

The Wait

The clock chimed once. The musical note was a welcome relief from the clunking of the pendulum swinging in the hallway. David opened the brown cardboard folder on his desk and read its contents. The case was ongoing. For over six years he had gathered information and still he was no closer to putting the Doctor behind bars. He removed a photograph and stared at its occupants. The hawk-eyed gentleman was Paul Jonker, the main financier for the Doctor's research. Detective Haines had tried to scare him into divulging information. It hadn't worked. To the right of Paul Jonker stood two scientists, Troy Eastwick and Ben... the surname escaped him. They appeared deep in conversation, no doubt discussing gene manipulation. The three people standing with their backs to the camera were unidentified. He often wondered if one of the unknown figures was the Doctor. David read his notes again. Five unannounced audits in one year, and still the police had found nothing irregular.

The next photograph was of Edward. The dark, piercing eyes stared at him with a ghostly intensity. Edward would have fitted comfortably as a villain in the late nineteenth century. His upturned moustache curved at its tips and dark, slicked back hair with a side parting gave him a menacing appearance. His features were sharp and unpleasant. David opened his desk drawer, pulled out a magnifying glass and placed it over the photograph. The tweed

suit was not cheap. A slight bulge protruded where Edward kept his glasses and his customary white handkerchief peeped out from his jacket's chest pocket.

A shiver ran down David's spine. Edward had murdered so many innocent people. He had taunted him with games that always ended in the death of an innocent person. His younger son had nearly been one of those innocent victims. David turned the page. Edward was no longer a problem; his son had had his revenge. David glanced at the study ceiling. His son was upstairs and by his side, Edward's daughter, Angel. If he was a betting man, he never would have guessed his son would hook up with Edward's daughter. He was relieved there was no resemblance other than her dark hair.

The next photograph was of his house and the reason he was still awake. For the last fortnight, he had not gone to bed before 3:00 am. The photograph, taken from Google Maps, was found in America, underneath a well-known vicar's dead body. Reverend John Brown had been tortured by Samuel, who was another evil piece of work, Edward's prodigy, and Angel's brother. At the crime scene there had been no note, only the co-ordinates to David's home. The photograph was a threat; it said, 'I am coming after you next.'

As a Chief Inspector David knew 80 percent of crimes happen at night between 11:00 pm and 3:00 am. David would retire at 3:30 am and rise again at 6:30 am. Functioning on three hours sleep was making him grumpy. He had snapped at colleagues and family, but until Samuel showed his face, he would continue the same routine. His wife Claudette and son Damien were unaware of the pending threat. He didn't want to scare them. They believed he had a major case that was absorbing his evenings and nights. He flicked over the photograph; on the back, his old friend and colleague Captain Henley had written, 'Don't worry. We'll catch him.' David smiled. Henley was right – with the police force behind him, they would catch him and lock him up for a long time.

At 1:30 am the Chief Inspector closed his folder and stepped out of his study into the silence of the hall. He was about to make his way to the kitchen when he noticed a hunched figure sitting on the top stair. Alarmed, the Chief Inspector pushed his study door wide open to cast the artificial light across the plush carpeted stairs, revealing that the figure was Angel. She was staring at the front door, oblivious to the sudden burst of light. The Chief Inspector glanced at the front door. It was locked and dead-bolted and would take a wrecking ball to smash through it. He considered calling her name to break her trancelike state, but instead, decided to head to the kitchen. Five minutes later he returned with a selection of cheese and crackers on a plate and a steaming mug of tea. If he was to stay awake for another two hours, he needed sustenance to keep his brain alert. As he passed the staircase, he glanced at the top stair. Angel was still rigid, staring at the front door. Her body was doubled over her knees, which were drawn to her chest. He placed his mug and plate on the small mahogany hall table and proceeded to the stairs. When he reached the third step, Angel rose.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you,” he whispered. “I wanted to make sure you were not sleepwalking.” Angel pulled her dressing gown tight around her body, flipped up the collar and dug her hands deep into the pockets. The heat went off at 11:00 pm and the temperature in the house was dropping.

“Do you want to join me in the study? It’s warmer than sitting out here.”

Angel glanced towards Damien’s room. There was no movement.

“I couldn’t sleep,” whispered Angel, as she descended the stairs. The Chief Inspector smiled. Angel was wearing Damien’s slippers; they were three sizes too big and flapped around her feet, making her look like Chico the clown.

“Make sure you don’t trip in those.”

Angel glanced at her feet and smiled. She didn’t own a pair of slippers, and Damien’s slippers always felt comfortable and warm. The Chief Inspector collected his plate and tea and wandered into his warm study. Angel followed.

“Why couldn’t you sleep?” he asked her.

Angel shrugged. "Are you still working, sir?"

This time the Chief Inspector nodded his response. He wished Angel would call him David and not 'sir' or 'Chief Inspector.' Realising the photographs were laid out on his desk, he scooped them into a pile and shoved them into a folder. Having second thoughts, he placed the folder in the top drawer of his desk, locked the drawer and placed the key in his shirt pocket. Angel watched him. She wondered what exciting case he was working on to keep him up to the early hours in the morning.

"Why were you staring at the front door?" asked David, placing a small slice of cheddar cheese on a cream cracker. He took a hot sip of tea then wished he hadn't when it burnt the roof of his mouth. From experience, the Chief Inspector was aware it was best to be direct with Angel. He pushed his plate of cheese and crackers across the table to Angel, who took a cracker without hesitation.

"Was I?" questioned Angel. The Chief Inspector nodded. She reminded him of a marmot nibbling the cracker at speed but the cracker seemed to stay the same size.

"If something is bothering you, you will tell me, won't you?"

Angel didn't respond.

"Angel," prompted the Chief Inspector.

"Sorry, I'm tired. I think I must have drifted off," said Angel, stifling a yawn. The Chief Inspector wasn't sure if she was evading his question, and he was too tired to pursue. He was also aware he might arouse suspicion by pushing for an answer. Angel would talk to Damien who would talk to his mother and before long there would be talk of cancelling Neil's wedding. The Chief Inspector sighed. There was no way he was going to allow scum like Samuel to dictate his family's life.

"How's Damien?" he asked, trying to clear his mind of Samuel and the pending threat.

“Ok,” was the instant reply. Then she added, “Damien hides a lot of his pain, and tonight he is restless.” The Chief Inspector had guessed his son was struggling, not that his son would ever admit he was in severe pain.

“I better go,” said Angel, standing. The Chief Inspector nodded his approval. Two more hours and then he too would retire.

The Pain

Damien's hand moved slowly down Angel's naked body. She lay on her side, her back turned toward him. He stroked the curve of her waist to the hipbone, creating a wave of pleasure. Angel's body was beautiful. He wished his body was beautiful; not like a woman's body, but beautiful without the illness that caused his skin to blister and scar and to develop gross, red, painful sores for no diagnosable reason. His hand gently skimmed her body again. The moonlight shining through the bedroom window outlined her silhouette. The thin, white cotton duvet pulled up to her neck contrasted with the darkness of her hair. A groaning sigh escaped from his lips; the pain was getting worse. He had gone to bed feeling great and then at two in the morning the pain started. The resident barn owl had woken him with its nightly hunting cry; three hoots and then a twenty-to thirty-second gap followed by one single hoot. That was two hours ago; the owl had stopped, yet the gnawing, stabbing pain continued to get worse.

Drawing his knees to his chest, Damien swallowed hard. Sometimes curling into a foetal position helped to alleviate the pain. Tonight everything he tried resulted in additional torment. His hand once again stroked Angel's body. Knowing Angel was close gave him strength, comforted him when he was in pain. Her warm, soothing body lay motionless in the king-size bed. Her sensitive intuition usually homed in when he was experiencing excruciating

agony; however, she had slept heavier than normal with very little tossing and turning. If she woke his pain would cease, but it didn't seem right to wake her and demand relief. Although painful, the torment served as a reminder of his past.

Under a pile of clothes tucked away in his top drawer lay an empty bottle of painkillers. Another empty bottle was in the bottom of his bag and had been for over three weeks. When Angel was around—which was currently all the time—he tried not to use them. They made him tired and sluggish, his mind cloudy, and extended periods of concentration became problematic. Now he wished he had kept a couple of the tiny pills in reserve for times when the pain was exceptionally bad. In a couple of days, they would leave his parents' house to embark on the next stage of their journey. He would pay a visit to the doctor before they left. Angel would no doubt blame herself for his decision; she would see it as her failure that he needed to resort to drugs instead of using her healing power. Angel's ability to take away his pain had been monumental in his decision to cut down on the pills. Nonetheless, on rare occasions when she was not with him or when he didn't want to disturb her, like tonight, then pills were the only answer to finding relief.

Damien tried to focus his thoughts on something other than the pain. His parents slept two doors down from his room in "the pink boudoir," named by his father, designed and decorated by his mother. Earlier that night, the gentle rumble of his father's snoring had complemented the owl's hoots. Now he too was quiet. The silence was agonising. Since Damien's condition had developed five years ago, his parents had naturally become over-protective so he was surprised when, without any argument, they agreed his girlfriend could sleep in his bedroom, in the same bed. He guessed that had been his father's influence - he was more open-minded than his mother, who was old-fashioned in attitude and so blinkered in many ways. It was thanks to his father that Angel was back in his life, the stunning young women that lay with him tonight. She hadn't intended to leave him, but Edward had taken her away. Damien didn't know that at the time, he hadn't stopped to think why. Once again, those

pessimistic thoughts took over any rational thinking. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to blank out the negative thoughts and the unbearable pain. Tonight he lay with the one person who made him feel special; she was the one he should be thinking about.

Damien had met Angel at school. She was the girl who nobody spoke to, whose presence was overshadowed by rumours of death and evil. It was only by chance they spoke. The day at the lake, he remembered it well. The day when he almost walked away, but curiosity and the mysterious female dangling her toes in the water drew him closer. Initially, he hadn't realised who he was approaching until she spotted him, and then it was too late to turn and run. Angel had been different from how he'd imagined. There was a welcoming warmth radiating from her, a sparkle in her eyes. She teased him, and he laughed, something he rarely did back then. Now, he often laughed; Angel had seen to that. Their friendship grew rapidly, and before he realised it, he had fallen in love. It wasn't planned; nobody really plans to fall in love. It just happened.

Now she lay beside him, just like every night. Glancing to his left, he saw the window was slightly ajar; he guessed Angel had opened it in the early hours. Some people need a light on to sleep. Angel needed the window open. In the past, he had watched her sneak to the window, open it wide and just stand and stare out into the darkness of the night. The slight breeze appeared to wash over her body, cleansing her mind. On occasions, her head fell back, and her eyes would close, her body soaking up the atmosphere, the silence of the night, a time to relax and contemplate. He often wondered what her thoughts were at moments like these. Tonight the window was only slightly open. He hadn't heard her stir, but Angel was habitually quiet, especially at night. Sometimes she roamed around the house for half an hour. It didn't matter who the house belonged to; she simply wandered. Angel wasn't sleepwalking. Quite the opposite - she was wide awake.

He frequently deliberated if she was checking the latches, putting the chains on the outer doors or raiding the fridge. The fridge was unlikely; Angel

would be checking the security of the building. For some strange reason, Angel was obsessed with security. As for fridge-raiding, Angel hardly ate unless it was an apple. She picked and pushed food around the plate. Rarely did anything pass between those luscious lips. Considering the lack of food, Angel remained surprisingly healthy and curvy, as his hand was discovering. When she returned to bed, she always kissed and cuddled him. Tonight he hadn't felt her slipping in or out of bed. Right now, he was just glad she was back in bed with him.

Once again, his hand stroked Angel's soft skin. This time, she stirred slightly. His hand froze, not wanting to wake her. Just when he thought he had gotten away with it, she turned over so her body was almost under his.

"Are you ok?" she whispered.

"Of course," he answered and tucked her hair behind her ear, although her face wasn't visible in the darkness.

"You're hot and clammy," she said, touching his forehead.

"It's nothing."

"The pain is back again, isn't it?"

Damien didn't answer. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"I know you didn't."

"I wouldn't do that."

"I know," she answered. "Let me take your pain,"

If he were a man instead of a wimp, he would have said no; however, the pain was hard-hitting tonight.

"It's my lower back and side," was his response.

"Slip your shirt off and let me use my magic," Angel offered.

Damien smiled. It was like magic; Angel was a magician who could work wonders with her touch.

"If I raise my arms, it stretches the skin and then it's unbearable," he whispered.

"Let me remove your shirt for you," she instantly replied. Now he felt like a pathetic child who couldn't even undress himself. He didn't argue; instead,

he let her undress him and the experience, as always, was painless. He lay on his front, with the side of his face lost in the plumpness of the soft cotton pillow while Angel conducted her magic. This was the bit he enjoyed. Her fingertips moved over the area of pain, making circular movements, pulling and pushing the infected area.

“I will take your pain,” she whispered in his ear, the warmth of her breath heightening and caressing his senses, like soft feathers drawn across his skin. A tingling sensation ran through his body. A pang of guilt engulfed him. Angel would now bear his pain for a minute, maybe longer. That was the worst part of the healing - Angel had to suffer.

“I didn’t wake you on purpose,” he whispered again and then it hit him with a jolt. His body spasmed as it reached another level. “Oh my God,” he cried, no longer whispering. He wanted to shout from the rooftops. The chains that held him down, that cut deep into his skin, broke. The miracle of freedom dug deep emotionally. The pain was no longer stabbing at his skin, causing him to squirm in self-pity; instead, it was replaced with a wondrous tingling sensation.

Propped against the far wall stood his skis, the word *Salomon* clearly visible in good light. His snowboard also rested nearby against one of his many cupboards; he was glad he hadn’t hidden them away. They only went away when he was severely depressed. Since Angel had arrived at his parents’ home, the skis had stayed out as a sign of hope. One day he would ski again, and he would teach Angel too, as he had promised. His sore, blistered skin would need to heal first to allow him to push and shove on the chairlifts like other people did without thinking. However, the scariest part of skiing was the thought of taking a tumble; the potential loss of his skin sent shivers down his spine. The illness had taken so much of his life, yet he believed like Angel believed, that one day he would be cured. On occasions, after a healing and when the persecution was over, the dream seemed reachable.

Angel followed Damien's gaze to the far wall where his skis were located. She felt his pain physically and mentally.

"One day," she whispered.

He smiled back. "I know."

As she settled her fit, healthy body next to his on the bed, a blue liquid dripped from the corners of her mouth. A quick wipe from the back of her hand, and it was gone. Angel was surprised how quickly Damien's illness had picked up pace. Only two days ago she had removed his pain, so it shouldn't have grabbed hold of him as quick as it had and with such a mighty vengeance. Was it possible she was getting weaker or was his illness getting worse? These thoughts were best not explored with Damien as they would only depress him. The only alternative would be a full healing, and the only way to do that was to break another bone, and there was no guarantee it would work. She had grudgingly promised Damien never to break a bone again, not for him, not for anybody. Angel guessed he hated seeing her in agony, and that was causing his reluctance to let her try and heal him again. When she removed his pain, her suffering only lasted for a couple of minutes, but a break took a lot longer.

"I love you so much, Angel."

She smiled. "I know you do."