

EPISODE 2

Mo's Visions

The past.

Fourteen-year-old Davis Starsky took another look around the wooded, rural area his younger-brother-by-one-year Kent talked him into camping at, and set his backpack and sleeping bag down. One dirt road was the only thing that spoke of civilization being nearby, and there were no houses in view.

Kent had wanted to come here for his birthday, and begged Davis to come too. Their mentor, a Native American tavern owner nicknamed Chief, dropped them off for the weekend two miles up the dirt road and said he'd be back on Sunday night to pick them up.

"Is this what they call camping?" Davis asked as Kent unloaded his gear too, including a Navajo blanket. "Not even a tent?"

"This is what you call roughing it, bro," Kent said as he took unloading a step further by kicking off his hiking boots and stripping off his jeans and flannel shirt.

"Please leave your shorts on," Davis said looking around at the trees. "If nudity is roughing it, I want no part of it."

"I have no intentions of skinny dipping," the blond said as he ran toward the big beautiful lake and jumped in, swimming out toward the middle. "Wouldn't want to make you jealous."

"Terrific!" the dark brother called after him. "What am I supposed to be doing? We got no phone, no TV, no Tool music, no nothin'!"

"You think going without a *straw* is roughing it! Hah! You brought a camera, didn't you? Take a picture of something."

Davis reached down and opened his backpack, taking out a vintage camera that had belonged to his dad, but before he could snap a picture, heard a sound in the bushes off to his left and jumped back.

“Kent!”

Kent was floating on his back in the middle of the lake, basking in the sun.

“What!”

“I heard somethin’!”

“You’re going to hear a few things! It’s the woods!”

“Yeah, but...what are you gonna do if there’s a shark in the water?”

“It’s a lake, man! Lakes don’t have sharks! Just practice building a campfire so we can eat later.”

“Eat? What are we gonna eat out here in the middle of nowhere?”

“Nuts, berries, fish, stuff like that. Nature.”

“I don’t see any fish.”

“They’re in the water.”

“And we didn’t bring any fish sticks, or whatever you call those things you get them with.”

“Poles, or rods and reels is what you call them. And we don’t need them.”

“How else are we gonna get ‘em?”

“Hand fishing. Like Chief taught me.”

“We aren’t Indians!”

“I’ll show you how. Wouldn’t you love a fresh fish filet cooked over an open fire?”

“No, I’d like one from a drive-through actually.”

“Well, I did you a favor, Dav.”

“What’s that?”

“I brought you some cans of brown beans. We can cook those over a fire if we have to, the way cowboys did. I’ll be the Indian, you be the cowboy, just like when we were little kids.”

“Kent, you’re half-German and I’m half-Jewish. I can’t wait for fish, I’m hungry now. What am I supposed to do?”

“Wouldn’t be fun if I told you, just go look around. You’ll find something. And bring back some kindling and wood for a fire. But don’t go too far away or you’ll get lost. Keep the lake or road in sight.”

Davis grumbled to himself as he put the camera down on Kent’s blanket and started looking around for something to eat. He crossed the dirt road and went to the other side, toward a stand of trees.

“Hey!” he shouted in surprise. “Apple trees!”

Kent took a deep breath and dove under the water, swimming around until his lungs burned for air, then came back up for breath, but when he looked toward the shore, he caught sight of two men overpowering his brother and forcing him into the back of a van.

Kent was in such shock that he literally lost his voice. His mouth opened, but no sound escaped. All he could do was swim desperately toward shore as the van drove away with his brother inside, trying to work a scream past his terror-stricken throat.

Once on land, he scrambled for Davis' camera and snapped some pictures of the departing vehicle, then ran after it in hopes of stopping it.

“Wait! Come back! Davis!”

But the scream had only been in his mind.

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The present.

Night.

Davis' bedroom.

“Kent? Tash?”

Davis slept fitfully—tossing, turning, moaning—reliving in a nightmare his abduction and torture by the Satanic cult called The Haven, led by charismatic but sadistic guru Lucia Common. It happened so quickly. One minute he was picking an apple from a tree, the next a driver and an accomplice blindfolded him, cuffed his hands behind his back, then rammed the butt of a rifle into his face and tossed him into the back of a van.

Davis couldn't recall everything that happened, due to being drugged at times, unconscious at times, and his mind blissfully blocking it out. But the experience found its way to the surface in flashbacks, memories, and dreams he now had as an adult. These flashes were usually of the cult members chanting Lucia's name, leaving him blindfolded and cuffed to a chair while beaten, cutting his wrist to drink his blood, and drowning him to the point of near death--only to revive him at the last moment so that they could do it again and again.

He heard the screams and pleadings of a few other unfortunates in the caves, and this was a torture of its own kind. He expected his own death to occur at any moment, tried to prepare himself, and was in a

sustained, paradoxical state of fear and courage, living and dying. But he prayed for God to spare his life and let his family find him in time.

He was to be used as a human sacrifice on the cult's holy day, which was one week away. They were saving him for the rare and anticipated appearance of Lucia Common, who would himself do the sacrificial butchering.

But Kent's pictures and description of the van, driver, and accomplice were enough for the police and Child Abuse/Protection Unit to zero in on the cult and prevent the boy's murder from taking place. The commune was raided with a tremendous show of force—Davis the only victim to survive, covered in red from the blood of lambs, goats, and children.

Davis was returned home alive, but not completely well, regardless of how tough he tried to show himself to his family. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder brought nights of insomnia and bad dreams. Days of hypervigilance or locking himself away from his loved ones because he needed to be alone.

He saw a therapist a few times, but didn't divulge everything that happened, partly because he couldn't remember or blocked it out, and partly because he couldn't face it. He just repeated the statement he'd given to the police. Just enough to keep his family from worrying. The rest he would work out himself.

His thirteen-year-old brother Kent insisted on moving into the Starsky house for a while, setting up a twin bed in Davis' bedroom, some nights even sleeping in the bed with him and holding him when he woke whining, trembling, and panting from a nightmare.

"Sshh," Kent would shush to his older brother. "I'm right here. I won't let anything happen to you ever again. I swear it."

I'm sorry, Davis. I'm sorry I didn't stop them or save you in time.

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“Kent?”

Davis awoke with a start, panting, chest heaving, realizing why the nightmare was bearing down on him like a freight train.

Kent had been missing for three days.

Captain Shaw had assigned a dozen officers to the case. His friends Tasha, Mo, and Lucky were looking too, and so was Chief, their Native American mentor.

Not that Davis could sleep. He had been hunting for his brother nonstop; driving the streets, questioning snitches, hookers, every contact he and his brother had--without eating, resting, or sitting down, taking only a few minutes to shower and change clothes.

Then, as he sat on the bed to pull on his socks and sneakers, exhaustion finally claimed him as he slowly sank sideways onto the bed.

Tasha found him that way in bed next morning on the way to her workplace, Bay City Hospital--one sock and shoe off, one sock and shoe on.

“Here, baby,” she said sitting next to him with a cup of coffee and breakfast sandwich and helping him to sit up. “You have to keep your strength up.”

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Visions of a painted horse head, stone, wood, trees, clear plastic wrap, and long black robes flashing through his head, the gym owner and psychic named Momo awoke with a strangled cry and tumbled from his bed and onto the floor as he reached for his phone on the bedside table.

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Later that morning.

A flurry of activity in the squad room--most of the officers were on phones or questioning in person anyone who might know anything about Kent's disappearance.

You guys got a lot of enemies, Lucky had told him. It could be anybody.

Thanks, Lucky.

But she was right.

There were the Marlboro Twins, hitmen for the mob, the surviving brother who swore he'd get even when Davis had to shoot his twin for going after his gun during his arrest.

Then there was Mac Rosetti, a notorious gangster and drug supplier who vowed death to both of them for bringing their Family down.

And various and sundry criminals they'd collared over the years, some noteworthy, others not so much.

Though they never sought the limelight, the limelight often sought them.

Davis paced around the desk he shared with Kent, phone in hand.

"My brother's been missing three days!" he yelled into the phone without even checking to see who was calling. "Unless you got somethin' related to him, I got no time to talk."

"This is Shelly Patterson with the Child Abuse/Child Protection Unit."

His voice lowered, almost apologetically. "Oh, yeah. You were involved in my cult case way back, right?"

Even now the word sounded strange in his ears. Cult. It isn't a word people use every day in relation to their past, and their past experiences—an almost laughable idea if it hadn't been so very real.

Shelly was now a woman in her late fifties, and still enjoyed working in the same department.

“I don't know if this means anything,” her voice said over the phone. “But for the past couple of weeks we've been investigating an unusual number of allegations by parents whose children attend the Daytime Daycare Center. The children are going home with stories of sexual abuse and trips to a farm or ranch with people in long black robes. It sounds impossible, but then I remembered the Lucia Common cult case with your abduction. I can give you copies of my reports and the kids' statements. It may help find Kent.”

Davis' heart quickened at the thought of his missing brother being held or ritualistically tortured by the resurrected cult of Lucia Common, and for any children who could be suffering at their hands. Common was of course behind bars, and the commune he'd governed had long since disintegrated, but he most definitely could have a thriving throng of new followers willing to continue the cult and fulfill their master's desires.

“Haven't received any ransom calls,” he told her. “No demands. I think they're out for some sick revenge, and any children they can hurt. I think the two cases just became one. Got an address on that farm?”

“I wish. The children are so young. Some of their statements are vague, and unreliable. They talk about a barn, and a horse, and, let's see, some rocks or stones, a well. Which, let's face it, pretty much describes any other farm. But Wesley is the oldest. He's five. He seems to be the most credible.”

He tapped off the phone and picked up his jacket just as Captain Shaw came from her office.

“Davis, I just convinced the media to delay running a story connecting Kent’s disappearance with some allegations about the Daytime Daycare Center and the Lucia Common cult. If there’s something to it, we don’t want it out to the cult that we’re on to them. It could endanger your brother’s life and the kids’ too.”

“Yeah, keep it hushed as long as you can. I’m headed to the daycare to see if I can nail down an address on that farm and talk to the staff and one of the kids.”

Davis pulled his jacket on and ran from the squad room, bumping into Lucky and Mo in the hallway.

He gave Lucky’s arm a quick but reassuring squeeze.

“It’s some kind of ranch,” Mo told him. “I got a bad vibe in the middle of the night. I think Kent is there but...”

“You get names? A fix on where this place is?”

“Not really. The most I got was stone. Something to do with stone.”

Davis nudged past them.

Lucky started to go after him, but Mo gently pulled her back and put his arm around her.

“Come on. Let’s keep lookin’.”

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“I think it’s all ridiculous,” the daycare operator, Mrs. Day, told Davis in her office. “No children leave here, except to go home. We aren’t even authorized to take them to the doctor without parental consent. My husband and I, along with the staff, keep a very close eye on the children. Don’t you think we’d know if someone were taking them on excursions to some farm, or if someone were harming them in some way? Children have fertile imaginations, Detective. They’re full of

stories. We watch a lot of fantasy cartoons here, read a lot of stories out loud. The kids tend to mix fantasy with reality, tell their parents wild stories when they get home. Most parents take it for what it is. Imagination. But some have been trying to cause us trouble, and actually *believe* their terrible stories about things that we would never do. It makes me wonder if these kind of things don't go on in their *own* homes, what kind of movies are they watching, or kind of stories they're being read. The child abuse people were here questioning the children, asking them all sorts of inappropriate questions, putting strange ideas into their heads. It's giving them nightmares. No children are being hurt here."

Davis noted crutches propped against a filing cabinet.

"Those yours?"

"Yes," she said raising her foot. "I was in an automobile accident three weeks ago. I've been home recuperating. I don't need them as much now. Today is my first day back. And I come back to this...investigation."

"So you haven't really been here the last few weeks."

"No, I haven't. But Robert, Jill, and Francine have."

"Robert..?"

"My husband. He's out back teaching the children how to plant flower seeds. Jill and Francine are my staff, and they're out there with them. Go ahead and check them out. All of us out. None of us have criminal records, and we didn't do anything. Haven't you ever heard of the McMartin Preschool case?"

Davis knew that a clean record was never an indication of innocence. His take: It just meant they hadn't been caught yet.

"I'll need to question all of the adults," he said as he rose to his feet.

"And Wesley."

“Wesley?” she asked as she read her attendance record. “He isn’t here today.”

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“I was just getting ready to call you,” Shelly Patterson said when Davis walked into her office. “Our first missing child in this case.” She nodded toward the young woman seated across from her desk. “This is Wesley’s mother, Cecilia.”

Davis sat in an empty chair next to the crying mother, handing her his handkerchief and leaning close to her.

“Ma’am, we think your son has been abducted by a dangerous group of people, and we need to find him, along with my brother, as soon as we can. So I need you to tell me everything he’s told you, no matter how farfetched or trivial it sounds. We need the location of that farm. And, would you happen to have a picture of Wesley on you that I can use?”

“Yes,” she whispered tearfully as she reached inside her purse, handing him a photo of her blond-haired son.

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Although R&I came up with no records on any of the daycare’s staff, Captain Shaw arranged surveillance.

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Davis stood with his back against the wall of the small, bare room at the prison, waiting for Lucia Common.

The door opened and the prisoner stepped in, handcuffed, escorted by a guard.

The guard waited in the corner while Davis walked up to Common, stood chest to chest with him, and looked him in the eye.

“You’re waiting for me to tell you something,” Common told him in his lyrical, calm tone. “And your brother is waiting for you.”

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When Davis arrived back at the squad room, Captain Shaw pulled him into her office.

“Davis, we’ve got that little boy Wesley down in the morgue. A truck driver found a body bag alongside the highway and he was inside, wrapped in clear plastic from head to toe. We’re waiting on the autopsy. The mother is in custody. She confessed to handing him over to the cult. She used to be one of Common’s girls.”

Davis rushed from the squad room.

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He flung open the door to the interrogation room and stepped inside, grabbed Cecilia’s cuffed wrists, pulled her from her chair, and pinned her into the corner of the room.

“Where is my brother?”

She looked calmly into his eyes and said, “We never tell.”

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After leaving Cecilia in the interrogation room with another detective, Davis walked down the hall toward the elevator and was met by Shelly Patterson as she was just stepping out of it.

Although she maintained a professional calm and objectivity in the course of her work investigating child abuse cases and protecting children and teens, there were times, like today, when her humanity got the best of her and she had to release it. Sometimes in tears of sorrow. Sometimes tears of anger. But rarely when she was at work.

Davis put an arm around her and walked her over to a bench so they could sit down, handing her a tissue.

They were still sitting together when Lucky and Mo approached them.

“I need something more,” Mo said to him. “I need to go to his place.”

Davis kissed Shelly’s hand before getting up and following Lucky and Mo down the hall and out the door.

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Kent’s apartment held an unbearable stillness for Davis when he opened the door and stepped inside, followed by Lucky and Mo.

As Mo walked around the room, looking, feeling, Lucky noticed that Davis was looking a little defeated, a little worn.

“Hey, baby,” Lucky said squeezing his hand. “It ain’t over till we find him.”

Mo picked up a Navajo blanket that Kent used on the sofa and for camping once in a while, and carried it with him as he walked around the rooms that reflected music, art, books, and his love of Native American culture.

“It was the middle of the night,” Mo said quietly.

The longer he held the blanket, the more he sensed, and the more agitated he became.

“Guys in hooded robes,” Mo continued as he walked, touching the walls, doors, furniture, lamps. “Chloroform. Overpowering him. He came to. They...tossed him into a trunk...he started to fight...they drugged him with something to put him out, I don’t...what was it...”

A film of perspiration came across Mo's upper lip as he continued to roam, touch, interpret; his walk now close to a stagger.

And now his voice, so much like Kent's voice: "What do you want, scum? Creeps?"

Mo's face began to twist into pain and discomfort.

"Not my brother. Me. Keep me."

Mo's legs weakened, and he slowly sank to his knees, covering his head with the blanket, leaning forward until his head touched the floor, burrowing down, his voice faint and muffled.

"Land. Hills. Barn. Stone. Well. Darkness. Silence. Just sleep. Just sleep. Horsehead painted. Side of a barn. Wild Horse Ranch."

Davis moved to crouch next to Mo, hand on his shoulder.

"Is he alive?"

Mo suddenly sprang at him, knocking him onto his back, gripping his jacket, the physical contact provoking one, long, slow-motion scene that stiffened the psychic's face into a silent mask:

Davis slowly approached the black zippered body bag propped against the stone well—seeing but not wanting to see. Feeling but not wanting to feel. Breathing but not wanting to breathe.

Be someone else. Be somewhere else.

Drumming heart. Bare breath.

Davis crouched to one knee in front of the shape, hand slowly going out, toward the top of the bag. The zipper. Carefully. Cautiously. Pulling down. Sliding. Partway down. Revealing.

Blond hair. Pale face. Closed eyes. Still form.

Wrapped in clear plastic.

Head resting peacefully on his shoulder.

Unzipping. Further down. Revealing.

Black robe. Inverted red cross.

Asleep. He's only asleep.

--He looks five years old when he's asleep--

But he wasn't breathing.

Asleep but not breathing.

Gone.

Gone.

Davis touched his cheek.

Gone forever.

Forever asleep.

Davis shoved Mo aside and onto the floor.

"I don't know," Mo said as he made his way to his feet. "I don't know if he's alive."

Lucky came to help both of them up.

Mo blinked and ran the back of his hand across his perspiring upper lip. "I think he is, but he won't be if we don't get there in time."

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Captain Shaw gave Davis directions to Wild Horse Ranch and called for an ambulance to get to the property, along with a half dozen officers.

But the officers weren't really necessary, Davis could see as he drove through the front gate, because the cult members were long gone, having deserted the place following Cecilia's arrest. Off to go underground for a time, then resurface in the future in a different location. Unless Cecilia turned on her fellow cult members and provided names, it would be difficult to identify them and track them down. Shelly would do her best to follow through on the sexual abuse allegations involving the children at the daycare, but it was unlikely to produce any solid leads and it would end up as a cold case. She would summarize in her report that she could prove only one of the sexual abuse cases to be true—Wesley's, according to the autopsy—and his telling of the story to the other children at the daycare prompted the youngsters to repeat what he'd told them—ludicrous dark fables to the ears of parents and staff—factual events to those who knew the truth.

And yes, Davis could see a large horse's head painted on the side of the barn when he got out of his car, and he could see the black body bag propped against the stone well.

Like a man in a slow-motion trance or dream, he walked closer, seeing but not wanting to see. Feeling but not wanting to feel. Breathing but not wanting to breathe.

Be someone else. Be somewhere else.

Drumming heart. Bare breath.

He crouched to one knee in front of the shape, hand slowly going out, toward the top of the bag. The zipper. Carefully. Cautiously. Pulling down. Sliding. Partway down. Revealing.

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Unzipping. Further down. Revealing.

Black robe. Inverted red cross.

Asleep. He's only asleep.

--He looks five years old when he's asleep--

Davis's fingertips pressed into his throat to feel for a pulse.

“Kent?”