

# The Execution of Innocence



REINAR CHRISTIAN



*After a tragic accident that rips the young boy from his mother, nine-year-old prodigy Danny Wallace awakens, frightened, and confused in a secret underground facility. An unwitting participant in a government-funded experiment designed to expedite the brain's ability to learn, Danny is pitted in brutal competition against Alex, a "friend" from his past. As years pass, Danny learns that Alex may be the key to the "accidents" that have shaped his own life.*

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## Chapter 3

**A**li opened her eyes slowly. The burning was right behind her eyes. *This is the worst it's been in a long time.* The lights were off, and that was probably a good thing. The light would just exacerbate the pain in her head. *These clothes; soft. They feel like flannel.* She brought her cuff to her nose. *Yep, feels like flannel, and smells like crap.*

Her eyes started to adjust to the darkness of the room. She noticed light seeping under the closed door from the hallway outside, creeping into her room.

Focusing seemed to be the most difficult. Even in the dark, her eyes burned with an intensity she had never felt. Her vision was foggy; blurred at best. She was sure her contacts had been removed. If she squinted hard, she could make out the silhouette of a door about three steps directly in front of her, and then finally, after a time, she could make out the handle.

She knew that without her contacts, the handle would be the best she could get. *I must have really gotten a knock to the noggin,* she thought. Within arm's reach of the bed she noticed her hiking boots. They were atop her neatly folded clothes, sitting on a chair. Then it dawned on her that someone had changed her clothes. She pulled out the top of the flannel nightshirt and checked. Her bra was still intact. She pulled out the front of the flannel bottoms. She let out an audible sigh of relief.

Mason; the only thing she could remember was the stranger holding him, then the flash, and the burning in her head. She tried to sit up and was instantly drawn back to the bed by the wave of

nausea that overcame her. Her eyes still burned, and there was a strange taste in her mouth.

She thought of Mason, and the man who carried him away. Forcing herself, she tried to sit up again, this time much slower. The man didn't seem to be a threat. She caught a laugh between her lips. *A man walks away with your son; your terminally ill son, and he's not a threat.* She made it to a full sitting position on the bed. She waited a moment for the nausea to subside.

Some people give off a vibe, a feeling; in her younger days, she would have called it an aura. That was before the scientists got hold of the word and mutated it into an explanation, instead of leaving it alone, allowing it to be what it is: a subjective description.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed and let them dangle inches off the ground. She put her hands to her stomach and saw the blood.

On the ground below her feet, a pool; perhaps the size of a basketball, was creeping its way toward the edges of the plastic that had been carefully laid down as containment. *The Sopranos?* Or was it *Pulp fiction?* Lay the person on plastic and *then* kill them. That, and having the person dig their own grave before you kill them, were two ingenious timesavers from one of those hit man or mob shows.

She looked down at the plastic. It was only slightly larger than the table. Her nausea was returning. Whoever laid the plastic was not taking into account any sort of spray pattern. *CSI?* The blood would only be trapped on the plastic if it fell vertically, slowly. *He was going to bleed her!* Panic started to well inside. Her eyes focused enough to see fresh blood on the tips of her toes now dripping slowly, feeding the puddle below.

A scream rose in her throat; she felt moisture on her chin. Using the back of her hand she wiped at her face, smearing the moisture across her cheek. She looked at the back of her hand and started to shake. *Bleed her?* She started to chuckle. *Bleed her, that's it. He's a*

*vampire*. She started to laugh. It felt good to laugh. It had been a while. She allowed herself one more giggle as she prepared to stand.

"I wouldn't do that quite yet," a man said, turning on the light as he came through the door. His voice was calm and subdued. His striking appearance caught her more off guard than his unexpected presence. His short, dark hair set the perfect frame for his dark-green eyes.

"How's your vision?" he asked, without looking directly at her.

She craned her neck to look once more at his green eyes. The best she could get was a profile glance. *I guess they didn't take out the contacts after all*, she thought.

"Screw my vision, what's the deal with all this blood? How did I get here?" Ali spat, sweeping her hand over the blood-covered plastic and holding up her hands, letting the red liquid drip off of her fingertips.

"It's not blood," he said dryly.

Ali said nothing, waiting for more information.

"It's a salve that is put on a wounded body to draw toxins out through the skin and orifices in the body."

"I've never heard of such a thing and believe me; I have plenty of experience around hospitals."

"The fact that you've never heard of it doesn't surprise me. The bio-gel; that's what we call it, was invented here."

"So why does this bio gel, that is dripping off my fingertips and toes, look like blood?"

"What you're looking at are the toxins that were pulled through your dermal layers, or skin. The fact that it's red is because the toxins are suspended in damaged red blood cells that were drawn out with the toxins. On the other side of the bed are some towelettes if you'd like to clean up," he said, pointing to the table. "So, again, how's your vision?"

"Fine," Ali answered, reaching for the pre-moistened cotton cloths. "It was blurry at first, but now it's...perfect."

“A little blurriness is to be expected,” he said. “I’m glad it cleared up quickly. Here, drink this please.” He held out a small Dixie cup at arm’s length. A small smile pursed his lips. She took the cup, took a swallow, and shivered in reaction to the flavor. After finishing the small paper cup, she wondered why she drank, God knows what, from this perfect stranger, without the slightest hesitation.

“That was horrible! What was it?”

“Something to help make you feel better,” he answered.

“I feel fine,” she lied.

“No, you don’t,” he countered.

She noticed he still avoided direct eye contact.

He pointed to the chair that held her clothes.

“I apologize for the discomfort of another dressing you.”

He paused for a moment, and just under his breath murmured, “Or *undressing* you.” He continued quickly, not giving Ali a chance to respond. “As your clothes were muddy and wet, I thought clean clothes would make you more comfortable.”

Ali was starting to feel a little woozy. *It must be the nausea again*, she thought.

“How’s your headache?” he asked.

“I don’t have a headache. Where is my son?”

“Yes, you do, and he’s down the hall.”

“No, I don’t. Take me to him.”

“Yes, you do. I’ll take you when you wake up.”

“I’m not going to sleep.”

“Yes you are. I’ll take you to your son, but not until I’m certain that you pose no health risk to the boy.”

“Me pose a health risk to Mason?” She was starting to sway as she spoke.

“Look, I’m sure you’re just trying to help. And there’s no way for you to have known this, but Mason is sick. In fact, he’s very sick;



the kind of sick that doesn't go away. The kind of sick that doesn't get better."

He sensed the elixir taking effect. He took the towelette from her hand and helped her lay back down to the pillow.

"Your son is fine," he whispered. "He's not the one who is sick." He covered her with a thin blanket.

"Want-my-son..." Her slurred words trailed off as she was overcome by a deep, restful sleep.

The man took the clothes from the chair and set them on the table, making sure they stayed immaculately folded. He then did what he had done the night before; sat and watched her. He was hoping tomorrow he would have the nerve to look directly at her. Maybe even have a regular conversation. But for now, he would sit, write in his journal, and watch her.

## Chapter 4

Consciousness came to her quickly the second time. For a moment she did nothing; just laid there with her eyes closed. Upon opening her eyes, they focused immediately. The room had no interior lighting, just what came in from under the door, yet she could see crystal-clear; and no headache. No buzzing, no high-pitched bells going off in her head, no burning behind her eyes; nothing.

She looked down for the plastic that had excited her imagination earlier. It was gone. Then she noticed the carpet. Even in the dimly lit room she could make out a soft, blue paisley pattern on a darker blue background. *Pretty, she thought, but way too delicate for a high traffic area.* She smiled, realizing how much she was becoming like her mother. She took a deep breath and propped herself up to a leaning-forward position on the bed.

She paused for a moment, waiting for the telltale signs of the freight train she commonly called a headache, to slam her back to the fetal position; nothing. She threw her legs over the side of the bed. Quick movements would also trigger the migraine. Again; nothing. She looked around the room. *Everything was so damn clear.* She looked to the extreme left then to the right. Normally after prolonged use her contacts dried out on the edges, causing irritation. The disposable contacts she had in should have been changed yesterday. They should be grinding on her eyes like sandpaper. *They're probably melted to my eyeball, she thought, that's why I can't feel them.*

She looked at her hands and fingertips that had, what she thought was blood dripping off of them earlier, and they were

perfectly clean. Her skin seemed to glisten. She ran her hands over the surface of her arm. Her skin felt so soft and smooth. She could swear the age spots that had begun last year were gone.

There was a soft knock at the door.

Ali took a quick glance down to make sure everything was covered. "Come in," she said.

"Where is my son?" she said in a commanding voice as he walked into the room.

"I see you're feeling better." Ali made no reply.

"The boy is fine," he added.

"The boy's name is Mason."

"Mason." He rolled the name over in his mouth like he was tasting a vintage wine. "Good name, strong name; stoneworker."

"Where is he? I need to see him."

"As I told you on Tuesday, he's down the hall."

Ali was stunned. "Tuesday?" she asked. "Today is Wednesday?" She noticed he still would not make eye contact.

"Today is Thursday." He looked at his watch. "And it's almost 3:00 a.m. You've been asleep for about twenty-one hours."

"No wonder I feel so good," she said. "It's amazing what a good night...or two, of sleep will do."

"I wouldn't know," he said under his breath. She noticed a sense of resignation as he murmured it.

"I want to see Mason."

"He's asleep. He needs his sleep."

"I'm his mother. I know what he needs, and he needs *me* right now."

"With respect, ma'am, there are some things we need to discuss."

"My name is Ali. And I'm not discussing anything with you until I see my son."

*What a beautiful name,* he thought. A name perfectly suited to this woman. He could see she was getting upset. He quickly ran

through the medical ramifications in his head. Increased blood pressure, increased adrenaline levels, increased blood flow to the brain. He needed to calm her down immediately.

"Ali, I'll take you to your son, but you need to relax. Your body can't handle a migraine right now."

"I'll relax when I see my son."

The stranger paused for a moment, and then said, "Let's go." He put his hand out to help her off of the bed. She ignored his gesture and slid from the bed onto the floor with a plop.

"You have to promise me," he asked pleadingly, "to let him stay sleeping."

She stopped, and making a point to look directly into his eyes said, "When it comes to my son, I promise nothing."

The minute her eyes made contact with his, he heard nothing but the beat of his own heart racing.

He led her through the door and down the hallway.

Even though she had not yet seen Mason, a sense of relief washed over her body. She knew she would be with him momentarily. Somehow she trusted this gentle stranger. She also knew there was something very different going on here.

As they walked down the hallway, the first thing she noticed was the absence of people. This was definitely a hospital of some sort. It had the distinct smell of disinfectant that all hospitals have. She glanced into the windows of the rooms they passed. *No sick patients, no family members in the hallway grieving over sick loved ones. No buzzing of machines.*

*So many things that didn't add up.*

"I never got your name," Ali said, breaking the silence.

"You never asked."

"Well, I'm asking now."

"My name is Danny." He took this opportunity to look directly at her.

He could feel his heart start to race again. He tore his eyes away. He wondered if he'd stared at her too long. He didn't want to make her feel uncomfortable or anything.

"Danny," said Ali in a soft tone. "I didn't mean to speak to you so harshly back there."

He kept at the same pace.

"There are things you don't understand about Mason. He's not well."

"I know," he said, without breaking stride.

"I don't think you do."

"Do what?" he asked.

"I don't think you do know that he's not well," said Ali, starting to get frustrated.

"Yes, I do."

Ali wasn't in the mood for banter. "Danny, where is my son?" she asked in a voice slightly louder than before.

"It is important you keep your voice down or you'll wake him." He slowed and reached for the knob of the door they stood in front of. Now that they were here, she became less assured of his condition.

Something inside told her that Mason was behind the door; that was for sure. She winced at the possibilities of his condition. She reached past Danny and threw the door open.

Of all that she had imagined she would find behind the door, what lay in front of her was not one of them. A child, an ordinary average boy, lay asleep on the bed before her. He was on his side, with his pillow tucked tight to his head. One pajama-covered leg lay on top of the covers, while the other rested comfortably under. She listened to his breathing; long, deep breaths, even an occasional snore and a chortle. He had a look about him his mother had not seen in years. If ever asked to describe it, she would just say that he looked like a boy who was asleep after a long, hard day of playing at the park. Emotion overcame her. There was no holding it back, and

Ali wasn't even going to try. She started to cry, and the cries led to sobbing. Danny stood silently by her side, letting her have this moment.

She looked up at Danny. "He's asleep," she said, catching her breath.

Danny smiled at her. "I would hope so. It's 3:00 a.m."

Ali laughed. "I haven't seen him like this in years."

"What, asleep?"

"Yes, well, no." She brought her voice back to a whisper. "I mean, usually he has to fall asleep in the upright position so the ventilator tube doesn't get kinked. Hey!" she exclaimed in her normal voice, "where is his ventilator tube? He needs his oxygen."

Danny quickly closed the door so as to not wake the boy.

"That is one of the things I wanted to speak with you about."

Ali walked over to the window and watched her son once again. "He's breathing fine. I don't understand this."

"Why exactly did Mason have the oxygen ventilator?"

Ali took a deep breath and let the air out slowly. "Last year Mason was diagnosed with a rare and fatal strain of Behcet's Disease. It's a disease that—"

"I know what Behcet's Disease is," Danny interrupted, "and that's not what your son has."

Ali paused for a moment, letting this stranger's words sink in. "I wish I could believe that. You don't *know* how much I would love to believe that," she said in a much softer voice. "I've been down this road with eleven different doctors. The first five had no idea what was wrong. They kept sending us home with medications that did nothing, or made him get worse. Doctor number six diagnosed him with Behcet's." She took her stare back to the window. "The next set of doctors was a futile attempt by a desperate mother to prove the diagnosis incorrect, but unfortunately, they all confirmed the diagnosis."

"That's what happens when they all read from the same book," said Danny, with a marked disdain to his tone.

Ali turned around to face Danny again. "What do you mean?"

"Ali, your son is allergic to fluoride." Then quickly Danny added, "But he's not the one I want to talk about."

"Wait a minute," said Ali, on the verge of anger. "Fluoride? You think my son is allergic to toothpaste?" Afraid Ali's voice would carry through the closed door, Danny took a few steps deeper into the hallway, hoping to draw the now-getting-louder Ali away from the sleeping boy. "And how do you know this?" Ali asked, following Danny. "Are you a doctor?"

"Fluoride is a mineral," said Danny, ignoring Ali's questions.

"I don't care if fluoride is a frickin' vegetable!" shouted Ali. "Tell me why I should believe a hermit in the middle of nowhere, living in what looks to be an old, deserted hospital! Instead of believing authentic, board-certified doctors that actually work in a *real* hospital, with real nurses, and real sick people?"

"Because," Danny said in a low, calm voice, "the doctors are wrong...all of them."

Ali felt a fluttering in her chest. *Could it be?* Her mind raced, trying to put together the pieces of this puzzle. She believed Danny. Something about him made her trust him. She wanted so desperately for it to be true. *But eleven doctors wrong?*

"I don't believe you," she lied.

Danny smiled. "You don't have to. When Mason wakes up this morning, talk to him, see how he's feeling. You'll see. Now, can we please talk about your headaches?"

"I don't have headaches." Ali quickly added, "So what is this place?"

*Okay, Danny thought, I get it; you don't want to talk about it.* He decided he would wait to bring it up after Ali had seen that Mason was okay. Maybe then she would trust him.

“This place,” Danny said, leading her down the hall, “is a very long story.”





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