

# *First, Do No Harm*

## *By The Blintz*

I stared wordlessly at the door as it closed behind the retreating figure of Dr. Matwick. I felt numb, utterly beaten as his parting words ran through my head. “Mr. Skyler is in my office awaiting surgery. You know what to do.”

Sure, I knew what to do. I knew to go to the medication room and draw up an appropriate dose of a special sedative Dr. Matwick had created for his more “difficult” patients. Then I would go to his office and administer the injection, watching and monitoring as the patient slowly sank into unconsciousness, blissfully unaware of what was about to happen to him.

That’s what I knew to do. And I had done it many times before on various patients for various reasons. So why was I still sitting here in my chair, my heart pounding and my stomach twisting into hard, unforgiving knots?

Because this time, it was Rudy Skyler. And, all logic and reasoning aside, I had developed a special fondness for this particular patient. True, he had caused a lot of disturbances since his arrival only two days ago. But from the moment he plastered that ridiculous fake mustache onto my face, I knew he would be one of my favorites. He had such a joy about him, such a zest for life, and his boyish smile was so contagious. Yeah, I gave him a hard time—that’s my job. I’ve been a mental health nurse for a long time, and I’ve learned that you have to keep things under control no matter how much you may like a particular patient. But he was so exuberant, it was hard not to let him see a crack in the tough exterior I tried so hard to maintain.

I thought about him as I approached the medicine room. I thought about how he had affected all of us since his arrival, how even Freddie and Victor had responded to him. And Howard! We were all aware of his preoccupation with time and his fear of being late to wherever it was his tortured mind said he was going. But leave it to Skyler to put that obsession to work, allowing Howard to time those ridiculous cockroach races. I felt a little twinge of guilt at that memory, still remembering the accusatory look Skyler gave me after I had killed one of the roaches. I reasoned that I was just doing my duty, but it was hard knowing I’d been the one responsible for taking the joy out of his eyes.

I looked at the medicine vial carefully, checking the label and the expiration date before swabbing the rubber stopper with alcohol and inserting the needle into the contents. Oddly enough, I never remembered my hands shaking before as I prepared to give medicine....

“Get a grip, Bycroft,” I said aloud as I headed down the hallway to Matwick’s office. After all, an order is an order, and I had my orders. But deep inside, I couldn’t wipe

away the images in my mind. Mental pictures of the other patients who had been operated on by the good doctor in the middle of the night. I was never allowed to be in the office while the actual surgery was taking place; for this, Matwick demanded absolute secrecy. But I had seen the results. Human beings who were reduced to mere shells of what they had once been, all the life and energy sucked out of them. And those were the lucky ones. Some of his patients were never seen again, and when I inquired about them, Dr. Matwick told me only that he had it under control. As I approached the office door, I wondered if I had the heart to seal Rudy's fate with the prick of a needle. Didn't that make me just as guilty as the doctor?

I hesitated outside the office door for the briefest of seconds, my emotions in turmoil. I had been a nurse for over twenty years, and never once had I failed to obey a doctor's order. I had questioned a few, but had always done what I was told in the end. I had a reputation for being one of the best nurses in the business.

This time would be no different. Taking a deep breath to squelch any thought I might have of going against an order, I walked resolutely through the doorway, syringe in hand. Rudy Skyler lay prone on the table, hands bound behind his back, forehead bathed in sweat, his desperate blue eyes locked onto mine. He never said a word, but he didn't have to. I had always known there was something different about him, and I had finally figured it out.

He knew.

I don't know how he knew, but he knew. He knew what was going to happen to him, and that he'd never leave this room alive unless somebody helped him. Every other patient I had sedated in this room was clueless. True, some of them were angry and frightened at being tied down and left alone, but they were still lost in their own world, their impaired minds unable to formulate any explanation for what was about to happen to them. I had seen fear and panic and even anger in their eyes as I had injected them with the drug, but the one thing lacking was understanding. They had no idea what was about to transpire.

But Rudy Skyler knew. And because he knew, I had to let him go.

Laying down my syringe, I couldn't resist the impulse to ruffle his curls before undoing the bonds that held him to the table. "It's gone too far," I said as I struggled a little with the straps. "Too far."

Rudy jumped off the table, planted a quick kiss on my cheek and said, "You're beautiful," as he ran out the door. For just a moment I was stunned. It suddenly hit me that Rudy Skyler was no more a mental patient than I was. I had no idea who he was or why he was here, but I knew without a doubt he didn't belong. And I also knew that I had done the right thing.

Realizing that my professional nursing career had just come to an end, I decided to follow Skyler and see exactly what he was up to. Leaving the office, I saw the door closing at

the end of the hall and headed that way slowly and cautiously, as I had no idea what I was about to walk into.

I had just about made it to the second floor landing when I heard the gunshots. Truly alarmed by this time, I quickened my steps, reaching the third floor in record time and cautiously peeking through the stairwell door into the hallway. I was stunned by what I saw. Dr. Matwick was sitting up against the wall in what appeared to be a pile of linen. Directly across from him was Skyler, holding some sort of gun in his right hand and, of all things, Mr. Hansen in his left. Hansen was leaning heavily against Skyler, his head hanging limply against Rudy's chest. I could see that something was definitely wrong with Hansen, so, pushing all the questions I had aside, I stepped forward to see if I could offer any medical assistance.

"Nurse Bycroft," Matwick shouted, an oddly feral expression on his face. "Get help! Mr. Skyler has obviously gone mad and somehow managed to find a gun."

I gave him the coldest look I could muster and turned my attention to Mr. Hansen. "What happened?" I asked as I gently extricated the unconscious blond from Skyler's protective embrace.

"I don't know," Skyler replied, his eyes never leaving Matwick's face. "Your boss here seems to have drugged him with something."

"Nurse Bycroft!" Matwick's voice had risen considerably, and his complexion was a strange mixture of purple and gray. "I demand that you—"

"Shut up!" I snapped impatiently. I had already decided that Matwick was the crazy one in this situation, and, no matter what the consequences, I was on Skyler's side. "And if you don't keep quiet, I will personally restrain you and gag you with one of those towels you're sitting on."

"Thanks." Skyler's voice was soft and filled with concern for Hansen. One look into his blue eyes, and I knew I had made the right choice.

"You're welcome, Mr. Skyler. Now, I'll go get a stretcher and we'll get Mr. Hansen into one of—"

"Hutch. His name's Hutch," Skyler interrupted. "And I'm Starsky. Detective David Starsky."

"Hutch. And Starsky." My head was positively spinning from the events of the last few minutes, and I didn't know how much more my overloaded brain could absorb. But I was still a nurse, at least for the moment, and I knew how to take care of a patient. "I'll go get that stretcher."

Several minutes later, we were all gathered in one of the treatment rooms. While Detective Starsky called the police station for help, I had checked Hutch over thoroughly and put him on oxygen. Matwick, with more than a little persuading from a very angry Starsky, had finally confessed to drugging Hutch with an oral dose of his special sedative and was glaring at us from a corner of the room. Starsky had found a straight jacket in one of the closets and had the doctor trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey, complete with a washcloth stuffed in his mouth and secured with a generous portion of first-aid tape.

“You did a very thorough job, Detective Starsky,” I said as I rechecked Hutch’s blood pressure and pulse.

“How is he?” Starsky asked, his eyes still filled with concern.

“He’ll be okay,” I reassured him. “He’ll probably be out a little while longer, and then he may have some aftereffects of the drug—nausea, vomiting, lethargy. Hopefully those won’t last but a day or so, and he’ll be good as new...” My voice trailed off as I brushed a stray lock of hair off Hutch’s forehead.

“How about you?”

I didn’t realize Starsky had moved until I heard his voice at my elbow. I sighed nervously and tried to force a smile. “Me? I’ll be okay, I guess. But I’ll never work as a nurse again.”

Starsky said nothing, just shook his head and averted his gaze.

“I broke the cardinal rule of nursing: ‘First, do no harm.’ I’m afraid I’ve done a lot of harm, Detective. An awful lot of harm.” I couldn’t help the hot tears that filled my eyes and threatened to spill over.

“Hey,” Starsky said softly, draping his arm around my shoulders. “Hutch and I’ll do everything we can, ya hear? We’ll tell the judge how you saved both our lives tonight, and, if you agree to turn state’s evidence, I’m sure they’ll be willing to cut you a deal.”

“Thank you,” I whispered softly, tearing myself away from his embrace.

The ensuing silence was a bit awkward, so I busied myself with taking care of my patient. He was showing signs of coming around, and I noticed Starsky was at his side the entire time, encouraging him to wake up.

“Look who decided to join us,” Starsky said cheerfully, as Hutch finally managed to pry an eye open. “How’re ya feelin’?”

“Lousy,” Hutch said truthfully, struggling to sit up. He must have been hit by a wave of dizziness because he suddenly slumped back down on the stretcher, a hand to his head.

“Take it easy, buddy,” Starsky replied, his hand on Hutch’s shoulder. He looked at me with those impossibly blue eyes. “Why don’t we let Nurse Bycroft here look you over right quick?”

Taking my cue, I once again examined the blond, checking his blood pressure, pulse, and respirations. It felt good to be useful, doing what I was trained to do, without hurting someone in the process. “Everything looks good,” I reported to a very worried-looking Starsky.

Starsky spent the next several minutes fussing over his partner while I watched from a distance, hesitant to intrude. I tried not to think about what was going to happen to me, but the reality of it was thrust upon me as the little room was suddenly flooded with uniformed police officers, all talking at once and bustling around. A brief argument ensued between Detective Starsky and Hutch over whether the latter would be transported to the local hospital for a complete check-up, but the decision was made when a large black man, whom the two referred to only as “Captain,” demanded that Hutch be evaluated.

Matwick was led away and Hutch was loaded onto a stretcher, with Starsky supervising every move the paramedics made. Inevitably, I felt someone grab my arm. A uniformed officer began to read me my rights as he reached for his handcuffs, but Starsky stopped him.

“No cuffs.”

“Come on, Detective. You know the drill. Standard procedure.”

“Stuff procedure!” Starsky replied. “I’ll take full responsibility.”

“Suit yourself,” the officer replied, shrugging his shoulders as he walked out the door.

Starsky motioned for a female officer to take custody of me. “No cuffs,” he stated again, making sure she understood. “This one is special, and I want you to give her the VIP treatment. You got it?” The female officer nodded in understanding, and Starsky rewarded her with a dazzling smile.

He finally turned to me. “Look, I gotta go see about Hutch, but Officer Whitaker here will take good care of you, okay? And I promise that Hutch and I will both be in your corner, and we’ll do everything we can for you.”

I managed a weak smile in gratitude. “You’re very kind, Detective. All I can say is I’m sorry. And thank you.”

Officer Whitaker steered me toward the door, but we were stopped as Starsky pushed past us in his haste to get to his partner. Almost as an afterthought, he turned around one

last time, and, cupping my face in his hands, he kissed me on the cheek. “You’re beautiful,” he said as he ran after the stretcher that held his partner.

I brought my hand to my face and lightly touched the spot that was still tingling from his kiss as Officer Whitaker led me to my new future.

*The End*