

THE KNITTERS

John Boston

Her name was Sovering, Anita Sovering. She was in her eighties. He had heard she was a doctor. Not that he really cared. Once they came in here, the clock started ticking. When the alarm went off, you were usually carried out in a stretcher. This was called an *assisted living facility* but in reality, it was just death's waiting room. You were pretty much on deck once you came here. No one ever left on their own. This was where you go when your tank is almost empty and no one wants to deal with you.

Bryce had seen it all in his time here. He caught the patients doing drugs. Almost ninety years old and still trying to shoot up. They had sexual assaults, fights, you name it. It was probably the most depressing workplace in existence, other than a hospital. At least in a hospital, you had a decent chance of coming out alive. Not in here. This was the last stop before the cemetery.

Bryce tried to be polite to the old bastards. They both knew they didn't have much time left. He tried to make their stay as pleasant as possible. He was the CNA assigned to her wing. He had a few cursory conversations with her and she certainly hadn't lost any of her mental ability, she was still as sharp as a tack, it was the rest of her body that was failing. She was wheelchair-bound for most of the day. He would take her outside when the weather was nice or push her around the grounds. She always seemed to genuinely appreciate his efforts. It was her in fact that asked him to call her by her first name.

"Please, no one calls me doctor anymore. I haven't been a doctor in almost twenty years," she said one day

"You were. I'm sure you could teach all of us a thing or two," said Bryce.

"I doubt anyone your age would listen to me."

"I would."

And just like that, their entire relationship changed. Anita was always on her cell phone, not to be entertained, but just to look up information. It was like she never stopped learning.

"*The more I learn, the more I realize how little I really know,*" she told him.

Bryce could sit and listen to her for hours. She was like a walking encyclopedia of knowledge. She was the first woman to graduate from her medical school. She told him repeatedly that first-hand observation is the only way to really grow. Don't believe what someone else tells you unless you can see it with your own eyes. That was good advice.

Bryce needed help with his exams for school. Anita was only happy to help. Bryce doubted he could have passed without her help. She also told him that based upon her experience, that much of what doctors know today simply isn't true.

"The best medical advice I could give to anyone is not to smoke cigarettes, drink too much and take vitamin D. That's a biggie. I think most diseases could be fixed if our population all took vitamin D supplements. I have no idea how or why, but I can tell you from almost fifty years of observation that it works and it works damn good."

She would periodically read some of Bryce's textbooks and just roll her eyes.

"It's like they're just copying words, none of these authors even seem to know what it is they are writing about," she said.

He listened to her for the next several weeks and each time, he grew more impressed by what she had to say. He never thought he could listen to anyone discuss gastric surgery and make it sound interesting, or the proper technique for making surgical incisions. Anita made it sound like anyone could do it.

"I went to medical school with some real clowns who were only there because their families had money. I wouldn't let them operate on a dead person."

"I wish you could still do surgery. It's really only something you get good at by practicing," said Bryce.

"Unfortunately my medical license expired. I figured no one would want an invalid working on them, even if I was better than most of the surgeons who had medical licenses. This whole medical license thing is a joke anyway. It should be up to the patients. They should be the ones who decide if a doctor should be practicing medicine."

Bryce loved to listen to her. He could listen to her for hours. She had been a nurse during the Vietnam War. Had volunteered her services after the 9-11 attacks and had saved countless people from the clutches of death, but couldn't practice medicine because her body was crippled with arthritis and she had been in an accident over twenty years ago which nearly destroyed one of her legs.

"I let one of my friends operate on me. The biggest mistake I ever made. Nice guy, handsome and charming, but not much of a doctor. Never let your hormones make important decisions for you. I would be walking if I hadn't let him operate on me."

Bryce noticed that Anita only had two visitors in the short time she had been under his care. Her daughter and son, both of whom made very infrequent trips to see her. She said she has grandchildren, but never gets to see them. Bryce kind of got the impression that her family life was a disappointment to her and tried not to bring it up.

The problem with being over eighty years old and in a facility like this one is that your life expectancy kind of drops off a cliff. Your immune system does not work nearly as well as it did when you were younger and it is very easy to catch a germ or virus in a place like this.

"Doesn't make any sense. My body has been exposed to so many different viruses and bacteria over the course of my life, it should be able to neutralize and kill almost anything very quickly, but that's not how it works. Just like the rest of my body, my immune system is barely functioning. The flu could easily kill me."

"*Immunoessence*. That's when your immune system no longer functions as it should," said Bryce.

"Very good. I see you've been studying."

"I have. I don't want to work in a place like this for too much longer. It's kind of depressing," he said.

"Tell me about it. Some days, I wonder what's taking the Grim Reaper so long. Maybe he's backed up with work or something."

"So many people die in here, he should have his own office in the building," added Bryce.

Unfortunately for Anita, that's pretty much how things played out. As brilliant as she was, there was no getting around the fact that she was on borrowed time. She knew exactly what was wrong with her, she just had no way to fix it. She had little faith in modern medicine and resisted any type of drug that might possibly help her.

"Most of the crap these companies pump out today is worthless, or worse, the side effects are worse than the disease it's treating. You'd be better off just smoking pot," she said one night.

"Anita, you have an infection. It could kill you if it's not treated."

"Antibiotics are a blessing and a curse. Do you know what they do to your gut bacteria? That's what builds immunity. You kill the good bacteria with the bad ones," she said.

"I'm sure that's true, but this is serious. You have a staph infection in your hip. It's not going to go away any time soon."

"I know Bryce. I know you are only trying to help me, but I took antibiotics once, in 1984. My body did not react well to them at all. I can just imagine what would happen now."

"You've only taken them once, in your whole life?" he asked

"Yes. Think about that. I've probably interacted with a thousand sick or infected people, some with nasty germs, but I didn't get sick and I didn't take antibiotics. They are destroying our immune systems."

Bryce knew better than to try and argue with her. He figured she would relent once she saw how serious the infection was and how fast it was spreading. The facility could legally not make her take any medication she didn't want to unless it had a court order. Anita had pissed off the staff doctor to the point where she basically wrote Anita off. She wouldn't get much help from the staff if things got any worse and of course, things did certainly get worse.

Her physical condition only deteriorated in the next few days to the point where Bryce was concerned she wouldn't make it through the night. It bothered him that someone as talented as Anita was going to die in his care because she was too stubborn to listen. Her doctor had enough. He put a sleeping pill in her food and once she was out, he administered intravenous Genomycin. She was touch and go for a few more days, but on day four, she was able to get out of bed. Bryce knew she was unhappy with him and wouldn't even look at him, but he was grateful to be alive, even if she was saddled with a body well beyond its expiration date.

"You know what you did wasn't just unethical, it was probably illegal." she snapped.

"You're alive aren't you?"

"If I choose to die, then you just have to accept my decision and not go around my back."

"Anita, that's unethical and illegal. I'm not going to let you die in my care. You aren't a flower or a hamster. Besides, I just do what my superiors tell me. I'm sure you can understand." said Bryce.

Anita suddenly became very quiet. Her demeanor changed. She was no longer angry or combative, she just seemed sad or remorseful. Bryce figured she realized how ridiculous she had been acting and was grateful for what he had done.

"Yes, Bryce. I listened to my superiors once and a whole lot of people are dead because of it," she said looking out the window.

"What? What are you talking about?"

"It was so long ago. Not really, the summer of 1984. It was hot in Pennsylvania. That stupid building barely had working air conditioning. We should have known better. We should never have listened to them. Like most people, I just did what my superiors told me to do.....and all those people are dead because of it."

Bryce wasn't sure what she was referring to. He had a lot of work to do and patients to see, but he just couldn't pull himself away from Anita. He knew she had a story to tell. He had never seen this side of her before. Most days, even confined to a wheelchair and crippled with the horrible pain of arthritis, she still acted like a college professor. Now, she looked more like someone who would be sitting in an examination room talking to detectives about her knowledge of a crime that had occurred. Bryce had to handle this situation carefully. He had to regain her trust.

"What people?"

"Bryce, you have lost my trust, well, sort of. I guess if I were in your shoes I would have done the same thing you did, so I can't be too upset with you. Someone has to know the truth. Someone has to know what happened to all of those poor people in the summer of 1984 in Lackawanna. It was so goddamn horrible. Even now, decades later, I have a hard time talking about it."

"What happened?"

"I let all those people die. I lied to their families. I lied to my co-workers.....worst of all, I lied to myself. Those are the worst lies, the ones we tell ourselves. That's what I am Bryce, a liar. I just did what they told me to do. Never just do what someone tells you to do, no matter who they are. If I had done something, maybe I could have saved them. Not all of them, but some of them. I realized the other night that I am the last one alive. I'm the last one who could talk. I don't know why they let me live. Maybe they knew what a coward I was. Someone has to know the truth. I guess that someone is you."

"Well, you may as well start from the beginning," he said and sat down on the bed next to her.

Anita began to sob. Bryce wiped away a tear on her cheek.

"The beginning.....yes, that would be a good place to start," she said

It was July of 1984. Hotter than hell. I was working for the pharmaceutical giant NALLANT. I was assigned to supervise the medical trials and experiments they were conducting for their phase 2 and phase 3 trials. Basically, we hired.....less than upstanding citizens to participate in medical testing. I was there to make sure we didn't kill them. If I saw them going south, I had to pull the plug on it. They had millions invested in some of these treatments. They wanted to see a return on their investment. I made it clear to them I was not going to ram through an unsafe drug. My name would be forever attached to the white papers associated with them. They understood. The job was shit, but the pay was incredible. I had lost my job at a hospital over a professional difference with the chief of surgery. That is another matter entirely. I had a good deal of savings, my husband also worked in the medical industry. My daughter was starting graduate school. Then he lost his job and two very wealthy, very white-collar individuals were suddenly very poor. I didn't want to take the job, but we were going to lose our house. You would think that there would be plenty of opportunities for a doctor to find a job, but it's not that simple. Once you are labeled in this industry, it can be very hard to find employment. I was clearly labeled as a troublemaker. I think I was just somebody with a conscience. We were stuck. The job was like a life preserver. I never thought at my age and position that I wouldn't even be able to buy food for my family, but here I was. It was a humbling experience, to say the least."

"Okay, so how did all these people end up dying?"

"I'll get to that. The company owned a giant medical industrial park in Lackawanna. It had razor wire around it and armed guards. Security was extremely tight. Everything in the facility was monitored by cameras. I had no idea what I was getting into. I figured I'd be working with flunkies and for the most part that was true. My immediate staff was actually quite good. I had Doctor Ling from Taiwan. Doctor Davis from Palm Beach, Florida, and several Rns. I remember one. This knockout from Alabama. Everyone called her HOT DOG because she was always eating hot dogs. It was a motley crew, but we thought we had a fairly easy assignment. We were only there to monitor and report. If we had a genuine emergency, there was an ER in the facility staffed by an experienced ER doctor. Doctor Ling had a decade of experience as an ER doctor and surgeon. I had done about seven years with the hospital and five years with the Army as a medic. We were certainly not strangers to emergency situations. I figured we would be able to handle whatever was thrown our way. Doctor Ling spoke fairly good English. Much better than

my Mandarin. Davis was young, right out of graduate school. He was the lab guy. He had little if any experience in surgery."

"So, what happened to the patients?"

"They came by bus. Cars were not allowed in the facility. A very general slice of the American population in 1984 Pennsylvania. Black, white, large, small. We needed an equal number of both men and women for the studies and trials. They were all so eager to participate. The company representatives helped them get settled into their dorm rooms and they all had to sign a bunch of forms before they could begin. The entire campus was like a prison. NALLANT was big on security. It had dorms and everything, even its own kitchen. It was in an isolated area surrounded by razor wire. Very secure. I realized later, the security wasn't so much to keep intruders out as it was to keep its patients in. All the damn company was interested in was for them to sign waivers. The company could do whatever the hell it wanted and its guests as they were called, could do nothing."

"Waivers of liability?"

"Pretty much. The company would not be held responsible for any medical problems that would arise from these trials. Most of the people looked like they had just come from a ghetto or trailer park. They were specifically picked for their medical histories. I had no idea what drug was going to be tested on them. I was only told it was a new antibiotic treatment. We were also supposed to approve a new weight loss drug. The corporate people were very stiff. They almost myself and the staff like the rest of the guests. My immediate contact was someone my daughter's age in the company. I didn't think this girl knew the first thing about anything, just how to make her boss happy. I had to give them reports twice a day. The information was actually transmitted over the phone. Sort of like a dial-up connection. It was pretty advanced for 1984. The company had very strict rules and regulations for their phase 2 and three trials. They had been sued several times for falsifying their claims on their medications. I knew my ass would be in the hot seat if these trials went south, but antibiotics had been around for decades since then, I figured they couldn't possibly screw it up too bad. No one in the company really wanted to answer any of our questions or help us. I felt like a first-year intern all over again."

"Anita, I only have so much time here. I'm supposed to be on the third floor now. Please get to the point. Tell me about how they all died." said Bryce.

"This new antibiotic was a forerunner of azithromycin. It was zinc-based. High levels of zinc make viral replication almost impossible. The problem was, we had to get them sick first. We actually injected them with a mild strain of the flu. We told them everything of course. They were to be paid over five thousand dollars for their two-month stay. We provided everything. They paid nothing. Some refused and were immediately sent home. We were now down to 31 patients. Out of the 31 patients, 19 showed flu-like symptoms with the first few days. The antiviral was very effective at slowing the virus. We then injected them with a mild form of measles. Some showed symptoms the very next day. The antiviral was very effective there as well. We monitored everything twice a day. Heart rate, blood pressure, white blood cell count, you name it. For people that are allergic to penicillin, this was a very promising alternative."

"Well if the drug worked so well, how did they all die?"

"I'm getting to that. You see they all lived in these dorm rooms. Men on one floor, women on another. They were free to interact with one another, but at lights out, it was boys on one floor, girls on another. Those were the company's rules, not mine. I guess they didn't want any unplanned pregnancies to screw up their research. They were shelling out a lot of money for all of this. It was so strange now, looking back on it all. We were kind of like a family and I was the mother. I guess that would make Ling the father. See, there was only one big TV in the dayroom. It got five channels. We tried to make it as comfortable for the guests as possible, but our hands were tied, we had to go through corporate for everything. This elderly woman named Ruth, well, she brought her knitting supplies with her and would knit for hours on end. Pretty soon, everyone was knitting. They would sit and talk and knit and discuss what they were going to do with their money. Most were very cooperative. We had a few bad apples who were quickly sent packing, but for the most part, they were very eager test subjects who did exactly what we asked of them."
said Anita

"So, where do the dead people fit into all of this?"

'One day, I get a call from my boss. Not his flunkie, the real boss. The President of the North American branch. He says some people from the Army will be visiting and that I should be as cooperative as possible. I took that to mean: do whatever the hell they tell you and don't ask any questions. I figured if someone this high up on the food chain was calling, it was serious. Sure enough, that afternoon, they showed up. Five of them. Two were dressed in Military uniforms. He introduced himself as General Gooding. He looked like a general. Tall, carried himself well, almost swaggering with pride. He pulls the staff aside and tells us that he wants to use our medical guinea pigs. I ask him what for. He says the Army has a brand new blood-clotting agent that was developed. It could be game-changing if they are able to deploy it on the battlefield. He says that it has passed the Rhesus stages with little or no side effects and does indeed immediately cause clotting in large wounds. Now, I'm worried. How the hell do we test this one on our patients without risking their lives I ask him. He just smiles at me and says: I'LL LEAVE THAT UP TO YOU AND YOUR STAFF. As if I had any idea how to administer a clotting agent. Basically, we'd have to cut or slice a large wound in the patients, administer the clotting agent, then hope they don't bleed to death. I tell the general this is going to be very difficult to do in the middle of a phase 3 test. He tells me not to worry about it, that it's all been taken care of. I was to personally call him and give him daily updates on the situation and its effectiveness."

"That's kind of weird. I didn't know the Army got involved in medical testing. No one in their right mind would let the army test something on them, no matter how much they got paid." said Bryce

"I tell the general, that legally, I have to inform the patients, or guests, that we will be testing this new agent on them. They are not required to participate. He then tells me that anyone who takes the new drug will be given twenty thousand dollars for their troubles. My jaw hit the floor. I have never heard of anything like this. This was an insane amount of money to be hashing out for medical trials in 1984."

"Kind of makes you wonder doesn't it?"

"It sure as hell did. Once they left I called several people in corporate and they confirmed it. Then, they dropped this bombshell on me: we are to treat the drug with BSL 3 precautions. That means we have to wear encapsulated suits and respirators at all times. I assumed this was because they didn't want the patients to get infected with bacteria. I assumed it was for the safety of the patients. I assumed wrong of course. It was for our safety."

"Wait....you mean like biosafety level 3? That's for extremely dangerous bacteria. Why would you do that over a clotting agent? Doesn't make any sense?"

"No, none of it did. Dr. Ling smelled a rat as soon as I told him. He wanted nothing to do with it and left the facility the next day. If I had any integrity, I would have to. Dr. Davis was hesitant, but he agreed. One of the Rns left right after the meeting. I had to beg her to stay and she agreed. We had two doctors and two RNS for 31 people. If things went south, we were going to be in trouble. I gathered everyone around in the dayroom and told them what was happening. Naturally, they were skeptical. I don't blame them. I made it very clear to my superiors that we are not a BSL 3 type of facility. We aren't even a BSL 1 facility. It's an office building with central air. If one germ gets out, it can infect the entire building. This was madness. I called the general back the next day and was going to simply tell him I cannot participate in a study like this, that the risks are simply too high. That son of a bitch tells me that for the safety and well-being of my family, that I should seriously reconsider. There it was, in black and white. Do what you are told or life will become very unpleasant for you. Like most people, I didn't want to be on the government's shit list so I backed down. I was scared. Worst of all I had no idea what I was injecting into these people. I didn't believe a word the general said. I should have just walked away and gone to the nearest newspaper or TV studio and told them what was going on. I should have, but I didn't. I knew if I quit this job I would never work in the medical field again. Almost twenty years of hard work down the drain. Then there was the little problem of my safety as well as my family's safety. I was caught in the middle. Looking back on it now, I know I made a mistake. I lied to all of these people. I just never imagined they were injecting them with something like that. I had no idea our government could be so evil, especially towards its own citizens."

"What do you mean?"

"The first red flag was that this clotting agent had to be injected into the blood directly. I figured it would be a spray or something. Something that a soldier could put directly on a wound. No, this had to be injected into the body, which made no sense. A representative from NALLANT sat with everyone and sort of calmed them down. He promised each of them the twenty thousand and even gave them some money as sort of a down payment. Now, I was really worried. He was bribing them to take the drug. The sad part is, almost all of them did. I remember it was Ruth who was the most suspicious. She asked me in front of everyone if I thought this drug was safe. I lied to her and told her this drug could save thousands of lives if it worked and she would be a part of that. I guess it worked. She held quite a sway over the group and most of them looked to her as the leader. I really didn't know what we were injecting into them. If I had known what it was, I like to think I would have stopped it. At least, that's what I tell myself so can sleep at night. The next day, two medics from the Army began the injections. All we did was sit and wait and we wouldn't have to wait too long. We did perform a few trial runs. We made incisions and waited to see what would happen. It quickly became apparent the drug was totally ineffective at stopping

the bleeding. I had to transfer several of them over to the ER. I never saw them again. I still don't know what happened to all of them. I like to think they went to a real hospital and got real treatment, but I know better. The Army had to keep a lid on their little secret and that would be impossible if they went to a real hospital. It wasn't long before everyone started showing symptoms, like very scary symptoms. Some couldn't even get out of bed. Within a few days, the knitters went from like twenty down to ten, then five, then two, until there was no one knitting anymore. I knew we had a real emergency on our hands. I was calling everyone at NALLANT. No one would ever call me back. I called the General. He told me this was to be expected and that I should start acting like a professional instead of a hysterical mother. I told him to fuck off and demanded to know what we had injected these people with. He tells me that information is on a need-to-know basis and right now that is not something I need to know. I got so mad at him, I was screaming into the phone. He says that I should just think about Robert my husband and Mary, my daughter. I got my team together and we all collectively decided this was a genuine medical emergency and the Army could fuck off. I knew I might be signing my own death warrant, but I had a duty to my patients, not to the Army. Dr. Davis marched over to the ER and demanded some answers. He was gone for about half an hour and when he came back, he had this weird look on his face. I'm like: so what the hell happened?"

"There is no ER Anita. It's just an empty building. No doctors, no beds, no nothing. I think it's just a morgue. I saw the body bags in the hallway."

"So now, I'm really panicking. I called the police and the fire department and told them that we have a genuine bio-hazard-type emergency here. No one ever came. It was like we didn't exist. I called the police department six times that day. No one wanted to leave and risk spreading whatever it was we had put into our guests. We didn't know if it was a virus or what. I called the County Health Department. They never responded. No one who should have responded ever did. They just kept saying that help was on the way, but it never got here. By day four, things began to get bad, very bad. Mrs. Johnson died first. Some Puerto Rican named Janine died the next day. We had to carry their bodies out of their rooms. Whatever we put into them was no clotting agent. It was something else. Something horrible. They had bled out. They were bleeding from every orifice and hole in their bodies. Even their eyes were bleeding. Whatever this was it was moving quickly. At least they didn't have to suffer. Everyone was panicking. Somehow, the security managed to contain everyone and prevent them from leaving. They actually chained the doors to the building at one point so no one could leave. I called my husband and told him this was probably goodbye. I doubted I would ever see him again. I called home sobbing.

"Um honey, there are some government people here at the house. They say if you don't cooperate that Mary and I will be taken into custody."

"Taken into custody for what?" asked Bryce

"Being married to a coward I guess. That night help did show up, but it was not the type of help I was expecting," said Anita with tears in her eyes.

"Who showed up?"

"The Army. Doctors and nurses and soldiers in full encapsulated suits with guns. A group of patients wanted to leave. Ruth was sick and getting worse by the minute. I'll never forget the look she gave me. She knew she didn't have much time left. She was struggling to breathe. She had nothing but pure hatred in her eyes for me. I couldn't say anything. I pleaded with them not to leave. I told them, they were most likely infected with a very dangerous virus and that if they left, they could expose the whole world to it. One of the men just looked at me and said:

"You bitch. You fucking bitch, you knew what they were going to do us and you didn't warn us!" he said and started coughing violently.

I begged them not to go outside. I don't know what happened to them, but a short time later, we all heard gunshots outside. The soldiers locked everyone in their rooms. They just locked them in and let them all die a horrible, agonizing death. I remember them screaming, crying, dying right in front of me and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

"Jesus Anita. What the hell did you give them?"

"It was similar to Ebola, at least the symptoms. Ebola isn't this quick, or even as deadly. People survive Ebola all the time. No one survived this time. Not one person survived the injection. Both of my nurses, Sheila and Kelly, or hot dog as we called her, became infected as well. I never saw them again. I hid in my office and drank coffee and smoked cigarettes all day for a week until it was over. I don't know what happened to Dr. Davis. I never saw him again either. Finally, when the last dead body was removed from the facility, General Gooding came in, with some of his associates. If I had a gun or a knife, I think I would have killed him. He didn't say a word, he just stood over me, like I was a puppy who just soiled the carpet. I kept hearing trucks, I realize now what they were....they were mobile incinerators. We treat our dead pets with more dignity than we gave those people. I remember talking to Gooding one last time. He seemed unmoved by the fact that we had just murdered over thirty human beings. People with families and children.

"It's over Anita. I know this wasn't easy for you. This wasn't easy for any of us. I know it's difficult in times like these to remain professional, but you must be a professional. Your cooperation in this matter will greatly be appreciated."

"General, if there is a hell, I hope you burn in it. Aren't you going to kill me too? What's one more body to explain away?"

"Anita, it wasn't supposed to turn out like this. None of this was supposed to happen?" he replied

"But it did happen, general! It did and all of these people are dead because of me. I lied to them and to myself. If you killed me, you'd be doing me a favor." I said sobbing.

"Anita, you are the only one in this building who survived this. You were exposed just like everyone else. We need to find out why you survived and you never even showed any symptoms. You are the answer to all of this." he said.

"What the hell gives you the right to just kill people? When did we grant someone like you the authority to do that? These aren't monkeys for fuck's sake, their human beings! I've seen sick cows get more compassion than you showed all these people in here. If you don't kill me, I swear

to God, I'll tell anyone who will listen about what you did. At this point, I don't care if I die, I just want you and everyone else who did this to burn for it!" I screamed and hit him as hard as I could. He staggered back a little bit. The man next to the general laughed. The general gave him a nasty look and he quickly stopped laughing.

"Anita, think of your family. Think of every family in America and then ask yourself: what would happen if this virus was unleashed in a major city here in America. A lot of people died so this virus could be smuggled out of the Soviet Union. We have to have an antidote or something that could slow it down. We don't have anything like this in our arsenal. We could lose the war before it even starts. This was terrible, of course, but we're talking about a few hundred million or a billion people here. Sometimes, this is the cost of progress." he said through his respirator.

"The only more evil than you is the person who created this thing. How can you think you are going to keep something like this a secret? What are you going to tell their families?"

"Just leave that to us, Anita. The families will be compensated for their loss." said the man in the respirator next to the general.

I was there for another two weeks. They ran every test imaginable on me. When I wasn't being tested, I was confined to my room. It was like I was a prisoner. I was allowed to watch TV and call home, but that was it. Finally, after two weeks, they were no closer to finding out anything. I guess some people were beginning to ask questions and they did what the Army does best, destroy everything and pretend it never happened. I was sent home with a warning that if I ever opened my mouth, I and my family were dead. I'm sure they meant it. I wasn't supposed to survive it, but I did. I even think I know how."

"How, how did you manage to beat it?"

"The antiviral. I took a huge dose of it the night everyone started getting sick. I don't know what it was, but I think it stopped the virus before it could replicate. I think some still had enough of it in their systems to slow it down, but I took a huge amount of it. I didn't shit right for a month. That was the first and last time I ever took antibiotics."

"Come on Anita, this is crazy. How the hell could the government just keep something like this a secret? There's no way. Even in 1984, someone must have said something."

"There have been rumors over the years, but nothing ever became of it. Evil people are allowed to roam free because everyone is afraid of them. I actually went to a local newspaper and told them my story, but they wouldn't touch it without some kind of proof. The families of the dead had been paid off or silenced, they wouldn't talk, so there wasn't much I could do. I didn't understand it either. The Army had helicopters and tents set up.

The sound of those mobile incinerators... ..a cremator on wheels to dispose of the bodies. No bodies, no crime I guess.

The whole area was sealed off, but no one ever really asked why. They don't obey their orders because they believe in what they are doing, they are simply too scared to say or do anything. I'm living proof of that. Sometimes, I have nightmares about being back in that place. I wake up and

I can hardly breathe. I'm so terrified. I'm back in that horrible place, watching all those peaceful knitters just knit away without a care in the world, oblivious to the horror that awaits them. Sometimes in the really bad ones, they are sitting there, knitting scarves or mittens and they are bleeding. The blood gets on the scarf and socks and they don't even notice. Sometimes I'm walking down the hallway in the dorm and I hear them screaming, pleading with me to help them. They put a bloody handprint on the glass above the door. I know exactly where I am going when I die Bryce. I know they will all be there, waiting for me. There's no escaping what I've done.

"Anita, come on. You can't blame yourself for what happened here. It sounds like it was going to happen regardless of who was in charge. If it wasn't you, then it would have been someone else. This wasn't your fault."

"Not mine completely, no. I could have warned them. I could have just walked away before it all began. They trusted me like I was their mother. They trusted me and I let them down."

"Anita, when someone in the government or military at that level tells you to do something, you're going to do it. You didn't do anything wrong here, the Army did. They're the ones that should have to answer for all of this."

"Oh, I did something wrong, Bryce. I'm sure of it. If I didn't then, why do I feel so guilty? I know they're coming for me. As my life winds down, I can feel them. Mrs. Harper, Mr. Kellog, Mr. Munoz, Mrs. Anderson. I can still see the faces. I've never forgotten their names. I've never forgotten what it sounded like to hear them fighting for their lives. That knitting club is coming for me, as surely as the sun is going to rise and set. They are coming for me and there's nothing I can do to escape it. I'm not long for this world Bryce. I just thought someone should know what really happened there that summer back in 1984. Someone should know. Someone should. I guess that person is you, whether you want to be involved or not."

Bryce looked at her and had nothing to say. He had a hard time believing all this actually happened. Anita looked like she had just been served her last meal and was being led down the hallway to the gas chamber. She looked like she was finally ready to die.

"Sometimes, I wish I had died back there as well because some part of me did and I want that piece back," she said and climbed into her bed.

"Anita, I have to go. Thank you for sharing this with me. I'm glad you did."

"Me too," she said and closed her eyes.

Bryce left her and finished his rounds. For the rest of his shift, he couldn't shake what she had told him. He searched on his phone for any information at all about her story. The only information he could find was that there had been a massive fire at the Lackawanna Medical Park in September of 1984 where several people had been killed. That was it. Nothing about the 31 people who died. Dr. Ling passed away in 2007 and there was no information about a Dr. Davis who matched Anita's description. It was hard to fathom there was no information about it all, which only added to the overall eeriness of it. It was like he had just shared someone's nightmare and now a bit of it was with him forever.

Just how in the hell does something like this happen and the rest of the world is completely unaware of it? he thought to himself.

Bryce wasn't sure what to think. It was so long ago, any evidence would surely have been destroyed. He could see how upset Anita was. She was almost shaking. He came back to see her that afternoon before he left. He knew there was more to the story.

"When I came home, my husband and I never said a word about it. We were too scared to talk. Sometimes, I would wake up in the middle of the night, screaming and crying. He would just hold me until the sun came up. He would never ask any questions. He didn't have to. He just knew. He knew something horrible had happened there. As bad as it was, I still needed a job, so I continued to work for NALLANT. They gave me a big promotion. I was to be put in charge of vaccine distribution in Central America. Totally pointless job, but I made so much money, I couldn't refuse. I was bought and paid for, just like everyone else. They bought my silence and I let them. I know horrible things like this happen. I just never thought I would be the one who let it happen. I'm a doctor, I'm supposed to be saving lives, not taking them. I never did hear from the good General again. I hope he rots in hell for what he did to those people."

"Anita, I don't know what to say. I'm so sorry you had to go through something like this. It's like a horror movie brought to life."

"Horror movies end.....this one never did. Makes me wonder whatever happened to that virus. Who has it now and what are they going to do with it?"

"It sounds like it was bearable with the right antidote."

"I've seen people die during my career. You become almost numb to it. But, those people in 1984.....I've never seen anyone die so horribly in my life. Something that evil had to be created in a lab in the depths of hell. I know these might sound like the ramblings of an old woman, but I see them sometimes Bryce. I see Ruth and Mr.s Anderson who were always complaining about the food. I see Janine who played her music too loud. I even see that goofy teenager who was trying to score his first kiss. I can see them all. Sometimes they are right outside my window. They might be dead, but they aren't gone. Not by any means. It won't be over until I'm gone as well."

He didn't see her for the next few days, he was needed in another wing. He returned to her wing a few days later when his shift began at 6 AM. He was just getting started when he heard a loud piercing scream coming from down the hallway. He then saw one of the nurses run out of the room. She flew past him and didn't say a word.

Wait just a goddamn second here.....that's Anita's room.

He ran down the hallway and into her room. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It was the weirdest thing he had ever seen. Anita was dead. She was laying in her bed with a scarf wrapped so tightly around her neck, it was as if it were welded on. The scarf was covered in droplets of blood. He fell to his knees. This nightmare was real. The knitters had indeed come back for one final hurrah to say bye to an old friend. Another nurse came running into the room. He went to grab Anita and remove the scarf from her neck. Bryce stopped him and smacked his hand away.

"DON'T TOUCH HER! DON'T GO ANYWHERE NEAR HER! WHATEVER YOU DO, DON'T TOUCH THAT BLOOD!" he screamed.

No one listened of course. He was quickly hurried out of the room. No one listened to Anita back in 1984.....and no one was going to listen to Bryce in 2021. No one ever listens to people like them and now the whole planet was going to pay the price for it.