

DOCTOR'S ORDERS

"I don't know why he wants me in here. They are doing something to me."

"Are you eating?"

"I'm not that hungry."

"You have to eat more than ice cream."

"Ice cream is the only thing that feels right for me now."

"What did you just say?"

"The little dog is crying, and he needs my help. I have been reading all about it in the paper. This is a very important story."

I was doing my best to get Grace

"Steven, she's been in the hospital before. If it gets worse, I will get there."

"Grace, it couldn't get much worse. She needs to see you."

"I have my ticket to come down at the beginning of the week. I'll be there on Monday."

"That may be too late."

I got a call in the middle of the night. It was Alida. She had gotten a hold of a phone.

"I needed to call you. Steven Fisher, you're a writer. You have to tell my story."

She had told me about her brothers and sisters. She had detailed the story of her mother. I knew all about her fight through poverty. Her efforts to make something of her own life.

"I have a real story to tell you."

Was this the story of our world? All the great events which were about to occur. More than ever, Alida was confirming my vocation as a writer. But we hardly had time to tell her whole tale. At this moment, what was the truth that she wanted to relate to me?

She did not want to talk to me about Grace. She said nothing of her husband. She was closer than ever to some realization about herself.

She was not telling me that we live to remember our loves. There was a greater cataclysm that she was witnessing. Everything else that had gone before, and everything that was to follow would echo in her words.

She had traveled to the coast. She had seen the waters slap on the shore. There was something deep in these origins that she wanted to reveal to me.

There was a total calm in her demeanor. But there was also utter panic as if she was revealing it all to me. I should have been listening all along. But I did not hear her. What had I missed? There was something important here. Something about the rocks and the water. The incessant pattern of time.

She had prepped me in recent months with her stories. Great honor and frightening deception. She understood these great ideas that had moved history. These movers behind the curtain. The great intrigues. I wondered if there was one more story which would pull it all together. I wasn't getting it right. The jungle doctor who was now stricken with the plague. He was made to reminisce.

"I never loved you, Raymond. We just came to an understanding about the world."

"What are you talking about?"

"I wouldn't have come with you on this trip if Michael hadn't been with us."

All his great efforts came down to a girlhood crush on his best friend. That was hardly

her secret.

Then there was the American woman who let it all come out in the open when they discovered her letters.

“What are you doing here, Gloria?”

“I wasn’t going to wait for you to try to take all the wind out of my sails.”

“Gloria, everyone knows. They always have.”

“You say that now. You’re trying to damage my reputation.”

“You should have paid me for the letters.”

“There’s no chance that I was going to give you a thing.”

“Now you’re going to shoot me.”

“You came to see me. You broke into my place. You wanted me back. I rejected you.”

“Gloria, you planned it out.”

“What is the word for it? A correspondent.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You still need me more than I need you.”

“You have worked through your alibi.”

“You surprised me. You threatened me. I had my honor to protect.”

“You are incorrigible.”

“You wrote the best letters.”

“You were good with words yourself.”

“I was a little more careful.”

She seemed as if she had planned every detail. She only needed to pose him right.

“You’re not going to shoot me as I’m running away!”

“I was thinking more like the moment when you break through the screen door.”

“I haven’t even threatened you yet.”

“What about the moment when you grab for your letters.”

“I am not going to get that close to you.”

“What about old time? Why don’t we forget about this foolishness. Here, take your damn letters.”

“You’re going to let me walk like this.”

“I really have no choice. There is really nothing else to bargain with. I still have my looks.”

She looked in his eyes. She drew in all of Richard’s power. He could feel all the energy get sucked from him. He kissed her. She slapped him. Then he grabbed her.

She emptied the gun at that moment. This was her last kiss. He didn’t have a chance.

That was hardly the last image in her palette. There was another dream.

It was the horse. The most lovely animal that she had ever laid her eyes on.

“I want you to win it for me.

“She is a lovely creature. Do you want to give him a spin?”

“Want to? That is my dream of a lifetime.”

Morningstar was a magnificent horse. There was hardly an animal more beautiful in all creation. She rode him into the sky.

“He is so giving. Everything that I imagine in a majestic beast.

Just before the big race, she wants to take him for another run. She does not approve it with the trainer. And he comes up with a slight injury. She doesn't want to say anything. But she doesn't feel right keeping it to herself.

When they are preparing the horse for the race, she can see that there is something wrong. She knew what that gasp would be if he fell in front of the crowd. She makes her way down to the field.

"Miss Rosemary, you can't come down here."

"I need to tell you something. I took Morningstar out for a run last night. And he broke his leg. You can see how he is favoring it. And when the race starts, he is just going to fall in front of every one."

"The horse is in great shape. The jockey has been taking him for his paces."

"He is going to fall and hurt himself even more. You are going to have to put him out his misery."

When the race started, Morningstar seemed to be favoring his leg. And the pack pulled out ahead. But the jockey knew his great horse. And he worked him through the race. He took him on the outside. And he ran him at all his might. The other horses stayed in the pack. And he pulled out so far in front that they could never catch him. He rewrote the racing books.

"You have nothing to worry about."

"You are not going to shoot him."

"He has many great races ahead of him."

The nightmare continued to plague itself on her.

"I am never going to take a horse out at night like that."

Everyone laughed.

"I think that you only made him hungrier to win."

"What about his leg?"

"Just a morning cramp. Nothing to worry about."

Alida pictured herself on that wonderful horse. There was such appeal in his gait.

Elizabeth Seaford gripped the letter in her hand. She had just received it in the mail. It had been sent fifteen years ago to her sister Dorothy. It was from a man named Scott Evans who lived in Indianapolis.

Elizabeth had never met Scott. He had never even heard her sister talk to her about him. She wanted to learn who had sent the letter. She was only looking for clues. She had put the letter in her handbag. Then she packed a suitcase and headed to Indiana.

Scott lived in a pleasant community. He sold insurance. He had a wife, Anna. They had two children. They had been married for twenty years.

Elizabeth knocked on the door."

"I am looking for Scott Evans."

"Scott is at work right now. Can I help you?"

"I work for a lawyer in Chicago. We are settling a will. And I wanted to track down your husband."

"We might get some money."

"Maybe."

"You came all the way to Indiana about a will. Why didn't you just call."

“I wanted to talk to your husband. It seems that there is some confusion with the will.”

“I know most of my husband’s family. Maybe I can help.”

“How long have the two of you been married?”

“Twenty years. We met before Scott went in the service.”

“I suppose that the two of you love each other dearly. I can just sense the feeling between the two of you.”

“We are very much in love.”

“Are you close to the family?”

“When Scott left Chicago, he was making a life for himself. He loves his family. But he prefers the distance.”

“I guess that it surprises you just as much that there is a death in the family.”

“We don’t talk about his family a great deal. We have our own, and there is a lot to think about. Our boys are eight and eleven.”

“You sound like you have a great marriage.”

“We do now. After Scott left the service, there was a rough patch. I went to live with my mother while Scott tried to work it out. He went back to Chicago for a spurt to work for his father. I told you that they didn’t get along. But Scott felt that he needed to go back to the city.”

“You sound a little sad.”

“I have always wondered about thing. I have always wondered about my husband. There was something that he wasn’t telling me.”

“And now?”

“There is really nothing to worry about.”

“I guess that there isn’t.”

Elizabeth did not wait around to meet Scott. She pretended that she found out what she needed to know.

“You didn’t ask too many questions about the family.”

“I know how to reach you.”

In the hotel, Elizabeth again read the letter to her sister. It all seemed so strange. He talked about how much he loved Dorothy. He told her that he was ready to leave his wife.

When she returned to Chicago, Elizabeth had the law firm that she work for draft a check for five hundred dollars. She made it seem all official. And she sent the money to Scott Evans.

Scott’s parents had both died a couple of years previously. He called his sister. She knew nothing about the money. Scott simply cashed the check and forgot about it.

“Steven, you are leaving something out of my story. None of these stories are right. They all seem like dreams. There is a beginning. Or a middle. But never a clear beginning middle and end.”

“The letters. They must surely say something more. This is a the chance to reveal finally who you are.”

Harrison Sinclair had just died. They were scheduled to read his will in a suburb of Boston. Jim Sinclair drove up for the reading of the will. Jim was a distant nephew of Harrison’s. A grandson of cousin or something. Jim had driven up from New Jersey with his wife and family. Charles had the insufferable habit of banging on Louise’s piano.

“What are they doing here?”

“They really think that there is some money for them.”

“What a bunch of yahoos.”

“There is a lot for them if they start to dig.”

“I just say get then the hell out of here before they start to ask too many question.”

“You have to have something to give them. Something to throw them off the trail.”

“Give them the vases.”

“If they don’t ask for anything now, they will give up their right to ask for money in the future.”

“Is that how it works.”

“Not really. But do something to get rid of them. Harrison is not going to give them anything on his own. I don’t even think that he knew who they were.”

“They don’t even know. And get that boy out of here while you can.”

All the family spoke out of turn. They all agreed to one thing.

“We need to get them out of here before they ask too many other questions.”

They all were agreed.

They packed up the family and sent them on their way.

“Jim, these vases are ugly.”

“Ellen, they are the only thing that I’ve ever gotten from my family.”

“I say that we should stuff the vases in the hotel.”

“We have to bring them back with us.”

“Maybe someone stuffed money in one of them.”

“I think that Charles already checked that.”

“Your aunt hated Charles playing on the piano.”

“I don’t think that they even play the piano.”

Rose hadn’t said a thing through the whole trip.

“That house smells of old potatoes and rotten fish.”

“I think that they keep it roasting all the time.”

“Rose is right. I am glad to get out of there. It smelled like a morgue. I am surprise that Harrison’s body isn’t in the kitchen or one of the other rooms.”

Jim got mad when he realized that his wife really did leave the vases in the hotel room.

“When am I ever going to get out of the hospital?”

“They want to get you back home soon.”

“Maybe today!”

She was probably not leaving the hospital. She kept asking about the little dog.

“He’s going to change the world. He’s in trouble right now. He needs help. I am sure that you are following the story in the paper.

“Are you going to come to the door, Mrs Wallace?”

“What do you want me for?”

“I am collecting money for the paper. I have been helping Richie with his paper route. Today is collections.”

“I’ll call down and pay.”

“You always say that you are going to pay by collections. You never do. I was told that I need to collect money from you.”

“Hold on. I have to get my purse. Richie, do you know that they say that it isn’t safe to answer the phone. There is a killer on the loose.”

“Mrs. Wallace, you’re going to be okay. Just give me the money.”

Jay took the money from Mrs. Wallace. He now had a great deal of money. This was most of Richie’s money for the week.

“Are you the paper boy?”

‘I am substituting for Richie.’

“Come on in, and I’ll give you your money.”

Jay felt a little hesitant going on the man’s apartment. The place was clean, maybe too clean. But he didn’t feel that comfortable being in there by himself.

“I need to close the door. There have been robberies in the complex.”

“I haven’t heard about anything.”

“I am not going to take chances. Police are looking for a killer.”

Jay thought that this guy fit the bill of a killer.

“Kid, you look like you have a pretty good imagination. Do you have a good imagination?”

‘It’s okay.’

“Do you ever get bad dreams?”

“I have dreams. Some are a little strange.”

“You ever get chased by a killer.”

“I was once locked in the house with a crazy person.”

“That kind of stuff has never happened in real life.”

‘Not at all.’

“Do you like horror movies?”

“Sure! I mean not really. I don’t like to have nightmares.”

“You told me that. Are you afraid of the dark?”

“We’re all a little afraid of the dark.”

“Let me try a little experiment. I am going to turn out all the lights. And you need to tell me if you are scared.”

“I thought that you were going to pay me for the paper.”

“I will do that. Let me try to experiment.”

“It sounds a little weird.”

“But you will try it.”

“I’m not sure!”

‘Let’s try it!’

“You’re going to turn off all the lights.”

“I am going to turn them all off.”

“For how long?”

“Let’s just see if you’re going to be scared.”

“I already am scared.”

“I haven’t even turned the lights out.”

“Just give me the money, and let me go.”

“I sit in here all the time, and I get bored. I just want to play a little game. Do me that

favor.”

“Be quick.”

“I am going to do it right now.”

“Did you turn all the light out?”

“Now they are!”

“Can you turn them back on?”

“Get used to it. It’s kind of fun.”

“This is not fun. Turn the lights back on.”

“You’re not crying.”

“No, I ’m not. But turn the lights back on.”

“Wait a minute! Wait one minute!”

“Steven?”

“What is it?”

“I am getting a little scared.”

“Alida, I will come visit tomorrow.”

“All the lights are out. It is dark here.”

“It will be light in the morning. I will see you in the morning.”

“I can’t stop the killing.”

“You can’t stop the killing or you can’t stop the fighting.”

“For me, it’s pretty much the same thing. I don’t know when I realize that about myself I think that they made me into this animal who lives by blood. I can’t stop the war.”

“You can’t leave the army.”

“It’s not just that. I live for battle. It’s now I see the world. Right and wrong. Us and them. Kill or be killed.”

“That is pretty severe.”

“That is how I’ve become. Kill or be killed.”

“That is rough.”

“It is real. They’ve made me this way.”

“And the rest of the world?”

“I don’t know how to think about them. I just seem myself in a constant battle.”

“Do you feel this way when you are asleep? Is this how you dream?”

“More like a job. It’s my job to fight.”

“Even a soldier takes time away from battle. He escapes the pressure.”

“It is not pressure to me. It’s a way of life. I don’t see having a life except by being part of it. I am born to love war.”

“That makes no sense to me. The world isn’t split up into friend or foe.”

“That’s just how I see. There’s got to be someone in this world who sees things the way that I do. I was born to do my job. And that’s how it has to be.”

“That seems pretty over the top.”

“You want to say sick. I want to say the same thing. But that is my life. It’s not as if the world can’t use my skill.”

“We can use a rest from killing.”

“I can’t. That just makes me feel as if someone is out to get me.”

“You have to learn how to calm down.”

“That is called death.”

“What if there is no war?”

“I will do what I have to do my job. Someone needs my help.”

“The war is over.”

“For some. It is waging for others. I am ready to find them.”

“When the Second World War ended , the Japanese were no longer our enemies. There was no more war.”

“We fought in Korea.”

“And there was a cease fire.”

“There is always the need to fight. The war drums are beating somewhere.”

“That only adds fuel to the fire.”

“I didn’t start the fire.”

“You must have started at least one.”

Alida wondered about the War Lover. Why could he not put the thrill away?

“Steven, are you getting down my story?”

“I am doing what I can?”

“The little dog is going to be happy! It is a big story!”

I called Grace.

“She is not going to last.”

“I will be there on Monday.”

“Monday will be too late.”

“What time is it?”

“Someone just took my watch.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Some thief in the train station just stole my watch.”

“The most important thing that you own. The very thing that you value. The object which is the most projected. What you know and love. This treasure could be taken in an instant. That is the art. Whether the thief is working alone or whether he has an accomplice.. This is an art. It can be taught. But the truly great artists feel it in their bones. They have a knack. I don’t teach it so much as pass it on. By the way, Brendan, here is your wallet.”

“You’re a common pick pocket.”

“That I how I first learned the trade. But I could steal anything. You name it.”

“My wife’s heart.”

“Brendan, is that a real challenge. If I succeed, you will never have your wife again.”

“I want you to steal her life from her.”

“I am not a killer.”

“I am not asking you to kill her. I just want you to take her life from her.”

“And leave her alive.”

“I set the challenge. You must figure out the details.

“What is your wife’s name?”

“Dear Charlotte.”

“And you have grown tired of Charlotte.”

“Charlotte is a very wealthy woman. I married my wife for love. But I have grown tired of our love. If I try to divorce her, I will get nothing. I want you to take her life from her. That way I will have the only thing that she really loves, her money.”

“That sounds like quite a proposition, even for me.”

“I know that you are always into a challenge.”

“But this is not something that I can undo. I cannot bring your wife back to life if I take her life from her.”

“Unless you really are a miracle worker.”

The master thief realized how he needed to set the table. He was looking for the right introduction to dear Charlotte. He could hardly walk up to her and tell her that he was supposed to take her life. He needed a game.

Wyatt was a special sort of thief. He played on people’s dreams of glamor.

“I always get them to think more of themselves.”

“Are you going to leave your car running in a no parking zone?”

“I am on important business. Bank business.”

“You work for the bank.”

“I am stealing from the bank.”

“Your car is still in the way.”

“Tell that to the police after I drive off.”

“What is your name insufferable man?”

“Wyatt.”

“Wyatt, move that miserable jalopy of yours, or I will cut it in two with my car.”

“The terror of the road. What is your name?”

“Charlotte.”

“Meet me across the street for drinks in a half an hour.”

“How did you know that I’d come?”

“You looked like a lush. Why did you come?”

“You looked like a sucker who I could con out of his fortune.”

“You really do look as if you are hurting for money?”

“You are starting to sound like a gigolo. I am hardly in the market for one of those.”

“I am actually a thief. And I am going to steal everything that you own, and turn you into a penniless woman. Then you will rush to me begging for help, and I can laugh at your filthy predicament. And that will be my revenge for getting me angry this afternoon.”

“A man after my own heart except all my money is tied up, and you couldn’t touch any of it if you tried.”

“Challenge me then. What do you have that I could steal?”

“All my jewels are in an impregnable vault.”

“That sounds like a challenge. But I am not going to take a risk for costume jewelry.”

“What are you calling costume jewelry?”

“You meet strange men for drinks wearing your best jewels.”

“I can’t exactly seeing your trying to hold me up in public. But what worth is all this sparkle if I can’t toss it around now and then.”

“Are you picking up the tab for our drinks?”

“There’s the gigolo in you once again.”

“I am not really looking for a quick affair.”

“I am married.”

“I didn’t hear you say happily.”

“I am not a fairy princess. But my husband does have first claim on my fortune.”

“That sounds like something that you’d like to do something about.”

“Nothing that a fall from a second-floor window wouldn’t take care of.”

“Let me get this right. You are talking to a strange man about doing something to your husband.”

“You wouldn’t have to do anything that he wasn’t going to do himself.”

“He has a drinking problem.”

“He has many problems.”

Wyatt needed to double check with Brendan.

“You can’t get into her money.”

“I am like a child. She had me on an allowance. It’s a lot of money. But only a small part of what she has. Hardly enough to live a separate life of my own.

“I am going to have a lot of trouble doing anything if I can’t get into your wife’s bank accounts.”

“Now you are feeling exactly like I do. If things were that easy, I wouldn’t have called on you.”

He parlayed his deal with Charlotte in quite a different way.

“You give him an allowance. And you want me to take care of him, but you are not going grant me access to his accounts. You are only making it easier for him to get away.”

Things were getting very complex. Somehow, Wyatt was able to gain a dinner invitation with the feuding spouses.

Neither one realized that he already knew the corresponding mate, but after a round of drinks, it no longer seemed to matter.

“Next time, I will make sure that my husband brings his new date. She’s been to the house before.”

“That will serve me good.”

After a couple of meetings, Wyatt had gained complete control of Brendan’s accounts. And he had the ability to tap into many of Charlotte’s business ventures.

“These two are like child’s play.”

They each betrayed so many confidences about each other. You could hardly tempt Wyatt with jewels. That was his real weakness. This time, he was playing for a whole financial empire. He couldn’t deal in securities. But he did drain as many as he could. He needed to be as quick as possible.

“Honey, I have some new for you. I think that we are going to have to live on our love for each other.”

She showed Brendan the safe with the lovely note.

“I left you a few things, because I knew that you would need something when you started over.”

“All our accounts have been emptied. There were part of the business that he couldn’t

touch. But he has cleaned us out.”

“At least, we have each other.”

“That is our hell!”

Alida found this story charming. All dinner dresses and tuxedos. Where did all the luxury go?

“I would like one more story?”

“One more?”

“Do you have the champagne?”

“Yes.”

“Let us lift one more glass. Then we can all walk down by the seashore. By the way the little dog was rescued.”

“Is that the last story?”

“I think that I am. I am a little afraid to take the flight. But I have my ticket and my passport. My backs are packed.

“We’re going to miss you.”

“I left a list of some of my favorite movies. If you get a chance, watch them for me.”

“I will get a chance.”

“After the last movie plays, just leave the television on.”

“We will.”

“Leave the light on in the room. This one last time.”

“We will.”

“And leave a glass of champagne by the bed!”

“Sure!”

“See you on the seashore!”