

Holding Their Hand

Shelly walked into work, coffee in hand.

“She’s been asking for you.” Nicole said, as she punched in. “They moved her to the second floor this morning.”

“I know, I was still here.”

The second floor; where all the residents who were on death’s doorstep were sent. Working shifts on the Alzheimer’s and assisted living wards meant Shelly had seen more than a few transferred there over the last four years. Many of them asked to see her after being sent there.

“I’ll go up in a little while.”

“You’ll have to wait until morning; it’s just you and me up here tonight.” Shelly just looked at her. What was going to happen during the overnight shift that she couldn’t leave for a few minutes? At least she could put off going to see Evelyn.

The break-neck, after hours pace at the nursing home didn’t prevent Nicole from taking four, unscheduled, extra long breaks, or from taking a two hour nap. At six-thirty, she told Shelly it was time to start distributing meds. Before they finished giving them all to the residents, she said, “Why don’t you go see Evelyn now? I’ll finish here.”

Shelly wasn’t fooled. It had long been suspected Nicole was taking some of the residents’ meds for herself and giving them Tylenol. Supposedly, she was being watched closely, but the suspicion had been around for awhile.

“That’s okay; I can wait until after the shift.”

“No, don’t hang around after you punch out. Go now and be back by the time the day supervisor gets in.”

There was no point in arguing. When people refused to do what Nicole wanted, she wrote them up, making false accusations, and saw to it they got fired. Shelly walked slowly to the second floor. She smiled at the hospice nurse, who watched her walk by, but didn't acknowledge her.

Evelyn's son, Mike, stood up when she entered the room.

"I'm glad you came," he said "She asked for you yesterday. She kept saying 'Dum' all afternoon."

Dum was one of the few words Evelyn could say, and everyone came to understand she meant Shelly, her favorite caretaker.

Evelyn had to be transferred from a state facility eight months ago. It was at that nursing home she had started wearing several layers of clothing all the time, eventually putting on almost everything she owned at once. The staff thought it was how the Alzheimer's was manifesting itself, until it was learned she was being raped by an orderly. The frail, old lady couldn't defend herself, so she used the clothes as obstacles between her and her molester.

Evelyn awoke and looked at Shelly. "Dum." she said, and smiled. Shelly sat beside her and held her hand. Twenty minutes later, Evelyn stopped breathing, but Shelly stayed by her side. She looked out the window and saw Nicole get into her car. Nicole looked around, popped some pills into her mouth, and washed them down with a soda.

By Steve Crocker