

THE CAGING AT DEADWATER MANOR

by Sandie Will

EXCERPT

I smile as I think of her, until my concentration is interrupted by footsteps coming down the hallway. I quickly look over to see if it's my aunt.

It isn't.

Instead, a male attendant greets me. His name badge identifies him as Drake.

"You're Jean Kynde?" he inquires.

I nod.

"Follow me, then."

I follow him down the hallway to the wooden door I saw earlier and enter. This room is much larger than the reception area with pink walls and white accents. To the left is a glass office; a semi-circle nurses' station. A couple rows of tables with metal chairs are scattered about, and a steel water fountain is stationed at the other side of the room.

Drake pulls out a chair for me and assures me he'll be right back. As I wait for my aunt, I try to imagine how it would feel to be locked up with a guard on every corner.

I wonder if my aunt feels like a prisoner. Why in the world did she agree to come here?

My attention is soon drawn to a commotion outside the same door I entered. I listen, but all I can hear is some mumbling, perhaps arguing.

Eventually, another man comes through the door. He appears to be older, with gray hair and eyebrows and sagging skin on his neck. As he approaches, I can see the script writing on his lab coat.

Doctor Garrett Wiggins; this is Dad's friend. Okay, so I'm in the right spot.

"Jeannie, correct?"

"Uh, yes. I'm here to see my aunt. Have you talked to my dad?"

"Yes, he's been telling me about some issues."

"Yeah, well, I guess my aunt had a nervous breakdown."

"Aunt?"

"Yes, Lesley Odell. You have her chart there, right?"

He looks at me for a few seconds and then looks away, unable to find words. He pauses. I'm not sure what is going on, but I don't like the uneasiness I'm feeling right now. I'm getting that gut feeling that something is wrong.

Did she die?

He pulls his chair closer to me like a true friend would. In a caring voice, he says softly, "Your aunt is not here."

I stare at him blankly for a second and then ask, “What? What do you mean? She’s gone already or—or worse?” The reality of the situation starts to take hold as racing thoughts of never seeing her again start scaring me.

He touches my arm for a second and says, “Jeannie, listen to me carefully.” I try to focus more on his mouth, since my difficulty in hearing is worsened by the tall ceiling in the room. “Your aunt was never here.”

The racing thoughts stop. I look at him dead seriously, trying to figure out what the hell he’s telling me.

Is she dead or not?

I look toward the table for a minute, not sure what he’s going to tell me next.

She’s dead? She’s alive? She’s somewhere else? She’s a fucking FBI agent? What’s going on?

“What do you mean? Where is she?” I finally manage.

“I don’t really know. There’s no record of her here. What I want to concentrate on is you, now. How do you feel about this?”

I frown and mumble, “Confused.”

He nods and says sincerely, “It’s understandable especially with the recent loss of your mom.” At least, I think that’s what he said.

I watch him, trying to figure out why we’re having this conversation. I don’t know how my dad knows this doctor, but his fake sincerity is not calming me. I glance over to the wooden door, and there are now two guards standing in front of them, one of which I recognize as Drake. Another door on the opposite side of the room opens, and two more guards move in.

This definitely doesn’t feel right.

“Hey, they’re just here for your protection,” the doctor says. I lean back in my chair, as he moves forward and whispers, “No worries.” His breath puffs across my hair, leaving me with a gift of strong cigarette stench. I try to lean back more but feel pinned. This guy does not know his boundaries. He starts stroking my arm in what seems like an attempt to comfort me, but it only makes me panic more. I can feel my palms moistening with every word.

“Is it okay if we talk for a while? I’d like to get to know you a little more, Jeannie. I’ve always heard your dad’s side of things, but the opportunity to hear your side is what’s important now. Why don’t we have you go relax in another room, and then you can come into my office a little later?”

I try hard not to show the panic that’s now taking over, hiding what I can of my heaving chest. It feels difficult to breathe with the short, shallow breaths that are now uncontrollable.

I’m going to have a panic attack.

I’m so screwed.

I look over to the guards, begging them not to force me behind the walls that will separate me from the rest of the world. I frantically search for a way to get myself out of what I know is inevitable, but it’s useless with all the guards.

I’m going to become the prisoner. I’m going to become the next rumor throughout the school.

It's all part of a calculated plot my dad would be proud of. This is his victory—a victory that includes my never leaving Deadwater or having a life, even if he won't be a part of it. As long as he knows where I am, he'll be happy. I close my eyes in disgust, concerned about what I'm about to endure. I hate the unknown, but this is way beyond what any eighteen-year-old should have to experience.

“Jeannie, you still with me?” the doctor asks.

I look up at the cohort who is now starting to tug at my forearm.

“I think we need to get you comfortable.”

I frown between the doctor and the guards. They both come forward to “help” me. Gasping for air, I throw my chair backwards to try the only path of escape I can think of, but they're too fast and catch the chair before I hit the ground.

“No! I am not going anywhere with you! I'm not a minor and my dad can't institutionalize me without my consent. Let me out of here!”

“Well, Miss Kynde, you just signed all the consents. There's nothing illegal here.”

What starts as a rational protest spirals out of control quickly. Panic sets in. I'm crying, screaming, and clawing at them. I try to kick their groins, but they predict that move and easily pin my legs to the chair.

I start breathing heavier now. Panic takes over, and I'm quickly losing control.

“Get the syringe!” orders Doctor Wiggins, pointing to the table next to the water fountain.

Drake holds out one of my arms and lunges backward for the syringe with his other arm, knocking the table over.

Oh, God! Get me out of here!

Drake is grasping for the syringe on the floor, so I take the opportunity to bite his forearm, causing him to bleed and withdraw his clutch. This does nothing but make things worse for me, though. Drake leaps toward me, pinning the back of my head against his stomach muscles. My free arm flails back and forth, as I try to reach something to use to hit him.

It's no use.

Frantically, the doctor kicks the syringe toward Drake, and I watch in horror when the needle roughly enters my vein.