

A CRIMSON COLLAR

Written by

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EXT. LEADVILLE, COLORADO - DAY

Population 2,173.

The tiny city is blanketed in snow. The church steeple is the only high rise for miles around.

TITLE: MARCH, 1973.

EXT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Outside the office of "ANNE JAMES MD". The building must be over a century old but age has only added to its appeal.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

DR ANNE JAMES (46) sits behind a desk, filling out papers with a fountain pen. A scar on her temple, stitches still in place.

Walls plastered with certificates. A framed newspaper article: 'Class of '57, Denver General- Psych Ward', shows a younger Anne with a group of peers in a busy ward. She smiles but seems ill at ease.

The very edge of the photo is obscured by a dark blob.

An antique wardrobe is being used for medical supplies.

Anne stops writing. Closes her eyes, takes a breath.

The scratching of her pen continues for a few seconds. Just before she comprehends the sound, a knock on the door. She opens her eyes, forces a smile.

ANNE

Come in.

CHRISSIE COMPTON (34) enters, dragging COREY TURNER (9) by the hand. Chrissie is fully made up. Wears clothes designed to attract attention.

Corey is skinny, small for his age. His glasses exaggerate the size of his lazy eyes. He constantly swings his head from side to side like a metronome.

He stares at the wardrobe for a few seconds before his gaze returns to the floor.

Chrissie gapes at Anne's scar, claps her hands to her face.

Anne sighs. Takes a bottle of pills from her desk drawer and shakes two into her hand. Chrissie sinks into a chair.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 (off Chrissie's look)
 For the headaches.

Chrissie tugs Corey down onto the chair beside her.

CHRISSIE
 (Quickly)
 Thank God it's nothing worse. You ought to take some more time off, Dr Phillips wouldn't mind. At least until the settlement comes in. You are suing aren't you? I mean do you have any idea how expensive this could end up being? Is that why you came back to work so soon? You know I bet your Qi is off. I could give you something--

ANNE
 I'm fine.

CHRISSIE
 Of all the places to be hit though...

ANNE
 I got lucky.

CHRISSIE
 I didn't hear anything. People started to say...

ANNE
 They brought me back.

Chrissie is shocked. She starts to cry. Anne pushes a box of tissues towards her.

ANNE (CONT'D)
 They have a really great team. Do you remember Dr Aarons, from Portland?

Chrissie blows her nose, nods.

CHRISSIE
 I'm so sorry about your father. You must be... Can I help with anything? Get the flowers or--

ANNE
You've got enough with the boys.

CHRISSIE
Have they found the guy?

ANNE
No.

CHRISSIE
Have you heard from the bishop?

ANNE
He sent a card.

Beat.

CHRISSIE
Corey's got a fever. I gave him
Ginseng and Wolfberry but he's
burning up.

Anne walks round, feels Corey's forehead.

ANNE
You should come straight to me when
this happens. These things spread.
How long have you been sick, Corey?

Corey ignores her.

CHRISSIE
About two weeks.

Anne reaches into the drawer, pulls out a wooden tongue
depressor.

ANNE
Look up for me and say 'aaah'.

No response.

CHRISSIE
(taps his leg)
Hey.

He looks up, opens his mouth. Anne inspects his tonsils.

A NURSE (24) knocks on the door.

NURSE
Do you want to come through to Room
3, Chrissie?

The nurse glances at Anne; concerned, but too nervous to say anything.

CHRISSIE

Thanks.

(To Corey)

I'm gonna leave you with Dr. Anne for five minutes. You do as you're told, okay?

She ruffles his hair. The nurse leads Chrissie away, leaves the door open.

Anne feels Corey's glands. Takes his temperature with a thermometer. She's uncomfortable in the presence of a child. The silence that falls is awkward.

Anne notices a few grazes on his knees.

ANNE

Did you fall over at school, Corey?

(pause)

Did you hurt yourself?

Corey eyes the wardrobe again. Anne takes the thermometer from him and scribbles notes on a pad of paper.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Would you like a lollipop?

He nods. She reaches into one of her desk drawers. She pulls out a SEVERED HAND. She drops it. Slams the drawer shut. Corey looks up at the noise.

Anne composes herself. Opens the drawer again, takes out a lollipop. She hands it to Corey and reaches for her bottle of pills. Shakes a few more into her hand, swallows them.

COREY

Who's Darcy?

ANNE

What?

Corey points to her notes. Anne has written 'Darcy' over and over, leaving no spaces between the words. She rips the page out and tosses it into the bin, starting over.

DARCY (19) sits in Corey's seat. A scarlet stab wound stains her faded white hospital gown. Blood drips onto the carpet.

DARCY

It's happening to you too, isn't it?

Anne jumps out of her chair.

Corey looks up at her, confused, then resumes his head swinging.

Anne takes a moment to calm herself. She seems angry at her fragility.

She studies the boy.

ANNE

How are you liking your classes,
Corey?

(pause)

Have you made some friends?

(pause)

Corey?

COREY

Yeah.

ANNE

Do you like it here?

COREY

Yeah.

ANNE

Do you miss your old friends?

COREY

Yeah.

Corey is unable to take his eyes from the wardrobe. Anne follows his gaze.

ANNE

Do you like that?

COREY

Yeah.

ANNE

You know, it's over a hundred years
old.

COREY

Yeah.

ANNE

It used to belong to the mayor.

COREY

Yeah.

ANNE

Did you know there used to be a
gold mine here?

COREY

Yeah.

Corey shuffles on the edge of his seat.

ANNE

You can open it if you're careful.
Don't touch anything inside.

Corey rises, stands beside the wardrobe. His head falls still. He strokes it as if it were a dog. Grins, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet.

Anne reaches for her prescription pad and pen.

ANNE (CONT'D)

I'm going to give you some
medicine. Now listen, you take all
of it okay, whatever Chrissie says.
Make sure you finish it all.

Anne tears off the prescription and hands it to him.

She looks at the paper, words glistening in red. Anne screams at the HUMAN FINGER she has been writing with, still held in her hand like a pen. She throws the finger away from her.

The fountain pen crashes into the framed newspaper article on the wall, sending it falling to the floor. The glass breaks and the paper falls out.

Darcy stands in the middle of the office, dark hair plastered to her face, a kitchen knife held high in one hand, the other outstretched.

DARCY

I told you it wasn't me.

Anne backs away from her.

DARCY (CONT'D)

You'll be here soon. We could be
friends.

She brings the blade down. Blood spurts. Her hand hits the floor.

Darcy stares at Anne, showing no sign of pain.

Anne gropes for reality.

COREY
Who did Darcy kill?

ANNE
What?

DARCY
You have to kill him.

COREY
Did she deserve to die?

DARCY
It's the only way.

A dull scratching from the wardrobe. Fingernails on wood.

ANNE
Stop it!

COREY
Did she kill the priest?

The scratching grows faster, louder. Something trying to escape. Corey looks up at Anne, questioning.

He never seems to blink.

Anne shuts her eyes tight. The scratching subsides, then the office is silent.

Corey sits in his chair, the prescription in his hand. Anne creeps to the cupboard.

Opens the door.

Her scream is lost in her throat. She stumbles, backs away, terrified. Flattens herself against the wall, unable to take her eyes from the wardrobe.

Corey advances towards her. His steps slow, his gaze steady. His voice barely recognisable, a wolfish growl.

COREY (CONT'D)
They're gonna lock you up, doc.
They're gonna lock you up and throw
away the key.

Voices echo from the corridor-- the nurse leading Chrissie back to Anne's office.

Anne rushes to the wardrobe and fumbles with the door. The voices grow louder but still she can't get it closed.

The merest glimpse of a white bishop's collar, stained with crimson.

Anne boots the door shut just as the two women enter.

The nurse stops short as she spots Anne pressed against the wardrobe, beads of sweat on her forehead. Anne's feigned calm fools no one.

NURSE

Are you okay?

Anne glances around her. Corey sits in his chair, head swinging back and forth, holding the prescription. The fountain pen lies on the floor.

CHRISSIE

(To Corey)

Come on, you.

ANNE

(To Nurse)

Yeah...

CHRISSIE

Did you say thank you?

COREY

Yeah.

Chrissie takes the prescription from Corey. She grabs his hand, steers him towards the door. She smiles at the nurse and Anne. They leave.

NURSE

Can I get you a coffee?

ANNE

I... No, I'll... I'll just finish up.

The nurse hesitates at the door.

NURSE

It's good to have you back.

Anne forces a smile, the nurse leaves her alone. Anne makes sure the door is closed, then approaches the wardrobe.

Squares up to it. Opens the door.

Medical implements and bandages arranged in plastic containers. A place for everything and everything in its place.

She closes the door, strokes the same spot that Corey did. Presses her head against the wardrobe and leaves, closing the door behind her.

The slight breeze from the door closing is enough to unfurl the newspaper article in the corner of the room, revealing the rest of the graduation photograph.

CLOSE ON: the photograph.

Next to the group of newly qualified doctors is a young woman with messy black hair.

Darcy's off-white hospital robes highlight her hollow visage. She's deathly thin, her eyes tormented. She stares in terror at something in the background of the photo...

A small boy, sitting on a bench.

Corey looks straight back at her, his face impassive. He hasn't aged a day since then.

The knife in his hand is almost bigger than he is.

FADE OUT.