



*She didn't sound like the type of patient he usually saw. Gwenna Luna. A strange name. Age: Seventeen. He was, he admitted to himself, a little curious about this one. Patients that age needed saving, the years and years before them at stake.*

*Wilson had been in practice fifteen years. He prospered on the worried well, a wealthy clientele old enough to feel a slight thrill of ennoblement at undergoing therapy with a black doctor. Saving hadn't had anything to do with it for years.*

*His town was ideal: a liberal, prosperous Boston suburb. He did well by his patients. What they wanted was a kind ear and little pills. Little pills he had aplenty. He distributed them by playing a game he called Prescription Bingo: Key words scored points for team paranoia, team depression, or team anxiety, and as his patients talked he pictured little race horses, moving ahead, falling behind, until a lucky winner emerged and his prescription pad came out. From the point of view of a medical board, the game might be considered a little frivolous. But those were his cases, those were his patients. His was the sort of practice where prescription bingo made perfect sense. Nobody got hurt.*

*And now—Gwenna Luna.*

*Seventeen.*

*A strange name.*

*"Gwenna Luna is here, Doctor."*

“Thanks.”

Sadie lingered in the door. Something in her face confirmed Wilson’s intuition: Whoever had followed that name into his waiting room was unusual.

“She didn’t give an address,” Sadie said. “And she doesn’t seem to have insurance.”

Wilson leaned back in his chair.

“Well,” he said. “Let’s have a look. We’ll have a little chat.”

Sadie stepped aside, and the girl came in without making a sound.

She was a slight girl, only her flowing clothes giving her, it seemed, any substance at all. Her hair was short, chopped carelessly, and Wilson felt sure that she had done it herself. He noticed a paleness, a near translucence that was ghostly. He also caught a glimpse of razor blade cuts. The scars came down to the girl’s wrists, and he suspected that they ran the length of her arms under the wide sleeves. There was a piercing in her upper lip that looked new enough for a slight swelling, and she had a childlike way of moving her lower lip over it, gnawing, as she surveyed his office.

A young, pale, pained, quiet mess, he thought, not without sympathy. Then she looked at him, and he saw an excitement in her eyes. She seemed filled with an inner triumph so inexplicable and at odds with her appearance, he already felt he had gotten his money’s worth. She completed this strange impression by saying, in a light, pretty voice: “There you are!”

Wilson looked at Sadie.

Sadie looked at Wilson.

“Well,” Wilson said, “I guess here I am, yes.”

He noticed the cloth bag the girl wore over her shoulder. “Salisbury Home Savings.”

“Will you...” Sadie started.

“Oh, yes,” Wilson said. “Hold my calls.”

“What do I put on the insurance form?”

“We’ll have a talk first,” Wilson said. He nodded at Sadie and she withdrew, closing the door behind her.

The girl’s eyes followed her out, then turned back to Wilson. There was an intention there, he felt. She had a definite purpose.

“Sit down,” Wilson said, finding it, somehow, necessary to declare the upper hand.

She slid into a chair.

“Relax,” he said, “We’re just chatting now. You’re not in therapy, yet.”

“You help people?” she asked abruptly.

He kept a straight face.

“When I can.”

“That’s what I want,” she said, nodding. There it was again, that sense of purpose.

He caught a glimpse of her scars again and thought of his sister. His sister, at that age, the only black kid in a school of rich bullies. His sister, who called him once a week, suggesting trips and visits. His sister, whom nobody had saved at seventeen and whose calls he usually avoided.

“Where’s your mother?” he asked.

Quickly, Gwenna Luna ran her teeth over her piercing. She had a tell, then.

“That’s a good question,” she said.

“I thought she called for your appointment.”

“No, I called myself.”

“I see,” he said quietly. “Help.”

She turned solemn.

“Yes,” she said. “Help.”

All her hope was in that word. She caressed it.

They sat facing each other for a moment, in agreement.

“Well,” Wilson said. “What do we do? I can’t treat you without your parents’ consent and without insurance. In fact, I should call child protective services, have you picked up?”

“Just write down I’m twenty-one,” she said.

She only maintained the brashness of her answer for a moment, until a gust of wind rattled the window. There was a quick, almost instant change in her, a flash of instinctual bravery in the face of fear. The fear, Wilson realized, was always present, sometimes apparently present enough to make her cut and bleed.

“It’s fall,” Wilson said. “Just the wind.”

She kept looking at the window, expecting he didn’t know what. She said the next thing quietly, almost to herself.

“My mother was a witch.”

The light seemed to drain from the office. The weather was changing.

“She came from Bulgaria, the Stranja mountains. My father brought her here. A few years ago, she disappeared. She was a witch.”

Then, reluctantly: “She is a witch.”

Wilson put down his notebook.

“Is that who you’re afraid of?” he asked calmly.

She didn’t answer. He turned on his desk lamp, and a warm glow filled the office.

Shadows banished. There were drugs that would do the same for her mind, he thought.

Help...

"So why do you come to me?" he asked. His voice was steady and without judgment. "I'm not Doctor Freud. I don't care about your mother."

She gave him a look that meant not caring about her mother might be a terrible mistake.

Wilson had heard of the Stranja mountains. That was a place where weird things happened, a place where whole villages moved because of voices from the woods. A childhood, then, filled with superstitious dread.

"I have a plan," Gwenna Luna said. "Do you want to hear it?"

"Tell me."

She reached into her bag and brought out what looked like an old diary.

"After mother left, I found one of her books. It was in the basement of our house. She had several of them. She must have lost this one when she ran away."

She opened the book, and Wilson saw pages and pages covered in writing, some of it in English, some in Cyrillic letters. There were symbols, too, and numbers.

"A book of . . ."

"Spells," said the girl. "It's one of her books of spells."

"Spells," Wilson said.

The girl paused, realizing, perhaps, that her eagerness had made her careless. She watched him for a moment.

"You talk, I listen," Wilson said, reassuringly.

He thought that she would comfortably win every game of prescription bingo ever played.

He decided to draw her out.

"Can you do . . . spells? You perform them?"

She shook her head.

"Not yet," she said. "I haven't translated them, not completely. I'm still learning. Some of the letters are strange."

"Those are Cyrillic," Wilson said.

"Those are not the ones I mean," said Gwenna Luna.

"Your mother knew how."

"Oh, yes," said Gwenna Luna. "Mother knew how."

She was so lost in these delusions. They had been, Wilson realized, bred into her.

"That plan you have," he said. "Tell me about it."

She was silent for a while.

"There's a lot of things to be afraid of," she finally said. "There's a lot of horrible things to be afraid of. I want to stop something. I want to save someone. I want to know I did some good, have a use. I want to say to myself, just once: "Bam. Good witch."

Wilson saw a line of text in the book still open on the table, something about the raising of demons.

"You want to fight the monsters?" he asked.

A childhood like that. He realized her intense loneliness, understood her immense need. To be a hero.

"Do you have friends?" he asked gently.

She ran her hand across the book of spells and looked up at him, as if the question had never occurred to her.

"Not yet," she said.

There was so much work to do, Wilson thought. There was a whole series of articles in this. He would help her. He would never be bored again. He couldn't wait to begin.

"That's your plan, then," he said. "Now. What made you come to me?"

The darkness slid over her face again. From her glorious future, it was back to the fear. He could see her plan: cutting off her hair, a new piercing, a new person.

Find, he told himself, what made her run.

"Why did you come to see me?" he pushed.

"The dreams," she said.

He waited.

"The dreams that aren't dreams," she said.

"Dreams," Wilson said, "are a good place to start."

She looked at him straight, and there was a change in her. She seemed, suddenly, much older, a shape by the roadside beckoning him into danger.

"I have the same dream, for a time, over and over," she said. "And it's not a dream, really. I'm somebody else. I experience, completely, something that happened to somebody else."

"Somebody you know?"

"No."

"But you think these people are real?" Wilson asked.

"I researched them. Some of these things happened a long time ago. Some recently. But they happened. Exactly in the way I dreamed them."

"What sort of things happened?" Wilson asked.

He was fascinated by the change in her.

Her eyes were full of ancient danger.  
"Strange things," she said.  
Stories of the Stranja mountains.  
The raising of demons.  
Mother knew how.  
Cut. Cut. Cut.  
He leaned back.  
"What do you think," he asked, "we should do about those dreams?"  
She checked the window again, and he thought about closing the blinds. The window distracted her. She seemed to expect a face to appear there.  
"I want to show you," she said.  
"Show me?"  
She reached for her bag again. For a moment Wilson expected, absurdly, that she would produce something grotesque—a human heart, a severed ear. He shrank back. What she placed on his desk was a black spiral notebook.  
"Another book?" Wilson said.  
"This one's mine," said Gwenna Luna.  
"You write down your dreams?"  
She shook her head, slowly.  
"What are you going to show me?" Wilson asked.  
She watched him steadily. He could tell she had come to the point, the purpose she carried with her. It was the moment she decided to jump and for one moment there was the frightened seventeen-year-old girl again.  
"There's an old man, he lives in a monastery," said Gwenna Luna. "Every time a cloud passes and the sunlight fades, he's so afraid that he cries. I dreamed what happened to him. Then I found him."  
She opened the book.  
There were crude drawings. At first, they looked like dabs of ink and short, unconnected lines, a mad alphabet. Then they became clearer. Shapes began to emerge, figures. They were like cave paintings, simple but full of movement. Wilson recognized, suddenly, severed arms, heads. There was, he thought, a bent human figure holding an immense ax.  
"Do you see it?" she asked. "Do you?"  
"What is this?" Wilson said.  
The pictures began to move . . .  
"You see it," she said, with immense relief. "Don't look away."

*It felt like falling. He was an old man hiding in a monastery, remembering what happened. The strange things. It felt like falling, and then he was a young man . . .*