

AFTERMATH
Craig Faustus Buck

"The nightmares still wake me up," said Sophia Ponti. "And every time, I'm drenched in sweat, no matter how cold it is."

She sat on an old yellow fold-up futon sofa that bore evidence of more than one botched attempt to remove coffee stains.

Dr. Karl Kaplan sat on the far side of a remnant from some long-lost sailing vessel, an old wooden hatch cover that sat on four cinderblocks to stand in for a coffee table. He twisted in his Aeron chair and felt his old Haverford Varsity Cricket team sweatshirt stretch tight across his stomach. He felt self-conscious about his beer belly, so he arched his back to free the fabric he was sitting on. Satisfied, he rested his black Converse high-tops on the hatch.

"How do you feel about that?" he asked.

"How would you feel, Dr. Karl?"

"You're avoiding the question."

"Well I'd rather sleep through the night, if that's what you mean."

She glanced at a photograph of Freud taken just before his death. He looked old and tired, like she felt. Only she was just thirty-one.

"What I mean," said Karl, "is how do you feel about still having the nightmares seven months after it happened?"

Her fingers picked nervously at the piping of a blue striped throw pillow. Her long black hair hung down to hide the left side of her face. Karl wondered if seeing only one of her aquamarine eyes diminished his ability to read her reactions.

"Shitty," she said. "How do you think I feel?"

"I think you're suppressing your feelings during your conscious hours so they're coming out to haunt you in your dreams. Are you able to get back to sleep?"

"I don't even try. I just get up and wander around the house like a madwoman. Last night I could have sworn I heard Robert's voice in the living room. I actually went in there to double-check."

"What did you think he was saying?"

"I don't know. But it really upset me. I mean, he's dead and I still worry about what he thinks of me. Is that pathetic or what?"

"If he could talk to you, what do you think he'd say?"

"The lying bastard would probably tell me I was crazy to think he was cheating on me."

"Do you think you were crazy?"

"I don't know." Tears came to her eyes. "I felt it so strongly."

"But there was no evidence, just your feelings."

"Yes."

"Do you think you can always trust your feelings?"

"I don't have any choice."

"So you're still convinced he was cheating."

"I have to be. Or else I shot him for nothing."

"You shot him in self-defense, Sophia. He gave you no choice. You've got no reason to feel guilty."

"I started the fight."

"He got violent."

"Maybe."

"What do you mean 'maybe'?"

"Maybe I exaggerated that a little bit during the trial. I was scared."

"Are you telling me you lied on the stand?"

She averted her gaze.

"I don't know anymore. I feel like it didn't have to go down the way it did. I lose control sometimes."

Karl mused on this, wondering if she was confessing murder. It didn't make any legal difference because a jury had already found her not guilty. She couldn't be tried again. But if she was guilty of murder, it could have an effect on her course of treatment.

"Are you feeling guilty about something you're not telling me?" he asked.

"This isn't about guilt."

"What do you think it's about?"

"Michael."

"If that's not guilt, I don't know what is. I mean, less than a year after Robert's death you start living with the man who wrote a bestseller about your trial."

"Michael and I love each other."

"I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it. I'm just saying that it's understandable for you to be struggling with internal conflicts and feeling guilty about it."

Sophia started to fidget, clearly annoyed. "That's not it. That's not it at all. You're missing the point."

"What's the point?" he asked.

She pushed her hair out of her face to reveal both eyes, whose aquamarine seemed to have darkened to gunmetal blue. She fixed him with a hardened glare.

"I think Michael's having an affair."

THE END