

PATIENT - X

First Edition

by Colin Duck

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*The only thing necessary for
the triumph of evil is for good
men to do nothing.*

~Edmund Burke

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In memory of Jamie Henderson.

You were a dear friend, and you are missed.

CHAPTER ONE

Wendy Peterson was a small town girl from a small village in California known as Crescent Mills. The population of this village was a mere 250 or so people and comprised mainly of countryside and small family run farms. Unlike her brothers, Wendy longed to see the world and was fascinated by people and their problems. An avid listener with a non judgemental personality was perhaps one of the reasons why so many of the townsfolk felt they could confide even their deepest darkest secrets to her, even as a small child, but certainly wasn't the only reason.

Not one for gossip, and almost biblical at keeping secrets, Wendy perhaps knew those who would talk with her regularly more than these people's spouses, parents or immediate family. Like when Bob Terence confessed his secret love affair with Patsy Milton to her, or when Toby Tuckerton broke down in hysterics after he'd murdered his neighbour's dog for keeping him awake at night. Wendy always felt compassion and empathy for those who spilled their darkness and was convinced that everyone was primarily good, but sometimes unforeseen circumstances or getting a little lost from time to time made people do bad things.

Being lost was one thing, but some people are so lost from birth, that there is no good and only pure evil within their souls. Perhaps if Wendy had considered such a grim possibility, her life would have taken a very different path indeed to the one she was fated to live. What most people did not realise however, was that it was her special ability which lead people to reveal their innermost thoughts to her. Many people would call her psychic, but it wasn't thoughts or future events or spooky visions that Wendy received, it was merely a suggestion she placed in the heads of those she talked to which got them to spill their beans to her.

Similar suggestions aimed at her parents was the reason she had such a large collection of books, despite her family being quite poor and uneducated, but what was a curious, intelligent girl to do when

the local library was used more for town meetings and yard sales than it was for loaning out books to any of the town's folks?

Wendy loved books and to read, and was top of her class in almost every subject. Had she not been such an attractive girl, this probably would have resulted in her being bullied. But everyone loved her. Only her mother perceived her as a problem child when she would find her avoiding her farm work chores curled up in the barn with a book instead of milking the cow or raking the forty.

It was of little surprise to most folk when on her graduation day from her senior year at Crescent Mills High School that she announced she had applied to Oxford university in England and was to move there in the fall of this year to study criminal psychology. Once again, that same power of suggestion she used made this quite acceptable to her parents, who otherwise would have preferred her to stay and work on the family farm and perhaps marry one of the local boys from one of the neighbouring farms.

Wendy was so excited, now 18 and full of promise and about to take her first ever flight in an aeroplane, she sat and waited to see who her passenger would be. *Would this gift of hers still work at 30,000 feet?* she wondered. With not so much as an electronic calculator throughout her life, she checked in her journal to make sure she had all the details needed for her journey.

Wendy hated gadgets and technology, and found them more distracting than useful, and always wrote in the neatest prettiest handwriting which she'd almost designed as an art-form of its own, completely unique to anyone else's. She was meticulously organised.

As Wendy went over the final details in her notebook, an elderly gentleman put his big brown bag into the overhead compartment and slowly sat down in the seat beside her.

"Good day madam!" he said in his ridiculously strong British accent. He made a hat tipping gesture despite not wearing one on his head which made Wendy smile.

"Hi, I'm Wendy!" she said.

"My name's Norman, pleased to meet you miss!" said the man.

"You going back home?" she asked with anticipation.

“Lord no! I’ve lived in Florida now for 38 years” he proclaimed with a proud tone in his voice. Wendy gave him a look as if to say “continue...”

“I’m visiting my son in London, he’s getting married!” he grumbled. Wendy had gotten good at picking up on subtle tones in people’s voices which made her suspect that he was not entirely pleased by this event in his son’s life.

“Oh, how lovely! I’m moving to Oxford to study criminal psychology!” she stated proudly.

“Criminal what!?” snapped the old man.

“Criminal psychology” repeated Wendy, this time much slower like she was talking to a 2 year old trying to teach it a new word.

“Oh! What’s that?” asked Norman.

“Well, I’ll be studying what drives people to commit certain crimes and try to help those who are damaged or broken!” explained Wendy.

“Damaged??” Norman laughed. “People aren’t radios little madam, some people can’t be fixed,” began the man.

The man struggled with his seat belt and attempted to figure out how to fasten it, but was obviously needing some assistance. Wendy saw this and began helping the man and fastened it for him. The man looked at Wendy with surprise, not expecting an 18 year old girl to be quite so helpful and as he looked into Wendy’s eyes, she gave a reassuring smile.

The man leaned closer to her and began to whisper “Some people.... Some people just do bad things because they enjoy it!”

Wendy contemplated this for a split second, and her face turned quickly into a frown, but almost like she was rejecting a flavour of ice cream in a parlour she quickly shook her head and dismissed the possibility that he was right and changed the subject.

“So, you must be excited about the wedding then?” she asked smiling again.

The man groaned at this question, like he'd been asked to climb 50 flights of stairs instead of taking the elevator, and then paused as he tried to think of the correct response.

"Once you've seen one, you've seen them all!" he stated.

Wendy could sense there was something about this wedding that he found uneasy and perhaps opposed, so she let her gift go to work on the old man. It was the same thing every time she wanted to get to the bottom of something, she simply looked harder into the person's eyes, like she was digging deeper, beyond their eyes perhaps right into their soul.

For Wendy it was like seeing a visualiser on a computer with bright shapes and colours animating towards her. This was a mixture of aura, thoughts and perhaps even synapses directly from the brain she was seeing, and she was able to read and identify some of them.

A dark patch which looked like a fully blossomed rose amidst the twirling, bright streams of concious always indicated a negative thought, feeling or secret the person was attempting to hide, and yet they were perhaps the easiest to spot.

She'd also at this point noticed that different colours normally represented different emotions. For example, when people talked about love, the colour was very red. Hate was often a blue or purple colour, and yellow and oranges represented a strong feeling of guilt or regret.

His colours were varied, a little mixture of everything, although she thought for a moment that there was more red in him than any other emotion, which was always a good sign. A person with much love in their soul is always sweet, she'd once concluded. Even Wendy wasn't sure how it worked, like a 3 year old using an iPad, she just learned through practice that to focus on one of these dark spots, and turn them white, caused the person to talk about and reveal whatever they were attempting to hide.

The biggest dark patch flashed white, and the man's eyes suddenly sparkled like a child who suddenly realises they are in a lot of trouble and have to face the music with their parents.

"Well, to be honest. I don't like the woman he's about to marry!" he stated.

“Oh really...?” Wendy asked in a very interested tone. Wendy’s work was now done, once someone starts telling you about their secret, the rest flows by itself. She knew no more dark patches should appear and need lighting up, since he’d already revealed his hidden emotion, all that was left now was for him to tell her in his own way how he felt.

Sometimes however, depending on the secret, a lie could reveal a new dark patch in the mind stream coming at her. But for small little secrets such as this one, people never lied once they got over their initial reluctance.

“Well, I think she’s after him just for his money!” said Norman.

“Oh no, that’s terrible. Do you think she loves him anyway?” she asked.

The man struggled to answer this question, not because he was trying to deceive her or hide any further information from her, but because he genuinely wasn’t sure himself. He groaned to reflect this.

“I just don’t know. Have you ever had a bad feeling about someone that you just couldn’t explain? Like a gut feeling?” he asked.

Wendy nodded. It was this gut feeling which always provoked her to start using her mind bending ability on someone, if she felt she was not getting the whole truth.

“I think I know what you mean” she said slowly, but then smiled again as if to reassure the old man that everything would still be all right.

Norman rustled around in his cardigan pockets and pulled out a bag of Werther’s Original.

“Would you like a toffee?” he asked, offering the packet to Wendy.

“I’d love one!” she said, reaching into the bag.

The plane took off and the two exchanged friendly chit chat throughout the journey, and Wendy helped him with the in-flight movie and headset. It wasn’t like her to get so wrapped up in such trivial secrets as this, but perhaps leaving her home to start a new life

had sparked some kind of new curiosity within her. For the whole flight she wished she could use her special ability to find out about Norman's son and the woman he was about to marry and put the old man's mind at ease.

Why should she care, she would never meet the man again. She would never meet his son or the woman, but for some reason, she couldn't get it out of her head. The concept of marrying someone for their money hadn't really hit her personally before today. Living in such a small poor village, nobody ever had that problem where she came from. She'd read about such women in books and despised someone who would abuse the sacred bond of love in this way, but this was no character in a book... this was a real person. And the idea of such a woman in the real world abusing such emotions in this way made Wendy very angry indeed.

These thoughts quickly disappeared almost the second the pilot came over the intercom and announced that the plane would be landing shortly. Wendy was now getting excited and getting her head in the game for the next part of her adventure in which she now had to find the student accommodation she'd be staying at for the next 5 years.

As she walked off the plane, she studied the signs carefully for the baggage claim area and followed them down what seemed to be never ending corridors and tunnels. On her way, she heard a groan which sounded like the old man, and as she turned to look behind her, saw he was struggling with his large brown bag.

She backtracked until she caught up with him and carried it for him.

"Allow me!" she said.

"Why, thank you madam! You're such a sweet young girl!" said Norman.

"It's no problem!" said Wendy, giving her usual sweet smile.

Several minutes after the two of them reclaimed their suit cases, they made their way towards the airport exit, Wendy still carrying Norman's bag. Then a middle aged couple reached out towards Norman opening their arms.