

...Detective Schneider stares helplessly at the body on the floor for a few seconds, spins around to leave the bedroom, scrambling past Officer Dominguez, who hasn't moved. Dominguez watches Schneider put his hand tightly over his mouth and rush out of the house. He turns back to the hallway and calmly says, "Sorry. Forgot to tell you it's a gruesome sight, one of the worst I've ever seen."

Lewis looks down at the fully clothed body and says, "Gruesome ain't the word I'd use. This is barbaric, depraved, beyond redemption. This woman was obviously tortured mercilessly before she was killed. Whoever did this is one sick bastard." He stares to the right of the body, and asks, "What's that? The killer's calling card?"

Dominguez steps to the bedroom door and peeks inside. "Don't know," he replies. "I suppose it could be."

"Is that her *blood*?" Lewis asks.

"It appears that way, sir. Yes."

"I sure hope that's where she's at now," says the detective...

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"You all right?" Lewis asks, raising his voice.

Schneider stops to turn around. "Sorry," he explains, dropping his head. "I just have never seen anything like that in person before."

Lewis nods. "Okay," he consoles. "You'll see the worst that people can do to each other in this job. Anyway, let's get that witness downtown."

A man and a woman, both carrying bags, step to the porch from the car they just parked on the street next door. The man is younger with brown hair to his shoulders and he walks slightly behind the woman, towering over her, but his position signals that he is the helper while she is the lead. As they near the porch, he looks down and runs his right hand through his long hair self-consciously.

Lewis locks onto the short, slight woman, her black hair tied back in a pony tail and bobbing back and forth as she nears. When she meets his gaze, he advises, drawing another puff from his cigarette, "You bring your barf bags?"

The woman answers confidently, almost as though she had been insulted, "Don't need 'em. We've seen everything." She never slows her stride as she meets and passes Lewis, looking away from him only after he's behind her.

Lewis turns slowly with her as she passes, his eyes narrow, and says calmly, "You ain't seen *anything* like this." - page 28