

CHAPTER 1

*I thought I would never see Carrie Genesen again and then she gets admitted to this hospital, where I work. **WHERE I WORK!!!** I knew she might talk and that would be a problem, a big problem.*

But I am systematic. I am in control. And I will deal with it.

When she was admitted to Danton, Carrie was considered both a flight risk and a suicide risk so that day she was taken directly to the locked ward on the first floor. I had just stepped into the lobby as she came through the front door. She was flanked by an ambulance attendant on one side and a woman from the admitting office on the other, each holding an arm. Her parents, Noah and Marlene Genesen, followed close behind her. She was older surely, about fifteen now, and a little taller with longer hair, but it was Carrie. There was no doubt. I watched as the group turned to my left and entered the locked ward. None of them noticed me then, but I stopped cold.

The situation was urgent. Critical. Carrie would soon be in therapy and she could reveal the truth any time in the course of treatment. I could not let her say anything. Louise Ponte would probably be her therapist. She works with most of the kids. How long could Carrie keep the secret bottled up inside her here? It will tear her apart, I'm sure. A good shrink like Ponte will pull it out of her. And if Carrie said what she knows, would that fucking bitch of a psychiatrist believe her? Yes. Would her parents believe it? Definitely. I cannot take the risk.

So I had to adjust quickly and as soon as I had the opportunity that first afternoon, I confronted Carrie. Change-of-shift had just started so most of the staff were meeting behind the closed door to the nursing office. I went right to her room.

There wasn't much time. I stood in her doorway, blocking her exit. She was sitting on her bed and she looked up at me. Her big brown eyes were unfocused. She was holding her bandaged arm and dressed in a tight red tank top and extremely short cut-off jeans. I could not help looking at her naked legs for an instant. Then I looked up to her face.

I stared hard at her, just like I had a year earlier. She was still wrapped in the anger that brought her to the hospital and then suddenly, I appeared in front of her. It took her a moment, but even without my disguise, she recognized me. And as my identity dawned on her, I could see she was terrified all over again.

The room enclosed her. She stood up next to her narrow bed and backed up a step. The only sound was the raspy breathing of her roommate, a frail, older woman asleep in the other bed, across the room.

Her eyes darted everywhere around the small room. "You..." she whispered, barely drawing a breath.

She was frozen in place once again. Only this time she was confined, with no exit behind her. She gathered her arms across her stomach. I didn't have to say a word. I knew she was struggling to make sense of my presence, how I could be there.

I think it took all of her courage, all the strength she could muster, to say “I haven’t said anything. Not to anyone. Just like you said.”

“And you won’t,” I hissed, through gritted teeth. “You don’t know me. I don’t know you. Got it?”

Carrie barely nodded and whispered “yes.”

I was satisfied I had made my point. I looked down at my watch. Staff would be spilling out of the nursing station any minute. I had to leave.

But I had no illusions. Sooner or later, she would talk. I had bought myself some time, time that I needed to make a plan to silence Carrie permanently.

CHAPTER 2

As soon as he left her room, Carrie felt dizzy. Her legs collapsed beneath her and she landed, sitting on the edge of her bed. She had harbored the tiny hope that coming to the Danton Morris Institute might allow her to help her older sister and feel better about herself. Maybe at last she would tell what she knew and that would save Wendy and bring her home. She loved her sister and longed to be with her again. But the same man who had terrified her a year ago, who had haunted her thoughts ever since, was here, in this hospital. He had stared straight at her, not moving and threatening her with his cold eyes. Her body shook with fear and confusion as she pictured his face in her doorway.

And although shocked and horrified, one thought was clear to her. *Don’t say a thing.*

Her tormentor had been gone only ten minutes when Carrie suddenly bolted from her room, running to the exit door of the ward. It was locked and she banged on it feverishly. “I need to get out. I need to leave,” she shouted.

Jared Appleton, a psychiatric aide, was seated in the hallway when Carrie dashed past him and crashed into the locked door. He leaped up and ran to her. “Carrie!” he said. “Calm down. You need to stop! Everything is okay.”

“Let me out,” she yelled. She was quaking, her eyes big and frightened. “I’m...It’s dangerous.”

“It’s okay. You’re safe here,” he emphasized, reaching down to the small quivering girl and gently turning her shoulder. “It’s all right,” he said, in a softer voice.

Carrie seemed to wilt. Her legs weakened and she leaned against the door, looking still smaller than her five foot two inch height. “I’m scared,” she whimpered.

“Just come back with me,” he said as he led her by the arm to her room. “You need to stay in here, Carrie. Quiet now. It’s okay. I’ll sit with you.” She sat down hesitantly on her bed and he sat down next to her.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, but she just shook her head.

He remained with her for the remaining few minutes of his shift. “I have to go,” he told her, but someone will be here with you. It’ll be all right,” he repeated. She did not look at him as she sat there

trembling. He left her and stopped in the nursing station on the way out and told the evening staff to be sure to watch her.

At dinner time that evening, and again at breakfast the next day, a meal was brought on a tray for her, but she would not eat anything. She remained on edge throughout the day and late that second afternoon, she attempted to escape the ward again. This time, she tried to run right through Jared who had been watching her from her doorway. When she slammed into him, he blocked her and she fell backward, striking her head on the bed frame and landing with a thud on the floor. Jared ran in and crouched alongside her, examining her head.

Nicole Boudreau, a young nurse, saw the incident from the hall and rushed into the room, finding them sitting together on the floor. She left to get a damp cloth and a first aid kit. She understood what Jared had done. It was an accident, she knew, and she was moved by the compassion he showed the young girl immediately afterward.

On the other hand, Barbara Hannigan, the day shift charge nurse, who was Jared's immediate supervisor, blamed him. She strode in and saw him holding Carrie's head which was bleeding slightly where it had hit the hard wood. He tried to explain that she had rushed at him and he needed to stop her from leaving. But Barbara was annoyed with him and ordered him to go to the nursing station. "I'll talk to you later," she told him.

Barbara was a large woman and she easily lifted Carrie on to her bed where she examined her, finding a minor cut, nothing serious. Nicole returned with the damp cloth and dabbed at Carrie's forehead. Both nurses thought Carrie was more frightened than hurt. Barbara told her that she was indeed safe, but Carrie shook her head. "I hate it here," she cried.

Over the following days however, Carrie became much calmer or at least more in control. The locked ward had a way of shaping behavior and with time, it gradually did its work. The consensus was Carrie was getting better. Everyone knew she did not belong in the locked ward for long.

CHAPTER 3

Around mid-morning, five days after her admission to Danton, Carrie was moved upstairs to Two, an open, unlocked ward. Not everyone was happy about that.

And now, at 4:15 pm, back in the locked first floor ward, while most of the staff met behind the closed office door, Jared sat on a rigid plastic chair outside the nursing office. He pushed his long legs out before him and absently patted his belly, feeling relaxed. In fifteen minutes, when change-of-shift ended, Nicole and the others would emerge and he would leave. But for the time being, it was his job to stay in the hall and monitor the patients.

Same old routine, he thought, not unhappily. For almost six years, he had worked as an aide in Danton's locked ward, the most secure section of the hospital. He liked his job at the Danton Morris Institute, a small private psychiatric hospital located at the northern edge of Brookline, Massachusetts, a suburb that wedged itself into the middle of Boston.

In the empty hallway, Jared listened to the sounds around him, the quiet chatter of patients and

visitors on the other side of the locked door and beyond it, the steady buzz of traffic two blocks north on Commonwealth Avenue. *It was not so peaceful earlier today*, he recalled.

Among the staff, the locked ward was called the Lobster Trap, or simply, the Trap. It was easy for patients to enter but hard for them to leave. Their only way out was if the staff let them out. And then they could not always be sure where they would go. It might be someplace worse. They might be sent to the state hospital in Medfield, considered understaffed and potentially dangerous, with little therapy and poor sanitary conditions.

But leaving the Trap could also be an improvement. Patients like Carrie could move upstairs to the unlocked ward, one step closer to freedom. Or they might even be sent home. Patients in the Trap rarely knew what their future held, but the staff usually knew. They knew who would move upstairs, who would go home, and who was destined for worse.

Jared looked up as Jim Eisner, a twenty year old schizophrenic man, approached him with an awkward, stumbling gait. The young patient's shoulders hunched together, making his slender frame appear even thinner than it already was. Long greasy black hair hung around the sides of his narrow face. He lurched to a stop and stood before Jared.

Jared looked up at him. Jim had been a first year student at Harvard, full of possibility when he suddenly suffered an acute psychotic break from which he never recovered. And he never would. Schizophrenics could not be cured.

How does a life take such an absolute and extreme turn? Jared wondered. *He's going to spend his whole stay in the Trap. And then, when his insurance runs out, he'll probably wind up in Medfield. We need to clean him up, poor guy. I'll give him a shower tomorrow.*

Suddenly, Jim waved a hand in front of Jared's face and asked "why do pigs fuck?"

Surprised and bemused, Jared pondered the question. "Cause they're makin' bacon?" he guessed. Jared thought that was a pretty clever answer.

"No," snarled Jim. "It's 'cause they're fuckin' pigs."

"Okay," Jared said, with a slight smile. He rose, swung around Jim and walked into Franklin Borelli's room. In the pale light, he saw the heavyset thirty-three year old man flat on his back, lashed to his bed, with his limbs splayed out at the four corners. Leather cuffs held each wrist and ankle in place.

Franklin had been a quiet, cooperative patient for the first eight days since his admission to the Trap, but at noontime today, he suddenly attacked the exit door, banging his shoulder into it multiple times, screaming something about the Devil and terrifying everyone within earshot. Talking to him did not calm him down and finally he had to be restrained before he injured himself or someone else.

Jared sighed and rubbed a sore spot on his chest where he had been kicked during the restraint. He had been no match earlier for the much larger patient and he was fortunate to have help getting the big man under control. Rick Creaton, the Occupational Therapy Director, had come in from the lobby, and two aides, his friends Todd Baron and Billy Kowalski, came down from the second floor. Together, the four men managed to pin Franklin to the floor.

Billy Kowalski was a giant compared to the others but even he would have needed help handling

Borelli. Todd Baron, though handicapped with a slight limp from childhood polio, was a weight lifter and quite strong for his five foot ten inch, 165 pound frame. And Rick Creaton was 28 years old and a fit surfer. It was unusual for a member of the professional staff like Creaton to join in a restraint, but he had heard the commotion from the lobby and decided he was needed.

From reading the chart, Jared knew Franklin had a severe manic episode, staying up three days straight and driving wildly throughout Rhode Island and southern Massachusetts. He had been speeding through Taunton on Route 495 when he was finally stopped by the Massachusetts State Police. In a torrent of speech, he told the state trooper that there was a radio transmitter in his brain and the Devil was tracking him.

Now drowsy but awake, Franklin was immobilized in his bed. Julie Ortwein, one of the staff nurses, sat in a chair alongside him, calmly writing notes. She did not look up as Jared approached the bed and stared down at the shackled patient.

Although sedated and bound tightly, Franklin still seemed dangerous to Jared as if he could possibly rip the restraints right off the bed frame. In fact, Franklin could barely move.

Jared leaned over. "How ya doin'?" he asked.

"Uh," Franklin gurgled, his bleary eyes looking up at Jared, "could you loosen dees tings?" He pulled up one arm, as far as it would go, an inch off the bed.

Jared looked closer. There were red marks where the cuff bit into Franklin's wrist. The swollen skin on his puffy hand was bright white. *That must hurt*, Jared thought. He felt a tug of guilt since he was one of the staff who had attached the cuffs. All four men had been frightened of Franklin at the time and maybe made the cuffs a bit too tight without really meaning to. Jared began to reach toward the raised arm and then hesitated. It was no longer his choice to make. He glanced at Julie, who shook her head.

"Not right now," he told Franklin. "Sorry. See what the next shift says. They'll be out soon."

"Uh" was the response.

Jared moved on. He poked his head in the other seven rooms on the ward. Carrie's room now only held the silent older woman who had been her roommate. Jared returned to his seat outside the Nursing Station, thinking about Franklin and Carrie. Jim Eisner was still standing in the hallway wearing a peculiar smile as if perhaps another riddle was forthcoming, but he said nothing.

"Why don't you go sit in the lounge?" Jared said to him. It was not a question and Jim knew it. He ambled off to the small day room at the far end of the hall. Jared ran a hand through his own thick dark hair and watched Jim go.

Jared usually worked the day shift in the Trap. That meant arriving at eight in the morning and leaving at half past four in the afternoon. The extra half hour allowed the four-to-twelve staff to get the day's change-of-shift report. During that half hour, he was responsible for covering the ward and watching the patients until the rest of the staff exited the small office.

At precisely 4:30, the office door opened and Eric Zinkawich, one of the evening shift aides, slipped out. A short, wiry twenty-eight year old, he was a man of extremes, either hyperactive or very lethargic. The lethargy was inevitably due to smoking marijuana. Today, he was his energetic self. He skittered over

the linoleum floor and landed, with a liquidy stop in front of Jared. Flicking his long sandy hair away from his face, he squeezed Jared's shoulder.

"So Carrie went up to Two today," he stated.

"Yeah, she was...she had calmed down. She was okay."

"And Franklin freaked out?"

"Yeah, completely. Screaming, banging into the door. Went nuts. Something about the Devil. The Devil had Carrie. Something like that. Man, he was a handful. It was not easy getting him down. He's pretty out of it now, though. Oh, see if they'll loosen his cuffs."

"Yeah," Eric said, his eyes darting up and down the small hallway. After a pause, he said "so no more Carrie."

"Nope," said Jared, studying his friend for a moment and wondering why he seemed so focused on Carrie. *He likes every good looking young girl. Simple as that.*

A moment later, Nicole Boudreau came out of the nursing station. The young nurse gave Jared a weak smile and his heart jumped. Seeing her always quickened his breath. He stood quickly and joined her. At the same time, Eric reached over and pinched her bare upper arm causing her to giggle nervously and causing Jared to feel a sudden stab of jealousy. Although Jared glared at him, Eric simply grinned at them both and walked away.

Nicole looked up at Jared, shaking her head but still smiling. He stared down at her, transfixed by her deep blue eyes and long dark lashes. After a glistening moment, her smile changed to a furrowed look of concern. He broke his gaze, moved to the exit door and unlocked it allowing them to walk out together. They stopped in the lobby and the door closed behind them with a sharp click. Nicole was quiet and he turned toward her again. He was eight years older than she and, at six feet, at least nine inches taller. He sought her face, but her lustrous dark shoulder-length hair obscured her profile.

Drawing as close to her as he could without actually touching her, he asked "tired?"

She looked up at him. "Kinda. Franklin really got to me today, I guess."

"Well, he seemed okay just now. Of course he's still in restraints, doesn't like that. They're tight, but he's calm." Jared paused a moment. "He's okay now, but yeah, this morning, man, he was a tiger. It took all four of us to handle him. He is one strong fucker..."

"Well, he was scared, you know?"

"*He* was scared? Shit, so was I. He kicked me in the chest. Man, it hurt. Still does. Good thing Creaton was there. And Billy and Todd came down from Two or we'd of really been in trouble."

"Well, a hundred milligrams of IM Thorazine helped too." She was the nurse who administered that tranquilizing shot to the screaming patient. The four men had to hold him still on the floor, so she could get close enough. "I wonder why he was so fixated on Carrie," she pondered, shaking her head.

Jared had no answer. *Who knows what patients really think? Or anyone, for that matter.*

For him, Franklin's behavior was not that unusual. Outbursts and patient restraints happened all the time. *Wonder how long stuff like that will bother her*, he mused. *Maybe always.*

"You wanna get a drink?" he asked, changing the subject. Her beautiful eyes flashed as she turned and seemed to study him. He loved looking at her.

Another smile formed on her pretty lips. "Okay. Yeah, that'd be nice. But not too long. I gotta get home."

"Yeah, okay. Charlie's? Or we could go down to Kenmore Square...Shea's?"

"No, let's go to Charlie's. Just a glass of wine." She smiled again. "That would be good."

Jared was not supposed to drink, but he could go to a bar. "Okay, cool," he said.

They stepped outside, both wearing light jackets. For the last four days, every day had been warmer than the day before. And now, even with the approach of a September evening, it was still seventy-five degrees, so they removed their jackets and carried them.

Jared glanced at the parked cars. "Let's walk," he suggested. "Charlie's is only a few blocks away." Nicole nodded absently. *She's still thinking about Franklin*, he thought. *She'll get over it.*

What am I doing? Jared wondered for a moment. He thought about Jill, his long-time girlfriend. *It's only a drink*, he rationalized. *Nicole is a friend. That's all.* True, they had long talks during the quiet hours in the Trap and they had shared a good deal with each other and he believed she liked him, but it would go no further. She knew all about Jill, about his life, and so he foundered in the space between a powerful attraction and a platonic friendship.

He tried to put those troubling thoughts aside and finally managed to, at least for the time being. The warm air felt good and in the late afternoon sun, they passed out of the hospital parking lot and onto Babcock Street where they turned right and headed up to Commonwealth Avenue. Jared enjoyed being alongside her, buoyed by the weather and her company.

CHAPTER 4

Boston seemed oddly peaceful for the hour. There were a few pedestrians on the sidewalk and not much traffic on the avenue. Jared matched his pace to her shorter stride. Neither spoke for the moment. The quiet was interrupted by a loud trolley as a Green Line "T" rumbled past them.

Charlie's was only a block away and Jared looked down at Nicole walking rapidly beside him. Although she had been at Danton for nearly a year, in many ways, she was still a recently minted psychiatric nurse. Much of what happened at the hospital was new for her. She was a natural optimist, usually smiling, though today she was troubled.

Nicole was born and raised in Saint-Amable, Quebec, a small town near Montreal. Jared had learned that early on as they got to know each other. He was her first friend at Danton, he believed. He remembered she said then that she liked nursing, psych especially, because the patients were so vulnerable. Thinking again about wrestling Franklin, Jared wasn't sure who was the more vulnerable.

Nicole always wore a traditional nursing uniform, dressed entirely in white, even down to her white stockings and white shoes. She looked pert and pretty as they entered the dingy atmosphere of Charlie's Pub. In her white uniform, she stood out like a bright beacon. In contrast, Jared wore dark clothes, a blue and brown flannel shirt and faded blue jeans. He felt a little unkempt, knowing his wavy black hair hung over his ears in thick tufts.

They found a wobbly table in the back, placed their jackets over the back of their chairs and sat down, facing each other. A waitress approached them. "What'll you have?" she asked.

Nicole ordered a white wine.

"Just a Coke for me."

A few minutes later, their drinks arrived. Jared put a five dollar bill on the table and picked up his mug of Coca Cola. It was wet with condensation. The cold glass felt good in his hand.

Nicole smiled slightly. Holding up her wine, she said "to Franklin." She smiled but then her eyebrows moved into an arch of worry.

"Okay. To Franklin."

He clicked his mug against her glass and they sipped their drinks, eyeing each other. After a moment she put down her wine, dropping her gaze to the table. She fingered the sides of her glass and seemed lost in thought. "That Carrie..." she finally said, raising her drink to her lips.

Jared tried not to stare at her. For the hundredth time, he admired the way her full breasts strained against her uniform. He longed to touch her, even the smallest contact, like a finger on her shoulder, but he held back. He was certain it would bother her. *Jill would be getting home from work soon*, he thought, feeling a tightening in his chest.

"Carrie? What about her?" he asked.

"I don't know. She meant something to Franklin."

"Yeah, seems like." He paused and changed the subject. "So what are you up to tonight?"

"Oh, me and the girls are supposed to go out. Out to dinner."

"Your roommates?"

"Uh huh, Nicky and Sarah."

"Yeah, three nurses. Man, wild times. You know, those nurses."

"Yeah," she laughed. "Wild. That's us."

"So Nicky got away from Brad for the night?" He did not want her to leave yet.

"Yeah, they're up and down lately. I think she needs a break."

"Hmmm, yeah." Jared felt nervous sitting with her. Despite their closeness at work, and the fact that they had gone out with a larger group to Charlie's before, this was the first time that just the two of them

had been together away from the hospital. Having a drink with her was new.

Years ago, he would not have felt nervous at all. Back then, in high school, before he was using hard drugs, he had been popular and considered good-looking. Well-built with gray-blue eyes, he drew girls to him easily. But that confident Jared was long gone. The past twelve years had humbled him.

“Well, I gotta get going,” she said, though she still had half her wine left.

“Yeah, okay.”

She picked up her glass and finished her drink. Taking her jacket from behind her, she pulled it around herself tightly, like a cocoon. She sat wrapped up like that for a moment, looking small and waiflike. She looked up at him, smiling again. He felt an intense urge to reach out and kiss her, but he stopped himself and looked away. He took a deep breath and the wave of desire dissipated.

“No rush,” he chanced.

“No, I gotta go.”

“Right.”

“Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow. Okay?”

“As usual,” he smiled.

She grinned, stood and zipped up her jacket. He looked up at her. As she walked past him, she said “bye, you jerk” and punched him in the shoulder.

Jared watched her go and then finished his Coke. He felt his breathing gradually slow down.

As he got up to leave, he felt for the ring on his left hand, something he sometimes did unconsciously. To his surprise, the little agate ring was missing. *Dammit*, he thought, *must have come off when we were restraining Franklin.*