

Misery's Companion

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With the Doctor a few steps ahead of us, I spoke softly to Dave.

“Well?”

“I think he is honest. I think he will get to the bottom of this....puzzle that began in his hospital.”

Smiling, happy that both Dave and I finally felt the same about one of our leads, I stood with my head a bit higher. Dave looked to me then held his head up high as well. We were on our way now, on our way to finding out what truly happened that night in this hospital. As we followed the Doctor down this corridor and that corridor, turning right here and left there, we finally emerged onto a straight but much wider hallway. Looking over his shoulder at us as we continued walking, the Doctor informed us that we were now in the Ambulatory Receiving hallway. This was where all ambulance attendants brought their victims, the hallway was wider for the stretchers that the victims would be lying on. Apparently this hallway led to two different places, one was the emergency department and the other end headed towards the elevators for fast transport to any floor in the hospital. At the end of the hallway was an automatic door which opened as soon as the Doctor stepped too close, beyond the door was the emergency department in full hustle and bustle from the day's emergencies. Doctor Swanker walked past the many desks, nodding to each nurse as he passed by.

“Follow me.” Dr. Swanker stated as he made a hard right down a smaller, shorter hallway. This hallway opened up into a large room with tables, coffee machines, coke machines and refrigerators. This seemed to be the employee lounge. Off in the far left corner of the room was a group of people all sitting, laughing and talking all at once. Each one had on paramedic uniforms. I knew that one of those men was Mike, the man we were all looking for. As we walked into the room, the group of paramedics stopped their chatter and looked towards the doorway where the three of us stood. Dr. Swanker had his arms crossed across his chest to show that he was here on business, not pleasure.

From where we were standing, I scanned the group of people, they all seemed quite nervous by the way the Doctor was standing.

“Good afternoon everyone.” Dr. Swanker stated.

Almost simultaneous, the paramedics all said 'hello'.

"I won't bother your break time for long, but Mike..." He stated as he pointed over to the corner of the table where the brown haired gentleman sat.

"Would you please accompany me and these fine Detectives into my office."

With great hesitation Mike gathered his things and quickly joined us at the door. All eyes were on us at that moment, soft whispers could be heard coming from Mike's fellow co workers. They were concerned, I could feel it. As quickly as we came into the employee lounge, we left back down the corridors. With Dr. Swanker in the lead and Mike quickly in tow, Dave and I were in the rear. Without saying a word, our ensemble of four marched back through the corridors we had just come through until we reached the door to Dr. Swanker's office. Dr. Swanker opened it and held out his hand for all of us to enter and take a seat. Mike sat quite nervously in the chair closest to the door, possibly so he could make a quick escape once this meeting was over. Dave sat beside him and I sat in the farthest chair. Slowly, to show his superiority, Dr. Swanker walked around his desk, his hands behind his back.

"Thank you Mike." Dr. Swanker stated as he took a seat in his chair behind his desk. Even in his position of power, Dr. Swanker still had an air of professionalism and warmth. He ruled with politeness, but he was strict and his employees seemed to know and respect that of him. Mike began to fidget in his seat, reaching his arm up to wipe the invisible sweat from his forehead. Mike was tall but a quite lanky man; he stood about 6 feet, but probably weighed no more than 150 pounds soak and wet. Mike's brown hair hung a bit into his face, which he constantly kept parting so he could see. His brown eyes seemed deep pools of oil on his pale face. Dr. Swanker was the first to break the silence that had quickly consumed this small office.

"Mike, this is Detective Sharpton and Detective Marke." He stated as he pointed to us. "They are from the Chicago Police Department and they are here on assignment. It seems a gentleman was brought in by ambulance two evenings ago and has not been seen since. According to one of our nurses, whom I'll be speaking to next, this gentleman is nowhere to be found in our systems. She also has informed the victim's wife that she never saw him at all."

Dr. Swanker paused briefly, looking Mike over as he intently listened to the Doctor. "Now, the reason you're here Mike is because you were the driver of the ambulance that night that brought in the victim in question." Dr. Swanker added before leaning back in his chair, his arms crossed across his chest. Both Dave and I then turned our gaze from the Doctor over to Mike. Mike seemed more nervous than he had before. Now he knew why he was sitting in that very chair. As Mike fidgeted more in his chair, Dr. Swanker seemed to lose patience with him.

"Sir," Mike spoke up, breaking his silence, clearing his throat in the process. "Two nights ago, I did bring in a wounded gentleman from the Carlisle Ct area, but the only thing I can tell you is that Ryan and I followed protocol and he was taken away by a female orderly. She met us at the doors as if she knew he was coming in and she told us she would take him from there to see the Doctor on duty. We never saw the patient after that." Mike paused.

Dr. Swanker uncrossed his arms and leaned forward in his chair.

Mike began to fidget some more in his chair. The air was getting thick with the aroma of Mike's perspiration.

"Mike, is it protocol to leave a patient with an orderly?"

Dr. Swanker asked. His left eyebrow perked up to signal to Mike that he wasn't amused.

Mike swallowed hard before answering.

"Ummm."

"Umm is not an answer Mike." Dr. Swanker interjected. "Did you follow protocol leaving this patient with an orderly?" Dr. Swanker asked again this time with more emphasis. From the actions of both the Doctor and the ambulance attendant, I knew what the answer was. No, the protocol was not to leave a patient with an orderly. Within seconds Dr. Swanker confirmed my suspicions.

"No, it's not Mike." His voice became sterner with each word. "The *protocol* is that the patient is *your* responsibility until he or she is in the hands of a *certified* doctor or nurse. Am I correct, Mike?" Dr. Swanker asked.

It seemed that the Doctor was not only fishing for the truth in what happened to Mr. Ronin but also reinforcing policies and protocols with Mike. Mike seemed quite uncomfortable; he knew he had made a mistake, a grave mistake, one that could very well cost him his job. Sweat was now beginning to flow freely from his brow. As I turned my attention back and forth from the Doctor to Mike, I could sense the tension between them. David seemed quite pleased with what was happening around him, he enjoyed watching Mike get reprimanded. David was like that, he enjoyed others pain and discomfort when it came down to questioning of any sort. Sitting back in his chair, Dave seemed quite at ease, a sly grin on his face as he watched the two men. I, on the other hand, was beginning to feel uneasy; maybe we shouldn't have been here for this. Just as I was about to interject and offer both Dave and I to leave the room, Mike softly answered the Doctor. His voice was barely audible.

"Yes sir."

The Doctor then leaned forward a bit more, a look of slight pleasure on his face to see that he had broke Mike. "I'm sorry, pardon, I couldn't hear you Mike. Can you please speak up a bit?" Mike looked down at his hands and then back up at the Doctor before repeating himself. His unease was growing.

"Yes sir."

Doctor Swanker then leaned fully back in his chair, his hands in front of him in the form of a pyramid as he drummed his fingertips together. He was deep in thought, even I could tell that. A hush fell over the office. From where I sat I could only hear the sound of the heater blowing its air from the floor vent. Mike couldn't stop moving, his tension could be felt by us all. Almost instantly, Dr. Swanker leaned forward in his chair again and grabbed another piece of paper from the corner of his desk. As he reached into the pocket of his hospital jacket, he watched Mike, an odd look atop his face before he looked down and began writing. Both Dave and I looked at each other and then back to the Doctor. We were unsure of what was going on now, but from the look of dread on Mike's face, I was sure he knew. Still writing, the Doctor then spoke.

"I want this patient *found* Mike, and until he is found, both you and Ryan are on unpaid suspension." With his last word, he looked up from his paper to meet Mike's eyes. "You're very well aware of how I like my hospital run, no patient of ours just goes missing. Do you realize who is accountable for each person in and out of this hospital? Me. Now you and Ryan have made a mistake, a big mistake that I cannot take lightly. You went against *protocol* and left *your* patient in the hands of a stranger, for what reason? I couldn't even guess, especially when you and Ryan both know the ramifications of your actions."

Shaking his head in complete disappointment, he looked back down to his paper and finished writing. As he signed it, he looked back up to Mike, stood up and thrust the paper out in front of him. Mike cautiously stood up and retrieved the paper from the Doctor without sitting back down.

"This is your official suspension letter, you won't be allowed back in this hospital or in an ambulance until you have heard from me and no one else."

Dr. Swanker then paused before continuing. "You and Ryan will both receive the same letter," He added as he pointed to the other piece of paper sitting on his desk, fully filled out and signed. "I also expect both you and Ryan to make yourselves fully available to these two fine Detectives for questioning or whatever they may feel necessary in their investigation. Is that understood?"

"Yes sir." Mike answered. A look of complete defeat on his face. I felt sorry for him, one mistake and now he may never be allowed to work in this hospital again, but then again the same would happen to Dave or I if we didn't follow protocol at the precinct. Dr. Swanker then excused Mike with one last request.

"If you think of anything that could aid these Detectives, it would be in your best interest to contact them immediately." His emphasis on 'best interest' meant only one thing, Mike might

still be able to save his job. Mike seemed to get this hint as well, for he piped up and responded to Dr. Swanker.

“Yes sir, I’ll do whatever I can to help. Thank you.”
With that Mike left the room, closing the door behind him.