

## Memoria Horribilis

“Where is it?”, Jack thought, flipping around in his bed reaching for his phone. Not under the pillow, not off the bed. “Wait, where the fuck am I?” He looked around. He wasn’t hung over, so he hadn’t drunkenly stumbled into someone’s house to sleep; he wasn’t dizzy either. He sat himself up on the edge of the bed and only one foot touched the floor. He noticed his right leg was missing. Just a stump left under the knee. “Oh, right, of course”, he said and picked up the prosthetic lying next to the bed. He put it on as if he’d done it a million times before. “What a shitty hotel this is,” he thought. He got up and looked around, and realization began to set in. There were bars on the window. He snapped around and inspected the door. No handle on it; just a closed slot in the middle. “I’m in prison? What in the flying fuck is going on?” Jack noticed a pearl of sweat pushing its way out from his forehead. His right hand was shaking. He looked around the room again and saw the orange pill bottle on his nightstand. It was his pain medication for the leg. “Why was it here with him though?,” he thought. He always kept it at home. Jack felt that something was not right here, and walked up to the door and banged on it. “Hey! Where am I?”. Nobody answered, but he kept knocking until his hand hurt. He quickly got tired and turned around exhausted and looked around the cell. He saw an envelope on the nightstand, just next to the bottle of pills. Jack felt it was something familiar with that envelope, so he opened it to see. There was a note in there and a small picture of a smiling woman holding a baby girl in her arms. He flipped it over and on the backside it read:

*“Your two favorite princesses. Love!”*

“Linda and Sophia!” he said to himself, smiling while choking up a little. He took out the note from the envelope.

*“It wasn’t your fault. You had no choice of your own that day and you only did what your training had taught you. I know the day will come when I will meet the real Jack again”*

It was at this moment Jack remembered the car crash with his wife and daughter onboard. He had missed a red light and an SUV had rammed them from the right. “Shit! Fuck!” He rushed to the door again and knocked with all his remaining strength. “Where are they? Are they OK? Were they injured in the crash? What hospital are they at?” He shouted and knocked all he could and just as he was about to give up he heard footsteps outside. A key turned with a loud and metallic clicking sound and the little slot in the door opened.

“I have to get out of here,” Jack erupted. “I need to get to the hospital. Linda and Sophia could be injured. You know the crash; we crashed in the intersection”

“Good morning Jack” The voice of the woman outside was calm and comforting. “I will find your wife for you. I think she’s here later today. Now in the meantime, do you want some breakfast?”

“Really, is she OK? What about Sophia?” His voice was cracking up and the feeling of guilt flushed over him.

“I will check that for you. Here is your tray”

“Hey, why am I in here? Is it because I drove the red light?”

“No Jack, that is not why” the woman said in a tranquil way as she closed the slot in the door.

Jack sat down on his bed and ate. Food and knowing that he would see Linda later calmed him down for a moment. He hoped to God that little Sophia was alright. He looked at the

pill bottle and knew he was supposed to take two each day. One in the morning and one before bed. He popped the lid and washed one down with the milk he had left.

When there was no more breakfast left to eat, the anxiety effortlessly clenched his undivided attention. He got up again and walked back and forth. He sat down. He got up. He held his arms crossed to his chest and mumbled to himself while he took three steps to the door and three steps back. He sat on the edge of the bed and rocked back and forth, just looking at a random spot on the floor and breathing faster and faster. He was petrified of what Linda's parents would think, not to mention his own. "But why am I in prison? I don't remember a trial or arrest or anything?", he thought. He got up and peeked through the narrow window. Outside, he could see the tall barbed wire fence stretching about half a mile down, almost up to the forest. He was puzzled by all the plants and gardens and even fountains and walkways inside the courtyard though. "That didn't seem normal," he thought. When he sat back down he adjusted his prosthetic and looked over at the nightstand again. Out of boredom and curiosity, he checked the drawer in it, and among other things, he found his medal, a Purple Heart.

To this day he could describe almost every detail of the attack vividly. He was in the back seat of the Humvee when they got stuck in a traffic jam in Fallujah, Iraq. Seconds after an RPG hissed inches above the roof, they were rammed by a vehicle careening from their right. It had smashed the back door in and crushed his leg like a straw. He knocked his head pretty badly too, and when he understood what was happening, the insurgents stormed to get into the vehicle; like frenetic zombies on a feeding craze. Jack had lost his rifle on the impact, and had quickly emptied his sidearm. When they just kept coming into the Humvee he had proceeded to beat their faces in with the butt of his pistol, until no more people would even fit inside.

He looked down at his prosthetic again holding the medal, when keys again rattled outside the door. The slot opened.

“Jack, are you there?” a woman spoke in a light tone.

“Linda? Is that you?” He hurried over to the door and looked through the slot with eyes wide open. It was the woman in the picture. “How are you? How is Sophia? Is she safe? Is she hurt?”

“I am fine Jack. Don’t worry. Do you remember anything from the car crash?”

“Um, well we got rammed from the side, and—”

“Good, and do you remember anything from right after the crash?”

“Um, no not really—Hey, how is Sophia? And why am I in here?” he said with growing apprehension.

“Are you sure you don’t remember anything?”

“NO! What’s going on?” he shouted desperately.

“Okay, relax, I’ll be right back”, she said and the slot was closed again.

“NO! Wait!” He banged the door again and struggled to hold back his tears as he fell to his knees.

The following morning, Stella Green (RN) entered the staff room and saw that Doctor Smith was there early.

“Good morning Doctor”

“Good morning Stella.” Smith responded. “Did we make any progress on our war hero yesterday?”

“No, not really I’m afraid. He still thinks the picture is really of his wife though, so we could try again to see if Nurse Helen can jog his memory again wearing the wig. And he found the Purple Heart medal, but he does that almost every time now.”

“I see, so he doesn’t remember his flashback or anything? — I mean that he did the same thing right after this crash as the one during the war?”

“Don’t think so, no...”

“Alright, we’ll increase the Donepezil dosage for the memory loss. Can you take care of that? Say, 20mg of Actavis?”

“Sure Doctor. Do you want me to just switch his pill bottle again?”

“Yes, I think that’s best. That’s the only way he takes them regularly it seems, and he doesn’t need the pain medicine anyways”

“Okay, no problem. I’ll get it done,” Stella said with a smile.

After some light small-talk with some other colleagues, Stella prepared to make her rounds. She got the food and drinks ready on the trays and placed the trays into her trolley. Then she measured out everyone's medication and put them in little boxes with their names on. When she got out of the elevator on the second floor and around the corner, she could already hear the knocking from inside room 27, and the muffled sounds of a young man shouting "Hey! Where am I?"