

O B V I O U S

the first part...

CHAPTER

1

“I don’t even know where to start.”

“Well, why don’t you start with why you wanted to see me,” Laura calmly says, crossing her legs. She has great legs. The kind of legs that should be wrapped around you, that should be spread apart. I’m scared. I know this will trigger another attack. I’m up to two already today and the hell my life has become is only feeding the intensity. She smiles but shame averts my eyes. The last thing I need now would be to lose her too - especially now. Laura’s been my psychotherapist for these past two shitty years, working to get me to come to terms with Anita’s death. Here’s a cruel twist of fate for you. Three years ago I was her mentor but now I’m sitting here rubbing my wrists where shackles have turned my skin raw and a prisoner’s number forever brands me. I clear my throat. That tingling sensation I’ve come to dread.

Look at those legs!

Breathe...easy...slowly.

I wish I could ignore that voice in my head. God, I wish I were still sleeping. Then maybe I could awake all over again and discover this is all a ridiculous nightmare. Yesterday I woke up in a guarded room at Downtown Hospital wondering how and why I was there. Wondering why some cop named Zukerman pounded me with questions before my eyes even began to focus. Where was Lucy? Where was Brendan? Why weren’t they here?

“You can start anytime you know,” Laura says, curious I’m sure as to what is going on in my head. “Desmond?”

That’s me. Desmond Bennett. A mere week ago I was a reputed psychologist in New York despite being Laura’s patient. Hell, being in therapy is hip in this town. And I should know because like I said, three years ago I was the star of Manhattan. I was the one at the top of our

er chair. I say that with all the affection I can muster for expensive, chic furniture that looks and feels like plastic white beanbags.

I stand at the floor to ceiling windows and soak in the impressive view of Manhattan. The media vans have cluttered the curbs along Broadway and the reporters - or rather vultures - are loitering for another morsel of my flesh to feed to a hungry public. How'd they find out I was here?

Fucking scum!

Across Broadway, Senator Goldbraith's billboard is perched pompously on the roof of a tenement building. One I'm sure he owns. He looks very distinguished, very sincere, and very corrupt. He's the archetype politician plying for Washington with all the usual bullshit promises. But Goldbraith promises a little something more. An aggressive new bill on crime, especially killers like me. And I'm wondering if my sudden notoriety has made me the perfect poster boy for his campaign zeal. After all I'm public enemy number one, the man whose face is gracing more magazine covers and grocery store tabloids than any other celebrity this week. I feel like human fodder. How did this happen to me? I gawk at the horde of media below. Maybe Anita had the right idea. You just step out on the ledge and escape.

"What are we, twenty floors up here?" I ask, still staring at the street.

"Eighteen," Laura says, like she knows exactly what's going through my fucked up head. She swivels her chair to face me. The chair is white of course. Or what did she call it the first time I was in this new office? That was only six months ago only I was here as a friend and formidable colleague along with a drunken gaggle of PhD's bantering Freudian analysis as the clock ticked to New Year's. No one could be drunk enough for that. But it was a good party.

Eggshell!

That was what she called it. It's like calling pink fuchsia; it's still pink to my untrained eye. And so eggshell is white, just plain old white, white and fucking tacky. But what does it matter. The whole office looked like the set of a Purex commercial anyway; pure, perfect, unblemished. And we're supposed to spill our guts in this vacuum of human fidelity and confess our fears? How the fuck do I...wait.

I can smell strawberries.

Breathe...easy.

Oh no. There she is. I'm still frozen at the window, the street looming eighteen floors below, and Anita's ghost is on the ledge, tormenting me, threatening my weak grasp on sanity as she always does. She just stands there completely calm and inviting, looking at me while gusts of wind tassel her hair and flutter her summer dress.

Love me, Desmond.

Then she leans forward, arms out, welcoming escape. It's always the same. But the instant gravity claims her she coils with sudden fear and realization. Her fingers clawing for me, eyes begging for a lifeline at that final moment upon free fall when she realizes she doesn't really want to die. Her scream fading as she tumbles at unimaginable velocity, arms and legs flailing, then sudden death. I close my eyes, tell myself to let it go. It's been two years. It was her choice.

"Desmond," Laura says. "Come and sit down." And as she always does when I'm fighting Anita's ghost at the window, Laura attempts to calm my panic.

I sink in the couch hoping she can't see how weak I am. Hoping she doesn't see what the whole country says I am. I'm trying to slow my breathing but the air is so thin. My hands are sweaty and cold.

Laura leans close enough for me to feel the brush of her breath on my cheek. "Look, Desmond," she says, "you need to talk about what you remember from last week..." she glances past her massive window at Goldbraith's billboard across Broadway, "...especially now. Have you talked to Harry?"

Laura is referring to Harry Bard, the resident chief psychologist at Breckendale Hall and one of the highest regarded members of our illustrious profession in New York. He is a friend. Someone Laura knows I would trust. But talking to friends who have long regarded me their peer is hardest at the moment. And Harry was more than that for many years. He was my mentor, my professor. So much so that I was the one who introduced Anita to Harry. Her suicide deeply troubled him as well.

"I don't know about Harry," I finally say.

"You have to talk about this, Desmond," she urges more like a friend.

Talk, talk, talk. . . It's all I've done for the past couple of years. How do I talk about my life spiralling into shit? My struggles with Anita's suicide and my divorce pale in comparison to what I woke up to yesterday. Lucy is gone. How am I supposed to live with that? God, I miss her.

My hands are shaking now. I can't stop it. I feel it coming. "Laura, I don't even know how to talk about this?"

She smiles reassuringly and says, "A word at a time."

Easy for her to say, she's not splattered across every front page and grocery store tabloid in the country under the headline: 'The Man who Murdered Lucy Greene'.

Lucy, Lucy, Lucy, you fucking, juicy little whore!

Stop it!! Get control dammit!

"I'm tired of not remembering," I say, pulling at my fingers.

Breathe...don't let it happen here; not in front of Laura.

"I know," Laura says. She can see it coming. "Desmond?"

I want to fuck loosie Lucyyyyyyy!

There it is. The squeezing chest, bristles on the back of my neck standing on end, face flushing, skin hot and cold, the walls closing in. Gotta relax. Gotta relax.

"Another attack?" Laura asks.

I'd respond if I could. But it's too late, the air thick and cold. I can't breathe, can't move. Not now! Not again! I flash on Lucy kissing me, loving me.

That girl knew how to fuck.

She loved me!

She loved to fuck!

"No!" I shout. Laura leans back, leery of me.

Fucky, fucky, fucky!

"No!" The tears are flowing now, the air in the room gone.

Shoulda fucked Anitaaaaaa.

Laura seizes my hands as if she'd like to physically pull me out of my head. "Desmond!"

My tongue swells in my pasty mouth.

Want some tongue, Lauraaaaaa?

There's death and darkness in my heart. The room is spinning madly. Somehow I manage to mumble the words I thought I'd only hear my old Breckendale patients say.

"I didn't kill her!"

I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it! I did it!

Air gone.

Everything black.