



Two Weak

By Lori Adams

There was so much damage and swelling; my body couldn't endure any more. Dr. Mike made the decision to induce a coma for two weeks and let my body rest; I was too weak right now.

Dr. Mike put everything back in its proper place, but nobody knew how much damage was done. Nobody would know the full extent until I was conscious - if I ever would be again.

At first, it was foggy and hazy. At times, it felt as though I was swimming in darkness. Thomas, my childhood friend who had passed away years ago, took me by the hand and led me to a train station that seemed to be in the clouds. It wasn't the first time he'd taken me here; when I'd had a near death experience before, he sat with me in the station and reassured me and yelled at me not to board the train. I could see that train, and he never allowed me to board it. The doors remained closed; he reassured me and told me that I couldn't leave yet.

He looked terrified. I didn't understand why; the surgery had removed the tumor and I would recover. I ended up reassuring him, again, that I would be fine. No matter what I said, his fear remained and he patted my hand and shoulders. He wouldn't take his eyes off me, terror plastered on his face.

I don't know how long I stayed with him in the station. Eventually everything turned dark again and I had no idea where I was. I heard voices close to me, some that I didn't recognize, but then my parents spoke. My father cried loudly, in a mournful manner. I began to wonder if I had died and was listening to them from beyond. When I tried to move or open my eyes, it was as if they were weighed down beyond my strength. I tried to give him a signal that I was there with him, but I wasn't strong enough. "She's gone; this is all that's left" he cried.

My mother's voice came next, assuring him that I would wake up. I thought I must have been heavily medicated after surgery, or maybe this was just how brain surgery recovery was? That must have been it. Brains are strange and complex, after all.

She wasn't as close to me as before, but still in the room with me now. She began to tell someone the story of someone who went in for surgery, but then had brain herniation, injuries, something about deformed vertebrae and another surgery to fix what they could. *Sounds like that person was having a bad day, I'm glad that I'm just here for one surgery and a night in the ICU, I thought.*

She told this story several times. I started to worry that it was Terry, who was also in an ICU room down the hall. Terry's wife, Mary, came into the room at some point. Her words were fuzzy to me, and I wasn't sure why she was in my drugged dreams, as we weren't all that close. She was kind and soft spoken, mostly consoling my parents, who were still upset.

More people came in and out of my foggy dreams – James, Grace, plus a variety of ones that I didn't know. Those familiar to me expressed their love for me and wished I would wake up soon. *Must be some **strong** medications* - I thought I felt the pressure of someone holding my hand a few times, but mostly my body felt numb as I slept. I thought about getting up a few times, but I was held down by immense weight and couldn't sit up or even open my eyes. Instead, I spent most of my time listening to sobbing at my bedside.

After a while of haze and darkness, I saw myself in a room. It was obviously a hospital bed, but it was covered with magnets. My body was covered in a blanket of magnets of the opposite charge. The inside of my body was filled with magnetic ions as well. These kept me firmly on the bed.

As soon as that vision was clear, there was a broom and a Swiffer by the bedside that I managed to grab. I planned to pry the magnets apart with the Swiffer and then “row” along the floor – *when was the last time I showered?* I would go to the bathroom first. My parents sat sleeping in chairs across the room, so I wouldn't disturb them while I made a break for it. The magnetic charge was stronger than I had anticipated, it seemed to increase gravity too! *Was my body being pulled down to the earth with this?* It was the most reasonable explanation for the feeling that I was having - but logic didn't live here.

I struggled to pry the magnets apart. Every time I failed, it was harder to try the next time. All the while, the Earth seemed to spin faster and faster until I collapsed in fatigue. I must have fallen asleep again, and drifted back into nothingness.

Nothingness brightened until the lights were blinding me. A sense of sheer terror and impending doom overwhelmed me more than the magnetic forces did. I fought hard to wake up from the nightmare that was forming, but my eyes refused to open. A raspy voice told me what was ahead – everything and everyone would be turned inside out if I couldn't stop it. Unfortunately, I didn't know how to stop it.

I tried to warn everyone of what was coming, but every time I opened my mouth, unintelligible sounds came out. I was met with people consoling me and telling me to rest and relax; but how could I when the universe was about to be inverted? My mother

especially tried to soothe me and tell me that I should rest; she obviously didn't know what was ahead of us.

I couldn't figure out how to prevent it, and time was running out. Eventually, I accepted that it was inevitable and braced myself for it. I sat down and meditated as everything began to warp and pull itself inside out. I felt it first in my feet, then slowly the rest of my body. My skin was pulled and ripped as the muscles and fascia were exposed to the world. It was some of the worst pain I'd had; it encompassed all the descriptions of pain – stinging, stabbing, sharp, itching, and somehow aching - and then surpassed them. My fingers and hands were especially gruesome; everything went black when it got to my head.

Some time passed, but I heard more voices around me. I suppose that it was truly just a nightmare, perhaps fueled by post-OP pain. Again, my mother was recounting the story of someone who was having a terrible time - massive injuries after a surgery. I was so relieved that I was only going to be in ICU for one night before I could recover at home!

My birthday was soon – 21 years! My family and I had celebrated early with cupcakes and a visit to the zoo (barely). It had been really the only thing that I wanted to do before the operation. I planned to have a small party with my friends after recovery; nothing too wild though.

My birthday must have been on my mind, as several voices wished me a happy birthday. A shaky voice sang “Happy Birthday” to me, with a few others chiming in occasionally. My real birthday would probably be spent recovering in a hotel or maybe at home with my family.

This was by far my biggest surgery, but far from my first. I thought about how I was going to do things at home. Shampooing my hair would be a delicate process for a while. Would the scar be really noticeable? I opted for minimally invasive surgery, so it shouldn't be a large area. I looked forward to recovering and returning to college. I remembered the biochemistry exam that was waiting for me. Crap.

My mind drifted into “sleep studying” for biochemistry. I thought about amino acids, various chemical reactions, and the reading I'd done a few days ago. If the other exams were going to be like this one, I felt doomed. I'd taken some other exams with massive headaches, sometimes dulled by massive medications, and I feared the results of those too. It felt so typical of me to worry about this though I'd just had a hole drilled into my skull.

Molecules were again interrupted by voices. The voices were largely crying and the unfortunate story I'd heard a few times. I worried for the person, it sounded like a very

difficult situation; I didn't quite understand why it was repeated so often, it surely wasn't me.

Soon I began to hear the voices clearer than before. My dad was leaving to rest, while my mom stayed with me. It must have been the night after surgery. I heard Thomas once more, he sounded relieved but I couldn't see his face. "Oh thank God!" he said with a sigh of relief. My body felt tied down, but my eyes were lighter. Slowly, I opened my eyes.