

Saving a Life

By Greg Earnest

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1. INT. CAB OF AMBULANCE - NIGHT

The city lights illuminate the streets of Memphis as DANTE looks out the side window from the passenger seat of an ambulance. He is a black man in his 30s who looks like the world has ridden him hard and put him up wet. Driving the ambulance is JILL, a young, white, optimistic woman whose EMT-B certification's ink is still drying on the paper. This is the second week with his new driver. Her idle chatter is annoying and soothing at the same time.

JILL

I think I've driven this section of the map ten times already tonight. I've been learning the north side when I'm off-duty, just driving and memorizing. You're lucky; you've lived here your whole life. I bet you never had to drive around in your spare time, huh?

Dante looks at her darkly.

DANTE

Look, rookie, living in this city does not make anyone lucky.

JILL

I meant that you already know...

DANTE

Yeah, I know my way around.

He turns back to looking out the side window. Jill drives in silence for a minute, but she seems determined to talk with her sullen partner.

JILL

My name isn't rookie, by the way. You could be a little nicer to me.

Dante huffs a little, but then shrugs in agreement.

JILL (CONT'D)

You hungry? I could go for a burger.

DANTE

All the good burgers are downtown. We'd never make it before a call comes in, though, because you mentioned food out loud.

JILL
Is that a thing?

The radio crackles on and the familiar voice of the dispatch is heard.

DISPATCH
Priority one... gun shot wound on
the corner of Knight Arnold and
Spencer...

Jill looks at Dante, as he gives her a "told ya so" look. They both sit up a bit as she turns on the siren and lights, makes a u-turn, and begins to weave their way to the scene.

JILL
Knight Arnold and Spencer... Isn't
that your old stomping ground?

Dante looks straight ahead and nods slightly.

2. EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

Their ambulance pulls up to a scene of blue lights and a crowd in someone's front yard. Jill jumps out and runs inside, while Dante locks the ambulance and looks for the nearest officer, ignoring "hey, I know that dude" and "yo, Dante, who got shot?" comments from the crowd. He recognizes one of the officers, OFFICER BEAUCHAMP, and works his way to him.

DANTE
What's the status of the victim?

BEAUCHAMP
Alive, but I bet he wishes he
wasn't. GSW in the throat.
Searching for perps now, but no one
around here's talking.

Dante nods his head. He knows well that no one helps the police in this neighborhood.

BEAUCHAMP (CONT'D)
Your new driver got a boyfriend?

DANTE
Why don't you ask her?

BEAUCHAMP
I might. Think she'll go for my
standard line?

DANTE

'Wanna see if we can drown out the siren?' Does that ever work?

BEAUCHAMP

No, but I keep trying.

Dante chuckles to himself.

DANTE

Victim have a name?

BEAUCHAMP

Yeah, Fernando Williams.

Dante freezes at the name.

BEAUCHAMP

(continuing)

42, recently released from prison. Did time for a murder about 20 years ago.

Dante runs inside the house, leaving Officer Beauchamp a little puzzled at his sudden change in attitude.

3. INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Dante stops short in the living room and stoops down to help Jill with the victim. As he looks at the victim, Jill notices Dante's face looking like he'd just seen a ghost.

JILL

I've bandaged the wound in his neck and run an IV, but he's passed out. I'll get the gurney if you'll watch him. Are you alright?

DANTE

...I'm fine.

Jill runs off leaving Dante with the victim. On the other side of the room, police officers are questioning an irate woman. Every time they tell her to calm down, she gets louder and more agitated.

Dante instinctively checks vitals and the bandage job on the victim, but he's lost in thought. He hears faint screams of children.

4. EXT. PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

It's a beautiful summer day. Seven kids, black, ranging in

age from 10 to 13, are sitting on a picnic bench in the park. There's a cake with the number 13 in candles on top, and a couple presents, and dixie cups next to a gallon jug of Kool-aid. There are a couple of adults sitting on a blanket by a tree about twenty feet away talking to each other . The kids are urging one of them to open his birthday presents. The birthday boy is the now-thirteen year old YOUNG DANTE. As he grabs a gift-wrapped box closest to him, a group of teenaged boys, ages 16-19, walk up. They are all wearing traditional gang regalia and colors.

FERNANDO, the gang leader, grabs the present from the hands of young Dante, as one of the adults notices them.

FERNANDO

Thanks for the present. What took you so long, huh? My birthday was last month.

His friends snicker behind him as he tears open the package's wrapping. When he sees a baseball glove inside the box, he tosses it to one of his henchmen.

FERNANDO

Yo, I don't play baseball. That was a bad present. (to one of his gang)
Throw me another one!

FATHER

(walking towards the scene)

Get away from those kids!

Fernando sees the adult coming towards him, reaches behind his back, and pulls out a semiautomatic pistol. With the gun pointed at the father, the kids all scream and the younger kids start crying. Young Dante is in shock at the scene.

FERNANDO

What'd you say to me, bitch? You better back yo ass up before I smoke you!

FATHER

(calmly)

Put the gun away, son. Stop scaring these kids. If you want something, just take it and go.

FERNANDO

(threatening)

Yo, shut the fuck up! You wanna be

(MORE)

FERNANDO (CONT'D)

the man, huh? You wanna be the man?
If you don't back up, you gonna be
the dead man. You understand me?

As Fernando gets closer to the adult to threaten him, one of the other adults, a woman of roughly the same age, gets up and starts running away. When Fernando sees this, he aims his gun at the woman.

FERNANDO

Yo, get back here!

As the gang leader is shouting to the woman, the father moves towards Fernando to attempt to disarm him, but he's too slow. A gunshot is heard and Dante watches his father fall to the ground. His mother lets out a wail and starts running towards the fallen would-be hero, and the other gang members start to flee. Fernando is stunned as he looks at the fallen man.

FERNANDO

Hey, man, get up. C'mon, man!

One of the gang members physically grabs the leader, urging him to run.

GANG MEMBER

Fernando! Let's go, man!

As he's fleeing the scene, Fernando turns back one last time to see the chaos he has caused, and he is confronted with the sight of kids crying and running. He turns and sees Young Dante staring at him. Fernando stops and stares at him in pity; the boy is frozen in shock and fear with his eyes locked on the face of his father's murderer.

Fernando turns and runs, and the boy stares after him. Young Dante slowly turns to see his mother trying to apply pressure to the wound, and crying. She yells to him.

MOTHER

Call 911! Dante! 911!

Young Dante can't move, standing there in shock.

5. INT. HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT DAY

The sounds of his past fade when Jill comes back with the gurney. He snaps out of his daze and helps Jill as the police officer is losing his verbal battle with the irate woman.

WOMAN

How is it that you're supposed to "protect and serve" when you do nothing but harass good people in they own homes? Why aren't you going after that muthafucka who shot my man, huh?

OFFICER

Ma'am, we have two cars out looking for him now. I just need to ask a couple more questions...

WOMAN

I done told you what he looks like, his name, why he was here. What the fuck else you need, his favorite color?

OFFICER

Please, ma'am, calm down. I'm just following protocol.

WOMAN

Well, you can take protocol and shove it up yo ass! Go get that man who shot up my home!

During this exchange, Dante and Jill get bloody Fernando strapped into the gurney and quickly take him outside.

6. INT. BACK OF AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Jill and Dante get the gurney with the victim into the back of the ambulance. Dante gets in the back, and Jill closes the doors behind him.

Dante sits down next to Fernando, looking at him. He is still unconscious. He looks down at Fernando's wound. As Dante imagines ways he could kill this man and make it look like an accident, Fernando's vitals start to fail.

It's clear to Dante that he will need to perform CPR to save this man, but for about ten of the longest seconds in his life, Dante considers doing nothing.

Finally, after a couple seconds of flatline tone, Jill knocks on the window.

JILL

(shouting)

Dante!

Dante springs into action. All of his training comes to bear on this victim as he attempts to revive him. After a few tense moments performing CPR, a pulse comes back. He stops pumping Fernando's chest and checks the bandage on his neck. It is bleeding through the gauze. He quickly grabs a trauma pad and applies it to the wound. Next, he reaches for a synthetic blood pack. As he tries to hook it up to Fernando, the ambulance hits a pothole, jostling them and causing Dante to drop the bag.

He jumps onto the floor of the ambulance, and looks for the bag. His frustration at not finding the bag becomes an audible scream. He gets up and grabs another bag. When he hooks it up, the blood flows into Fernando, and his vitals become stable.

Dante places his hand on Fernando's neck, checking for leaks and applying pressure to the wound. With his hand still there, he sits back emotionally drained, breathing heavily.

Dante looks at his father's killer's face.

DANTE

I will save you. I will save you. I
will save you.

7. EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

The ambulance pulls up to the Emergency Room doors, and Jill jumps out of the driver's seat, and runs to the back of the ambulance. When she opens the doors, Dante comes out and helps her get the victim into the hospital.

8. INT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

As they are pushing the gurney down the hallway, the nurses are talking fast, trying to get his vitals and information. Before they take Fernando to the operating room, Fernando comes to and grabs Dante by the arm with great force. Dante looks down at Fernando, and they lock eyes.

Fernando tries to say something to Dante, but the gunshot wound in his neck only allows a horrible gurgling sound.

A nurse gives him a shot, and he releases his grip and falls unconscious again. They wheel him off as Dante and Jill stand there watching him go.

JILL

(turning to Dante)
Did you know him?

DANTE

Yeah.

JILL

Who was he?

Dante debates telling his new partner that the man they just saved killed his father, but he's not ready to let her in.

DANTE

A ghost from my past.

After a few moments of silence, Jill starts walking back to the ambulance.

JILL

Let's go get that burger, huh? I'll treat you to Dyers...

Dante looks at her, and he smiles at her and shakes his head.

DANTE

Sure.

JILL

What?

DANTE

Nothing.

They walk back to the ambulance.

9. INT. CAB OF AMBULANCE - NIGHT

Jill is looking at Dante as he gets in the passenger side.

JILL

Ok. What was going on back there when we were in route?

DANTE

I guess I froze up for a second.

She eyes him suspiciously. She starts the ambulance and puts it in drive. As she drives, Dante looks forward.

DANTE

You know, my dad and I used to go to Dyers.

JILL

Oh yeah?

DANTE

Yeah. I don't think I've been there
in twenty years.

JILL

Well, then, Dyers it is...

Before she can finish her declaration, the radio crackles on
again.

DISPATCH

Priority one... Motor vehicle
accident on Lamar between McLean
and Central...

Dante smiles at Jill and looks at her with new life in his
eyes.

DANTE

Let's go, rookie!

Jill looks strangely at him, but she puts the ambulance in
gear and heads in the direction of the accident. As she
drives, Dante looks ahead with anticipation.

DANTE

Here's another rule for ya:

JILL

Oh yeah?

DANTE

If you respond to an MVA after
midnight, and there's no drunk on
the scene, somebody's missing.

JILL

(optimistically)
Well, maybe we'll get lucky.

DANTE

(returning her optimism)
Maybe we will.

The lights of the ambulance bounce off the cars they pass as
it heads down the streets of Memphis.