

THE PARTY

John Boston

His name was Gene. He wore his hair in a ponytail and had these wire-rimmed glasses that made him look kind of douchey. He wore a trench coat. He just looked out of place. Like someone who had just put on the first thing, they could find. The signs of mental illness are sometimes very obvious. Sometimes they aren't.

"Tell me about it," said Brenda. That's how she liked to begin all of her sessions. She wasn't a shrink, but she was more than just a counselor. Public health care in this state left much to be desired. She could only pass on her recommendations to her superiors. If she thought they needed hospitalization, she would recommend they be hospitalized. If she thought they needed to be on medication, she would refer them to her boss who was a psychiatrist. There were only five of them in the state to handle a caseload in the thousands. All she could do was try to put out fires before they spread. There were a whole of crazy people out there, who were only one bad day away from destroying their lives.....and those around them.

"I don't even know where to begin, really," said Gene.

"Why don't you tell me what brought you here," she said.

"Joshua brought me here," he said.

"I see. Who is Joshua?"

"He's this guy I keep seeing. Every time I see him, something bad happens. Something very bad happens."

"How bad?"

"Usually someone being killed," he said.

"So, is it Joshua that kills these people?"

"Yes. He's done horrible things. When I say horrible, I mean horrible." said Gene.

"Are you the only one who can see him?"

"I'm not sure. I think so."

"When did you first see him?"

"Years ago, when I was just a teenager," he said.

I bought this old Honda motorcycle in the summer of 1992 from my neighbor. I was young and restless, so I decided to take a trip upstate. Didn't really have a destination in mind. I just got on the bike and drove. Didn't even have a motorcycle license either. I was like three hours from my house and I decided to camp out for the night when I see this beautiful house by the lake. I pull in and ask them if they have any gas. Stupid me, I was almost out. They were very nice and gave me a gallon. They even asked me to stay for dinner. I have dinner and a few glasses of wine. They offer me the couch. I'm almost asleep on the couch when the wife comes over to me and whispers in my ear. I follow her to the bedroom. Her husband is in there and the three of us have sex all night with each other. I fall asleep back on the couch and when I wake up in the morning, I see him standing over me. I figure he lives here as well, so I introduce myself. He is acting really weird. He crept me out.

"Do you know what you've done?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" I reply.

"Look in the bedroom," he says with a smirk on his face.

I look in the bedroom and I see both of them dead. It was horrible. There was blood everywhere. I've never been so scared in my life."

"Couldn't have done it better myself. My name's Joshua. I think you and I are going to be good friends." he said, putting his hand on my shoulder.

I wake up and I'm back at my camp in my sleeping bag. My bike now has gas in it. I don't really remember anything more than that, but I remember he was there. He was there the whole time."

"Are you saying in the summer of 1992 that you may have murdered two people?" asked Brenda.

"I'm not a murderer, doctor. He killed them. I know he did. He killed them and tried to blame it on me."

"Did you go to the police?"

"No, they wouldn't believe me. You don't even believe me, I can tell."

"It's not that I don't believe you, Gene, I just want to make sure I get all the facts."

"Are you going to turn me in?"

"I'm going to need more information. I'll see if there were any murders in that area in the summer of 1992. If there weren't, you're off the hook." said Brenda.

"I already looked. There were. The Sweitzers. John and Linda. Killed in July of 1992. It was kind of a big deal around my neck of the woods."

"I'm assuming this was not the only time you saw Joshua," she said.

"No. Years later I was at this party. Jennifer Taffioli's apartment. Everybody just called her 'Taffy'. I saw him at the party. He was wearing the same jean jacket and cowboy boots. I saw him and just froze. He looks over at me and gives me a nod. I know something horrible is going to happen that night. I know he is going to kill someone else. I leave the party and just run home. I was up all night just waiting. Sure enough, the next morning they found her. One of Taffy's friends was stabbed in her car. I know he did it."

"When was this?"

"The fall of 1996. There's more. That's not all. *I saw him again in 2001 at a Christmas Party. I was working at a lumber plant. Shitty job, but it paid the bills. I didn't even want to go, but there was this secretary I kind of liked, and she was going, so I went. Guess who I see at the party, serving drinks? It's him again. I walk over to him. I have to know more about him. I had to know if he was real or not.*" said Gene.

"Hey, buddy. Good to see you? You want a Tequila Sunrise?" he asks.

"Who the hell are you. Why are you here?"

"I'm the life of the party. I'm the wind in your sails. You need me here, Gene."

"No one needs you here. I need you out of my life." I say.

"Gene.....I didn't kill those people.....you did!"

"That's a Goddamn lie! I'm not a killer. I would never do those things to another human being. You killed them!"

"Sorry, Gene. I can't take credit for something I didn't do," he says and hands me my drink.

I throw it back at him and storm out of the party. I'm sure you can guess what happened next.

"Someone else was murdered?" asked Brenda.

"Yup. Skinned her like a fish. When they found her, they couldn't even identify her. It took four days for her to be reported missing. Turns out, it was that girl I liked. Joshua killed her and is going to blame it on me."

"Gene, you do understand that anything you tell me, I have to report to the police. I can't sit on information about two murders," said Brenda, getting increasingly nervous about the man sitting across from her. Crazy people are crazy.....and very unpredictable.

"I understand. You have to do your job. I just want you to hear my side of it. I know I'm going to be arrested, I just want you to hear my side first." he said with his hands folded in his lap.

"Okay. When did you see Joshua next?"

"Last week. I hadn't seen him in over twenty years. I thought I was finally free of him. I was never even questioned in any of the murders. Not once. I wasn't even a suspect. I had moved on

from him and then I see him standing outside my building. He was wearing the same exact outfit from twenty years ago. He looked older now, but it was definitely him. I knew I had to confront him. I knew I had to get some real answers this time. I knew someone else was going to be killed and very soon."

"What did you say to him?"

"I asked him what he was doing here."

"Just checking out the local talent," he says with that stupid grin on his face.

"Bullshit! You're going to kill somebody."

"Nope. I'm not.....but you are," he says and slaps my back.

"Someone else was killed?" asked Brenda.

"Yup. A few blocks away. Young girl. Very pretty. Someone slashed her face, then cut her up with a knife, just like all the others. Horrible thing to do to another person.....absolutely horrible. Who could do that to another human being? It was like she was attacked by an animal, not by a person."

"Did you go to the police?"

"No. What would I tell them? They would just think I did it. I didn't do it. I'm not a murderer. Joshua killed them. I know he did. I just wish they would arrest him."

"Gene. Does anything you're telling me make sense to you?" asked Brenda.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you certain that Joshua is a real person?"

"Of course he's real."

"You're sure he's real?"

"Absolutely."

"Why would he just randomly appear in your life and murder people around you? Where does he live? Where does he work?" she asked.

"I don't know. I never asked him where he lives, or where he works. I doubt he would tell me anyway."

"Gene.....I'm going to recommend you see Dr. Carver. He's a clinical psychiatrist that works with me. I'm going to put you in for an appointment tomorrow evening. Is that okay?" she asked.

"Sure. I know you don't believe me Brenda, but I'm not lying. Joshua is a very real person. He's as real as you or I."

"Gene, at this point, given what you've told me, I can't say one way or another. Have you ever been arrested?"

"No."

"Have you ever been committed to a psychiatric hospital or mental institution?"

"No."

"Have you ever spoken to a mental health professional before?" she asked.

"No, you're the first."

"Okay. Thank you for speaking with me today. I have to end our session now. I have other patients to see. See my secretary for Dr. Carver's information."

"Thanks. Thanks for listening," he said and slowly stood up. He went out the back door, which she thought strange. She had a stun gun underneath her chair that she kept ready at all times in case people like Gene, decided to act out their fantasies on her. On his form she wrote in big bold letters:

REQUIRES IMMEDIATE HOSPITALIZATION!

That ought to get Dr. Carver's attention. People like him need to be in cages, not walking around on the streets. She didn't even have time to look at the name of her next appointment. She walked outside her office, which had two doors, in case she needed to make a quick exit. Gene had gone out the back door. Had he gone out the front door, things might have been a whole lot different.

"Hi, come on in," she said.

He was a middle-aged man. Kind of out of place here in the city. He wore a jean jacket and cowboy boots.

"So, your name is Joshua. What brings you here today?"

"Doctor.....I know this is going to sound crazy, but I know a man who kills people. I don't know if he's real or not. I think he's real, but I'm not sure."

"I see. Have you ever been hospitalized before or taken psychiatric medication?"

"No, never."

"Have you ever spoken to a mental health professional before?"

"No.....no, you would be the first."

"So, you see a man who kills people and you're not sure if he's real or not?"

"Yes.....his name is Gene. He's got a ponytail and wears these wire-rimmed glasses," said Joshua.

"I see.....well, why don't you start at the beginning," she said as she felt for her stun gun, making sure it was ready at a moment's notice.