

## **Prologue**

Beaverton, Oregon, 1951

Cowboys and Indians, plastic and bendy, red, green, yellow and now and then a brown or a white. They fit perfectly between Joey's fingers, and they were his favorite toys. Some had guns, some had spears, some had lassoes and some had nothing. They could wrestle each other and shoot at each other while he made satisfying bang! noises and threw the victims down on the wooden floor or over the edge of the big gray sofa cliff. His dad had given him a jumbo bag of brand new figures for his fifth birthday, and he had already introduced them to his old ones. He wasn't sure how many he had altogether, but they filled two large shoeboxes, and his mom was always saying that he had far too many, but of course there were never enough.

Then there were the horses, who had their own box. He loved them the best. Lots of black, white, brown and tan, but also a few red, one gray, and his favorite, a bright orange one with a white mane and tail. Rearing, running, bucking, walking, and the orange one, that might have been jumping, most with saddles that were part of them. Some of the cowboys and Indians could ride some of the horses, but if you tried to put a too-small cowboy on a too-large horse, then the cowboy might suddenly shoot off the back of his bronco, just like a real horse throwing a rider. When that happened, Joey always laughed.

That morning, he got up early, wanting to show his mom how the orange horse could buck off the green marshal figure, but his dad had said no, Mom was sleeping, she wasn't feeling well. His dad looked cross, so Joey got dressed in blue shorts and a Roy Rogers T-shirt and went into the living room and played, trying to be quiet. He hoped his mom wasn't very sick, and he hoped that she and Dad wouldn't get into another fight. Joey hated it when they fought. His mind wouldn't work right, and he wanted to cry, but Dad didn't like it when he did. To keep from crying, he chewed on some of his cowboys, grinding off guns and the brims of hats. He hated doing this, but he couldn't stop himself. It was the only way he could push back his tears. Even then he felt as if his head might burst open.

Joey lined up his fiercest Indians on the edge of the sofa and pretended that they were throwing spears down onto the cowboys camped out below on the big green rug that looked like a field in the park his mom took him to sometimes. Then the cowboys shot some of the Indians, but not too many, so his best cowboy, a big red one that he called Bob, got on the biggest horse, a white one with its ears straight forward, and jumped high, high up onto the end table cliff, and then up and across onto the sofa cliff. No other horse and rider could do this, and the Indians were so scared they started to run --

“Joey!”

Joey snapped his head up, dropping Bob and his horse onto the sofa. It was his dad. Joey couldn't tell if he was angry or not. “Hi, Dad. Look at this. I was just about to have....”

His dad shook his head, and for the first time Joey saw that his father's clothes were all wrinkled and rumpled, as if he had slept in them, even though they were not the same clothes he had worn the day before. "Stop playing now," his dad said, pushing a long string of black hair out of his face. He looked tired, and his eyes were red. "Go into the kitchen and eat your breakfast. I poured you a bowl of Cheerios. There's a glass of orange juice for you too."

Joey brightened up. The Cheerios were new. "Can I look and see if there's a toy inside the box?"

"Sure," his father said, without looking at Joey. "Yeah, go look for a toy. The milk's already in the bowl. Spoon's there too. Eat up fast, though. We got to leave."

Joey jumped up and raced into the kitchen. There was a little wax paper bag inside the cereal box, and inside that was a small cream-colored cowboy, crouching down and aiming a pistol at something. He slipped the toy into his pocket for later and sat down to eat. "Where we going?" he asked his dad, who was pacing back and forth in the short passageway between the kitchen and living room as if he were mad at someone or thinking very hard about something.

His dad stopped and looked down at Joey. "We're going to visit Uncle Sid. You remember him, don't you, Joey? He's not your real uncle. I used to work for him. You were at his ranch before. It's far away in the country."

Joey crunched his cereal and frowned, trying to remember. "Uncle Sid? A ranch?"

“Yeah,” his father said. “Maybe you were too young to remember, but you’ll love it. You really will.”

“Is Mom coming too?”

“No.” His father began pacing again. “She’s not feeling well. I told you that. You and me, we’re going away for a few days until she feels better. C’mon, don’t worry. You’ll have a great time with Uncle Sid, and when we get home, Mom will be all better. Okay?”

Joey tried to smile. He wanted to believe his dad, but sometimes what his dad said wasn’t really the way things happened. Like once his dad told him they were going camping, but all they did was go to some sort of restaurant place, and Joey waited for a long time in the car alone. And sometimes when Mom cried, Dad said she was crying because she was happy. Only she didn’t look happy. So Joey wasn’t sure how to feel or what to think when his dad promised things. “Okay,” he said. “Can I take my cowboys?”

His dad looked suddenly very nervous. “Sure, take a few in a bag or something, but hurry up. We got to go. Sid’s waiting for us. You done with your Cheerios?”

Joey nodded. He knew he had better hurry or his dad might get really upset. He got a brown paper bag from a cupboard and scooped a few of his favorite figures into it. “Mom won’t throw out these others if I leave them here, will she?” he asked. She had threatened to do that before when he left them out.

“No,” his dad called from upstairs. “It’s fine. Just leave it all. They’ll wait right there for you until we get back.” Then his dad came downstairs carrying two suitcases, a

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big brown one and Joey's small blue one with a picture of a cactus and a cow skull on it.

"I packed a few of our things. You got your toys? Let's go. Stay with me."

Joey began to follow his dad to the car, but out on the porch he changed his mind and scurried back into the house and up to his parents' bedroom. The door was closed, so he opened it. "Mom?"

His mother lay on the bed, sleeping, a heavy comforter pulled up to her chin. He couldn't see her very well, and then he could. It was like a mist had hidden her and then lifted. She had a splotch of blood on her nose, and there was another splotch on her pillow, and he thought at once of the morning he had been bouncing on the sofa and slipped and fell and hit his nose on the coffee table. His nose had begun bleeding and it hurt like crazy. His mother had held a handkerchief against his nostrils and tipped his head back, and after a while everything had been okay. But he had never bounced on the sofa again.

"Joey! Shut the door!"

Joey closed the door carefully so that he wouldn't wake up his mother. "Mom's got a nosebleed, just like I did," he whispered. "Is she okay?"

"Yeah, yeah, she'll be fine," his dad said, not whispering, but he looked more upset than ever. His hair in front stood straight up, like Bugs Bunny's whenever he was scared. Suddenly he reached out and pinched Joey hard on the forearm. Joe cried out in pain. His eyes filled with water, but through it he could see white marks, like horseshoes, on his skin.

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“What’d I do?” he whimpered. Then, sensing that something was very wrong and had nothing to do with him, he asked again, “Is Mom okay?”

“Yeah, but you gotta listen to me,” his father said, glancing around the hallway, as if he expected someone to be there besides Joey. “You didn’t listen. You gotta listen or this won’t work.”

Joey wasn’t sure what to make of the pinch, but he sure didn’t want another one. “You mean I’ve gotta be extra good or Mom won’t get better?” he said. Sometimes he wasn’t sure exactly what his dad was saying.

“Yes. No...It’s just...it’s just that she needs her sleep, okay? I was afraid you’d wake her up. She’ll be fine. Maybe she’ll go to the doctor and get some medicine. She’ll be all better when we get back. Everything’ll be fine. Don’t worry, okay?”

“Does she know where we’re going?”

“Yeah, of course she does.” His dad paused for a minute, staring at the closed door. “Maybe I’ll go and bring her to the ranch too, when she’s feeling better. Would you like that?”

Joey smiled a little. His arm wasn’t hurting anymore, and his dad seemed happier. “Yeah.” He held his father’s hand and followed him downstairs, hoping that his mom really was okay. Dad would tell him if she wasn’t, wouldn’t he? Joey climbed into the big white station wagon while his dad loaded the two suitcases, a blanket and two bags of food into the back. “Are we going to have a picnic?” Joey asked, looking at the groceries.

“Maybe,” his dad said as he scrunched himself into the driver’s seat. “It’s kind of a long ride, so I think it’s a good thing to take some food with us.”

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That made sense to Joey, so he sat back and listened to the radio as his father drove, pretty slow at first, but much faster when then finally got onto the big road that, his dad said, went east. “Are we going into Portland?” Joey asked, bouncing along to the happy music on the radio. “Can we see the boats on the river?” Last summer they had gone to Portland to see the Rose Parade, which was great, because there were lots of cowboys and horses in it. The best part, though, was the big navy boats parked along the banks of the big river. They even let you go on some of the boats.

His dad shot him an impatient glance. “Simmer down. We’re not going to Portland. Like I said, we’re going to the country. To the ranch. It’s outside of Pendleton, which is sort of far, so you’ll have to settle down and just relax, okay? You’ve got to be a good boy on this trip, Joey. It’s really important that you’re good and you listen to me. Okay?” Joey nodded. He could see that his dad meant business because the veins on his neck were bulging and his forehead was dripping sweat, even though it wasn’t that hot in the car. “You want some candy?”

Joey laughed in surprise. His dad never offered him candy, except maybe at Christmas or on his birthday. “Sure,” he said, then remembered that he was supposed to be good. “I mean, yes please. What kind? A chocolate bar?”

His dad fumbled in his pants pocket and pulled out a candy bar with a red, white and blue wrapper. “Baby Ruth. Okay?” he said, shoving the treat into Joey’s waiting hands. “Just eat it and be quiet, all right? I gotta concentrate on driving.”

Joey ate the candy bar slowly, trying to make it last, but it began to melt and run all over his hands. He wiped them on his shirt, but then there was chocolate all over the

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picture of Roy Rogers and his golden horse Trigger, and he hoped his father wouldn't be mad at him. He was relieved to see that his dad didn't seem to notice at all.

The air in the car got warm and stale, and the view outside the window changed from houses and trees to big flat areas full of dry brush. The breeze rushing past outside smelled like the turkey Mom had cooked at Thanksgiving. Eventually Joey fell asleep. The next thing he knew he was riding Trigger, Roy Rogers' wonder horse, through the desert. Trigger was running at full speed, but Joey wasn't afraid. He heard someone behind him calling, "Joey! Stop! Stop now!" and then he heard another voice saying, "We're not stopping. I'll take care of you, Joey." The voices made Joey feel confused and alone. In front of him, the desert had changed into a shapeless mass of swirling colors. He twisted in the saddle to look behind him, but all he saw was gray ground and white sky.

"I want my mom!"

"Wake up, son!"

Joey woke up. It took him a few moments to realize that he was still in the car and that it had stopped beside a ramshackle white house. Joey smelled something nasty and other smells he couldn't name. Maybe they were at the ranch. "Dad! I gotta go to the bathroom!"

"Just get out and do it over there," his dad said, pointing to a rickety pole fence. "I'll go see if I can find Sid."

Joey jumped out of the car and relieved himself against the closest fencepost. It lasted a long time, and he was surprised to see that he had that much water in him. When he pulled up his shorts and turned around, he saw his dad standing next to a much shorter, older man that he had never seen before. The man had a scraggly reddish-yellow mustache, and a dirty white ballcap hid the top of his head. Even though it was afternoon and getting pretty hot, the man wore a dirty gray jacket over a grimy T-shirt and overalls. “Hi,” Joey said.

“Hi yourself,” the short man said. “You piss as much as my horse.”

Joey ran up to his dad and clung to his pants leg. He wasn’t sure how he felt about the stranger, but he wanted to see the horses, if there were any. “You really got a horse? A real one?”

“This is Uncle Sid,” his father said, before the other man could answer. “You’re going to stay with him for a couple of days because I’ve gotta go away for a little bit, see? You be good and listen to him and do everything he says, okay?”

Joey, who had been looking at an ant crawling across his shoe, suddenly looked up when he heard the word *away*. “Dad, don’t leave!” he shouted. He ran up to his father and threw his arms around his dad’s legs. “I don’t wanna be alone! You gotta stay! Who’ll get my dinner for me if you leave? Who’ll tuck me in at night?” Joey began sniffing. He knew his dad didn’t like it, but he couldn’t help it. First his mom was gone, now his dad was going. It wasn’t right. Something wasn’t right.

Joey glanced up at his dad, who looked worried and not angry but might be heading in that direction. He knelt down and placed his big hands on Joey’s shoulders.

“I don’t want to leave you, son, but I’ve got to, just for a little while. I’ve got a real important errand to run, and after that, I’ll go back home and get your mom and we’ll both come back here and get you. Sound good?”

Joey wiped his nose with the back of his hand and nodded. He hoped his dad wasn’t telling another story. “Will you come back tonight?”

“No, sorry, you’ll have to stay here tonight,” his father said. “But I’ll try to be back tomorrow. Uncle Sid will take care of you until I get back. He’ll feed you and tuck you in. Right, Sid?” Joey’s father was beginning to sweat again; he cocked his head and looked at the little mustached man.

“Yeah, sure,” Sid said. He smiled, showing yellow teeth and a black gap where a tooth should have been. “It’ll be fun. Don’t worry about us. Seems like a good kid. You like horses, Joe?”

Joey didn’t know what to say. All he could think about was his dad leaving and the funny little stranger staying.

“He doesn’t talk a lot,” Joey’s dad said. “But he’ll mind you.”

Dad and Sid talked for a little while between themselves, but Joey didn’t pay much attention to what they were saying. He held onto his dad’s hand as tightly as he could and pressed himself against his dad’s legs. He tried to pray to God, like his mom had taught him, only silently, so his dad couldn’t hear. He thought if he prayed hard enough, God might make Dad change his mind and drive back to Beaverton with him to see Mom. *R father witch art in heaven hollow bean I name....* He didn’t remember any more of the prayer, so he kept thinking the one line over and over, adding *Please make*

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*Dad stay with me* every once in a while. It didn't work. When Dad was finished talking to Sid, he tousled Joey's hair, told him to be good, and got back in the car.

Joey ran up next to the car, but Sid held him back. "Dad! Don't go!" His father started the engine, then, with a quick smile in Joey's direction and a nod toward Sid, he took off back down the dirt road, away from the farmhouse and from Joey. Joey broke away from Sid and ran after the car, but it was going too fast; he couldn't keep up. The dust kicked up by the car's tires made him choke, and at last he stopped running. From somewhere an invisible dog began barking, but it quit by the time Joey walked back to Sid. "My dad's gone," he said. Somehow, his blue suitcase had ended up beside the little man, who was resting his foot on top of it.

"Yeah," Sid said. He fished in his pocket and pulled out a package of cigarettes and a book of matches. Then he made Joey wait while he pulled out a cigarette, lit it, and sucked on it, hard. "He'll be back."

Sid began walking back toward the house, Joey's suitcase in his hand. Without anything else to do, Joey began following him, watching his suitcase sway back and forth as the little man ambled forward, bowlegged, like a cowboy. Joey felt comforted for a moment, but when he realized what was wrong, he stopped and began to cry.

Sid turned toward him, frowning. "What the hell's the matter?" he said, blowing smoke from his nostrils.

Joey had never seen anyone do that before, and it made him feel more afraid than ever. "Do you...do you have my cowboys and Indians and horses?" he said between sobs. "They were in a sack in the car, and I don't see them anywhere."

Sid looked around, which made Joey look around, even though he knew the cowboys and Indians were long gone. “Plastic toys, huh?” Sid said. Joey nodded. “You won’t need ‘em here, kid. We got real horses. You can be a real cowboy. Besides, your dad’ll bring your stuff with him when he comes back. Stop blubbering, will ya? It hurts my ears.”

Joey took some deep breaths and stopped crying. Sid was probably like his dad, someone who hated tears, and Joey knew better than to keep crying when he was told to stop. Sid might start shouting, or worse. His mind raced for something to distract himself. “You got a dog? I thought I heard a dog.”

“That’s right,” Sid said, taking another drag. “Old, old dog. He’s kinda sick or something. Not much of a dog anymore. C’mon up to the house and I’ll show him to you. Here, take this, will ya?”

Sid handed him the suitcase, and Joey shuffled along behind the man as best he could, gripping his suitcase in his arms. When they reached the farmhouse, Sid walked inside, took the suitcase from Joey and flung it onto a beat-up brown and tan sofa. Joey wrinkled his nose. The place smelled like smoke and beer and a dirty toilet, except for the kitchen, which smelled like bacon grease. Everywhere he looked was busted-up furniture, empty bottles and beer cans and ashtrays full of cigarette butts that perched on the edges like little white birds on a birdbath. “Where’ll I sleep?” he asked.

“Got a place for you,” Sid answered, stubbing out his cigarette in one of the overflowing ashtrays. “But first, follow me.”

Joey followed Sid to the back of the house where there was a little screened-in porch. There were stacks of old newspapers everywhere, but in one corner was a dog, a shaggy black dog that lay on a pile of newspapers like a discarded rug. It didn't move when Joey approached it. The newspapers under the dog were yellow, and it smelled awful. "Is he dead?" Joey asked. Just then the dog wagged its matted tail once.

"Might as well be," Sid said. "Come into the kitchen and I'll make us some food."

Joey petted the dog's immobile head a few times and went into the kitchen with Sid. The man made a big show of opening all the cupboards and shifting about their contents, finally selecting a can of tomato soup and a big can of baked beans. He opened the cans with a black-rimmed can-opener, then poured two streams of food, one brown, one red, into a large pot and heated them up on the old stove. "Is that what we're eating?" Joey asked, not because he minded but because he had never had anything like that before. His mom always cooked chicken and dumplings and meatloaf with mashed potatoes and other great stuff, with pie or cake for dessert. He had a feeling he wouldn't be getting any dessert that night.

Sid looked at him in a funny, squinty way, almost a frown but not quite. "No, I'm gonna paint the fuckin' walls with it," he grumbled. "'Course we're gonna eat it! Don't get smart with me. You eat what I cook and like it, understand?" Joey nodded. Sometimes his dad talked that way, so it wasn't a surprise to find that other guys did too. Sid poured the heated mixture into two white china bowls and gave one to Joe, along with a slice of plain white bread. Joe ate every bite; he hadn't eaten anything all day

except for the Cheerios and Baby Ruth, and the stew, as Sid called it, tasted better than it looked.

After supper, Joey used the smelly toilet in the tiny bathroom, then went with Sid to the barn to feed the horses. It wasn't like the barns Joey had seen in books and movies; it was more like a big wooden shed with peeling gray paint and cracks in the boards. Some of the smaller cracks were jammed with straw and rags. Inside it was dusty and dark and smelled like rotten wood. "Where are the silver saddles?" Joey asked.

"Huh?"

"Like in the Rose Parade," Joey explained.

Sid hocked up a lump of phlegm and spat onto the floor. "Don't have no saddles. No bridles, neither. Right, Victor?"

There were two box stalls at the back of the shed, and a shuffling sound came from one of them. A big brown horse with a black mane poked his head over the door and made an odd, puffy sound through his nostrils. "That's Victor, kid," Sid said, nodding at the horse. "His real name's Hail the Victor. Pretty good racehorse in his time." Sid took some straw from a bale of hay and stuffed it into a net bag beside the horse's head. The horse nibbled at the straw, then looked at Joey with curiosity and kindness in his eyes. Joey was a little frightened of the big horse, but when Sid pushed him toward the stall, the animal lowered his huge head and blew warm breath into Joey's hands.

"Can I ride him?" Joey asked, feeling braver.

“Nope. Nobody rides him. Can’t bear any weight on his back, not with his lousy legs.”

“Whatsa matter with his legs?” Joey peeped through the slats of the stall door at the horse’s front legs but they seemed okay. It was funny, but they were all white, even though the rest of him was golden brown. “Did he fall down?”

“Yeah, in a race, at the top of the stretch. Long time ago. I was his trainer,” Sid said quietly, stroking the tiny white spot in the middle of the horse’s head. “Man, we made a lot of money together, didn’t we, Pops? Then he broke down and they were gonna shoot him, so I bought him for \$10. Couldn’t bear to let him go, not like that. So now it’s just him and me, two old crowbaits out here in the ass end of nowhere, waiting to die. Oh, and the pony too.”

Joey wasn’t sure what Sid had just said about Victor, but a pony! That was something wonderful! “Where’s the pony?”

Sid smiled, but he wasn’t looking at Joey. Then he sighed and turned away from the horse. “Out back in the corral. Worthless piece of shit. Wanna see her?”

Before Sid had finished his sentence, Joey was racing outside and around the barn to the back. A black pony with a little brown on her face and legs looked up at him and immediately walked over to him, poking her shaggy head through the rails of the corral. “Hey! She licked my hands!” Joey cried, delighted by the velvet-smooth touch of the pony’s muzzle. “She likes me! What’s her name?”

Sid shrugged. “She don’t have a name. I just call her the pony. Friend gave her to me to keep Victor company. She’s gimpy, but not all the time. Call her whatever you want.”

Joey instantly thought of a name for the pony, but he wasn’t sure he should tell Sid about it just yet, so he just nodded his head and said, “Okay.” Then he wondered aloud, “I can ride her, huh?”

“Not today,” Sid muttered. “She’s limping today. But we’ll see. Maybe sometime.”

Joey was going to ask about saddles again, then decided not to. Hadn’t Sid said he didn’t have any? But how could you ride a horse – or a pony – without a saddle? He probably had one somewhere and would bring it out when the pony was ready to ride.

Sid showed Joey two more small buildings, a shack he called the bunkhouse and a smaller shack he called the smokehouse. They both looked like garden sheds to Joey but he politely said nothing.

The sun went down in a haze of red and purple, and the sky began turning dark. Back at the house, Sid took a can of beer from the icebox, opened it, took a gulp and, clenching the can like a pistol-grip, led Joe up a set of narrow steps to the second floor. It was just one room, and Sid called it a loft, but to Joe it looked like some kind of storeroom, like the basement in his own house in Beaverton. Boxes and old furniture lined the walls, and on one side was a small bed, like a camp cot, and a nightstand with a lamp in the shape of a wild duck flying with a lot of reeds behind it with a real battered lampshade. A little gray rug with pictures of Indians on it lay on the wooden floor, right

next to the bed, and looking at it made Joey feel a little better. He hoped his dad would hurry up and bring back his plastic cowboys and take him home. He missed his mom something awful, and he felt like crying just at the thought of her.

Sid turned on the duck light. "Here's where you'll be sleeping. Ya don't wet the bed, do ya?"

Joey shook his head. "Not any more." He thought he could probably make it to the bathroom in time if he woke up in the middle of the night.

"The sheets and a blanket are in a box at the foot of the bed. Don't forget to turn off the light before you go to sleep. It's an old lamp and it could start a fire if it gets too hot. Goodnight." Sid and turned toward the stairs.

Panic welled up in Joey's throat, not just because he was scared of causing a fire, as bad as that was, but because he realized that he really was going to have to spend the night alone in Sid's miserable shack. "Wait!" he called out. "I don't want there to be a fire."

Sid shook his head. "There probably won't be. And there definitely won't be if you just remember to turn off the lamp. See? Here's the switch." Sid demonstrated how to use it, plunging the loft into frightening darkness, then bringing back the light. "Off. On. Off. On. Real easy. Now make your bed and get some sleep."

But Joey was still worried. "When's Dad coming to get me? Where's my mom? She always reads to me before I go to sleep at home. I'm not really sleeping here tonight, am I?" His voice got very high as he said the last sentence, and he looked all over the

room, into the shadows, hoping his mother might suddenly appear and scoop him up into her arms. He could almost smell her flowery perfume.

But his mother didn't come. She was home, miles away, maybe even still asleep, with that bad nosebleed.

Sid turned back, frowning a little but not really upset. He drank a little beer, and after that he looked more relaxed. Joey didn't want to make Sid angry, not if he was anything like his dad. "Look, I know it's hard staying overnight at a strange place," Sid said, "but you got to do it. I can't do no better for ya. I'm sure your dad'll be back in a day or two, and then he'll take you back to your mom. Okay?"

He paused, and Joey didn't know what to say. Didn't Dad say that he would bring Mom to the farm? Things weren't okay, but he didn't want to lie and say they were. "Can...can you help me with the sheets?" he whispered at last. "Mom always does it for me."

Sid shrugged, took a long drink of beer and set the can on the nightstand. "Okay, this once, but you know, it's time you started doing stuff for yourself. Your mom and dad won't always be around to help, ya know." He walked past Joey, picked up the cardboard box with the bedding and dumped two worn sheets, a faded pink blanket and a thin flower-print comforter onto the bare mattress. "Don't know if you'll need all these covers. It's cold outside at night, but it's warm up here."

Joey was barely listening to him. His mind had frozen at the thought of his parents not being with him forever. He had assumed his mom would always be with him to comfort him after a bad dream, and his father would always be around to yell at him.

Now there was the chance that this wouldn't be so. "But Dad and Mom are coming back, aren't they?"

"Here, catch this," Sid said, throwing one end of a sheet toward Joey. "Now spread it out like this and tuck the tails under the mattress. You got to do this by yourself next time, okay? Like I said a million times already, your dad'll be back, and don't worry about your mom." Joey nodded. "And no crying, okay?" Joey nodded again and they finished making the bed in silence. Then, still without speaking, Sid snatched the beer can from the nightstand and took off down the stairs.

Alone in the attic, Joey sat on the cot and listened to the house. It spoke to him in squeaks, like a mouse, and long, stuttering sighs as the wind pushed at the roof and snuck in around the edges of the one window. *This is a real old house*, he thought. *Maybe even as old as Dad*. He wanted to remember all the details of the ranch – the house noises, the dog, the stinky bathroom, the horses – so that the next time he saw his mother, he could tell her all about it and they could laugh together at his funny adventure.

After a while he couldn't keep back his tears; he felt them sliding down his cheeks and he tasted them with his tongue. Still, he tried to keep quiet. Sid might be listening, and he might get angry. Time passed, and Joey wished he had remembered to bring his Hopalong Cassidy watch, even though he was just beginning to learn its secrets. Still sniffing to himself, he fished his pajamas out of his suitcase and took off his dirty clothes. When his hand brushed his shorts pocket, he smiled. The cowboy from the Cheerios box was still in there! Eagerly he pulled the toy from his pocket and examined it closely. Other than the pistol, the cowboy was pretty plain, although he did have a big

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hat and a bandana and boots. Now that this guy was the only one left, at least for now, Joey thought, he'd have to take care of him. He could imagine Indians and horses, but he had to have a cowboy.

Feeling a little happier, he put on his PJs and got into bed. He jumped out quickly, though, afraid he would start a fire if he forgot to turn out the light. Once the duck lamp was off, he crawled back onto the cot and pulled the girly, flower-dotted bedspread over him. Then he remembered the cowboy, still clutched in his fist. Carefully he felt for the edge of the nightstand and placed the plastic figure in what he hoped was a safe place. *R father witch art in heaven hollow bean I name*, he said, over and over to himself until he fell asleep.

In the morning, Joey dressed and went downstairs, expecting to see his mom and dad waiting for him, but they weren't in the kitchen or the dumpy little living room or even the bathroom. He looked around for a telephone – even though he didn't know his number, maybe Sid would – but he couldn't find one. After he used the toilet, he went outside onto the porch, thinking that maybe his parents were looking at the poor dog. But not only were they not there, the dog wasn't there either. Just the yellow newspapers, which were now yellow and red. “Here, boy!” Joey called. Maybe his parents had taken the dog for a walk. “Here, boy! C'mere!”

“He's gone. He can't hear you.”

Joey jumped. He turned around, and for a moment he forgot all about his mom and dad. “Uncle Sid! Where's the dog?”

Uncle Sid stood before him, dressed only in his underwear, a ragged vest and briefs, which should have been white but instead were gray and grimy. There was an open beer can in his hand. “Like I said, he’s gone. Run off. Dogs do that all the time. Maybe he’ll be back. Maybe he won’t.”

Joey looked again at the red splashes on the newspaper. “Did he have a nosebleed? My mom did. That’s why she couldn’t come here with us. Did Dad bring her back yet?”

Sid shook his head and pulled on his chin with one hand. “I don’t know about the dog’s nose, but your mom’s not here yet. Dammit, you gotta be patient, kid! Now why don’t you be useful and gather up that stinkin’ paper and take it to the firepile in back of the house? I’ll burn it later.” Sid waddled back into the house, sipping his beer as he disappeared into the shadows.

Joey looked at the soiled papers; he wasn’t that close to them, but he could smell urine, blood and something even worse that he couldn’t name. The thought of touching the mess made his stomach do a flip-flop, but he gathered his courage, clutched the pile of papers by two corners and, after a struggle, hauled it off the porch. It took him a lot longer to drag the papers to the back of the house, but he finally managed. Finishing the chore made him feel a little better able to handle his mother not being there. Hopalong, Roy Rogers and Gene Autry had all said it at one time or another: Listen to the grownups in charge and do your chores cheerfully. That was what the real cowboys and cowgirls did! But the real cowboys never had to drag dirty papers around either, at least in the movies.

CHAPTER ONE – Horse-boy

Portland, Oregon 1961

*The late bell shrieked through the halls of Lincoln High School, as indignant as the buzzing of a captive honeybee. Cathy looked down the long hall lined with gray metal lockers. No other students, she thought. I'm late, terribly late. What class is it? Physics? English? She had a test in English, didn't she? She hurried down the hall, came to her locker and tried to open it. What was that damn combination? The lock refused to open. There was that stupid bell again, even angrier now. And there was her dog, Dilly the beagle, sitting at her feet, pawing at her legs, whining with concern. What was Dilly doing at school? "It's the phone, Cathy. Get the phone, honey," the dog said.*

The lockers faded, and Dilly's face became the face of her husband, Dan, barely visible in the dim light of the bedroom. Cathy Morgen heard the ringing of a telephone and realized it was coming from her nightstand.

"This is another reason I want you to quit," Dan mumbled, flopping back down on his side of the bed. "It's fucking three o'clock."

Cathy fumbled for the phone, wondering what emergency was about to fall into her lap now. She finally gripped the receiver and brought it to her ear, still half-immersed in the world of her dream. "H...hello?" she sputtered. "Dilly?"

Megan Davidson  
The Thundering

There was a short silence on the other end of the line and then a nervous basso profundo voice began speaking rather rapidly. “Dr. Morgen, this is Peter Gorsky at Summerhaven. Sorry to disturb you. First let us say how much we admired the work you did on the Princess Betsy case. I read it the moment it came out. Absolutely brilliant.”

“Thank you,” Cathy murmured, “but I assume that case isn’t the reason why you’re calling.”

“Very true,” Gorsky continued. “Again, our apologies for calling you so late. Obviously this case isn’t on your schedule, but we need your help. We’ve had an emergency admission, an adolescent male, a charity case. Frankly, we’re not sure precisely how to proceed. The patient has already kicked one of the attendants in the face and broken his nose.”

Cathy, still groggy, forced herself to focus on what the director of Portland’s most prestigious private sanatorium was saying to her. It wasn’t a good sign that he was using first person plural. “Broke his nose? Peter, I don’t understand. If he’s that violent, why don’t you just sedate him?”

“Actually, we have, but he seems to be resisting the effects. And to answer the question you haven’t asked, no, we haven’t used Thorazine. Yet. We may have to. In any case, I’d like you to see him first. You’ve had great success with this sort of patient.”

She was almost fully awake now, sitting up, shuffling her feet around in search of her white satin slippers. At least Peter was using the first person singular now. “And what sort of patient would that be?” she said, anticipating the answer.

Again there was a slight pause. “He reminds me of your princess,” Gorsky said. “I know she wasn’t aggressive, of course, and this boy is, but... I think there’s more than meets the eye here. I don’t want to damage this poor child any more than I have to. That’s why I’m calling you. It’s my experience that boys this age respond better to female doctors than to male.” There was a slight pause. “A psychologist such as yourself might be able to see something we missed.” Another slight pause. “All right, then. You’re my ace in the hole.”

*Or your last resort, she thought, before Thorazine.* Sure, when all else fails, call in the rat jockey. A faint, ringing cry punctuated her observation. Cathy immediately thought of a panicked animal. “Is that your patient?”

“It is,” Gorsky said. “And I’m calling from my office. What do you say?”

Ten minutes to get dressed, plus 15 or so to get to the hospital, and five minutes leeway. “I can be there in about half an hour,” she said. “Can you manage until then?”

“I think so,” Gorsky replied softly, without a lot of confidence. “Please hurry. Thanks so much.” He hung up abruptly, not giving her a chance to have second thoughts.

Cathy shook her head. Dr. Gorsky was almost never perturbed. A short, scholarly Santa Claus with salt-and-pepper hair, he glided through his duties at Summerhaven with thoughtfulness, compassion and deliberation. Whenever she was there, usually two or three times a week, she had never even seen him move faster than a majestic walk. On the phone, however, he had seemed almost desperate. What was wrong with this boy? What if she couldn’t help? Look what had happened to the Princess, after all. But Pete was a good guy. He’d saved her hide a time or two. At least

she could try to help him. She turned toward Dan, a dark, fuming mass beside her. “I’ve got to go, darling. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Sure. Go on,” he said, without turning to look at her. “But you know, this isn’t the way it’s supposed to be. Calls about loonies in the middle of the night... I’m trying to put up with this craziness, but it’s not easy for me. I don’t know how much more of this I can take.”

Cathy hesitated. What could she say to that? That her work wasn’t crazy, when clearly at times it was? She had already told him she was limiting her practice. She’d be out in a year and a half, two at the most. Could he take it that long? “They’re patients. I know you’re having a tough time with this,” she said, for lack of anything else more cogent. “We can get through this if we work on it together.”

Dan grunted. “Now you’re talking like a shrink,” he answered.

“I should be,” she replied. “I’m a doctor whose patients are mentally ill. That’s the woman you married. We’ll discuss it later.”

Dan was silent after that, and Cathy got dressed hurriedly in a garter belt and stockings, a simple white blouse, a comfortable brown A-line skirt and sensible brown pumps. No point in dressing up for what could very well be a long, difficult encounter, complete with bodily fluids. Makeup? Who would notice, under the circumstances?

She grabbed her purse as she left the house, trying not to make too much noise for fear of waking her daughter, Suzie, who actually did have high school classes in a few hours. The slightly battered white-and-aqua Bel Air sat in the driveway, waiting for her, almost as if it knew she greatly preferred it to their other car, a sleek black Mercedes

Benz that, for unknown reasons, had always struck her as soulless, if not downright sinister. She hopped inside the welcoming Chevy and backed into the shadowy stillness of the street.

The drive to Summerhaven was tense and quiet. There was not another car on the road, and it was easy for Cathy to imagine that she was one of the last people on earth, speeding off to a rendezvous with another of her lonely kind.

All too soon she pulled into the parking lot of the hospital, a looming brick affair built at the turn of the century to house the genuinely insane and those who just didn't fit into the family picture any longer. A slow-witted brother, a terror-stricken child too frightened to speak, an alcoholic wife or two, a temperamental mother-in-law, a grandfather entering dotage, black people who had publicly disagreed with white people: All these and more, Cathy knew, had ended up incarcerated, forgotten in the maws of this stately building. What was the old joke? If you're not crazy when you come here, you will be after a month. Today, of course, things were different. Thanks to Dr. Gorsky, the inmates were actually being helped. Or, at the very least, managed humanely.

A nurse met her just inside the huge double doors. The woman looked red-faced and disheveled, but she greeted Cathy in a professional manner and led her through a maze of dim hallways to a beautiful brass and walnut door. Cathy recognized it at once from her many previous visits: It opened into a room with a one-way window that overlooked a large observation chamber. The subject, of course, saw nothing but a mirror.

Inside the room were Dr. Gorsky and two other doctors, whom she didn't recognize. All three were looking through the window at an adolescent boy and two orderlies, none of whom were moving, except for an occasional shift of weight or turn of the head. One of the men held a white restraining jacket. The boy, naked save for a pair of dirty white boxer shorts, stood between the two; he skittered away whenever the men made a hint of a movement in his direction. Then he would turn and glare at them, his mouth open and his head snaking from side to side.

When Gorsky saw Cathy, he rushed up to her and grasped her by the shoulders, like a man who had had no human contact for weeks. "Cathy!" he cried. "So glad you're here. Please...take a look and tell me your observations. Believe me, I'll value any advice you suggest."

Cathy went up to the window and looked out, but the tableau of boy and men barely shifted at all for several minutes. There was something strangely familiar about the young man, although she was certain she had never seen him before. He was fourteen or fifteen, five foot five or six, with a thin build and erect posture. His freckled face looked tense and drawn. His large brown eyes shone with intelligence, as well as fear. By far his most unusual physical attribute was his rust-colored hair, which was shaved on the sides; in back it fell in tousled waves to his shoulders. "His hair," she began, but stopped. Just then the boy bolted to the door, his long hair streaming behind him like a mane. The two orderlies just managed to cut him off and drive him back to the center of the room. The boy paced nervously in a circle for a few moments, and then the tableau

resumed. For the first time she noticed a few spots of blood on the floor. The broken nose, she thought.

“His hair,” she said again. “Why is it so long?”

“Interesting you should focus on that,” Dr. Gorsky replied. “He has spent the past six months living in a sideshow, part of a traveling carnival that’s currently in Salem for some sort of benefit show. Murphy’s Human Miracles, I believe is their name. They cut his hair like that and called him ‘the horse-boy.’ If you look closely, you’ll see bits of theatrical makeup on him, too. Heaven knows what they did to him. I’m told that he acts just like a horse, and from what I’ve seen, I believe it.”

*Every horse has a mane,* Cathy thought. Then it struck her why the boy looked so familiar to her. His balanced stance and alert expression reminded her of her teen-aged years, when she had spent every free hour of her life at a local stable, riding the horses but more often just observing them. Like so many young girls, she had been in love with horses, and perhaps, on some level, she still was. Cathy glanced at Gorsky. “I can understand why the authorities would rescue him from such a situation. He’s too young to be working under those conditions.”

Gorsky sighed and sat down in a nearby plastic chair that seemed much too fragile to hold him. “The police did bring him in, but not because of any altruistic standards. Apparently he bit one of the patrons on the face. It was all the police in Salem could do to talk the man into not filing charges. Then there was this horrible comedy of errors.” Gorsky explained that Salem Mental Hospital wouldn’t take the boy. They called Portland County Hospital, which agreed to take him, but when he arrived, they

realized they had no room for him. So they called Summerhaven. “We said we’d take him, so the Portland police brought him over here. What an ordeal for the poor lad! Thanks to the prosperous parents of one of our patients, we have a fund for emergency situations like this. Still, I’m beginning to rethink our generosity.”

Well, no wonder the child was disoriented! Cathy studied him more intently. One of the orderlies held up the jacket again and took a step forward. The boy stepped backward, pawed the floor with a straight leg and rolled his eyes. When the orderly stopped, the boy tossed his head and let out a piercing scream like the one she had heard over the phone. “A broken nose and a bitten face, and that’s just one day’s work,” she mused aloud. “I wonder what caused him to attack the customer. Does he speak?”

Gorsky nodded. “Yes, but not much so far. Just a few words and phrases, but coherently and in context. Back, wait, stop, get out and so forth. The police said the customer was apparently teasing the child, but I don’t know the details.”

“And you and the orderlies are attempting to do...what, exactly? Escort him to a room?”

“Yes,” he said. “For now. In the next few days we’ll process him and try to get him stabilized. We’ve registered him under the name Joseph Chief. That’s the name they used for him at the sideshow, but we have no idea what his actual name is.”

“Joseph Chief? Like Chief Joseph, the Nez Perce leader, but backwards.” *He certainly does seem to be out of sync*, Cathy thought. She had no idea what was fueling the boy’s odd behavior, but she recognized at once, nearly from the moment she got a good look at him, just what he was doing, and she knew that two muscle-bound men with

a strait jacket and menacing postures weren't going to accomplish much. Except perhaps another injury. At that moment, she thought her prediction might come true as the boy turned his back on the orderlies and shouted, "Go away!" She watched in terror as the boy leaped into the air and kicked backward with both feet. She had never seen anyone do such a thing before. Anyone with only two legs, of course.

It was an empty kick, a warning, perhaps. Both orderlies scrambled backward toward the steel door. Gorsky pressed a button on a console on the wall in front of him, and a small red light in the room was immediately illuminated. The orderlies rushed out, and Cathy thought they both looked extremely relieved. "Do you have a soft cloth rope, or anything similar, about four feet long?" she asked.

The nurse who had admitted her spoke up. "Our terry-cloth robes come with long belts. We never use them, however...safety's sake, you know. But I can get you one if you like."

"Thank you," Cathy said, her attention still focused on the boy, who was now pacing in agitated circles around the room. "I'll also need a hard candy, like a peppermint or butterscotch disk."

"Butterscotch?" Gorsky eyed Cathy intently as the nurse rushed off on her errand. "May I ask why you need these items?" he said. There were black smudges under his bloodshot eyes, but nevertheless, he suddenly looked very awake and very skeptical.

“Because I’m going in to try to help Joseph comply with your request, and the belt may prove helpful,” Cathy replied, looking at her friend with a crooked smile. “So might the candy. Don’t worry. If I’m correct, no one will be hurt.”

“I won’t allow it!” Gorsky boomed, and he suddenly seemed much taller than he actually was. “You can’t put yourself in jeopardy like that. The boy is clearly dangerous, and despite your confidence and skill, it is entirely possible that you are not correct, you know.”

“I know, but it’s worth a try. Peter, the boy is frightened, as opposed to vicious. I believe he’s acting in his own defense, at least, his perceived defense. I’d bet the farm on it. I think I can reach him. Isn’t that why you called me and woke me up in the first place? To get a psychologist’s opinion? To get my help? This is the only way I know how to help you. And Joseph.” Cathy paused, realizing how fast she was speaking. Gorsky looked unconvinced. She knew he might not approve of what she was about to do; it was, after all, feeding into the boy’s behavior, or delusion, if that was the case. Dr. Cailouette, the associate director of the hospital, definitely would not approve. But he wasn’t present; in fact, he was one hundred miles away at a conference in Eugene. “Or do you want to use the Thorazine?”

Gorsky shook his head. Cathy knew that he never used the powerful new personality-draining drug on young patients except when he had run out of other options. Yes, Thorazine did seem to make hostility, delusions and hallucinations magically melt away, but it took every other part of the patient’s identity with it, right down to the light in their eyes. Sometimes it seemed to her as if that were the point: create docile, tractable

patients at all costs, even at the cost of who they were. And if they were born to be irascible, belligerent, argumentative, uncooperative, rash and irresponsible, Thorazine could take all that away and replace it with quiet, effective patient management. Was it wrong? It didn't matter, really. Summerhaven was Peter's hospital; he made the rules. "Very well, go ahead. But just what is it you wish to do?"

"Lead him to his room, of course, either by the hand or perhaps with the belt. One of your attendants should be ready to guide us."

"It's not your intention to humor his delusion and treat him as if he actually were a horse, I hope."

"I don't know," she replied. "We'll have to see how it works out, but my goal is to get him to his room safely, quickly and quietly, with the least amount of aggravation. Right now, that would be an improvement, wouldn't it? And by the way, it's not clear that his bizarre behavior stems from a mental delusion, as you imply. It could be a desperate bid for attention, or a physical reaction to a drug or other substance or a medical problem...or something else entirely."

Gorsky waved his hand in a gesture of defeat. "Obviously we don't have a diagnosis as of yet. I just don't want anyone to be injured. Not the boy, and certainly not you, doctor." He paused, then sighed deeply, then nodded. "All right, then. Try to lead him into the hallway, and we'll take it from there."

Before Cathy had a chance to ask Gorsky what he meant, the nurse returned with a long white terry-cloth strap. She placed it in Cathy's waiting hands, along with a red and white striped candy.

“You don’t plan on using that belt around Joseph’s neck, do you?” Gorsky asked, his face a mask of sudden anxiety. “I can’t allow that.”

Cathy shook her head and smiled again. “Of course not,” she said, although in fact the thought had occurred to her. She was still planning what she was about to do when she left the room and walked up to the door of the examination chamber with quick, deliberate strides. She put her fingers on the door handle as Gorsky and two aides and a doctor she didn’t know clustered around her apprehensively. If she were wrong, she might end up with a concussion. Or worse. But no, she wouldn’t allow herself to think about that. She must put such ideas far from her. She smiled at Gorsky. “See you in a few minutes, Peter,” she murmured.

“In one piece, I hope.”

She unlocked the door, turned the handle, and entered, closing the door behind her.

The boy immediately stopped pacing and looked directly at her, his head held very high, his eyes glistening with distrust. Now that she got a good look at him, Cathy could see that he was unusually muscular, and his arms were noticeably longer than normal. She said nothing but nodded her head several times, then took a few steps toward the boy. He stood his ground, his look of doubt softening into curiosity. Cathy waited, and for a minute or two neither she nor the boy moved at all. What was it that she felt from him? Fear, certainly, but something much more complex and confused that she couldn’t quite fathom. He made her think of Princess Betsy, the 12-year-old she had helped, or tried to help, or almost helped. Cathy got the same impression from Joseph as

she had from Betsy: I have made a wall to separate us, and I am not allowing you through it.

Cathy turned slightly sideways and looked toward the boy. In her childhood she had observed horses communicating with each other with this gesture whenever they wanted an individual to walk toward them. Would a child who superficially – although convincingly -- behaved as if he were a horse understand this subtle communication? The boy turned in a tight circle and took a few steps toward her, backed up, stepped toward her again, and then stopped, as if afraid to get too close. When he didn't advance any further, Cathy backed away. When she was about ten paces from the boy, she bent her knees and sat down carefully on the floor, folding her legs beneath her.

Years ago she had watched dumbstruck as Mattie, a girl in her riding class, had sat down in a field where five horses were grazing. One by one they had come up to Cathy's friend, the bravest first, then the next curious, until Mattie was surrounded by horses, licking her face and nuzzling her hair, emboldened by their curiosity. "They just can't stand by and do nothing when there's exploring to be done," Mattie had said.

At first the boy ignored her. Then he walked around her slowly, sticking close to the walls. After two circles, the boy stretched his neck forward, as if trying to smell her. His luxurious red hair fell into his face, and for a moment he did indeed look very long-faced, very equine. Cathy said nothing. When she had first tried to imitate Mattie in the field, she had called aloud to the horses and spoiled the magic; the horses never did come to her. Not on that occasion. Quiet and calm were key.

Cathy observed the boy, waiting as patiently as she could, breathing only when she had to. Time slipped by without measurement, as it never did during her busy days and evenings. Hours and minutes were too precious to waste, and she doled them out carefully. But here, in this quiet room with this mysterious boy, time didn't matter. Several times Joseph stopped pacing and looked at her, then advanced a few steps and retreated one or two, until he was only an arm's length away. Carefully and delicately, so as not to spook him, Cathy unwrapped the peppermint. As the boy inhaled the sweet scent, Cathy rose to her feet, languid, like a goldfish lazily drifting to the top of its bowl. When the boy was only a foot or so from her, she offered him the candy on her outstretched palm and broke her silence. "Joseph, my name is Dr. Morgen, and I'm here to help you. I don't want you or anyone else to be hurt. I just want to get you to your room for tonight. Alright? Care for a sweet?" She spoke softly, her free hand gripping the terry-cloth belt like a lifeline.

To Cathy's amazement, Joseph shook his head. His hair rippled around his face and neck. "No thank you," he said.

Cathy nearly fell back down to the floor. They must be chattering to themselves right now like a flock of crows, she thought, glancing at the mirror. Quickly she regained her mental balance. "Hold onto this, please," she said, holding up one end of the belt. "I'll lead you to your room. Everything's going to be all right. I promise. No one's going to hurt you anymore. We're here to help you."

She stopped speaking, and silence fell down around her and the boy. She didn't dare to breathe as Joseph hesitated, looked warily behind him, and after a little snorting

and head-shaking, grasped the belt. Her breath returned to her in shallow gasps. Turning her back on her charge, Cathy began to walk to the door. Joseph followed, hesitant at first, then peaceful. She saw the red light come on. She wanted to leap in the air and scream out in triumph, but she stayed silent and collected, at least on the outside. When they reached the door, she pushed it open and stepped into the hallway. She heard Joseph's bare feet padding behind her on the tile floor. A stern-looking orderly stepped up to her side, as she had expected, but why did he suddenly grin at her? A hand clasped her shoulder: It was Peter.

“Thank you, Dr. Morgen. Your technique was flawless. Please, come with me,” he said.

Then she understood. “No!” she cried, turning just in time to see another attendant, bigger and burlier than the first, grab Joseph from behind in a powerful bear hug. A third orderly sprang into the fray. The boy cried out and struggled to free himself; as strong as he was, he might as well have been a butterfly in the grip of the three men.

Cathy felt herself being pulled back. She stumbled, lost her footing, and slipped backwards into Gorsky's grasp. “This is wrong,” was all she could manage to growl at the man. *He...he tricked me*, she thought, her mind awash with hurt and confusion.

“I assure you, this is best for him. We can handle everything from here,” Gorsky said soothingly, escorting her back down the hall, away from the screaming boy. More distant cries, from other inmates, shuddered throughout the building, like the moans of

awakened ghosts. She turned once and saw Joseph's red mane whip upward like a flame and quickly fall back.

A nurse holding a syringe brushed past her. Cathy eyed the woman nervously, then glared at Gorsky. "What the hell is that?"

He bundled her toward his office like a teacher hustling a frail child away from a schoolyard brawl. "Please, don't worry. It's just Miltown, a slightly higher dose than what we gave him earlier. They'll get him in a jacket and take him to his room. In the morning, we'll be able to evaluate his condition in a far more controlled setting. You'll see...it's all for the best."

"You...you told me I could lead him to his room," she said. *Great. Now she was sputtering. Very professional.*

"Not exactly," Gorsky said, cocking his head in a way that was not quite condescending. "I said you could lead him out into the hallway. Surely you didn't think I was going to endanger your life and let you walk through the facility with a new, unknown and probably dangerous patient."

Cathy didn't know what to think. One always took risks when working with patients, especially unfamiliar ones. She'd never encountered anyone quite like Joseph, especially not at four in the morning, and she imagined that Gorsky hadn't, either. Maybe Peter's way was safer, she thought, trying to justify his stratagem. What if Joseph had bolted from her and run amok throughout the hospital? Then she would have been responsible for any damage or injuries that occurred, and Joseph would be in worse shape than he was now. She still felt used, but at least Joseph was secure.