

VEIL OF INSIGHT

Chapter One

“Your sister? She was the latest victim?” Dr. Ruby Clarkson, psychiatrist, adjusted her eyeglasses, and leaned forward on her wing-backed chair. Her eyebrows arched remembering she’d counseled the mother of the first victim four years previously. Here in Ruby’s early twentieth century furnished office sat victim number four’s older sister, Eva. Although Eva had been a client for over six months she was here today at her regularly scheduled therapy session and medication review. Her sobbing was far from regular.

“Yes, my younger sister. I feel like I’m falling apart.” Eva grabbed a tissue on the coffee table as her tears flooded down her tanned cheeks. She blew her nose and added, “She left the theater and never made it home.”

Ruby furrowed her eyebrows, remembering the details about this latest murder victim; a college student and a volunteer at the children’s grief group. Her body had been found on the banks of the Red Cedar, not more than one hundred yards from the previous find. She had read much of the newspaper to her husband, Adam, as she did every evening after his caregiver left. She hadn’t read that part though as he often cried when told anything upsetting. Dementia hadn’t robbed him of his empathy.

Eva continued to sob as Ruby balanced between murmurs of sympathy and assessing her patient’s emotional status. Ruby’s focus was entirely on her patient’s pain. It made it easier to avoid feeling her aching, eternal loneliness.

“How horrible for your family,” said Ruby swallowing to ease the ache in her throat.

“Yes, it’s hard for anybody to believe, especially my mother. She’s fallen apart.” Eva glanced out the window a furrow forming between her eyebrows.

A door closed and a shuffling in the hallway. *Must be Tiffany here for her Saturday Jim Beam drink-a-thon*, thought Ruby. *Another therapist with an alcohol problem*. She shook the thought from her mind and returned to Eva. *What need is she communicating and what are her immediate emotional needs?* Ruby decided there was no need for an anti-anxiety as Eva was expressing grief within normal limits. After demonstrating deep breathing and giving comfort Ruby scheduled the next session, one month away, November 16, 1996.

Only after escorting Eva to the side door did Ruby note business cards strewn across the floor of the waiting room. *What in the world?*

Ruby ignored her internal confusion and offered Eva a last comforting thought about the strength of her family and assisted her out. Then she twisted around to scan the hallway. Nothing more than the shadows cast by the overhead lighting. No one was visible. It was a quiet mid-west autumn Saturday and she was the only practitioner on her team who worked on Saturday. Indeed, she was the only one in her town who did.

Ruby was a rare psychiatrist who maintained a one-day-a-week schedule for therapy sessions with clients. Her dream of retiring at fifty died a long time ago. Yes, the six week affair with Kingsley distracted her for a bit but the guilt was too much. Ruby had found a good way to avoid feeling.

Smoothing her tweed skirt under her hip, Ruby couched down and picked up her business cards, noting that each had a clear, straight even cut. All cards were halved exactly between her first and last name, Ruby, slash, Clarkson, M.D.. Goosebumps rose across her body and her shoulders tensed as she glanced toward the other business card holder. Every practitioner's card was placed correctly except hers. Grasping the cards she glanced behind her prepared to see an intruder. *No one here, but there could be. Surely Tiffany wouldn't do this*. In spite of her wave of

nausea Ruby squared her shoulders, checked each office and found no one else in the building. Not Tiffany, not anybody.

Ruby had never considered locking the doors between clients because this area was considered one of the safest places in the city so there hadn't been a need. She didn't want to create the appearance of needing to lock up as it could cause clients undue jitters.

Striding across the waiting room, shoulders tense, Ruby pulled back the box window's lace curtain. Eva's blue sedan was pulling out of the parking lot and a gray SUV was immediately behind. Ruby had seen this vehicle before. The driver was 'Slovenly Joe' as she usually thought of him, the live-in boyfriend of Jennifer, a recent referral from the Domestic Assault Victims Center. *Checking to see if she's here I imagine and then, while he's at it, attempting to frighten me*, she thought noting a tingling feeling in her stomach. *Well, he's succeeded, if only mildly.*

She locked the doors before returning to her office to wrap up for the day. Occasionally abusive men showed up at Ruby's office. Nice guys never did. *Ah, he must be afraid, afraid Jennifer' changing, becoming stronger, saying 'no' more often.* Ruby took a slow deep breath and shook off her tension. *He's basically a coward so nothing much to worry about.* Her mind flashed to the red button on the telephone in the office. It was a direct line and alarm to the police department. All she needed to do was press the button and the police would arrive in less than five minutes. Ruby assured herself that the red button was all she needed. Even so she continued to have slight tremors of apprehension.