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Beat

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BEAT

Dan B. Shapiro

The dad bends over the son, eyes aflame. The son is shocked; his hand clenches bedsheets. The dad is temporarily blinded by headlights through the window. The son panicks. The son's mouth screams soundlessly. Headlights flash again through the glass squares of the window.

The son is catatonic in a hospital gown. The mom asks, "What'd he do to you?" Visitors outside crowd the observation window. The mom cries, "He's gonna leave for a while. But, he still loves you, he does. He's just—" A hand closes in on the son's thigh. A nurse leans over his body, then spreads his gown open.

Through the window, the mom screams soundlessly. The thermometer under the son's little tongue wobbles. The brother shoves chocolate in his mouth. The dog's paws claw against the window. The nurse attaches a bag to the IV pole. A dim circle of yellow light comes from an otoscope. The doctor leads the nurse out of the room. The son lies rigid on his back. He cannot sleep.