

## A Man Alone

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### III

#### Lucid

Fatigue. Total body fatigue. I lay in bed too sore to move and too sore to breathe deeply. A cough wracked my body something awful.

All because of some bad Chinese food. And I don't even like Chinese food all that much. It was all Zach's idea to go to the Super Duper China Buffet on Saturday and two days later I'm laid up in bed. I didn't know what it was at first. I thought it was the flu—which is called influenza, and that didn't strike me until a week ago when I read about flu shots at work. Influenza is the flu. Imagine. Influenza sounds much worse.

Monday I woke up at two in the morning with an urge to empty my bowels. I felt terrible. Then I go back to sleep and then, two hours later, I do it again. But I'm washing my hands and I feel my stomach flip and I dive for the toilet bowl head first and up comes the remains of food from the last day or so. I felt so bad that even my necklace was irritating. I took it off and set it next to the sink with the crucifix facing down.

So, now I was lying in bed with a fever that wouldn't break and every ninety minutes I'd throw up and shit. The thing is, I felt like a woman because it's liquid, you know? I hate to say it like that, but that's what it was. How awful not to be able to aim.

Even with nothing left in my stomach, the vomiting still did not subside.

I'd dry heave a few times and feel so frustrated that I'd spit some saliva just to make myself feel like I accomplished something.

I couldn't get to sleep, so I just laid there in silence. Usually I like to put on a CD to help me relax, but the thought of moving alone made me want to vomit. I had my legs bent at the

knees because when I was younger my dad told me that it made you feel better. I believed it back then either because I thought it made the sickness go through you faster or because the bent legs relieved some of the strain on the stomach muscles. Either way, every little bit helped especially since no one was there to help or even pity me.

I had a cool washcloth on my forehead, but I was paranoid (maybe from the fever) that I was going to wind up sterile. See, my whole body was hot including my, well, testicles, okay? I read that the boys down there need to be slightly cooler than the rest of the body otherwise one could become sterile. That's why some people prefer boxers to briefs. After an hour of paranoia, I just stopped caring. If I became sterile, then fine.

I experienced moments of lucidity where all I wanted was for someone to be there with me. Steph's face kept popping into my head. She had this tiny smirk and she looked so precious. She wouldn't even have to do anything for me; just being with me would have been enough. Her presence would simply cure me.

I missed my sister, too.

The washcloth was losing its coolness and I didn't want to get up. Living alone sucks. My dishes were never done, neither was my laundry or cleaning, no one ever cooked for me, and no one was there to open a 7-Up to take the fizz out.

I managed to call into work and explain that I was sick as the dickens. I knew they thought I was faking because even my voice was strained beyond reason. But all that throwing up was wreaking havoc on my stomach. I had cramps from the heaving and it was murder.

At ten I stumbled into the bathroom again and squatted—no kneeling because it gave me cramps in my feet for some strange reason I couldn't fathom—and threw up some more. This time I felt something come up, and a black ball of some sort flew out of my mouth and plopped in the water. I had absolutely no idea what it was. Hell, it could have been some alien creature like from that episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* where these scorpion-looking things are taking over the Federation by wrapping themselves around the spinal column of Starfleet personnel. I looked at it its semi-spherical shape sinking in the water and flushed thinking that I'd have to clean the streaks of vomit and feces on the lid and bowl before it became too rank.

At around noon I was in bed too sick to think. My phone rang. On the sixth too loud ring I picked it up and got it to my ear.

"Scott?"

"Yeah?"

"I called your work and they said you were home. How ya feeling?"

Finally someone I could talk to about my problem. "Zach, man, I'm sick."

"Dude, me too."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I think it was the Chinese food. You throwing up?"

I suddenly felt a little better knowing that I wasn't alone. "Yeah, I am. Are you shitting?"

"Oh, man, like a fiend. My asshole is raw."

I began laughing, but that hurt. I coughed, but that hurt, as well. "Oh, don't make me laugh. I'm just glad I'm not in this alone, you know? I was laying here barely able to move. I thought I was dying."

"I feel the same way." Funny, it sounded like he was in much higher spirits than I. I could tell he was smiling by the inflection of his voice. "Look, I just wanted to call you and see how you were. I'll let you get some rest, but give me a call tomorrow or whenever you're feeling up to it, okay?"

"Yeah," I had enough trouble getting just that out.

"All right, buddy, take it easy." He hung up and I turned off the portable phone and let it rest by my weary side.

For the rest of Monday I did nothing except visit the bathroom every two to three hours. I ate nothing and I drank nothing. It's odd how I kept emptying something from my bowels that had to have been cleaner than if someone had drained a gallon of Liquid Plumber into them. Where did it all come from? Like when you have a cold, where does all that snot come from?

Tuesday I called in sick again and apologized to my boss. The bathroom visits became less frequent, but my body was near death. Every minute movement from adjusting my head to lifting my arm pained me. The fever broke at some point early Tuesday morning as I was drifting in and out of consciousness. But I still felt quite delirious. I was faint and my vision blurred every time I tried to focus.

On one trip to the bathroom I had the brilliant idea to grab a cup and fill it with water. I sipped it from time to time and eventually threw it up. The important thing is to keep yourself hydrated, I heard every adult who ever took care of me when I was sick saying in my head—it

was quite disorientating, all those voices at once. I thought I was going to pass out from the noise.

I filled the glass again and threw it up as well. And then again. I was getting rather frustrated with my body rejecting something as harmless as water. I thought about giving it up and just laying there to die. Who'd miss me anyway?

But then my whole self-preservation thing acted up and just like Mel Gibson in *Lethal Weapon 2*, I heard a voice inside my head like a drill instructor say, "Get up!" I didn't much want to, but I did anyway. I went into the bathroom and did the familiar but nasty deeds and refilled the cup again and began sipping it before I reached my bed.

I spend all of Tuesday in bed with the shades drawn to keep that pesky sunlight out. No TV and no radio. Just the sounds of my body and my fan and the refrigerator and the neighbors and the traffic outside and the hum of electricity and the tectonic movements of the Earth's plates and the music of the spheres could be heard. Nothing major to disturb my recovery.

I don't know why I did it, but I picked my phone up from its cradle (I must have hung it up at some point) and called my brother's house knowing he would be home at this time of night.

Seven digits dialed and five rings later he answered: "Hello?"

"Hi, Lance. How are things?"

"Fine, how are you? You sound funny."

"Oh, I'm fine." I took the washcloth that had long since lost its coolness and tossed it toward the bedroom door. It fell to the floor less than halfway to where I wanted to toss it. "I'm just calling to see how things are going."

"Still fine." He didn't have anything to say to me.

I wondered how distorted my voice was due to my fatigue. "Am I crazy...or did we talk like three days ago?"

"Yeah, we did."

"Wonderful." I grabbed the cup and drank some, but since I was on my back, the water cascaded too quickly and it ran from the corner of my mouth down my cheek into my ears and the pillow. The coolness woke me slightly and I imagined a small pool in each ear and what creatures would enjoy the temporary swimming holes. "Am I crazy or did you tell me that your wife was pregnant?"

"Yeah, I told you that. What's going on?"

"Okay. I just had a few questions that I'd like answered, okay?"

"We'll see." I could tell he was getting annoyed, but I didn't care. He wasn't near death, was he? No.

"I thought you were using some sort of birth control."

"Yeah, Gwen was on the pill."

"I thought the pill was all effective...and stuff." I smiled thinking what his face looked like.

"Usually it is."

"Did she miss a day or something?"

"We don't think so. It just happened."

"Mm-huh. You two going to have an abortion?"

The answer came fast and forcefully: "No!"

My calm demeanor remained. "Oh, that's right, you're a Catholic, now. You wouldn't go against the Church like that. I can dig it, truly. Hey, do you remember when you got married and you were twenty-eight, I asked you if you were ready and you said you weren't sure?"

"Yeah."

"Well, brotha, you're thirty-one, now. And you're going to have a kid, you better damn sure be ready for this."

"Thanks. Is that all?"

"No, one more thing." I took another sip of water. "Do you blame me for mom's death?"

He hung up and I poured the rest of the water on my head feeling so much better.