

The Weak Force

by Benjamin Matvey

So I'm sitting in this orange plastic chair, waiting to be shot up with some radioactive "tracer" so some uber-camera can tell me if I need my gall bladder out.

My gall bladder.

You know what the "risk factors" for needing your gall bladder removed are? The 3Fs: Fat, Forty and Female. That's what my baby sister, Kim, told me and she's a nurse. I'm a scrawny 28 year old guy, for fuck's sake. What am I doing here?

So this tiny little girl, 25 maybe, Kim's age, with gnarled teeth comes into the waiting room, mangles my name and I follow her. She takes me into this big fluorescent-lit room and tells me to lie down on this tin table. I feel like a fried fish platter. Then she pokes me with a needle (I hate needles. Have to close my eyes.) and she pushes me under the gigantic manila plastic box that she pulls down an inch over my stomach.

"For the first stage you will lie here for an hour," the girl says.

"And what's the second stage," I ask.

She giggles, "Well, you lie here for another hour."

She turns on some computer monitors, turns off the lights so I can rest and tells me she'll be back.

I don't want it to be dark again. My head returns to what I was thinking about before she came and got me. The doctor Kim wanted me to talk to—the other doctor—told me I should start keeping a journal. I asked what he meant and he said I should start writing about my life so he could know what I meant when I said "depression."

Jesus, how should I know? What did he go to school for if he can't tell me? He talked about it in that general, doctor-like way that makes it sound like it's some weird infection or something. Like it's not justified, like it's something I got stuck with, like it isn't about the way my life really is. Like it has nothing to do with Ann, or my job, or the way fucking everything is panning out.

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So I lie here as this spot in my back and between my shoulder blades seizes up, shooting hurt down into my toes and up through the muscles in my neck, and somehow making it feel like I have hot plate behind my right eye.

It's not just in my head. It's the way things are. I *am* broken or just not designed right. Organs are dying, I cough myself to sleep once every month, and the muscle that runs from my ear down the front of my left shoulder is pissed and hot. No 28 year old should... but it's always been like this. It was like this when I was 25 and 21 and 18 and 9. Fucking decaying. Had to give up football when I was 16, lifting when I was 18, running when I was 20 because one piece of me gave out or blew up or burned.

I feel like I am always in this hospital room on a tiny table that digs into my back staring up at the brown-stained water-damaged tiles that look like they are going to collapse and drop asbestos into my mouth.

Feeling good about this would be lying.

So I close my eyes and try to sleep. Time drags, and then it kind of blurs...

I am woken—I have no idea how long later—by the girl saying: “Wake up little sleepy head.”

Nicely unprofessional.

She is actually kind of pretty. Latin or something. She's looking at the monitors and I can see the shape of an organ, my organ, I guess, and I ask what's going on. Apparently the radioactive stuff they injected me with is dripping into my liver and my gall bladder and my “upper bowel” and it is radiating radiation out of my organs up through my shirt and my sweater and the camera can see! And somehow this will tell me if I am okay. Kind of neat.

So the cute Columbian radio-tech tells me the injections give off GAMMA RAYS. Holy shit! Does she know what the freaking means? Gamma rays are what turned Bruce Banner into the Hulk!

And she doesn't even know who the Hulk is. How far away is Columbia, anyway, I ask and because I'm laughing the organs in the monitor jiggle.

"And you'll be giving off gamma rays at a low level all day. But it is perfectly safe," she assures me.

That's so cool. And I explain to her about "The Leader" this green super-genius guy with this big huge forehead who is the Hulk's arch nemesis and about all those dumb, dumb plotlines. You know, her teeth really aren't bad.

She is looking at the screen and she tells me, even though, the doctor must confirm, everything looks fine, and I think she's right. I'm going to be fine. I get up and say goodbye to Carla and head out of the hospital to a cart to get a bagel and some coffee. I wasn't allowed to eat before the procedure and boy I needed food. Maybe I should have gotten her number? Can't worry about that, though, I'm gone. It's sunny out, for the first time in days. Sunny clear and just cold enough I'm glad I have a jacket. I march the few blocks over to the office building I work in and when I enter the secretary calls me "Johnny come lately." I told everyone I was having tests but they bitch at you whether it's a Saturday or you need to have your lungs amputated. So fuck them.

So I walk behind Sandra's desk and I put my radioactive tummy right up to her beaded dreadlocks and I tell her about the nuclear energy that is flowing through her right now. She laughs and screams at me the way I am sure her daughter does when someone pulls on her pigtails.

Hearing the commotion, Mark comes up and asks me how I feel and I tell him about the radiation.

"You are going to become the Hulk."

Totally!

"Hey, you know the sun gives off gamma rays, too," he says.

"Cool," I remember. "Pretty much me and the sun today."

"It's a very exclusive club," he says.

So this kills me and I walk to my desk and think about all the cosmic rays coming out of me as I turn on my computer, half hoping it will just blow up from all the radiation.

I have a ton of shit to do but I check my personal e-mail, and there are e-mails from my sister and Andy and Liz. I write Liz and tell her not to worry about my tests and that it is kind of cool and we e-mail back and forth like half a dozen times like we're on Twitter and Facebook, and fuck work, I'm in CYBERSPACE today! I was just at the hospital and things can wait, and I am the fucking sun today!

Liz is on fire today with the Twitter and the e-mailing. God, she is so funny. I write this last tweet and it kills me what I am writing, I mean its funny, and I send it to the Twitterverse and I turn on my media player with the 400 gigabytes and of MP3s I have ripped.

No response yet on my personal e-mail. So I check my home voicemail; I have few saved messages but no new ones. I look out my window at the park and it is starting to look greener like winter is really finally going to stop.

Mark offers to go get me a hoagie for lunch and I give him a few dollars. I've got the music set to random but it keeps playing the best songs in a row. Good job big holy computer force.

And I check my personal e-mail again and Facebook there are no new messages, and no retweets on Twitter, so I might as well check my work e-mail. Shit, another big ass assignment. I wonder who the fuck these people think I am sometimes. I am not The Leader; he got super smart because...he was exposed to gamma rays! Hey! Maybe this *is* my chance.

I start getting some responses together to some of our customer's computer questions, and I check e-mail, Facebook and Twitter again. Nothing. And I write a few more work e-mails:

Mr. Morales is away on vacation, in the meantime maybe I can answer your questions about ServerSoft™'s newest product line...

I check my old Hotmail account and do some more work. So many questions I get are so fucking lame. Don't they even *look* at our website? I feel like a whore, you know, being all nice to get paid.

I check things again. Liz has already left work by now. I should stop checking. They'll text cell phone if they need me. I'm not going out tonight anyway, I have freaking kryptonite in my craw, you know? So I catch up a little. Can't fuck around all day, really. Economy's real bad. Real bad. Liz is *so* going to get fired. I don't want to tell her that. But she must know.

So I work. These customers ask the most impossible questions. I think they just want me to make things up. And then I realize the sun its setting. Kind of scares me for a second. I don't know why. Feel kind of stupid about it. I do one more thing. Shitload to catch up with tomorrow.

Before I go I check my e-mail and Twitter and Facebook again. Nothing's going on.

I guess Mark left. Jen is the last one at work. I say goodnight to her and she nods. She would be cuter if she was nicer.

It's almost dark by the time I'm walking through the park below my office building. It's pretty empty. My joints are creaky. It's a wet kind of cold.

I get home, unlock all the deadbolts and my apartment looks so big. The ceilings are really high. I could have a party sometime? I should have a party sometime.

I pick up my phone and it beeps at me. I have a message. They always fucking call the second I stop checking, and the fucking LANDLINE. Seriously. It's the hospital. Results in. I'm okay. Fucking doctors. Make me get so many tests, scare the fuck out of me.

So I sit down on the couch, still in all these tight nerdy, work clothes and stupid black socks. Maybe I should...what's on TV...no...two hours disappear in a blink. *Goddammit*. I have shit to do. I have to write that thing Kim's doc wants me to write. Kim thinks I'm fucking broken. I'm not fucking broken.

I decide to pour myself a bourbon into a wine glass that's left over from the pair Ann got me. The other one broke in the sink a while back. I flip my computer on. Going to get some stuff

done. Could have done it today if I wasn't fucking around so much.

And it's such a slow computer. I need new one. So I pace around a little. I look into my bedroom. My comforter is all ruffled and half falling off. I can just hear Ann now, she would have called me a slob.

My bedroom looks big, too. Someone's porch light is coming through my blinds and spots on my sheets seem to be glowing a weird blue. Not baby blue. I don't know the word. I wish I could describe it better.

I actually got used to having Ann in my bed. I thought it was normal. But now it just seems...impossible. It's like I can't even imagine it. To wake up with someone smiling at you.

It was a different life, a fluke or something. I used to have someone who wanted me to kiss her, who wanted me to take her clothes off and—and have sex with her and was actually sad when I wasn't around. It made her *sad* to wake up without me. It seems impossible now. Even more unbelievable that everyone—or what seems like everyone—has someone warm to wake up with. Andy wakes up every morning with Liz. I wonder why she hasn't called, why she hasn't tweeted?

My computer is on, now. I open *Word* and now I'm staring at this big empty document. I can hear that homeless guy outside again, yelling at nobody. It's only 9:00 and I am so goddamned tired.

C'mon brain. Pull through. I have to figure out what to tell Dr. Freundlich. But I don't think I can.

Fuck.

I wish I was smarter. That line from my shoulder to my neck is burning again, like it's mad at me. Fucking...

Kim thinks this will help me. Kim thinks it's gotten this bad. Like I'm sick now. I don't know what to write to Dr. Freundlich, he isn't going to buy anything I write. Kim will be so fucking disappointed with me. She needs to know I'm okay. I don't...I wish I could tell Dr. Freundlich what I mean when I say depression, but I don't even know what I mean. I'm not sure it means anything.

It's not me. Things are just...*things* are just bad right now.

I am so sorry, Kim. I'm so sorry I always let you down.

