't. Maybe that's the worst part. By the time Connor is over for breakfast, my daughter is shuffling dark hair around her face. She's wearing a fuzzy red robe with a caricature of Dracula all over it. She yawns so wide that I can check her almonds. Damn, she says. School again? Again, I agree. Eggs? Of course, she says. Coffee? The elixir of life with lots of cream and sugar coming up. We eat like family. It's expensive for me, even if it's not for half-sleep children; I need to hurry Lenny when she wants to dent. If I don't ride the herd, they'll both miss the bus, and Sam should be on the way. I share a sweet kiss with Sam at the door. I read regret in his eyes. We missed our short privacy window today. Today, I hope. If nothing comes. Sam? I'm calling for him. He turns back on the road to his truck. Be careful. So many rules, he says, and flashes my smile. Dawn breaks behind the trees, and he bathes everything in a friendly, soft light. It glitters from the glass of our car and truck windows, and for a second I think I'm imagining things because the bright red spot on Sam's chest seems so out of place. I feel like my heart starts hammering before I work out what it is. By then, the laser point is moving. Sam! The anxiety in my voice is clear, but I can say that he doesn't know what I'm warning him about. I'm going to scream down when the side window of his truck goes milky white as security glass crazes. There's a quarter-sized hole in the center. The boom shot echoed over the hills behind the house. The adrenaline hits me hard and I start the door before checking myself out. Sam's not injured, but he's an open target. He dived, but he's clearly looking for the origin of the shot. I'm screaming. Wow! He rushes outside the door. The shot came from behind the house, and above. Someone in line at the tree. Someone wanted me to see that he had a ball on Sam, and could put a round through Sam's chest as easily as through that window. Jesus Christ, says Sam. He sounds remarkably calm, though his face paled. I didn't see him. I'm pulling him out of the porch. You'll slam the door. Drop the locks. Attract the alarm with lightning strikes of my trembling fingers. Children bolted from their bedrooms and stand frozen, faces sharply anxiously. Back out of the windows. I tell them, pointing to the kitchen. Get in a safe room and stay down! Mom, was it a shot? Lenny asks. Get in a safe room now! She grabs her brother and drags him in that direction. I'm desperate to look Sam up and down for any wounds. It amazes people that way sometimes that in a rush of adrenaline they don't feel shot. But he's not bleeding. The sniper had him labeled dead to the right and then deliberately missed him. Warning. Are you okay? I ask him. He looks at me with the same strange calmness. Aside from wishing I took more car insurance? Are you sure. He missed. He didn't miss it. He had a laser sight on his chest. And you know laser sights at this distance are, says Sam. Bullet curve. He puts his hands on my shoulders and then moves them into the cup of my face. Gwen. Breathe. It's all right, it's just a window. No, I say. I turn away, grab my cell phone, and quickly dial Norton's police. Continuation in Bitter FallsUS:AmazonBNindieboundBooks-A-MillionUK:Amazon UKWaterstonesFoyles UKWaterstonesFoyles stillhouse lake book 2. stillhouse lake book series. stillhouse lake book 3. stillhouse lake book 4. stillhouse lake book 4. stillhouse lake book summary. stillhouse lake book club discussion questions. stillhouse lake book 1

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Stillhouse Lake was a finalist for the Goodreads Choice Award, the Thriller Writers International Award and the 2018 Killer Nashville Award. Gwen fights with vigilantes from the Internet, the anger of the victims of her ex-husband. She is looking for some relief in a new cold case to investigate: the disappearance of a young man. But as chaos swirls in the ever-expanding sinking pool, there is no safe place anymore... For all of them. USA-AmazoN- NindieboundBooks-A-MillionUK:Amazon UKWaterstonesFoyles BITTER FALLSCHAPTER 1GWEN When my personal phone rings, I check the caller ID. The power of habit. There are only six people in the world, I take calls from this number. Of course it's Sam Cade. A little bubble of heat explodes inside me as I press the button and lift the phone to my ear. Hey, stranger, I say. Hey, myself, he replies. I hear a hoarse tone in his voice too. Oh, the subtext. It's so sexy. What is going on? Right now? Absolutely nothing, - I say and yawn. It's three thirty in the morning and I sat in this cold rented car for three hours, not counting the quick dash to the shop down the road for urine and giant coffee I'll regret. I'm waiting for my boyfriend to make a move. Going to what to do? You're not going to tell me? It sounds ridiculous. Well, you know. Not until I'm sure. Anyway, you're late. Or early. What is it? Just get some paperwork ready for the day, he says. The kids are still sleeping soundly, by the way. I checked. My children are my life, and he knows it. Sam is also well aware that he is one of a very select group of people I trust with my children. My daughter, Lenny, is in a difficult sixteen-feels like twenty. My son, Connor, is too old for his age at thirteen and too young for him at the same time. It's not easy to deal with people, my children. There's no reason why they should be. They have spent half their lives now with the terrifying knowledge that their father was a serial killer, and with the same heavy burden that people unfairly hate them by association, want to protect them from the world. I can't, of course. But I still want to try. Will you be home until six? He asked me, and I sigh. Okay, fair enough. Do you want me to wake Lenny up when I'm gone? I can't trust her to hear the alarm and get Connor too. I'll text and let you know when I'm on my way. I want my kids to sleep. They should be at seven, but an extra hour of sleep for a teenager like ten for me. None of them will want to get up, and even more so to go to school, but they are used to facing unpleasant situations. I'm flabby giving up home school to them. Their lives will be incredibly difficult, given our family history. I want them to learn how to handle this now, rather than hit eighteen as protected little porcelain dolls. There are monsters. The advice made us all some good. I started the kids in personal therapy for a few months and then together, while Sam and I met with another counselor as a couple. Now we do it as a family every two weeks and I dare think it's all right... Better. Were it not for the fact that the city itself closed the ranks against us, I'm not quite sure what tipped Norton residents to utter dislike; maybe it was Sam's unintentional but ongoing feud with a bunch of drug dealers, but powerful people on the hill. And some of them I brought on myself, agreeing to do a TV interview. The situation has become completely toxic. This caused even more media attention to rush into the tranquil backwaters of Stillhouse Lake. I thought I was doing a good deed, but it was like unloading a dump truck ten days of garbage on my head. Internet trolls are back, relentless and ghoulishly joyful as ever. I'm never sure what they get from trying to ruin my life, but I'll give them so much: they're dedicated. I recently found a post on a bulletin board that said their goal is to drive my kids to commit suicide live on camera. The level of sociopathy that takes goes up to eleven, but no mistake, it's there. And, worryingly, it's not that rare. That's who we deal with on a daily basis. I don't like to call them monsters; they are just bored, angry, empathy-free people for no reason who see me as a target for their rage. After all, I was married to Melvin Royal, the notorious serial killer. He killed women for fun, so I must have been responsible for that, too. No, the swarm of trolls are not monsters. I know monsters. I ran into them down, including Melvin.I kill monsters. You'd think they'd keep that in mind. I talk to Sam for about half an hour, I'll in comfort and warmth and deep spiral need to feel it with me, but we both know it happen right now. Thanks to the gated town of Norton is basically shunned by us, his construction work has dried up and he has to go to get a job. This means more overlap to be together. It's a quiet time. I've almost never been unlucky, and today today Different. I'm going to go in the front door and drop the alarm. Connor got up and sat at breakfast, nibbling a piece of toast. At the age of thirteen, he put on a growth spurt that took me by surprise. He filled his shoulders and chest. He has height, too. But Connor doesn't look good today. He fell off his shoulders. The dull, dark shadows in his eyes. Sam cooks eggs at the stove. He flashes me warm, quick smile and shrug, messages received and recognized. Sam's in his thirties, a little older than me. Average height, average weight, blond hair. A beautifully symmetrical face that looks more youthful, depending on its mood and light. And I love it completely. It still surprises the hell out of me; what right should I love a man this solid, is that good? How does he love me? It's a mystery I don't think I'll ever solve. Hey, baby, I say. He barely reacts. What happened? Connor's not answering. It looks pretty zombieified, which is partly an hour and partly something else. Sam is in charge of it. He says he woke up sick. Sick, I repeat. Again the stomach? He nods and nibbles on tiny toasts. He's got dark circles under his eyes, and he needs a haircut. I keep intending to take him for one, and it seems to me that he looks halfway neglected right now. He has a favorite threadbare sweater I told him to throw away, paired with distressed blue jeans. Add ragged hair to this, exhausted eyes. . . If you sat it on the corner with the WILL WORK FOR FOOD sign, it would absolutely get donations. You don't want to go to school? I ask him and get another non-verbal agreement. How about going to the doctor? This time it's negative. I'm pressing the back of his hand against his forehead. He doesn't have a fever. Baby, I'm sorry, but you know you need to either go to the doctor or go to school. I can't just let you stay home. You've missed enough days already. He gives me a miserable look, but still doesn't say a word. He just dropped the toast and goes back to his room. I look at Sam, and he holds his hand in a gesture I don't know. If I had to guess, I'd say bullies,' he tells me. Connor has dealt with them for years. Connor is also moving around town. He might be looking forward to leaving the bullies in the rear, but he's settled in now. He must face them endlessly in sight. I may be wrong, but -- But you probably aren't, I'm sighing. Ok. Save my balls? Got it. I knock on Connor's door and make it easier. He sits on the edge of the bed, looking at the floor with socks that he has not yet put on his hands. I'm a ved, and he's not mad, so I closed the door. Me. Sam thinks they're bullies, I say. He's right? A slow nod. Can you talk to me about it? I'm not sure what he will be, but he finally does, in a voice so rusty it hurts. I'm just... It's hard. He's right. I get abuse and threats daily in my email. On social media. Even sometimes by mail directly to our address. But at least these people are at a distance. Connor comes face to face with his bullies every day. And he can't escape. I feel an irresistible burst of rage, frustration, anguish, making my pulse beat hard in my temples. Although I want to protect him from pain, there's not much I can do. Stick to your decision. He has to learn to cope with it as he grows. Wrapping him in my arms and protecting him from the world, he can't give him the armor he needs. Teach him how to protect himself... It will keep him safe when I'm not there. Honey, I know. I am sorry. I can talk to the principal, make sure he knows they have to back off. . . Mom. No. If you do anything it will be worse. I took a deep breath. So what do you want me to do? Nothing, he says. Just like -- He doesn't finish it. His voice is receding, but I know what he wanted to say. As always. It must seem that way. Although he knows how much of my life I dedicate to protecting them. It hurts, but I tolerate it. I'll be fine. I can make you an extra appointment with a consultant, if you-He puts on his socks, then his shoes. Calm, methodical movement, how important it is, it gets it right. Of course. His voice is soft now. Alarmingly empty. Whatever it is. It's scary anything. It's a steel door slapped in my face. I'm used to getting this from my daughter, not Connor. But he grows up, becomes his own man. I'm no longer his hideout. Now I'm in his way. It hurts. I have to take a breath from the cold that cuts through me. Who is this? I ask him. He doesn't stop at tying his shoelaces. Why? What are you going to do, beat them? . I say. It really is. I hear a very real shiver in my voice at the end. So is he. He's looking up fast. I can't read what's on his face and he turns his head again so fast that it's a blur. It was easier when we moved, he says. When we shouldn't have just taken it. I know. Do you want to move? I thought you liked being in one place. Yes, I mean, I like the idea. He just sits back with a sigh, but doesn't look at me. I'm going to Reggie's house after school, remember? He says it like we've already agreed on it. We didn't. But I just nodded and let him go. My son must feel like he has something to look forward to. Call When do you get there? I'm doing it. Not an order. He looks relieved. Of course, Mum. He gets up. I think I should eat something. That's a good call. I want to hold him, but I see he doesn't want to. My heart aches for him. I'm so afraid the whole world is going to hurt him, but I can't stop the whole world. I know I can't. Maybe that's the worst part. By the time Connor is over for breakfast, my daughter is shuffling dark hair around her face. She's wearing a fuzzy red robe with a caricature of Dracula all over it. She yawns so wide that I can check her almonds. Damn, she says. School again? Again, I agree. Eggs? Of course, she says. Coffee? The elixir of life with lots of cream and sugar coming up. We eat like family. It's expensive for me, even if it's not for half-sleep children; I need to hurry Lenny when she wants to dent. If I don't ride the herd, they'll both miss the bus, and Sam should be on the way. I share a sweet kiss with Sam at the door. I read regret in his eyes. We missed our short privacy window today. Today, I hope. If nothing comes. Sam? I'm calling for him. He turns back on the road to his truck. Be careful. So many rules, he says, and flashes my smile. Dawn breaks behind the trees, and he bathes everything in a friendly, soft light. It glitters from the glass of our car and truck windows, and for a second I think I'm imagining things because the bright red spot on Sam's chest seems so out of place. I feel like my heart starts hammering before I work out what it is. By then, the laser point is moving. Sam! The anxiety in my voice is clear, but I can say that he doesn't know what I'm warning him about. I'm going to scream down when the side window of his truck goes milky white as security glass crazes. There's a quarter-sized hole in the center. The boom shot echoed over the hills behind the house. The adrenaline hits me hard and I start the door before checking myself out. Sam's not injured, but he's an open target. He dived, but he's clearly looking for the origin of the shot. I'm screaming. Wow! He rushes outside the door. The shot came from behind the house, and above. Someone in line at the tree. Someone wanted me to see that he had a ball on Sam, and could put a round through Sam's chest as easily as through that window. Jesus Christ, says Sam. He sounds remarkably calm, though his face paled. I didn't see him. I'm pulling him out of the porch. You'll slam the door. Drop the locks. Attract the alarm with lightning strikes of my trembling fingers. Children bolted from their bedrooms and stand frozen, faces sharply anxiously. Back out of the windows. I tell them, pointing to the kitchen. Get in a safe room and stay down! Mom, was it a shot? Lenny asks. Get in a safe room now! She grabs her brother and drags him in that direction. I'm desperate to look Sam up and down for any wounds. It amazes people that way sometimes that in a rush of adrenaline they don't feel shot. But he's not bleeding. The sniper had him labeled dead to the right and then deliberately missed him. Warning. Are you okay? I ask him. He looks at me with the same strange calmness. Aside from wishing I took more car insurance? Are you sure. He missed. He didn't miss it. He had a laser sight on his chest. And you know laser sights at this distance are, says Sam. Bullet curve. He puts his hands on my shoulders and then moves them into the cup of my face. Gwen. Breathe. It's all right, it's just a window. No, I say. I turn away, grab my cell phone, and quickly dial Norton's police. 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