

- Prologue -

Gerald Warren leaned back in his rich, Corinthian leather desk chair and propped his feet on the corner of his desk. He inhaled deeply from an expensive Cuban cigar and blew rings of gray smoke that drifted silently to the ceiling.

“Gentlemen, come in,” he said, motioning with his hand, “I’ve been expecting you.” He turned up the corners of his mouth in a Grinch-like smile. “I believe we’ve found our nurse.”

Bob Carlson closed the door and nervously followed Tim Alford across the lushly carpeted office. Gerald pushed his humidor across the desk and opened the lid.

“Sit down, boys,” he said, “and fire up one of Cuba’s finest. We’ve got reason to celebrate.”

“Cut the crap, Gerald,” Bob snapped. “Who’s the nurse?”

Gerald thumped the ashes from his cigar and smiled.

“Kind of testy today, aren’t you, Bob?” he asked. “Think I should send Tim down to the pharmacy and get you a Valium?”

“I don’t need a Valium,” he grumbled. “It’s just that you’re so damn cavalier about this whole thing. I don’t mind telling you I’m not very comfortable with what you’re asking us to do.”

Gerald put his feet on the floor and sat up straight in his chair. He took another deep drag from his cigar and gently blew a stream of smoke toward Bob.

“You don’t have to be comfortable, Bob, just cooperative,”

he said. "Same with you, Tim. The two of you just do what I tell you and I'll take care of the rest. No one will ever know about your past transgressions."

Tim stared coldly at the hospital administrator. His face remained expressionless as he unbuttoned his white lab coat. "You say you've found a nurse?" he asked.

"Actually, Tim, I believe I said 'we've found a nurse', but that gets into semantics and that's not why we're here."

"We've found a nurse," Tim replied sarcastically.

"Yes, we have," Gerald confirmed.

"Who is she?" inquired Bob anxiously.

Gerald folded his arms across his chest and rocked back and forth in his chair.

"Young nurse by the name of Alex Lowe," he replied. "She hasn't been working here long, but I'm confident she's the one."

"How'd you pick her?" Bob asked.

"Actually, Dillard recommended her," Gerald replied.

"Is she involved?" Tim asked.

Gerald raised his eyebrows and confidently nodded. "She is now."

"How'd you convince her to go along with your plan?" Tim asked.

"Same way I did with you two. Just dug up a little dirt on her." Gerald flashed a confident smile and chuckled softly, shaking his head. "It's amazing how cooperative people can be when you discover the skeletons they've hidden in their closets."

"How much does Dillard know?" Bob asked.

"About as much as you two," Gerald replied.

"What makes you think the Lowe girl will cooperate?" Bob asked.

"Oh, she'll cooperate," Gerald boasted, "especially when she sees these tapes."

He opened the center desk drawer and flipped a switch. The mahogany paneled wall behind his desk parted revealing a room with a panel of television monitors.

“Watch the screen on the top left,” he instructed.

Bob and Tim leaned forward in their chairs and stared at the screen.

“Who’s the patient?” Tim asked.

“A young man dying with AIDS, Jackson I think,” Gerald replied, “but that’s irrelevant. Watch the nurse.”

The three men stared at the monitor as the young nurse entered the patient’s room. After glancing nervously about the room, she pulled two glass vials from her pocket and filled a syringe with their contents. She quickly placed the empty vials back in her pocket and injected the contents of her syringe into the patient’s I.V.

Gerald smiled as he rolled his cigar between his thumb and forefinger. He had found his nurse.