

DeSoto (To Dose)

Chapter 3

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Roy looked up from where he was polishing one of the squad's side mirrors. "How're you and Karen doing these days?"

Chet closed the valve of the air tank he was checking and hefted it back to its place on the engine. "She's a little miffed at me for pranking her."

Roy turned to face his friend, "Chet, you didn't."

"Well, not on purpose. Parker pulled a fast one on me. We were talking about possible pranks that last time we met. I teased him about how it was a shame they were never gonna let him near the little kids again this side of high school graduation." Chet leaned against the side of the engine as Roy moved to the squad's passenger side.

"Now he's taken one of the ideas we talked about that would've work like a charm on those kindergarteners and spun it. Yesterday, he convinced his entire fourth grade class to squeal in fright and fall out of their chairs every time Karen said any word that described a natural disaster. Think tornado, volcano, tsunami..."

Roy managed not to laugh at the image forming in his head but he couldn't keep from smiling. Chet followed him to the rear of the bay as he stowed the polishing rag and cleaner.

"Yeah, I'd be able to laugh too, if Karen wasn't more than a little P.O.'d. She says some of them really got into it. They scared the crap out of her the first time they did it. When she said 'earthquake' and they all hit the deck, she thought something had really scared them."

John met them at the back bay door. "You two ready to join us out back? We're just starting a game of h.o.r.s.e." He'd heard enough of Chet's tale of woe to pick up on its basic gist. "I think it's kinda sweet, just a chip off the old block."

"I wish Karen saw it that way. Parker timed this for the beginning of a unit on 'Natural Disasters around the Globe.' It took her a few 'mock disasters' just to figure out what the trigger was. She tried outsmarting them by using vague phrases like 'the event' but even the phrase 'really big wind storm' had them seizing in the aisles. She finally threw in the towel and moved on to a different subject. She thinks I put them all up to it. Boy, can that woman hold a grudge."

After playing a game of three on three they moved inside. Henry was waiting at the back door wanting out.

Chet bent to give the slow-moving dog a pat. "Hey, boy, you missed a great game. Cap, Roy and I smoked 'em." The Basset swung wide, avoiding Chet's touch. Chet straightened with a look of hurt on his face.

"Looks like Karen isn't the only one that can hold a grudge," John said with a grin. "And who can blame him? I read that dog book of yours. You're not supposed to use human toothpaste, dummy. They make it in dog-friendly flavors so they *like* to have their teeth brushed. Now because of you, he'll never learn to brush regularly, his halitosis will remain unchecked and he'll never win the battle against tooth decay."

The men spread out as they filtered into the station. It was quiet, for a Saturday afternoon, and they each were beginning to wonder how long this all-day lull would last.

The answer came at 1537 when the tones and Sam's voice from dispatch sent the squad out on a possible pediatric O.D.

The girl who met them in the driveway with an empty cough syrup bottle was frantic. Roy guessed her to be maybe thirteen. In her red, swollen eyes he read panic and remorse.

"I'm so sorry; I don't know how she got hold of this. I thought she was taking a nap."

Roy turned the brown glass bottle over as they climbed the stairs of the front porch. "Codeine," Roy read aloud to John. "My name's Roy and this is my partner, Johnny. Was this full?"

"I don't know," the girl answered, holding the front door for them. "My name's Trisha. I babysit Angel on weekends."

Roy handed the bottle back to the girl as he stepped inside. "How long ago did she drink it?"

"I don't know for sure. I found her in the bathroom holding the open bottle. I called right away, so it's been maybe 10 minutes." The girl stopped in the center of the living room, looking lost.

John was right behind the pair. "How old is she?" he asked as he pulled the front door closed.

"She'll be two next month, I..."

"*Where* is she?" John interrupted as he turned in a searching circle, anxious to start an assessment on the child.

"I don't know! I guess she was upset when I scolded her. I ran to call for help and I only turned my back for like thirty seconds to dial and then she was gone. I can't find her anywhere." The young teen looked ready to cry again, but just when Roy thought she was going to, she seemed to win a battle and managed not to break down in front of the paramedics.

They split up, with Roy moving to the adjacent dining room and John starting in the front living room. They each dropped into an ingrained search pattern beginning with the perimeter of each room. Trisha made a quick check of the bathroom in the hallway and was headed for the back bedrooms when the door bell rang. She crossed to open the front door but hesitated, remembering to call out first, "Who is it?"

"Sheriff's Department."

This seemed to fluster her even more and she looked over her shoulder at Roy who had returned from the childless dining room. The girl looked so young, so unsure of herself, that he revised his earlier estimation of her age downwards to closer to eleven or twelve. He crossed the living room from where he had moved the drug box and biophone and reached around her to open the door.

A Los Angeles County Sheriff stepped into the house with a nod. "Lieutenant Dan Frey," the deputy said as he offered Roy his hand. "Since it was the sitter," he glanced down at a small note pad, "... a *Trisha M. Settinger* who called, we were dispatched too, in case you need help with consent to treat."

Roy felt a tremor flutter down his spine. It wasn't his. There was a quaking form behind him, trying to disappear between his shoulder blades.

"Roy DeSoto and John Gage, and this is Trisha." Roy twisted around, gently tugging her out from behind his back.

"Trisha, we need to find her as soon as possible. You can help. You have her parents' phone numbers, right? If you can show Lieutenant Frey to a phone, Johnny and I will keep looking while you get hold of them."

"Try to find out how much was in that bottle," John called from where he has bending over the back of the couch.

Roy knelt to open the biophone. "John, I'm going to call Rampart and see if they want us to give ipecac when we find her."

"Well, she's not in this room; I'll start checking the rest of the house." John paused by the girl standing next to the officer who was dialing a phone in the kitchen. "Let's check in here." He and a calmer, less skittish sitter searched every cupboard, meeting at the sink without finding the missing toddler.

The sheriff stood at the opposite counter speaking with someone on the other end of the phone line. "Thank you Ma'am, that's Angel, middle initial R, could you spell your last name, please? Okay, H, U, S, H, O, N, S, got it. We'll find her Ma'am, and you be sure to drive safely." Turning from hanging up the phone, he announced, "Okay guys, I got hold of the mom. We've got permission to treat. She says we should check the dog house on the patio. Angel sometimes hides there, and the bottle was almost full."

"I'll start out back," John said as he opened the kitchen slider to the backyard.

Roy replaced the biophone's handset. "Okay, I'm going to keep looking inside; Bracket ordered the ipecac as soon as we find her."

"Ee-yow!" John's voice yelped from the backyard, followed by silence.

"Johnny?!" Roy reversed directions and headed toward the kitchen. The lieutenant emerged from a bedroom and they both rushed outside to meet John as he carried a wide-eyed toddler and the teddy bear she clutched across a broad expanse of red brick patio. She looked a bit disoriented, perhaps by finding herself being whisked without ceremony back toward the house. The stormy expression on her face chronicled her struggle over whether to be excited or terrified.

"What happened?" Roy asked as he followed John back into the house.

"She was in the dog house alright, but she wasn't alone. A Cocker Spaniel bit me when I reached in. 'Mostly just startled me.'" John moved into the living room, where they had left the equipment.

As John set the girl down and started to collect a set of vitals, Roy squatted by the black drug box to fish out a small, brown plastic bottle. "Okay, Angel, I'll bet you're thirsty," he said brightly to the little girl tugging on the bell of the stethoscope around his partner's neck. She was beginning to warm to the idea of new playmates. "Johnny, you need to get the dog's rabies tag number. Don't get bit again," he added, only half in jest as he and John traded places.

The sheriff left to help corral the cocker spaniel which was currently putting up a fuss on the other side of the sliding glass doors.

They returned after a few successful minutes, with the dog weaving between their feet, wagging her tail so hard her hind end was swaying. John paused in the living room doorway, not wanting to overwhelm the toddler. "We're good; Gypsy here has tags that don't expire for months. How's it going?"

Lieutenant Frey was torn between concern at the gravity of the situation, and amused admiration as Roy sat, legs folded "criss-cross-applesauce" with the child sitting in front of him. He was gently sweet-talking the toddler into finishing the dose of syrup he had drawn up in a syringe. Angel had turned stubborn and was swinging her head away with lips sealed tight against any overture Roy made. He finally tickled her gently under the arms and got her to swallow the last bit carried on a giggle. Frey was suitably impressed by this feat of coercion, but he was pretty certain that what followed strayed a bit from the paramedic handbook.

Roy spoke quietly to Trisha for a moment and she left the room. Once she returned with a child's plastic teapot, and four small cups, he proceeded to play host to a formal tea party. There was standing room only, with John and Lt. Frey stationed nearby, leaning against the fireplace mantel, passing an empty pink tea-cup between them as they pretended to take sips. Those seated made sure the guest of honor got the lion's share of the "tea" Roy was pouring.

"What's that he's trying to get her to drink?" the lieutenant asked John under his breath.

"It's just water, but for the ipecac to do its job, she has to drink at least four ounces of it; eight would be better."

"Then what?" Frey asked as small hands helped Teddy take a sip.

"Then we wait. But it's probably best that we head for someplace less...carpeted. Which way is the bathroom?"

Angel stopped mid sentence to look down at her tummy.

"Yep..." Roy said as he unfolded his legs and lifted the little girl. He resisted the urge to hold her at arm's length. "...come on, pumpkin, time to move this shindig."

Before he followed Johnny into the bathroom, Roy paused. "Okay, honey, can Trisha hold your bear for a bit? She might get lonely out in the hallway."

John set the biophone up on the closed lid of the toilet. Roy glanced over and did a double take. He bent slightly, reaching an empty hand to tug John's coat sleeve up.

"It's fine. Most of the blood is coming from where a loose nail caught my arm."

"Here," Roy paused from lifting the toddler into the empty bath tub to hand his partner a small towel he'd pulled from the ring next to the sink. "You're dripping."

An ominous gurgle erupted from the region of the toddler's belly button, startling in volume and portents. The paramedics exchanged a knowing look. Roy picked her up again and turned back towards the tub.

"Is she gonna hurl?" Trisha asked, poking her head through the door and catching sight of the splattered blood on the sink and linoleum floor.

"Roy! Behind you, she's going down!" John accepted the toddler his partner pushed into his arms as Roy turned and lunged just in time to guide the sliding form safely to the floor.

In the meantime, little Angel did indeed hurl.

Gypsy added her slice of chaos as she barked in frenzy from her end of the hallway. Lieutenant Frey held her collar to keep her out from underfoot.

John knelt to place the child in the bathtub. *A day late and a dollar short*, he thought as he considered the front of his once blue uniform shirt. The cough syrup had been clear, but it looked like mac and cheese had been served before tea. Angel vomited again as John supported her tiny frame. Roy was getting a quick set of vitals on Trisha out in the safe zone beyond the bathroom door.

Meanwhile, their patient continued to oblige the paramedics. She retched. She tossed her cookies. She yarked. And just when John was about to run out of ways to describe the child's complete compliance with "doctor's orders", she made a fair attempt at bringing up her toenails. He waited for a full minute after the last dry heave before he turned the exhausted and frightened child toward him. With a resigned sigh, he gathered the pathetic bundle onto his lap to begin a hazmat cleanup with the wet wash cloth his helpful partner handed him.

"Next time *I'll* catch the young maiden in distress," John muttered as he started in on Angel's face.

Roy considered an apology, but their eyes met over the drowsy female cuddled in John's lap. "Next time I'll flip you for her."

"Come on, Johnny, you're riding in with Angel. Her mom is meeting us at Rampart."

"Huh? Why? *You* were the one that gave her the puking-potion. *What?* You don't think she's empty? She couldn't possibly have another drop left in her - do you think?" John took a cautionary step out of the line of fire as they lifted the gurney down the front steps.

"Nah, I agree she's probably finished. But you're going in with her because there's no need to stink up the squad." He shot an apologetic grin toward Albert, the ambulance driver when he made that declaration.

Half an hour later, Roy leaned against the wall of the exam room as Dr. Morton scrubbed the bite wound on John's hand with betadine. "I know you said the dog had its vaccinations, Gage, but I'm still concerned..."

"Aw, man, I am *not* going through a series of rabies shots. That dog has current tags, she has no symptoms of illness of any kind and she had a motive: I was reaching into her dog house. I should've known better. She was doing what any red-blooded, normal, *healthy* dog would do. I hope you don't take this wrong Doc, but I'm getting a second opinion."

Roy pushed away from the wall without comment as Johnny slid off the exam table, but he had a grin on his face to match the one on Morton's.

John turned to his partner to continue. "Sure laugh, you think it's funny that he wants to jab me a couple of dozen times in the *stomach*? And what about the dog? They'll have to put her down to do brain biopsies and..."

John's rant was interrupted by a laugh from Dr. Morton. "It was the *dog* I was worried about, Gage. You didn't let me finish. I know *she's* had her shots, but I don't know that she isn't in danger of catching some raging madness from you. Get back here. Since the bite is on your palm, I want to set a pair of stitches." Morton chuckled at his unexpected success at getting a rise out of Gage. He rotated John's other arm to examine the groove the nail had carved. "When did you get your last tetanus shot?"

"There, do I pass inspection? Wanna check to make sure I cleaned behind my ears?" John called as he came out of the bathroom of the mens' locker room, toweling his hair dry so it didn't drip on the borrowed scrubs he wore. He dropped the towel in a hamper as he stepped close enough to make Roy flinch when he shook his head to remove a few remaining drops.

"Knock it off, Johnny. I'm going to call us in available if you're done draining the hospital of hot water. You were in there long enough."

"Well, I was only half kidding about washing behind my ears. There's nothing like getting up close and personal with a kid demonstrating a perfect ten in the execution of projectile vomiting. Yech," John shuddered. "It's going to be awhile before I can eat macaroni and cheese again."

"Let's not go there; it's a staple at my house."

"Well, you'll have to make my apologies to Joanne then, because the thought of it is enough..."

Roy purposefully interrupted John, hoping to break that train of thought. "While you were in the shower, I checked on Angel. Dr. Bracket thinks she'll be fine. They're going to keep her overnight for observation; there's no telling if her drowsiness is from codeine that got into her system, or from the ipecac itself."

"That, added to the sheer exertion of throwing up more than..."

"So, how much are you willing to bet the guys are serving us high tea in thimble sized cups next shift?" He picked up the plastic bag that held Johnny's defiled uniform and handed it to him as they headed out to the hall.

John thought for a moment, calculating the speed at which news traveled in both the fire and sheriff's departments, factoring in the irresistible nature of the tale and the time it would take to reach a fellow firefighter's ears. "You're on. I'm thinking it will take well over a week. You're forgetting that no matter how juicy the story is, it still has to jump agencies. I bet I can go so far as to guess exactly who the guys are going to hear it from and when.

"A couple of the truckies from 49's B-shift play poker with a few county sheriffs on the first Friday of every month that they all have off." John juggled the vaguely aromatic sack to free a hand. "That'll be six days from today." He passed the sack back to Roy and held up fingers from both hands as he started to keep track. "The guys from 49 will make sure everyone at 51s hears of it first thing Saturday morning when they all come back on shift." He brought up a seventh finger. "Not one of those jokers on B-shift will be able to keep it to themselves longer than the time it takes to call Chet at home, who will have plenty of time to beg...borrow...or steal..." Three more fingers straightened individually for punctuation. "...a little girl's tea set before we're on shift again the following Wednesday. They'll be asking us 'one lump or two' eleven days from today. You wait and see: it'll be Wednesday after next."

"You're on. Why am I holding this?" Roy shoved the sack back into John's arms and lifted the HT to put them back in service.

Monday morning found Roy tying his shoes in the locker room, his radar tuned for signs that the "ipecac tale" had reached A-shift's ears. He wasn't planning on wasting much time trying to read Stoker or Captain Stanley; they could both be as stoically unreadable as an Egyptian sphinx. Chet on the other hand was acting a bit too nonchalant and Marco was quick to make an about-face before returning minutes later without the shopping bag he had initially entered the locker room with. Yep. Something was a-foot.

Johnny joined them and the conversation centered around giving him a hard time about his latest near-conquest. They each finished changing into their uniforms and filtered into the kitchen for a pre-roll-call cup of coffee.

Later that morning, Roy and John were finishing mopping and straightening the day room and kitchen. They had the station to themselves since the engine crew had not returned from inspecting a new set of storage units that just went up over in the railroad yards east of the station. They themselves had gotten out of that tour because there was a paramedic peer review meeting scheduled at Rampart at 10 a.m.

"Johnny, I hope you have five dollars in your wallet, because I'll be collecting on that bet sometime this afternoon."

"Too soon, man. There's no way that bit of gossip traveled that fast." John carefully wound the paperclip and rubber band device he had salvaged from the envelope labeled "dead killer bee" Chet had tried passing around last winter after watching a re-run of *Killer Bees* on TV.

Roy took a last swipe at the kitchen counter with a rag before turning to face John. "I'm telling you, Marco and Chet are hatching something. If Vince Howard heard about it Saturday evening before he got off shift, it woulda been easy enough for him to pick up the phone. Knowing those two, they probably had something planned before lights out."

"So, what are we gonna do about it?" John asked from where he crouched in front of the paperback Stoker had left on a corner of the kitchen table.

"Oh, I figure we should have something ready to pull out to share. Joanne says cucumber sandwiches will go nicely with whatever the guys are serving. The makings are in my car. We'll have to put them together after lunch. It wouldn't do to bring soggy offerings to this gathering." Roy leaned back against the counter as his partner finished placing the trap. "You really like to live dangerously, don't you? Come on, we're going to be late."

"How'd the meeting go?" Cap asked from his office doorway as he waited for his paramedics to join him after they hopped out of the squad.

"Pretty dry stuff. Brice felt the need to review the past six month's stats. I thought Johnny was going to put his own eye out with a number two pencil just to keep from sliding into a coma."

"You were looking pretty glassy-eyed yourself, pal. If we hadn'ta caught that run out to the college, we both would have needed precordial thumps to be revived." John paused with his hand on the kitchen door.

"Cap, what'd Mike make for lunch? I'm starving."

All three men swung back to retrace their steps at the sound of the dispatcher's voice.

"Squad 51, see the woman at the retirement center, 21811 Main Street; twenty-one, eight, eleven Main Street; time out 1242".

Cap paused to acknowledge the run, "KMG365. We'll keep keeping yours warm," he offered as he turned from the radio podium to pass the address to Roy.

"You going in with her?" Roy asked as he picked up the biophone and black drug box. The question was almost a rhetorical one, since it had been John who started the I.V. and had built a rapport with the seventy-nine-year-old resident.

"Yeah, see you there," John answered as he trotted alongside the stretcher to hold the I.V. aloft. He followed the gurney into the back of the ambulance and moved to switch the oxygen cannula from the green cylinder tucked between the patient's legs to the flow meter on the back wall.

Roy slid the biophone and black med box across the deck and paused to give his partner a moment to get situated before swinging the doors closed and giving them a solid "all clear" double-tap.

They were running code one since the patient was stable, and Roy lost sight of the ambulance after he caught a second red light in a row. He was just clearing the intersection on the green when the shriek of brakes made him flinch a glance to the rearview mirror as he braced for an impact. The stomach-turning crunch of folding metal came from behind and to the right of the squad.

He pulled a sharp right turn into a small parking lot, grabbed his helmet and the HT and jogged back to the intersection.

"LA County, this is Squad 51. There's been a single car accident at the corner of East Carson and Figueroa Streets. The vehicle is partially blocking both south and west bound traffic. Respond law enforcement and a tow truck to this location. Standby while I check for injuries."

"Ten-four 51, LA County, standing by."

Traffic was flowing around the rear of the white Datsun pickup, which jutted into the intersection. Roy turned his face away from the spray of dirt the rear wheels were kicking up as they spun in reverse. The left bumper and part of the hood were wrapped around a traffic signal pole in snug embrace.

"Hey, are you hurt? Did you hit your head?" He called as he reached through the driver's window to turn off the ignition and pocket the keys. He gave the door an experimental tug, followed by a more emphatic two-handed effort. The door refused to yield.

"You take it easy, okay." He reached to put a restraining hand on the man's forehead only to have it batted away.

"Get your hands offa me. Who the hell are you? Give me back my damn keys!"

"My name's Roy DeSoto. I'm a paramedic with the fire department. Try not to move. Do you hurt anywhere? Looks like you hit your head." Roy boosted himself further in through the window to get a better look at the gash above the man's right eye.

"You're not a cop. Let go of me! You have no right to keep me here! You give me back my keys, or you'll be wishing I had stopped at having my lawyer take your badge."

The man had lost most of Roy's attention which was now centered on the high-pitched wheeze coming from under the dash on the passenger's side. "Try not to move sir," he repeated, as he squirmed his way back out of the vehicle.

"LA, this is Squad 51, respond a second squad to my location."

"Ten-four 51."

Roy yanked the handle on the passenger side; this time the door gave way with ease.

He met the driver who was scooting across the bench with the source of the wheeze held against his chest.

"Sir, don't move him any more; I need to check him out."

"Get your hands off of my son. He's *my* son! You can't try to keep us from leaving!"

Roy was beginning to have his doubts about the truth of both of those statements.

"Let's just set him down here. Was he eating anything? Did he have anything in his mouth? Sir, does your son have asthma?"

Although the man wasn't answering any of Roy's questions, at least he had relinquished his hold on the gasping boy. The child's lips were circled by the barest of blue.

Roy positioned the child's airway, noting both shoulders shrugged with each breath and the spaces above the child's collarbones caved, matching the same harsh rhythm. He leaned in close to see if there were clues on the boy's breath; no discernible odor of hot dog, candy or the mint of gum. Roy asked the boy's searching eyes directly. "Son, do you have asthma?"

He was keying the HT even as the boy gave the slightest of nods in the affirmative.

"LA County, this is Squad 51, I have a male victim age approximately seven years old, currently having an asthma attack. Be advised I have no biophone, drug box or oxygen with me at this time." Roy did not mention that he was also lacking parental consent.

"Sir, does your son take any medication for his asthma; does he carry an inhaler or pills with him?"

"I, ah..."

Roy caught the flutter of the boy's right hand and followed the direction it pointed. He swept the space under the dashboard and fished out a metal Peanuts lunch box. Snoopy was doing his frenetic happy dance across the lid.

Something rattled as he lifted the lid and sifted through lunch remnants to produce a canister from the bottom of the tin box. Roy shook the inhaler and gripped the boy's chin in an effort to get his patient's attention. A darker shade of blue lips parted when he pressed the mouthpiece to them. "Okay, son. I need you to take a deep...

"TATE IS NOT YOUR SON!"

"Then be his father; he needs you right now," came the paramedic's steely reply. "Okay now, Tate. Take a slow, deep breath. Atta boy." After he squeezed the inhaler, Roy actually muttered an audible prayer that a greater portion of the medication had been delivered than he suspected. Tate's small hand came up to help steady the mouthpiece and his nod let Roy know he was ready for a second puff. This time the boy managed to inhale long enough for Roy to better synch the depression of the canister. "Good job, Tate. Now hold your breath just one more second. Great! You're doing great. Now slow and easy. Try to take slower breaths." The paramedic let his world narrow for the next several breaths as he cheered the weakest of respiratory efforts.

The wail of a sirened vehicle announced its approach and the man who had been holding the boy's legs in his lap found animation once again and scooped the boy up onto his shoulder. The burly, agitated man began to force his way past Roy in renewed effort to exit via the passenger side door. "Cut the crap, Tate Henry," he ordered the weakly struggling child. We talked about this. You are going to come and live with me now, so just settle down."

The boy did settle, but Roy judged it was more in surrendered exhaustion than due to any form of happy compliance.

"Hold on now, let's let that medicine work before we move him. More help is on the way." The unfolding scenario was causing Roy's already strident longing for backup and equipment to ratchet up a few notches.

"No, you hold on. My son and I are leaving *now*. I'll make sure he takes his medication, but you have no right to keep us."

Roy refused to budge, and instead reached to rotate a small arm for a better peek at likely veins. "**LOOK** at your son. He can't breathe. He needs more than just his inhaler. He needs oxygen and an I.V. and a doctor. He needs to get to a hospital. And right now he needs you to help him get those things. If we don't get his airway open, he is going to die. *Your son is going to die* because you decided to refuse help."

"Get out of my way, I'm going to sue your ass off. You can't keep either of us from leaving." The father's agitation was ground out from behind clenched teeth.

"Maybe he can't, Mr. Erbright, but *I* will."

Roy rolled grateful eyes skyward when he heard the stern voice coming from just off his left shoulder.

"Hey, Roy. Squad 43 is just another minute out." Lieutenant Frey guided Roy as he backed out of the pickup with Tate in his arms. The deputy reached to pull a somewhat deflated father out of the cab. Turning to his partner, while keeping a firm hold of Erbright's arm he called, "Here Justin, take him over to the patrol car and make sure he understands his rights." He leveled a look of warning into his prisoner's eyes. "Don't make him add 'resisting arrest' to your growing list of felonies."

"Kevin Erbright, you're under arrest for kidnapping and reckless endangerment of a minor. You have the right to remain silent..." Roy did not even look up from his patient as Deputy Justin Cataldo led the non-resisting man away.

Frey spread a blanket from the squad. "He took the boy from his school's playground during recess. They missed him almost immediately. We got hold of his mom who has sole custody not to mention a restraining order against her ex. We asked for permission to treat him right after you reported the asthma attack."

"Watcha need, Roy?" A hand on the small of his back let him know Ted Fallon's position as the paramedic dropped the med box at Roy's left elbow.

Brice must have been covering at station 43, because the efficient hands that reached to place a non-rebreather oxygen mask on the now fully cyanotic boy's face belonged to Craig.

"Get Rampart, Ted. We need an order for an I.V. and epinephrine. This kid is tanking fast." Roy handed a tourniquet to Brice and he set another aside as he tore open packages and set an optimistic, optimally-sized needle along-side two incrementally smaller ones.

"Rampart, this is Squad 43, how do you read?"

He tossed Brice a matching set of packages and cinched rubber around the boy's right bicep. He felt a firm grip on his own forearm as he slapped his first choice into a wimpy imitation of a raised vein. He flicked his gaze up and silently acknowledged the unspoken concern in his fellow paramedic's eyes before inserting the middle choice of needles under his patient's skin.

"Go ahead, 43," Dixie's voice answered, "We read you loud and clear."

With an exaggerated sigh, Brice returned to the left inner elbow he held in his hand and continued to search for a back-up site. He abandoned that effort when the boy took one shallow breath, and...did...not...exhale. "Respiratory arrest," he announced as he moved to the patient's head to swap out masks for the one attached to the respirator valve.

"Rampart, we have a male patient, approximately six-years-old, about 45 pounds, in respiratory arrest..." Ted paused, hoping Roy would jump in with a few details.

"Got it!" Roy almost crowed in triumph. "Tell them he's an asthmatic, had two puffs of Primatene Mist eight minutes ago and ask for that I.V. and epinephrine. Do it now, Ted." Roy taped the I.V. cannula in place and attached a bag of Ringer's.

"His lungs are too stiff for the regulator, I'm switching to the Ambu bag."

"...requesting an I.V. and permission to administer epinephrine." Ted's eyes were wide enough to show their whites, but his voice held steady.

Roy's fingers were snapping out the bubbles from the dose of epi he'd just drawn up as Bracket's voice replaced Dixie's.

"Go ahead, 43. Give him zero-point-two milligrams of epinephrine IM. Start an I.V. with Ringer's lactate, and get me a set of vitals ASAP. Have a bag of D5W with one milligram of epi mixed and ready to piggyback into the I.V. but hold off on that until we get a strip..."

The first epi was injected into a thigh and Roy had the I.V. drip prepared before Bracket's order was "over". Brice continued to ventilate while Ted attached EKG leads and Roy listened to breath sounds.

Tate was breathing pretty much on his own; a watchful Brice hovered, armed with the bag/valve/mask to give an occasional assisted breath as they loaded into the ambulance five minutes later.

By the time Roy left exam room four, his young patient was answering questions and asking about his mom and dad.

John was holding up the front of the nurses' station pretending to be totally absorbed in a conversation with Dixie, but Roy did not miss the searching gaze that was turned on him the moment he stepped into the hallway. No doubt, John had gleaned enough information about the run he'd missed to have worked up a fair amount of curiosity and concern.

There was no way, this side of God striking Johnny momentarily deaf and blind, that his astute partner missed it when Craig Brice pounced. Roy was pulled into exam room three for a harshly whispered conference and lecture. A conversation, that, while it included stern admonishments and preachings against such egregious disregard for protocols, "protocols-that-were-set-in-place-to-protect-both-paramedic-and-patient", was not without a grudging undertone of concession that a life had been saved. Too bad it ended with an attention-getting slap to his back and Brice's instructions to never, *ever* involve him in such goings-on again.

Roy took a sip from the can of Fresca he had dug from the depths of the refrigerator and made a face. *Who drank this stuff?*

Even though the 'Walking Rule Book' had made no mention of the need for full disclosure, it felt beyond wrong not to give Bracket at least a thumb-nail sketch of the actual timing of the pre-hospital treatments he had ordered for a small patient by the name of Tate H. Erbright*. The jury was still out as to whether the now incarcerated father would attempt to press charges. As Medical Director of the paramedic program, Dr. Bracket deserved a head's up. The fact that Roy respected the doctor and considered him a friend made that doubly true. They had a meeting scheduled for 4:30 in the afternoon; a meeting Roy was not anxious to attend, in spite of the fact he himself had set it up. At least he would be able to try for some sleep at home before indulging in a round of true confessions with his boss.

He upended the can so it could fulfill its higher purpose of distraction as it splattered in hiss and foam on the asphalt at his feet.

"Jackson on C's is gonna miss that. His wife is making him cut back on caffeine, calories, and the enjoyment of palatable beverages." Johnny's voice floated through the pre-dawn air before its owner joined Roy to lean against the brick at the rear of the station.

A nudging elbow interrupted his circling thoughts with the offer of a full glass of milk - twin to the one his partner was just polishing off. Roy shook his head.

"You want company when you talk to Bracket?" John started in on the second glass, as Roy turned his face towards him. "Frey and Ted filled me in... and Dix," John supplied the answer to the question he read in Roy's raised eyebrows.

"No, but you can meet me someplace afterwards - somewhere we can pursue "the enjoyment of palatable beverages."

John sipped his milk, Roy worried at events he could not change and the morning sky lightened.

"Well, I still have a job," Roy announced as he joined his partner at a corner table.

John snorted over the foam on his beer. "Like *that* was ever in question. I know you needed to stew about 'what-ifs' and 'what-nots', but the bottom line is you did exactly what every one of us *hope* we would have done."

Roy, not feeling up to a dissection of the run, returned the snort as John lifted the pitcher in pantomimed question. A nod filled another glass.

The silence lasted as long as Roy was willing to test Johnny's patience.

"Bracket had already guessed most of it; it turns out the biophone is not quite the buffer/filter/barrier we sometimes perceive it to be."

John held the easy quip that came to mind.

"He wasn't thrilled with how it all went down, but it helped that it worked out okay," Roy added after a few moments of silence.

"How's the kid doing?"

"They're keeping him for a few days to get a pulmonary doc in to consult. Both Bracket and Early think it's time Tate had a more involved regimen than an over-the-counter inhaler tucked in between his peanut butter and jelly."

Half an hour later a captain slid into the chair next to Roy; an engineer claimed a spot across the table. Roy poured without comment.

Chet sauntered in and with a "Hey, babe" and turned to confiscate a chair from the empty table behind him. Roy's eyes swept the room to settle on Marco. The final member of the crew leaned against the bar, content to peruse the pretty waitresses as he waited for the bartender to turn his way. Roy raised his original, still-mostly-full glass in greeting and settled back to let the conversation flow around him.

He looked up when a plastic saucer pinged off his wrist. Marco casually dealt five others across the table. Roy picked up the matching cup which was plunked before him to contemplate the Holly Hobby motif.

It turned out whiskey served from plastic tea-cups went down pretty smoothly.

*If you are playing the anagram game, this is the form of Tate's name you should use as the subject. Three rug rats in this episode have anagrammed names.