



STARLING

PILOT FURY

Written by

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First Draft

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TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM — NIGHT

Moonlight spills across tangled sheets.

Framed ultrasound photos on the nightstand.

A pair of black reading glasses rest neatly atop a folded book: BABY NAMES.

A phone vibrates on the dresser — silenced, face down.

MICHAEL (30s), shirtless, scarred — alert even at rest.

LAUREN (28), sharp-eyed, composed.

They lie close, breathing in sync. Michael pulls her closer. She smiles, half-asleep.

MICHAEL

So, this is what I'm thinking. Two kids. A boy and a girl.

LAUREN

And a dog. You keep forgetting the dog.

They laugh, kiss. A fleeting moment of happiness.

A LOUD CRACK downstairs.

The future shatters.

INT. STAIRWELL / LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

Michael descends. The house creaks.

Suddenly the front door CRASHES inward. Three masked men charge in, knives and crowbars gleaming.

Michael fights, desperate. A blade stabs into his side. He collapses, alive but bleeding.

INT. BEDROOM — NIGHT

Lauren SCREAMS. Two men drag her; one ransacks the dresser.

MASKED MAN #1
Shut her up! We've got a lookout
outside!

INT. LIVING ROOM – NIGHT

The burglars drag Lauren downstairs. Michael groans on the floor.

The door EXPLODES inward again – this time by force.

LIEUTENANT DAWN HUDSON (early 30s) storms in, gun raised. Striking red hair and piercing hazel-green eyes. Worldly, sense of purpose. Command radiates from her voice.

DAWN
Starling PD! Drop it!

Behind her, ROHAN VARMA (38) (Mohican), CHRIS REINHARDT (35), and STEPHANIE TAYLOR (33) fan out.

One robber panics, opens fire.

GUNFIGHT ERUPTS.

Bullets shred drywall. Glass bursts. Officers return fire. One robber drops screaming, another collapses when Rohan hits his shoulder with his sidearm.

The third man grips Lauren with a knife to her throat.

MASKED MAN #3
Nobody moves or she dies!

Dawn steadies her aim, voice cold as steel.

DAWN
You're done. This is your last
chance.

His resolve cracks. He lets Lauren go. The knife clatters to the floor.

Officers cuff the men. Lauren rushes to Michael, clutching him as he groans in pain.

Dawn lowers her weapon, steps back toward the kitchen. Her eyes sweep the wreckage. Broken furniture, blood, shattered glass. The weight hits her.

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

DETECTIVE SEN CHOO (30s), a Korean-American pulls up.

Across the street, a FIGURE stiffens.

He clocks the car.

Turns.

Runs.

Gone.

Choo climbs out and walks to the front door. As he opens it...

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

One suspect is on his knees, cuffed.

Another masked man, WOUNDED, not yet secured, leans against the wall.

Chris turns to assist Lauren.

In a flash, the wounded man lunges.

His hand SLAMS into Chris, grabbing the grip of Chris's sidearm.

CHRIS

Gun!

The suspect rips the weapon free, spins, fires.

The shot blasts past Chris.

Choo, just inside the doorway, dives, but he's exposed.

Dawn raises her sidearm at the man's masked face.

DAWN

Drop it, now!

The suspect swings the gun toward Choo.

DAWN (cont'd)

Choo! Look out!

Dawn fires once, precisely. The man goes down, lifeless.

Silence crashes over the room.

Dawn's hand trembles.

She stares at the smoking barrel of her gun.

SMASH TO BLACK.

END TEASER

ACT ONE

INT. HOUSE — NIGHT

Choo and Rohan approach Dawn.

Choo reaches for her weapon.

Her hands tremble as she gives it up. Her knees buckle.
Rohan catches her before she falls.

ROHAN

I've got you, boss. We've got you.

CHOO

You'll meet with your lawyer, PAUL?

DAWN

Yeah.

ROHAN

There'll be an interview. Internal
Affairs. Homicide. Auditor.
Not sure if BONNIE can be involved.

DAWN

I know the protocol.
Let's just get it over with.

ROHAN

I need your sidearm. And your body
cam.

DAWN

I know. And my badge.

She hands everything over.

They guide her out as PARAMEDICS load Michael onto a
stretcher. Lauren walks alongside him.

ROHAN

You won't be able to speak to them.

Lauren hears, stops.

LAUREN

I will testify. Lieutenant Hudson
acted appropriately.

CHOO
That's enough, Mrs. Lasher.

LAUREN
No. She saved my husband's life.

Rohan nods, measured.

ROHAN
I'll note it.

They move on.

EXT. HOUSE — NIGHT

Rohan opens the rear door of his cruiser. Dawn slides into the back.

INT. ROHAN'S CRUISER — NIGHT

Dawn closes her eyes.

ROHAN
This is the first time you've fired
your weapon in fourteen years.
You'll get through this.

DAWN
How do I tell my family?

ROHAN
You will.

EXT. STARLING PD — NIGHT

Rohan opens the cruiser door. Dawn steps out.

DAWN
Can we do this tomorrow?

ROHAN
You know the drill.

DAWN
Yeah. Thanks for making me human.

ROHAN
Always.

INT. STARLING PD – CONFERENCE ROOM – EVENING

Dawn sits alone.

COMMANDER PETER BROWN (40s African American) enters with
CHIEF MARIE PATERSON (40s African American the first black
female chief of police).

MARIE

This is procedural. Your team will be
interviewed. Mental health, fitness
for duty – everything.

DAWN

My allergies. My grief. None of that
changed what happened. I was
protecting Choo. My body cam will
show it.

MARIE

How's your head?

DAWN

Clear.
There's no timeline on grief.
But the man was firing. I acted.

Marie studies her – then nods.

MARIE

Okay. Rohan, Chris, Choo, and
Stephanie will be interviewed next.

PETER

Dawn, just take it one day at a time.
Go home. Your leave starts now. What
you do on it, is your business. Why
don't you and Choo get some dinner.
The IA hearing won't be until
tomorrow. Choo, take her straight
home after.

CHOO

Yes, boss.

CUT TO:

INT. LUNA CAFE – EVENING

The cafe is decorated in moon and stars theme. Dawn and Choo
sit at their favorite table. The table is shaped like the
moon.

It bears a full giant moon on the table in gloss coating. The lamp above is also moon shaped and gives off the glow of the moon.

A plate of food rests in front of her, untouched except for a few distracted stabs of her fork. Choo has already made a dent in his sandwich, chewing slow, watching her.

CHOO

You haven't taken more than one bite.

DAWN

(staring at her plate)
I'm not really hungry.

Choo sets his sandwich down, studying her.

CHOO

You should really eat. I mean if I know you, and I think I do, you only had a plain muffin for breakfast and a Pepsi.

She leans back against the booth, arms crossed tight. And nods to him with a smirk.

DAWN

You know me too well. It's not supposed to feel like this.

CHOO

Like what?

DAWN

Like I'm the one who did something wrong. I keep replaying it. Over and over. Him dropping. The sound. His face.

Choo lets the silence hang, then leans forward.

CHOO

Huds, you did your job. You stopped a man who was hurting people.

Dawn shakes her head, voice barely above a whisper.

DAWN

Yeah but, I just feel, I don't know if there is a word to explain how I feel! How do I tell my family? How do I tell Austin?

CHOO

You will figure out how to tell them.

DAWN

Yeah. You know, when I killed Rick Cane and Tony McQuade, that was different. That was survival. This time I pulled the trigger before he could even—

Her voice cracks. She grips the edge of the table.

DAWN (cont'd)

What if I could've stopped him another way?

Choo's voice stays calm, steady, anchoring her.

CHOO

He pulled a weapon. You had seconds. You didn't choose wrong. You chose life. Mine. Everyone else's.

A WAITRESS approaches, smiling nervously.

WAITRESS

Lieutenant Hudson?

Dawn looks up, startled.

WAITRESS (cont'd)
I just wanted to say... thank you. For
what you did. We're all safer because
of you.

DAWN
Thank you.

The waitress leaves. Dawn exhales, shaking her head.

DAWN (cont'd)
They don't understand.

CHOO
They don't have to.

Before Dawn can answer, an OLDER MAN passing their booth
stops.

OLDER MAN
Lieutenant, I heard about it on the
news. Took guts, standing your
ground. Starling needs more like you.

Dawn stiffens. She mutters something resembling "thanks."

The man pats her on the shoulder and moves on. Dawn looks at
Choo, almost pleading.

DAWN
You see? They think I'm some kind of
hero. But all I feel is—

She struggles for the word.

DAWN (cont'd)
Empty.

Choo leans forward, lowering his voice.

CHOO
Empty is normal. First time you take
a life on duty... it's not glory. It's
weight. It stays with you.

Her hands tremble around her fork.

Choo's phone BUZZES. He checks the screen.

CHOO (cont'd)
It's MAGGIE, my wife.

He answers, voice softening immediately.

CHOO (cont'd)
Hey, love. (pause, listening) Yeah.
She's right here.

Choo lowers the phone, nodding at Dawn.

CHOO (cont'd)
She wants to talk to you.

Dawn hesitates, then takes the phone.

DAWN
(quiet)
Hello?

MAGGIE (O.S.)
Dawn. I just wanted to thank you. For
what you did. You kept Sen safe. You
kept others safe.

DAWN
I don't... I don't feel like thanks is
what I deserve.

MAGGIE (O.S.)
That's what makes you the kind of
officer we trust. You carry it.
(MORE)

MAGGIE (O.S.) (cont'd)
You care. Don't let the guilt eat you
alive.

DAWN
Thank you, Maggie.

She hands the phone back to Choo quickly, afraid her voice
will crack. Choo takes it, gives her a reassuring look, then
finishes the call.

Dawn stares at her untouched plate, eyes distant.

CHOO
One day you'll eat again without
thinking about it. For now — just
breathe.

She nods faintly, not trusting her voice.

The diner hums around them. Life moves on.
Dawn does not.

Her fork CLINKS as she forces herself to take a small bite.

Choo watches — says nothing.

DAWN
I killed him.

Her phone VIBRATES.

Names flash across the screen —
AUSTIN. JACOB. ALANA. JACKIE. BONNIE. FRANK. TRUDY.

Dawn turns the phone so Choo can see.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. CHOO'S CRUISER — NIGHT

Silence.

Dawn sits in the passenger seat. Off-duty. Disarmed.

Her phone lights up again.

A text buzzes through.

AUSTIN: Mom?? Are you okay??

Another.

JACOB: I'm on my way if you need me.

Another.

TRUDY: You're not alone. We're here.

The phone doesn't stop.

Dawn stares straight ahead.

Choo drives. He clocks the screen lighting up — again and again.

Silence stretches.

DAWN
(quiet)
They already know.

CHOO
Yeah. Perhaps you should answer.

DAWN
I can't. I, I need a moment to...
breathe.

She flips the phone face down but it keeps vibrating against her leg.

DAWN (cont'd)
This is going to get ugly. They'll
dig. They'll want answers from me.

She looks at him — not for comfort. For understanding.

CHOO

I know.

A pause.

CHOO (cont'd)

As your partner, I've got your six.
I'm right here. Do you want me to
come in with you?

Dawn swallows. Considers it.

DAWN

No. Thank you. I've got this.

Choo nods.

CHOO

Call me if you need anything.
I mean anything, Huds.

DAWN

I will.

The cruiser slows.

EXT. DAWN'S HOUSE — NIGHT

Choo pulls to the curb.

Dawn looks up. Her eyes widen.

Cars line the street.

Not police. Not media.

Family.

Bonnie's car.

Jackie's.

Alana's.

Her father's truck.

Lights glow inside the house.

Movement behind the curtains.

Dawn exhales — shaky. Not fear. Relief colliding with
exhaustion.

Choo follows her gaze. Understands immediately.

CHOO
They beat us here.

Dawn nods, emotion threatening.

DAWN
Of course they did.

She opens the door.

EXT. DAWN'S HOUSE — CONTINUOUS

Dawn steps out of the cruiser.

The phone vibrates again in her hand.

She doesn't answer.

She pockets it.

Choo watches her for a moment — steady, protective.

CHOO
I'll be close.

DAWN
I know.

She closes the door gently.

Choo waits until she's inside — then pulls away.

INT. DAWN'S HOUSE — ENTRYWAY — NIGHT

The front door opens.

Dawn steps inside.

She stops short. Austin runs right to her.

AUSTIN
Mom! You're home. You scared us,
really scared us!

DAWN
I know, I'm sorry. After everything
happened, I just needed some time,
you understand?

AUSTIN

I think so. I may be seventeen but I think I get it.

BONNIE. JACKIE. ALANA. FRANK. All there. they surround her as she is still with Austin, her only son.

Trudy moves in from the kitchen.

Jacob stands from the couch.

For a moment, no one speaks.

Then Bonnie crosses the room and pulls Dawn into a hug.

Tight. Immediate.

Before Dawn can say a word –

BONNIE

Don't ever do that to us again.

Dawn exhales against her sister's shoulder.

DAWN

I'm sorry. I just needed to breathe. Choo took me to get a bite. I didn't eat. I just, I can't believe it's real.

Jackie joins the hug. Then Alana.

It becomes a pile-on.

Frank watches, eyes wet.

Finally, he steps forward and wraps his arms around all of them.

FRANK

You scared the hell out of us.

Dawn nods, voice barely there.

DAWN

I know.

They break apart.

They sit.

No one rushes her.

JACKIE

You okay?

DAWN

I don't know yet.

ALANA

That's an acceptable answer.

BONNIE

We weren't mad you didn't call.

Dawn looks up.

BONNIE (cont'd)

We were mad we couldn't get to you.

That lands.

FRANK

I raised you to be strong.

Dawn stiffens — then she softens.

FRANK (cont'd)

I didn't raise you to be alone.

Dawn swallows.

DAWN

I didn't want you seeing me like that.

JACKIE

Too bad.

A faint smile flickers.

JACKIE (cont'd)

This is what family's for.

Silence settles, not awkward. Shared.

ALANA

What happens now?

DAWN

IA. Interviews. Waiting. leave. Probably unpaid. I surrendered my badge, my sidearm. I feel, naked.

BONNIE

Then we wait with you. And I bet you fell naked. But Dawn, we got you.

FRANK nods.

FRANK
However long it takes.

Dawn's eyes fill. She looks away.

DAWN
I killed him.

No one flinches.

FRANK
You stopped him.

Trudy appears with a mug of tea. Hands it to Dawn.

TRUDY
Drink.

Dawn takes it.

Holds it.

Grounded.

Later, after everyone leaves and Jacob, Austin, and Trudy are in bed, Dawn goes back to the living room.

INT. DAWN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM NIGHT

She sinks onto the couch, elbows on her knees.
Stares at the floor.

Her hands tremble.

She presses them together.
Hard.

INT. DAWN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - PRE-DAWN

Darkness.

A GUNSHOT ECHOES -

Dawn BOLTS upright, gasping.

She's on the couch, drenched in sweat, breath ragged.
For a split second she's back there, the foyer, the muzzle flash, the body dropping.

Her hands tremble.

She presses her palms into her thighs, grounding herself.

Footsteps.

Jacob appears in the doorway, half-awake, instantly alert.

JACOB

Dawn?

She doesn't answer.

He crosses the room, kneels in front of her.

JACOB (cont'd)

You didn't come to bed.

She blinks, still caught somewhere else.

DAWN

(quiet)

I didn't want to wake you.

Jacob studies her, the distance, the coldness.

He gently takes her hands.

JACOB

You don't have to do this alone.
Not with me.

Her breath finally breaks.

DAWN

I keep seeing it. I close my eyes and
it's—

(shakes her head)

I didn't even dream. I was just...
there again.

Jacob pulls her into him.

Not tight.

She lets herself lean into his chest. For one moment, she's
not a lieutenant. She's not a headline. She's just his wife.

JACOB

I know you. And I know when you go
quiet like this, it means you're
hurting more than you'll say.

She closes her eyes.

DAWN
I killed him.

Jacob doesn't flinch.
Doesn't correct her.
Doesn't argue.

He just holds her.

JACOB
I know.

A long silence.

JACOB (cont'd)
I'm here. I'm not going anywhere.

Dawn nods against him, small, exhausted. She rises from the couch and goes to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN — DAWN

Gray light creeps in through the windows.

Dawn stands at the counter, Jacob nearby.
He watches without hovering.

She pours hot water into a mug.
Tea bag.
Steam rises.

On the counter:
A wrapped muffin.
Untouched.

Jacob notices.
Says nothing.

Dawn takes a sip of tea.
Winces — too hot — but keeps drinking.

Her phone RINGS.

They both freeze.

She answers.

DAWN
Hudson.

INVESTIGATOR (O.C.)
Lieutenant Hudson. I'm a private
investigator for the department.
(MORE)

INVESTIGATOR (O.C.) (cont'd)
My name is Phil Pritchett. I'd like
you to come in this morning for a
meeting.

DAWN
I understand.

PHIL(O.C.)
You're not under arrest. This is a
formal interview. You may bring
counsel. After my part is finished,
IA may take over. It depends on owner
MEGAN DELCO. But she's hired me on to
conduct an internal investigation.
She wants this to be done thoroughly.

DAWN
Okay, I'll be there.

The call ends.

Dawn lowers the phone.

Her phone buzzes, it's Choo.

Choo: I'll be there shortly.

She looks down at herself, sweatpants, T-shirt.

Jacob follows her gaze.

JACOB
You want me to drive you?

She shakes her head gently.

DAWN
Choo's coming.

Jacob nods. He walks her out after she properly dresses in
her uniform.

EXT. DAWN'S HOUSE — MORNING

A cruiser pulls up.

Choo steps out. Takes one look at Dawn, understands.

Jacob stands beside her.
Protective.

CHOO
Morning.

DAWN
Hey.

Jacob kisses her forehead, soft, reverent.

JACOB
I'll be here when you get back.

Dawn nods.

INT. CHOO'S CRUISER — MORNING

Dawn settles into the passenger seat, tea in hand.
No muffin.

Choo pulls away.

Jacob watches from the doorway until the cruiser disappears.

Dawn stares out the window, braced, carrying the weight but
not alone.

CUT TO:

EXT. STARLING PRECINCT — DAY

Choo's cruiser pulls into the lot.

Dawn and Choo sit for a few moments after the engine cuts.
Neither is in a rush.

Choo glances over at her.

CHOO
No matter what happens in there,
Huds, I've got you. The team's got
you.

She meets his eyes.

CHOO (cont'd)
We've got your six. Always. It's what
we do.

Dawn nods once.

They step out of the cruiser.

INT. STARLING PRECINCT — CONTINUOUS

The building hums with familiar noise.
Phones ringing.
Footsteps.
Voices.

Dawn walks beside Choo through it all. A place she knows by heart, now suddenly unfamiliar.

They reach the hallway where paths split.

Choo slows.

CHOO
I'll be right here after.

DAWN
I know.

They part ways.

INT. WOMEN'S LOCKER ROOM — DAY

Quiet.

Dawn steps inside, closing the door behind her.

The hum of the precinct fades.

She moves to her locker.
Opens it.

Inside:
Photos of her and Jacob and Austin line the door. Some of her and Luke. There are her spare notepads from her nephew Brian. Some pens with sayings that Austin bought her. Photos of her and Trudy, Rachel, WILLIAM (Trudy's deceased Husband) even. And her and K9 OFFICER CHARLOTTE RINNING.

She stares at everything, then gently closes the locker without touching anything.

Dawn sinks onto the bench.
Lets out a slow breath.

For the first time since the shooting, she is alone.

She closes her eyes.

Just for a moment.

CUT TO:

INT. STARLING PRECINCT — INTERVIEW ROOM — DAY

A sterile room. Plain walls. A table. A recording device.

Rohan, Choo, Chris, and Stephanie sit across from Phil, clipped, professional.

The Interviewer leans forward.

PHIL

I'm Investigator Phil Pritchett. Let's address the concern directly. Lieutenant Hudson's mental health. Has her grieving compromised her judgment in the field?

Rohan doesn't hesitate.

ROHAN

She's grieving, yes. She lost Luke. She lost Rachel. That doesn't make her reckless.

STEPHANIE

It makes her sharper. She's the most disciplined officer I've worked with.

Choo leans in.

CHOO

When she fired, it wasn't anger or panic. The suspect was about to shoot me. She saved my life.

The Interviewer writes. Watches them.

PHIL

So you're saying Lieutenant Hudson acted out of necessity.

ROHAN

Without hesitation. Her judgment was sound.

A pause.

The Interviewer clicks his pen shut.

PHIL

Detective Reinhardt. You were present.

CHRIS

The suspect had a clear shot on Choo.
Seconds mattered. Dawn reacted. It
was fast. It was precise. It was
necessary.

Phil nods once.

Before he can speak again—

The door OPENS.

Two INTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICERS enter. Calm. Controlled.

IA OFFICER #1

This interview is now under Internal
Affairs jurisdiction.

The Interviewer stiffens but steps back.

IA OFFICER #2

We'll continue from here.

The room shifts. No one relaxes.

Stephanie folds her arms.

STEPHANIE

You already heard the truth.

IA OFFICER #1

We'll decide that.

Lauren stands beside Chief Marie Paterson, focused, steady,
she gestures to a wall of monitors.

LAUREN

The house had a Razor camera system.
Full-angle coverage.

She taps a keyboard.

Footage appears. Dawn in frame. Weapon raised. The suspect's
gun visible.

Lauren watches it silently.

MARIE

This supports her account.

Lauren exhales. The IA officers sit at the table now. Files
open. Recording device blinking.

The door opens again.

Dawn steps inside.

Every eye in the room lifts.

She takes in the scene, the files, the recorder, the weight of it.

She takes the chair opposite the IA Interviewer measured, unreadable.

IA INTERVIEWER
Lieutenant Hudson. For the record,
state your name and badge number.

DAWN
Lieutenant. Dawn Hudson. Badge
number; 9785.

The interviewer nods, clicks a pen.

IA INTERVIEWER
You understand this is a voluntary
interview. You are not under arrest.

DAWN
I understand.

IA INTERVIEWER
And you've been advised of your
rights.

DAWN
Yes.

IA INTERVIEWER
Walk me through what happened
from the moment you entered the
house.

Dawn exhales slowly.

DAWN
We breached.
Suspects scattered.
One went down.
Two complied.

Her voice is steady. Professional.

DAWN (cont'd)
I stepped back toward the kitchen.
(MORE)

DAWN (cont'd)
That's when I heard movement at the front.

The room feels smaller.

DAWN (cont'd)
I moved into the foyer.
That's when I saw him.

She closes her eyes.

DAWN (cont'd)
The suspect wasn't secured fully like we all thought. He grabbed Chris' gun. Choo was entering the home.

The interviewer watches her closely.

IA INTERVIEWER
Lieutenant, open your eyes.

Dawn startles slightly.
Opens them.

IA INTERVIEWER (cont'd)
Don't relive it. Tell me what you saw.

Dawn swallows.

DAWN
I saw intent. I saw a clear line of fire. I knew if I hesitated, Choo would be dead.

A pause.

IA INTERVIEWER
You didn't issue a verbal command.

DAWN
I did. I said... drop it, now! He refused and proceeded to fire at Detective Choo!

The interviewer writes.

IA INTERVIEWER
You're certain of that?

DAWN
Yes.

She blows out a few breaths.

DAWN (cont'd)
I didn't fire because I wanted to.
I fired because I had to.

The interviewer studies her.

IA INTERVIEWER
How does it feel — taking a life for
the first time?

Dawn doesn't answer immediately.

She looks at the table.
The recorder.
Her hands.

DAWN
It feels heavy.

She looks up.

DAWN (cont'd)
I don't regret protecting my partner.
But I will carry what I did, for the
rest of my life.

The interviewer lets the silence stretch.

IA INTERVIEWER
No further questions. For now.

He clicks off the recorder.

The red light dies.

Dawn exhales, but the weight does not lift.

INT. STARLING PRECINCT — INTERVIEW ROOM — DAY

Dawn sits still, shoulders squared, eyes forward.
She hasn't relaxed, not for a second.

The IA Interviewer closes the file.

IA INTERVIEWER
That's all for now.

A moment.

The door opens.

PAUL MARTIN (40s), sharp, controlled, steps inside.
Suit immaculate. Eyes already reading the room.

He gives Dawn a look, not emotional but comforting.
Reassuring.

IA INTERVIEWER (cont'd)
And you are?

PAUL
Paul Martin. Counsel for Lieutenant
Hudson.

The IA interviewer nods, unsurprised.

IA INTERVIEWER
We'll be reviewing all evidence.
Body cam. Civilian footage. We'll be
in touch.

PAUL
You'll direct all further
communication through me.

The IA interviewer closes the file.

IA INTERVIEWER
Understood.

The IA officers rise and exit.

The door shuts.

Only Dawn and Paul now.

Paul sits beside her.

PAUL
You did fine.

She doesn't look at him.

DAWN
I killed him.

Paul doesn't flinch.

PAUL
You protected your partner.
There's a difference.

Dawn exhales, not relief.
Just air leaving lungs that have been tight for hours.

PAUL (cont'd)
For the record, state your name and
badge number.

She looks at him now.

DAWN
Dawn Hudson.
Lieutenant.
Badge number; 9785.

Paul nods.

PAUL
You're on administrative leave.
No contact with witnesses. No
statements. No interviews.

DAWN
I know, Paul.

PAUL
Good. Just reiterating what Marie
told me to tell you. Because they're
going to test them.

He stands.

PAUL (cont'd)
Go home. Be with your family. I'll
handle the rest. Bonnie is super
worried about you as is everyone
else. They will probably be there
when you get home.

Dawn rises slowly.

PAUL (cont'd)
And Dawn —

She pauses.

PAUL (cont'd)
You don't owe anyone your pain.
Not today.

She nods once.

INT. STARLING PRECINCT — HALLWAY — DAY

Dawn walks alone now.

The precinct hums around her, phones ringing, laughter from a nearby bullpen, boots on linoleum. Life moving forward, indifferent.

She slows near the WALL OF HEROES by the exit.

Gold stars line the white wall. Neat. Polished. Final.

Dawn steps closer.

Her fingers hover... then settle on a single name. Centered. Bottom fourth row.

SAMANTHA CYNTHIA HUDSON 1990–2008

She presses her thumb gently beneath the star, as if afraid it might disappear if she lets go.

DAWN
(under her breath)
You should've been here longer.

An officer brushes past behind her. The world snaps back into focus.

Dawn straightens, drops her hand, and squares her shoulders.

She takes one last look.

Then she turns and walks out.

She reaches the exit.
Stops.

Her hand brushes instinctively toward her hip.

Nothing.

Then steps forward.

EXT. STARLING PRECINCT – DAY

Dawn exits into the daylight.

Across the lot, Choo watches from a distance. Doesn't approach.

Dawn meets his gaze.

A nod. She walks on.

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. ICE RINK — AFTERNOON SAME DAY

The sound of skates cutting ice.
Pucks slamming boards.

Austin skates hard. Focused. Angry.

Dawn watches from the glass.

A parent nearby whispers, not quiet enough.

PARENT

That's her.

Another parent glances over. Then looks away.

Dawn feels it. Pretends not to.

Austin misses a pass. Slams his stick against the boards.

The COACH blows a whistle.

COACH

Austin. Take a lap.

Austin looks toward the glass. Sees his mom watching. He skates off, lips pursed.

Dawn doesn't move. But her hands curl into fists.

Austin skates hard. Too hard.

His movements are aggressive, unfocused.

He misses a pass.

Slams his stick against the boards.

COACH TRENT MCGINNY (50s), weathered, steady, blows his whistle.

COACH MCGINNY

Austin. Bench.

Austin skates off, jaw clenched.

Dawn watches from behind the glass.

Still. Silent.

Around her —

Parents whisper.

Phones are checked.

A conversation dies mid-sentence as she approaches. She hears those words again.

PARENT (WHISPERED)
That's her. Killer. She's killed a
guy. Just killed him!

Another parent shifts uncomfortably.

Dawn pretends not to hear.

She's used to eyes on her, just not like this.

On the ice, Austin watches his teammates skate.

Coach McGinny signals another drill, then skates over to Austin.

INT. ICE RINK — BENCH — MOMENTS LATER

Coach McGinny crouches beside Austin.

COACH MCGINNY
You're not in trouble.

Austin doesn't look at him.

COACH MCGINNY (cont'd)
I know it's... a lot right now.

Austin's jaw tightens.

AUSTIN
Everyone's talking.

Coach McGinny nods.

COACH MCGINNY
Yeah. They are. Your mom did her job.
Sometimes that job gets messy. That
doesn't make her a bad person.

Austin finally looks up.

AUSTIN
They act like she is.

Coach McGinny exhales.

COACH MCGINNY

People get scared when they don't understand something. And fear makes folks say stupid things. You don't owe anyone answers. Not here. Not on this ice. Not on this team. Anyone gives you any trouble about this, come to me.

Austin swallows and nods.

COACH MCGINNY (cont'd)

But I need you focused out there. For you. Not for them.

Austin nods.

COACH MCGINNY (cont'd)

Take a lap. Then you're back in.

Austin steps onto the ice again.

Dawn watches this exchange from afar. her hands relax.

Practice ends.

Players filter out.

Parents gather their kids.

Some nod politely to Dawn.

Some don't.

One mother pulls her son closer as they pass.

Austin notices.

Dawn notices him noticing.

AUSTIN

See, this is happening more now. I am so glad I am home schooled.

DAWN

I'm so sorry. I keep wishing I could go back. But Austin, if they give you any trouble -

AUSTIN

Coach said go to him. I will tell you.

She hugs him and pulls him closer to her. She kisses him on his forehead.

EXT. ICE RINK — PARKING LOT — DAY

Practice ends.

Players filter out.

Parents gather their kids. Laughter, chatter, the ordinary noise of a Saturday afternoon.

Some parents nod politely to Dawn.

Some don't.

One mother pulls her son closer as they pass.

Austin notices.

Dawn notices him noticing.

AUSTIN

See? This is happening more now. I'm so glad I'm home schooled. Can you imagine?

DAWN

I know. I keep wishing I could go back. But Austin, if they give you any trouble—

AUSTIN

Coach said go to him. I will tell you.

She hugs him. Pulls him close. Kisses his forehead.

They turn toward the parking lot—

MAN (O.S.)

Must be nice. Getting away with murder.

Dawn stops, turns.

A man near a pickup truck. Watching. Waiting.

MAN

Badge doesn't make you untouchable.

Phones come up.

A half-filled coffee cup is already in the air.

Dawn reacts instantly, she twists, pulls Austin into her, turning her body...

The coffee SLAMS into her neck and jaw.

Steam. A sharp gasp.

Dawn stumbles but keeps her arms locked around Austin.

No one moves.

Austin looks up – then sees it.

Her skin is already reddening. Angry. Blistering.

DAWN
(low, controlled)
Austin... stay with me.

Her knees buckle. She drops to one knee, one hand braced on the asphalt.

AUSTIN
(screaming)
Someone help! Call 911!

No one steps forward.

They're all filming.

Austin's breath goes ragged. He fumbles for his phone, hands shaking so badly he almost drops it.

He dials.

AUSTIN (cont'd)
(into phone)
My mom– she's hurt– she's burning–
please– We are at Fraser ice Arena on
Utica and Fifteen mile. HURRY!

Dawn grips his jacket, grounding herself, fighting the wave of pain.

From the rink doors–

Coach McGinny and several TEAMMATES rush out, skates slung over shoulders.

COACH
Hey– hey! Back up! Give her space!

A parent from the opposing team kneels beside Dawn, pulling off their jacket, gently pressing it against her neck.

OPPOSING PARENT
Stay still. This will help. Keep it pressed.

Dawn's breathing is tight now. Focused. Trained.

She looks at Austin — terrified, trying to be brave.

DAWN
You did good.

Sirens grow louder.

The phones keep rolling.

This is already everywhere.

CUT TO:

INT. STARLING PD — PRESS ROOM — LATE AFTERNOON — SAME DAY

Cameras flash.

Reporters murmur.

Chief Marie Paterson steps to the podium.

Composed. Controlled.

MARIE
This department is aware of the officer-involved shooting that occurred two nights ago. The investigation is ongoing.

A REPORTER raises a hand.

REPORTER
Is Lieutenant Dawn Hudson still on active duty?

MARIE
Lieutenant Hudson has been placed on administrative leave, per protocol.

Another reporter.

REPORTER
Was the shooting justified?

Marie doesn't miss a beat.

MARIE
That determination will be made
following a full review. At this
time, no charges have been filed.

Cameras CLICK.

Voices overlap.

MARIE (cont'd)
We ask the public to allow the
process to proceed without
speculation.

She steps away.

No Dawn.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — BURN UNIT — NIGHT

Muted lights.

Monitors hum softly.

Dawn lies propped up in a hospital bed.

Her neck and jaw are carefully bandaged.

A cup of untouched tea sits on the tray beside her.

Austin sits in a chair near the bed, scrolling his phone.

He stops.

Locks it.

Dawn watches him.

DAWN
You okay?

Austin shrugs.

AUSTIN
Coach benched me for a minute.

Dawn shifts slightly — winces, then steadies.

DAWN
Why?

AUSTIN
I was playing angry.

She nods.

Understands.

DAWN
I'm sorry this is spilling into your
life.

Austin finally looks at her.

AUSTIN
Did you have a choice?

The question hangs.

DAWN
No.

Austin processes that.

AUSTIN
Then... I guess they'll just have to
deal with it.

Dawn's eyes sting.

She looks away.

The door opens softly.

DR. KERRY ELLSWORTH (50s) steps in, calm, practiced.

DR. ELLSWORTH
Swelling's stable. Pain manageable?

DAWN
I've had worse.

He almost smiles.

DR. ELLSWORTH
Of course you have.

He checks her chart.

DR. ELLSWORTH (cont'd)
We'll keep you overnight. No surgery.
But you'll need follow-up care.

Dawn nods.

DR. ELLSWORTH (cont'd)
And rest.

He glances at Austin.

DR. ELLSWORTH (cont'd)
Both of you.

He exits.

Austin stands, hesitates – then leans in and hugs her carefully.

Dawn closes her eyes, absorbing it.

The lights are lower now.

Austin sleeps curled in the chair, jacket pulled up.

Dawn lies awake.

Her phone lights up on the tray.

A NEWS ALERT:

COMMUNITY REACTS TO OFFICER-INVOLVED SHOOTING

She doesn't open it.

She turns the phone face down.

Outside the window, distant sirens echo – the city going on.

Dawn closes her eyes.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL – BURN UNIT – NIGHT

Dawn lies in bed, bandaged, exhausted but alert.

Austin sits close, chair pulled up beside her.

The door opens.

Jacob enters.

He looks wrecked – jacket off, sleeves rolled, phone still in his hand.

Dawn's eyes find him immediately.

DAWN

Hey.

Jacob crosses the room fast but careful – stops short of the bed, afraid to hurt her.

JACOB

Hey.

He leans down, kisses her forehead – just above the bandage.

JACOB (cont'd)

I'm sorry I'm late.

DAWN

You're here.

That's enough.

Jacob exhales, nods.

JACOB

It was chaos at the house.

Dawn tenses slightly.

DAWN

Media?

JACOB

Everywhere.

He runs a hand through his hair.

JACOB (cont'd)

Frank got there first.

Your sisters followed.

Trudy took control like she always does.

A beat.

JACOB (cont'd)

They blocked the driveway.

Covered the windows.

Frank stayed outside until the police showed.

Dawn closes her eyes, absorbing it.

DAWN

I didn't want them dealing with that.

JACOB

Too bad.

A gentle smile — protective, not joking.

JACOB (cont'd)

That's what family's for.

Austin looks between them.

AUSTIN

They wouldn't leave.

Jacob nods.

JACOB

I know.

He pulls a chair closer, finally sitting.

JACOB (cont'd)

They sent me here so you wouldn't worry.

Dawn opens her eyes again, searching his face.

DAWN

You okay?

Jacob hesitates — then answers honestly.

JACOB

I will be.

He reaches for her hand. She squeezes back.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — ROOM — MOMENTS LATER

The door opens again.

Bonnie, Alana, Jackie, Frank

And Trudy.

They don't rush the bed.

Frank steps forward first.

FRANK

There she is.

Dawn smiles faintly.

DAWN
Sorry to ruin everyone's night.

JACKIE
You should see the other guy.

Bonnie moves in, checking bandages with a practiced eye.

BONNIE
Doctor says you'll scar.

DAWN
I can live with that.

BONNIE
Good. Because you don't get a vote.

Alana stands at the foot of the bed.

ALANA
House is secure. Press is gone, for now.

Trudy sets a bag down on the counter.

TRUDY
I brought clean clothes. And your tea.

She pours it immediately, hands it to Dawn.

Dawn takes it. Holds it.

This is the first time since the parking lot that she feels steady.

Frank looks at her – really looks.

FRANK
You scared us.

DAWN
I know.

FRANK
But you're still here.

DAWN
Yeah.

He nods once.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — ROOM — LATER

The room is full now — but quiet.

Austin dozes off again.

Bonnie talks softly with the nurse.

Jacob sits with Dawn, hand never leaving hers.

Outside the window, flashing lights move past. Life goes on.

Dawn watches her family.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — BURN UNIT — DAY 2

Morning light filters through half-drawn blinds.

Dawn lies in bed, neck and jaw carefully dressed. Awake. Still.

A NURSE adjusts her IV.

On the side table:

Cards.

So many they're stacked in uneven piles.

Handwritten. Typed. Folded police stationery. Children's drawings.

The nurse smiles.

NURSE
You've got another delivery
downstairs.

DAWN
Already?

NURSE
Apparently, you're popular.

The nurse exits.

Dawn reaches for the top card. Hesitates. Sets it back down.
Overwhelmed.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — ROOM — LATER

Jacob enters, arms full — more cards, a small gift bag.

JACOB
I stopped counting at fifty.

Dawn exhales, incredulous.

DAWN
From who?

Jacob shrugs, starts laying them out.

JACOB
Cops. Neighbors. A second-grade class
from North Star Elementary.

Dawn picks up a card with crayon stick figures – a badge, a
cape.

She swallows.

AUSTIN
That one's my favorite.

Austin sits nearby, flipping through another stack.

AUSTIN
This guy says you taught his kid to
ride a bike once.

DAWN
I... don't remember that.

JACOB
He does.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL – ROOM – DAY (TV ON, MUTED)

A NEWS REPORT plays.

Lower-third chyron reads:

OFFICER PRAISED FOR BRAVERY IN RINK ATTACK

Footage of Dawn – blurred, respectful.

Statements from officials.

Words like hero, selfless, quick-thinking scroll by.

Dawn watches, detached. She turns the TV off.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT – NIGHT

A sparse room.

ART sits alone at a small table.

Bills stacked neatly.

An empty chair across from him.

A laptop glows.

On screen: the same news clip. Muted.

Dawn's image freezes mid-frame.

Art closes the laptop.

He reaches into the desk drawer and pulls out a folded card.

He stares at it – then sets it down, untouched.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL – BURN UNIT – NIGHT (DAY TWO)

Lights dimmer now.

Trudy sits near the bed, knitting quietly.

BONNIE reviews discharge paperwork with a DOCTOR.

ALANA scrolls her phone, reading headlines.

JACKIE leans against the wall, arms crossed.

FRANK sits closest to Dawn.

No one speaks for a moment.

FRANK
They're calling you a hero.

DAWN
I know.

FRANK
You don't sound thrilled.

DAWN
I'm not sure what I'm supposed to
feel.

Frank nods.

FRANK
Then don't rush it.

He reaches out, squeezes her hand.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT — NIGHT

Art stands at a window now.

Outside: city lights. Distant sirens.

He opens a drawer.

Inside:

A photo of two brothers, younger, arms slung over each other.

Art closes the drawer.

He sits.

Picks up the blank card again.

This time, he writes.

We don't see what.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — ROOM — DAY

Dawn is dressed now. Ready to leave.

Bandages fresh. Movement careful.

A NURSE hands her a final stack of cards.

NURSE
These came in this morning.

Dawn accepts them. She doesn't open any. She just holds them.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — DISCHARGE DESK — DAY

Dawn stands in street clothes now. Bandages visible at her neck and jaw.

The Nurse hands over paperwork.

NURSE
You'll have follow-ups with the burn clinic twice a week.

Physical therapy to keep the tissue flexible.

Dawn nods, already bracing.

NURSE (cont'd)
And occupational therapy.

That gets her attention.

DAWN
For my neck?

NURSE
For the scarring. Movement.
Sensitivity. Pain management.

NURSE (cont'd)
And trauma counseling is strongly
recommended.

Dawn stiffens — just slightly.

DAWN
Recommended.

The nurse meets her gaze. Not judgmental. Just honest.

NURSE
Burns heal in layers.

So do people.

Dawn absorbs that. Doesn't argue.

Jacob steps in beside her, steady.

JACOB
We'll be there.

The nurse nods, satisfied.

INT. ST. MERCY HOSPITAL — HALLWAY — CONTINUOUS

They move toward the exit as a group.

Jacob at Dawn's side.

Austin just ahead.

Trudy already scanning exits.

Bonnie, Jackie, Alana, and Frank fall into place without
discussion.

DAWN
You don't have to—

FRANK
We know.

They reach the automatic doors.

Dawn slows.

Outside, through the glass, a few PEOPLE linger.

Phones in hands. Curious. Waiting.

Nothing aggressive.

Dawn's breathing tightens.

Jacob feels it immediately.

JACOB
Hey.

She looks at him.

JACOB (cont'd)
You don't have to rush.

Austin turns back.

AUSTIN
I've got you, Mom.

Trudy steps forward first, pushing the door open.

TRUDY
Let's go.

The doors slide apart.

They step outside together.

Dawn flinches at the brightness. At the openness. She hesitates.

DAWN
I can't!

JACOB
Yes, you can. Come, we've got you!

Frank subtly shifts, blocking one angle.

A few phones lift around them.

Jacob stops – calm but firm addresses the people.

JACOB (cont'd)
That's enough! My wife has been
through so much. Please, leave us
alone!

The phones lowers.

They keep moving.

Dawn exhales.

EXT. HOSPITAL PARKING LOT – DAY

They reach the car.

Jacob opens the door for Dawn.

She pauses one last time, looking back at the hospital.

Then she gets in. The door closes.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAWN'S HOUSE – NIGHT

A NEWS VAN idles across the street.

Another pulls in behind it.

Cameras mounted.

REPORTERS lingering.

Phones out.

The quiet neighborhood feels watched now.

INT. DAWN'S HOUSE – NIGHT

The front door closes.

Locks click.

Dawn stands just inside, listening.

Outside voices bleed faintly through the walls.

REPORTER (O.S.)
Lieutenant Hudson—just a comment—

Dawn exhales.

Turns away.

Trudy is already moving, closing blinds, drawing curtains.

Calm.

TRUDY
They'll get bored eventually.

They always do.

Jacob enters from the hallway, tense but controlled.

JACOB
Police said they can't make them
leave.

Not unless they cross the line.

DAWN
I know.

Austin appears, hockey hoodie on, uncomfortable.

AUSTIN
Are they staying?

DAWN
Not forever.

INT. KITCHEN — MOMENTS LATER

Bonnie and Jackie unpack food containers onto the counter.

Alana sets drinks out.

The kitchen fills with motion.

Bonnie watches Dawn carefully.

BONNIE
You hungry?

DAWN
Not really.

BONNIE
Cool. You're eating anyway.

Jackie smirks.

EXT. DAWN'S HOUSE — NIGHT

A FLASH pops as a camera fires.

Someone across the street takes notes.

INT. LIVING ROOM — NIGHT

The coffee table has been cleared.

A MONOPOLY BOARD is laid out.

Austin drops onto the floor, already sorting money.

AUSTIN
I'm the banker. Non-negotiable.

JACKIE
That's how corruption starts.

ALANA
He learned from the best.

Dawn watches this, quiet, stunned. Jacob presses a beer into her hand.

JACOB
You don't have to play.

DAWN
I want to.

She sits.

Dawn sets her phone down, taps play on her epic playlist.

MUSIC fills the room —

"Lucifer" by SHINee.

Austin groans.

AUSTIN
Again?

DAWN
It's a classic.

Jackie switches it. RUN DMC kicks in. Jackie nods to the beat.

JACKIE
Now this?

Laughter breaks through.

Dawn rolls the dice. They clatter across the board. She lands on Boardwalk.

DAWN
Yes! I'm buying Boardwalk.

BONNIE
Of course you are.

EXT. DAWN'S HOUSE — NIGHT

Across the street, reporters watch through windows.

The house glows warm against the dark.

INT. LIVING ROOM — LATER

The game is chaos.

AUSTIN
You're cheating!

DAWN
I'm winning. There's a difference.

She smiles.

It surprises her.

Jacob catches it.

Holds onto the sight like oxygen.

INT. DAWN'S HOUSE — FRONT WINDOW — NIGHT

Dawn stands quietly now, looking out through the blinds.

The reporters are still there. Waiting.

She doesn't flinch.

Behind her — family noise. Music. Life.

Trudy calls out:

TRUDY
Dawn! Your turn!

Dawn turns away from the window.

Back to the table.

Back to her people.

She picks up the dice.

The music swells.

She rolls.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT — NIGHT

A television glows in the dark.

NEWS FOOTAGE:
Dawn exits the hospital, bandaged.
Her family surrounds her.
Protective. United.

The chyron reads:
OFFICER RECOVERING AFTER ATTACK

Art sits at a small table. A card in front of him.
Plain. White.

He watches Dawn on the screen. Not angry. Not cold. Just heavy.

He picks up a pen. Writes.

We do NOT see the words.

He closes the card. Slides it into an envelope.

On the front:
LT. DAWN HUDSON

He pauses.

Adds a final touch.

INSERT — THE CARD (JUST ENOUGH TO READ)

"Speedy recovery, LT."

Art sets the pen down.

The TV continues to play. He turns it off.

THE END