

A Nurse's Confession

The room encompassing the Medical Board was overly expansive, creating an illusion of sparse furnishings. Hints of a modern décor appeared to center around a long cherry oak conference table, and off to the side, a miniature model of the entire medical complex stood alone on a complementary oak pedestal. Several framed photographs and conceptual drawings of the hospital stood on opposing walls, chronologically detailing its growth over the last century.

The members of the Board were primarily middle-aged men of varied nationalities, but it was one particularly ambitious woman who stood out amongst the majority. And to Bradford's dismay she was highly revered. So much so, that she had recently become the Director of the Board. Naturally, he held little favor with this woman who despised his flamboyant personality and chauvinistic repertoire. Dr. Anne Tunney was simply too shrewd to succumb to his deceitful tactics.

"I'm having a little trouble understanding why you want us to reverse our decision now. Just a week ago you were singing his praises. And now you're trying to tell us that he's redirecting funds for a phantom project?" Tunney probed impatiently.

"I know it's hard to believe," Bradford responded with a sinister smirk, "but the fact of the matter is—Mr. Wright's

been performing unauthorized experiments right under our noses. We have a moral obligation to shut him down.”

“It took six months of deliberation to endorse this project. We’re not going to drop it simply because of some personal conflict!”

Bradford seemed perplexed. “You’ll have to forgive me Madam Director, but this has nothing to do with a personal conflict. I’m merely looking out for the reputation of this institution. Frankly, I’m insulted by your implication that...”

Tunney interjected abruptly. “Dr. Bradford—there are no implications here. But it has been brought to our attention that you’ve been making things very difficult for the man.”

“He told you that?” Bradford queried with a hint of sarcasm.

“No. Actually we’ve heard it from several sources who will remain anonymous,” Tunney countered shrewdly. “In fact, we find it very disconcerting that a senior member of our staff has carried on in such an unprofessional manner. After this matter’s been resolved, we *will* be conducting a thorough investigation of your administrative practices.”

Bradford was steaming, but quickly recomposed as he responded. “I understand, but I think you need to hear the basis of my accusations before you pass judgment on my actions. I have irrefutable proof that this man has knowingly deceived this institution, and this Board would be foolish not to attend to this issue promptly.”

Another Board member chimed in rather angrily. “Dr. Bradford—I suggest you watch how you address this Board. You’re already skating on thin ice!”

Tunney raised a hand in truce. “We will decide whether or not to take action on this matter. So far, all we’ve heard

from you is unsubstantiated rumors and hearsay. Where's this proof that you've been boasting about."

Everyone's attention was now sternly focused on the man. Bradford calmly produced a manila folder and began distributing the contents to the Board members.

Merritt was sprawled out on a fitness machine, extending and retracting his arms as beads of sweat began to form on his brows—all the while, listening intently to Wright's most recent account of his horrific nightmare.

"...and I looked up to find Cassandra standing above the grave. It's the first time my suspicions had been confirmed."

Merritt paused, lowering the weight bar. The weights made a metallic clank as they came to rest. "What do you mean?" he queried breathlessly.

"Whatever it was that appeared as Cassandra, wasn't her at all. When I looked down to see what it really was, I was horrified." Wright's eyes widened with terror, recollecting the nightmarish image.

Merritt sat motionless in suspense.

"It seemed that my worst fears and phobias had conglom-erated into the most horrific beast that I could ever imagine. Something that was part arachnid, part reptile and God knows what else. All I know is that it scared the hell out of me."

"Well Jack, I'm sorry the prescription didn't help. That's strange because..." Before Merritt could complete his sentence, Hardcourt walked into the room.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but I was hoping to speak with Jack in private," she said with apprehension.

Wright and Merritt glanced at one another curiously. After a moment, Merritt finally shrugged. Taking that as a cue, Wright stood and exited the room with Hardcourt.

“Jack—is it alright if I call you Jack?” Hardcourt asked. Her tone was somewhat submissive.

Wright glanced down momentarily, confused by her kind demeanor. “Yeah—I guess,” he finally responded.

She took a deep breath and spoke. “I realize this is kind of awkward, but I wanted to apologize for making things so uncomfortable between us.”

Wright was leery of her intentions, but remained silent as she continued.

“Believe me when I say that I can relate to the pain of losing a loved one. I’ve had...”

Wright immediately raised a hand in objection. “Nurse, you’ll have to forgive me, but this topic is not open for discussion—especially with you!”

Hardcourt was not discouraged and pressed on. “Jack—please let me talk. It’s important that you understand where I’m coming from. I’m not the horrible person that everyone makes me out to be.”

Wright said nothing, but gave a nod of affirmation.

“Thank you,” she said graciously and continued. “You see—I wasn’t always this cynical. When I started out as a nurse, I had all the dreams and aspirations of a starry-eyed young woman. That was until one cold December evening.” She paused momentarily to reflect. “I had just finished my Christmas shopping with my daughter Jenny and we were on our way home. As I crossed the intersection of Main and Fourth, I heard this loud bang. The next thing I know, my car’s spinning out of control. When the car finally came to rest, I placed my hand over my face and noticed that I was bleeding. It hadn’t even occurred to me that we’d just been hit by another car. The next thought that went through my mind was that of Jenny. I looked over to see if she was okay.

To my horror the entire passenger's side had been completely caved in. At first, it looked as if Jenny had survived. She smiled at me as if to let me know that she was alright, but then she closed her eyes and never opened them again." Hardcourt's eyes began to well up with tears. For the first time Wright felt genuine sympathy for the woman and placed his hand on her shoulder.

Hardcourt quickly regained her composure and continued. "Anyway, the man who hit us jumped out of his car. As he approached, I thought he might be coming over to help, but he simply ignored us as he ran by. It couldn't have been more than a few moments before the police arrived. It turns out that we'd been the victims of a high-speed pursuit. The man was a notorious drug dealer."

Wright politely interrupted. "I'll hazard to guess that the individual in question was black."

"Yes," she responded somberly and resumed her story. "But that's not the end of it. He was eventually arrested and the DA began pursuing charges of vehicular homicide. Unfortunately, before they could make the charges stick, the man somehow made bail. To no one's surprise he fled the state. As a result, I then had only one mission in life—to find the man who murdered my daughter."

The memories and images of the event began to race through Wright's mind. "Wait a minute. I remember this story. You mean to tell me that was you?"

"Yes, but obviously I was under my married name at the time," she responded rather coldly.

Wright seemed stunned as he spoke. "I would've never have guessed you'd been married—let alone had a child." He paused for a moment, pondering his next question. "So what happened to your husband?"

Her eyes grew cold and resentful as she responded. “Well, as you can imagine, I spent every waking moment trying to locate this murderous bastard. Interviews, phone calls, follow-ups on any potential leads. It didn’t leave much time for my husband. He just wanted to forget about the whole mess and move on. I mean, I could understand if it had been years or even months, but we’re talking only a few weeks. Maybe that was his way of dealing with the pain, but it created a huge rift between us. We never recovered.”

Wright began to feel a genuine sense of remorse for the things he had said to this clearly tortured woman. The story had nearly brought him to tears. Yet, in the back of his mind, something wasn’t quite right. He thought carefully before he spoke.

“I must admit, that’s one of the most tragic stories I’ve ever heard, and I can honestly sympathize with your loss. To watch the dearest, most precious person in your life fade before your very eyes?” Wright’s voice wavered momentarily. “There *is* nothing more devastating. But tell me this. Do you really think that gives you the right to be a racist. And surely it can’t excuse your malicious behavior. You think *you* have a right to be angry at the world? At least you knew who was responsible for your daughter’s death. You had something tangible to hate—someone to despise. And if memory serves, they ultimately caught him. Right?”

Hardcourt was a little shaken by his reaction, but graced him with a single nod.

“And wasn’t he punished for his crimes?”

“Yes, he was eventually implicated in several murders. He was executed about six years ago,” she said coldly.

“So you had closure,” Wright exclaimed, clasping his hands together. “Well, I never had closure. My wife was

taken from me for no good reason and I have no one to blame for it. I'm supposed to accept it as the will of God. Well, I don't accept it! Yet you don't see me taking it out on everyone around me. Don't get me wrong. I appreciate your candidness, but you're going to have to do better than that if you want to earn my respect." Wright ended the conversation abruptly and returned to the weight room.

"So what did our good nurse have to say," Merritt queried facetiously.

Wright shook his head in sorrow. "It's no laughing matter Chris. On the one hand, the woman gave me every reason to forgive her for all the trouble she's caused. But on the other hand, I'll never understand why some people want to punish the world for their anguish. I just hope she got the message."

Merritt felt a tinge of shame for his earlier quip as he responded. "I take it that she told you about her daughter."

"Yeah. You knew about it?"

"Of course. That's why I've always tried to give her the benefit of the doubt. And let me tell you this. She hasn't shared that story with too many people. Frankly, I'm surprised she shared it with you."

Just as he said that, another interruption broke into their conversation. "Doctor—I'm sorry to bother you, but we've got an emergency and your presence is required," the nurse said urgently.

Both men reacted to the request and headed for the emergency room. When they arrived, Merritt nearly fell to his knees. His father was lying on the examination table.