

*(Static fades in then cuts.)*

I have this... memory of screaming.

*(Music fades in)*

And it feels more like something out of a bad dream than it does anything... tangible or real. It's not like something that actually happened. *(breath)* It's hazy and unclear. Clouded and also incorporal. Like it never dwelt in the physical world, I mean, but there's no good word for something like that.

And okay, I've been revisiting that memory in my dreams, so on one hand, I want to say that this is why it feels so surreal and shaky. But I guess there would be a counter argument where someone would say that if I see it in a dream, then it is a dream and has always been a dream. But I don't know.

And in some ways, I can never know. Because that point, for all of its merits or reasonableness or rationality, is based in a different kind of brain. In a normal that is not mine anymore. Or is not the sort of thing that can be said of any brain that my dad has touched or worked on. That much I do know.

*(Pause)*

You see, sometimes... Well sometimes patients don't want their families to go back with them during a procedure. As to what that procedure is, that's something... that's something that I can't go into right now. Please. For my own sake. But there are other times when families don't go back for procedures or examinations of any kind, and there are other times when, logistically speaking, that's just not possible. A couple of the procedure rooms aren't sized right or the dimensions are off. It's hard to say. But the

sort of it is that we didn't build that facility around our needs. We didn't build it at all. Years, maybe even decades ago, Dr. Alexson bought it from a developer who didn't have much medical experience himself. So from the beginning, everyone has had to make do with unforgiving walls and poorly placed hallways. There's even a bay of cubicles somewhere that we really don't need, but given the electrical workup in the flooring, there's not much we can do about that. We can't put patient rooms in there. We can't alter the ones we have. We're just... stuck.

And while that's unfortunate, because of that, sometimes family members have to sit out in the waiting room, out in my domain, with Dad surely locked away somewhere and needing to be in that place for a while. And you know, at some point, talking to them, or tending to them as I would call it, is just proper etiquette. More than that, it's part of patient care, you know. Not just in the moral and ethical sense, but if you want a patient to continue their treatment, you have to treat them well. Them and their family. Especially when the patient's faculties decline, and their medical decisions are left with those same relatives. You better hope they like you at that point; it makes a world of a difference.

Or that's what I was always told. Dad would stress to me that we should try to deter people from taking their care or their relative's care elsewhere. We couldn't legally prevent it from happening, so we had to use other tactics. And all of that would make sense, right? But have you stopped to ask, why? Why would it be so horrible for them to leave? I mean, we have a waiting list, though it's small. Regardless, we still have to turn

a couple patients away each year. So it isn't like we couldn't fill those spots. And it's not an issue of income or money for us. We have plenty of that coming in.

*(Music fades out and new music fades in)*

Inconsistencies aside, I never cared enough to think about that. But now, I'm starting to. Because so very few people know the details of what Dad does. And they've all had to sign Non-Disclosure agreements. And true, that would not be so uncommon in research or in a field like this. And you might think you know the reasoning behind it. But having been in that office, having worked with these people, it doesn't seem like that to me. It strikes me as odd. Very odd and very calculated.

Anyway, the other day, we had a patient whose daughter could not go back with her. This patient had been assigned the most infamous of the rooms size-wise. Not that I've ever been in any of them. I didn't want to. And now I still don't for different reasons.

But it wasn't the first time that one young woman was left in the waiting room. I remember. She stands out in my mind because her and her mother are much younger than average, and there's something intrinsically tragic about that. About this woman losing her mother at this time when she's still trying to get settled into herself and her adulthood. It's a two for one, I guess. Loss of innocence and loss of who protected that innocence happening at the same time. Never mind that her mother should technically have years and years ahead of her, to be happy, to have grandkids, whatever she wants to do, I don't know.

I don't know where her other parent is--be that a dad or another mom or something else that I can't even think of right now--and maybe that's telling in a different way. That she's always alone in the waiting room. No parent. No siblings. Nothing.

You know, she always looked like a Rebecca to me, but that's not her actual name, so fair enough, I can call her that here. But regardless of what she normally looks like, this visit, she carried extra sadness and exhaustion on her face. And she couldn't sit still. Her leg was constantly bouncing when she could force herself to sit down, but she could seldom force herself to sit down. So instead, she ended up pacing our waiting room, and our waiting room is larger than average but appropriately large when you consider that things like this happen all the time.

But it is a hard thing to prepare yourself for as a staff person. The new receptionist also noticed. And thankfully, believing she was the first one to see this, drew my attention to Rebecca. Of course, my attention was already on Rebecca. Obviously, it was, but this way, I would have a verifiable reason for why I walked over there. Clearly I needed to do it; she was causing a scene. And she was a patient's daughter.

*(Music fades out and new music fades in)*

Because, yes, I took my chance. I loudly gave my assurances to the receptionist that I was going to handle it, and I walked over to Rebecca. My hand came to rest on her shoulder. At the touch, she looked at me, and it was like she could breathe again. For the first time in awhile. I guess she must have felt pretty alone or she saw that I was in something that vaguely resembled scrubs. I don't know.

*(Brief sounds of a storm in the distance. Sigh).*

I'm sorry.

*(Music cuts. Static fades in and out. New music fades in)*

I needed to check on Roslyn. There's a storm outside. Thunder and lightning, that whole thing. She gets scared, but it's not the thunder that scares her. It's the lightning. It's the light that she knows and understands to be electricity because it is electricity she's afraid of, full stop.

It's to the point she does not want to touch her bedroom lamp or light switches. And she's the only kid I know who has an aversion to technology. To all the gadgets that can make modern childhood so fun. The sorts of things you seemingly have to engage with as a kid who wants to have friends. So is it a wonder that she doesn't have friends? But it's because she know and understands that everything like that has electricity in it. This thing she's very much afraid of.

Put aside the issue of why for a hot second. Roslyn is very afraid of electricity, and rather than overcoming it with knowledge, knowledge is having the exact opposite effect. Because now, her boogieman exists literally everywhere she goes, and she knows it. She knows she can't escape from it. They're just peacefully cohabitating. For now. That could change, she thinks. And yeah, maybe there's some reason to think about that. Electrical burns are a thing. Death by electricity is a thing. And she knows this. *(sigh)* No wonder that kid's such a hot mess. How could she not be.

And I, I guess this is where we get to the why, but I don't want to talk about why. I don't want to think about it. Not really.

But before you ask or think to ask, the screaming isn't her or her voice. It's me.

*(Music fades out and new music fades in)*

But Rebecca and I talked for a bit. The short of it is that, yes, she has a lot to be upset about. Undoubtedly. Her entire situation--or her mom's situation or their shared situation--is hard and terrible and all of those things. But for a while, as she put it, it wasn't so unbearable. It only got to be that way recently.

And I've heard that line before. Usually, this precedes a discussion about incontinence, which is a hard one to have, yes. For the patients' families that's usually the point where this whole thing gets painfully real in a very intimate way, but that's not what Rebecca was talking about.

Her mom had been getting nightmares lately, as Rebecca put it. Not that her mom could explain to Rebecca exactly what she was seeing; that's beyond her capabilities right now. That's something she hasn't been able to do for a while, but Rebecca can only see the outward effects. The panicked expression, the shaking, the gasping for breath.

And that's when I asked something that I probably should not have asked her. It might have been a bit invasive, but I asked Rebecca, "Does... Does she always... Um Your mom's right leg but only her right leg does it kick when she gets this way?"

Rebecca nodded and added a detail that I deliberately left out as a test. She added that her mother's angle was flexed but not at a proper ankle. Like mine. Like the reason why I've been walking with a slight limp as of late. Dad wants to say it's my

weight, but he has not come up with a clever comeback yet. He's not clever enough, I guess.

But I am very clever. I guess I get it from my mother. You see, Dad wasn't available, but another doctor was. And guess who needed to talk to one? Rebecca. And guess who could not be persuaded under any circumstances to let go of my hand?

Now the doctor in question clearly wanted her to. It was on his face when she pulled me in. In the way the blood drained from his face and his eyes went glassy. And the way he cleared his throat multiple times and fidgeted in his chair. And then there was the stammering, but he was never all that great at public speaking anyway so what does any of that matter?

She would not let me go, though. She couldn't, in many ways. Her hand was locked onto mine. She was desperate for my comfort and presence. Nothing could change that, so how could he deny her me? Why, with a clear reason. A reason he also couldn't give.

*(Music fades out and new music fades in)*

So he had to answer her question while I was there. He had to explain it. And you know what... Nightmares like that, they're a known side effect of the treatment. No one can know if they're real vision or not because of the nature of the condition being treated. So it might be a regression to a horrible memory, and maybe it's the less than ideal firing of all the neurons of a--quote--deteriorating brain.

At no point did the doctor clarify what the treatment was or how this is happening. And fair enough on that; no one in the room needed him to say it. Not even me.

Because this was enough. This was really enough for me to know without any doubts that Dad had done something to me.

And *(sigh)* maybe I should never have doubted it, you know? Or what doubts I had should have been discarded long before we got to this point. Like I had to know what I was seeing, right? I knew Dad and what he was capable of. Better than anyone else. Because I could see the coldness and anger that his carefully manicured image tried to hide. I saw what he left out when it was in his best interests, when it would have worked out for him, or when he needed to try. But he never had to try with me. There was never any need for any pretenses that he was good and just and virtuous with me: his daughter, his... whatever I am to him, servant, punching bag. I don't know.

But all things considered, my portrayal of him would have been the most accurate because he would have made no attempt to mislead me. But it was... It was so out of step with what everyone else thought he was. And there were many explanations and excuses and reasons for the discrepancy beyond him being evil, terrible, whatever.

*(More emotional)* But also, being wrong and having any of those other reasons be right is just less frightening. Less scary because of what it all means.

I don't have a choice. Every night when I go home, when I lay myself down to sleep, I have to wonder is there a monster ready to consume me just a few doors over. My door has a lock, but why couldn't he just kick it in? It's not a strong door. It's not a good lock. And is... Is every step I take leading me a trap that he could have placed? Am I really walking on eggshells, and what would happen if I broke one?



I think about that a lot, but it's always a thought that's coupled with the knowledge that it would be great to be wrong. I do want to be wrong sometimes. *(Sigh)* Oh no, um... I want things to be better than what I think they are. And that could happen any number of ways. So yeah, maybe I do want to be wrong.

*(Music fades out and new music fades in)*

Maybe I still don't want to believe it or believe that there's more abuse in my mind, lurking somewhere that I will remember one day. And I can't control when I'll remember it. It will just hit me when I least expect it and knock me to the floor, and it'll kick me. And I will cry and scream and hate myself more than I already do. And it will show me all the breaks and wounds in my body. And I will realize... I'll realize how broken I am, how fractured or that I'm bleeding, *(quick breath)* that maybe I've always been bleeding and right then and there, I'll have to deal with it. *(inhale)* Not because I can and am able to or want to but because I won't have a choice anymore.

I won't have a choice at all, and .... And that's the best case scenario. In many regards. This could all end some other way. Some other... Some other horrible way.

In the dream, I am the one who is screaming. And it's a very visceral, gut-based cry of agony and suffering. *(breath)* It's me. It's my cry. I am the one. I am the one who is dying. *(inhale)* Or dying would have been merciful, but I wasn't dying. And when I wake up, my throat is throbbing, like it remembers when it had to do that impossible thing, like when it was screaming and crying and begging for help that never came. Even though there are figures around me. And some are small, but most aren't. And I'm

upright. And I can see ahead of me. Only ahead of me. And my arm is burning. My...  
And then... And then...

Then... Then I wake up. I wake up.

*(Pause to regain composure)*

It's electricity, right Lucent? That's what will bring the message on the small canvas to life. But it can't be from an illumination with electricity. Because that would be woefully impractical. Uncontained sparks will only last for moments. But if I let the current run through the canvas, that would awaken something within it, something in the paint. I can already feel some discrepancies in it when I run my fingers across the top. It's not clear enough for me to find the message by touch alone, but it's enough to tell me that it's there.

And yet, I have some doubts and fears because of course I do. Of course. *(sigh)*  
Or maybe it's not fear and doubt. Maybe it's just me being realistic. Because I can't stay. But I can't take the kids. They aren't my kids. And there aren't enough people who would believe me. And sure sometimes I *(inhale)* sometimes I do want to leave them behind, but I can't. I can't do that to them. They didn't choose this for me. They didn't put this on me. They're victims too.

There will be a nanny soon enough. I don't know who, and I don't know how they'll be. Dad disinvited me from those interviews. Because apparently, we haven't found one yet because I'm being territorial and hormonal. And yeah, that... To me, that doesn't make sense, right? Because I've wanted help for so long. It's just that rationally

speaking, if you get a bad nanny now, you're going to have to get another one in the very near future. I hire people all the time. I know this.

But it's more convenient for him to pretend that I don't. Because then he doesn't have to include me, and if he doesn't include me, he'll have control over this new person. Not overt control. But he'll be the established boss, they'll be indebted to him. They will learn from him first and foremost what to do and who to trust and what this family is like.. And I'll just be... And I'll just be whatever he tells them that I am. No more. No less. I'll be the failure child. The daughter of the prodigy who never showed any potential of her own. I'll be on the outside of my own home, so maybe this is inevitable and I need to leave. Undoubtedly, I have to go if the end effect is going to be the same. But it might not be. It might be worse for all I know.

Once again, I... I can't know.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

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