

The first I knew of Mr Wilson was when he showed up to take my mother to see *Unforgiven*.

'Jeffrey,' said Ma. 'You're early.'

'Am I?' he replied, smiling like a kid on his first date. 'I hope you don't mind.'

'No, it's fine,' she said. 'If you don't mind waiting, that is. I have to put my face on.'

'You always look beautiful,' he smiled.

Even I didn't buy this and Ma stared at him for a moment, wondering whether she should just say to hell with this and send him packing but finally she shrugged her shoulders and let him in.

'This is Jack,' she said, pointing at me. 'Jack, this is Mr Wilson.'

'Hello, Jack,' he said, extending his hand. 'What's that you're watching?'

'TV,' I said.

'Well I can see that. What show is it?'

'Jack, answer Mr Wilson when he asks you a question.'

'I don't know,' I said. 'Just something that's on.'

'Will you two boys be alright if I go and make myself presentable?' asked Ma.

'No rush,' said Mr Wilson. 'We'll be just fine, won't we, Jack?'

I said nothing as Ma left the room.

'I have a nephew called Jack,' said Mr Wilson, sitting down. 'He's about your age. Maybe you know him.'

'We don't gather in a group,' I said.

'No,' he said, smiling. 'No, I don't suppose you do. Tell me this. Does your mother have many dates?'

'Why do you want to know?' I asked.

'No reason. My, you're a friendly little boy, aren't you?'

The truth is she did have dates. Quite a few of them. And I hated them all. One was a guy young enough to be my older brother. One was my teacher. One was my uncle. It was a mess, the whole thing.

'I know you, don't I?' I asked, staring at him.

'I don't think so.'

'Your wife works at Mr Whippy's. I've seen you with her.'

'Actually, that's my sister,' he said, smiling. 'Nice try though.'

'Fine,' I said, standing up. 'If that's how you want to play it.' I walked over to the dresser and stopped for only a moment before slamming my head into the corner of it. The blood poured as the bruise formed on my forehead and Mr Wilson could only stare at me, open mouthed, unable to believe what he'd just witnessed.

'What the - ?' cried Ma, running out of the bedroom.

'I'm sorry,' I said, bursting into tears and pointing at Mr Wilson. 'All I said was he should take care of you, that's all. He didn't have to hit me.'

He looked around at my mother and then back at me. A few minutes later, and he was gone.

'I'm so sorry,' said Ma, kissing me over and over. 'These guys... one's worse than the other. It's just gonna be you and me from now on, I promise. Ok?'

'Ok,' I said, wondering whether I might get the next day off school too.