

MY SO-CALLED DEATH

By

DAMOND FUDGE

In a couple of hours I'll be dead. I'm not ruining anything, no need for a spoiler warning. This has been my fate for the past day or so. Every few hours I die, then later I wake up, only to have the entire process start over again. Oh, and when I say 'die' I mean 'killed.'

I woke up yesterday, at least I think it was yesterday since I have no concept of time, and found myself trapped in this bed. I couldn't move, can't move, at all. I can't even talk. The only thing I can do is turn my head. It gives a view of the room, but a very limited one. I can hear the footsteps approach and the door open every time. Then someone enters the room and that's when it all starts.

Whoever it is always stays just out of my eye line. Not a difficult task. I can't even be certain if it's the same person every time. I think it is, though. Their heavy breathing sounds the same. That is all I have to go on, too. I can't smell anything from them. No soap, cologne, B.O.,

deodorant. Nothing. All I can tell is they wear one of those formless smocks you see surgeons wear on television.

Today is no different. The person enters and pulls back the sheet. I'm naked, exposed to the world. I never know where they will start. Feet? Mouth? Fingertips? The last time it was my stomach. I hear them fiddling with the various tools and implements on their tray and my body instinctively tenses. Sometimes I can see the glint of the lights off some metal. I can almost tell the size of the blade when the first slices are made.

This time the person has decided to start at the top. I sense them move around me, can feel their presence at the top of my head. At the upper edge of my peripheral vision I see something shiny just before I feel blinding sharpness, quickly followed by liquid warmth. At one point, during its path across my forehead, the blade opens one of those pesky arteries, and the spurts arc in regular intervals. I feel the blood land between my breasts and roll down to collect in the crevice between my clavicles. Droplets land in my eyes, forcing them shut.

The cut continues across from temple to temple. It is a small blade, probably a scalpel. I feel it slip inside the cut, being skillfully worked so skin separates from bone. I occasionally feel the scrape of the blade against the skull, a grating sensation that sends electricity through the fillings in my teeth. Eventually the blade opens enough space where I feel fingers work their way inside. Air slips in between the fingers and I feel tiny patches of cool.

There it is, finally. I knew it was coming, but no amount of mental preparation is ever enough when it comes to being scalped. At first the hands move into a better position from which to clutch the skin, gathering it up for leverage. You can almost sense the muscles in their arms tensing. The initial rip is the worst: the skin, veins and nerves separating from the skull, swearing

you can feel every molecule weeping as it peels away from you. By the time the hands need to readjust, bunching up more forehead, the body has semi-shutdown and it all just becomes tugging. Wet, warm tugging. Eventually, the hands let go and I can tell that the entire top of my head is flopping against the edge of the bed.

My torturer steps away. I hear the plastic clicks as something unlatches. This is followed by another plastic sound, more like something inserted into something, followed by another click. My curiosity is quickly sated with the two quick test whizzes from the cordless drill. I have experienced this tool before, in various deranged ways, and I wonder what it has in store for me this time. I see hands, blue casing, gold titanium spiral that shrinks down to a pinpoint. I know that if my skin was still in place I would have felt the bit when it touched home. I hear whirring and a high-pitched whine, followed by that hot calcium odor. My last conscious thought is a fleeting memory of the dentist before the thunk-slpurch of the power tool breaking through and chewing its way through my frontal lobe.

then...

darkness...

How long has it been? Minutes? Days? I wish I could see the clock. I can see one thing, though. If I turn my head just so, I can see another person in the same situation as me. She is on her own bed, across the room. It takes me awhile, but I recognize her. She works at a local TV station. A weather girl, I think. It was hard to tell who she is without all that makeup. She's always so chipper and she shows up at all kinds of special events, usually as an emcee or singing

the national anthem or cutting a ribbon. They constantly show photos or video of her at these things during the news. What an attention whore.

I try to find empathy for her, but I just have anger. She deserves to be here more than me. She's so famous and I'm a nothing, nobody, inconsequential. Sometimes I think she might be mocking me, mimicking my own expressions. I limit the amount of time I look at her, don't want to make lingering eye contact for fear that my irritation will show. It's the only time I'm happy we have no voice. It would just add to the torture if she were able to talk.

The door opens again. The sounds of preparation resume. Sometimes they like to...I guess the word would be 'gloat.' They will hold the chosen implement up so I can see, reveling in the horror that must show on my face as my mind runs through all of the sickening possibilities. I'm being shown pruning shears, the hand working the mechanism, snapping them closed over and over, like razor sharp novelty chattering teeth.

After they disappear, I feel the cold metal, its blades flat against my belly. They slide to the right side, turn over, the point never losing contact with me and then slide over to the left. This repeats in the opposite direction. My mind races, my breathing quickens, my nerves on edge. The shears move down my belly, inching slowly closer to the top of my legs. I tense up as much as my situation will allow, my muscles tight with the unreleased energy that would have escaped had I been able to flop around normally. The metal scratches along the pubic stubble that would usually be waxed smooth and I tense even more than I thought was currently possible.

I hear a chuckle come from my tormentor. Male. Bastard.

The shears lift from my skin. I only have the briefest moment of relief before the point pierces me at the top of my belly button. Heat spreads across my entire torso, a fire that cannot

be extinguished by the liquid that flows as the tool makes its way toward my chin. The pain is accompanied by a sound like scissors cutting thick, damp construction paper. The surgery proceeds up between my breasts and stops, yet continues perpendicularly under each of them until my chest has been sectioned into quarters.

I can feel the rivers of blood running down my sides and soaking the sheet, the damp stickiness slowly creeping under my body. So much blood. Why haven't I died yet? The shears finish their work and are replaced by a carving knife. The lights wink off the blade while the hands test the cutting edge with a thumb. One hand lifts the heavy flap that contains my right breast. I can see the pulpy backside of it at the edge of my vision. The knife tip hovers close to the meat, hanging in the air as if it's trying to figure out what to do next. It decides to stab, cutting easily into flesh and puncturing my implant. Saline-diluted blood trickles out along the blade.

The hands move it and work it, slicing deeper and deeper, and the breast begins to shrivel, collapsing inward. Why haven't I died yet? Eventually, the forward motion of the knife and the reversing of the skin convene. The nipple keeps getting pointier until, in a spritz of clear pink fluid, the blade emerges. The hands spin the blade counter-clockwise, and it scrapes layer after layer until it has entirely cored the areola. The knife is removed and the flap unceremoniously dropped, crumpling into a gooey pile.

The carving knife is put aside. I hear a metallic snick and I see the hand now holds a slim switchblade. The free hand holds down the edges of the other breast's flap, pressing it into my sternum and rib cage. I thought my capacity for feeling pain had dissipated until that moment, when the nerves contained within the flap burst to life. Instead of the slow, methodical treatment,

this breast suffers several quick jabs. It's a frenzy attack whose intensity is punctuated by the haste which the knife is tossed to the side. Both hands grab the breast and squeeze hard, creating a saltwater fountain to rival the Bellagio. The pinkish shower is warmer than I expect, yet it causes ice cold shivers through my body. I feel droplets landing on my exposed intestines, dribbling down into the cavity beneath them. My oppressor cackles as he empties my implant. His laughter is much too loud at first, but gradually fades.

then...

darkness...

I wake this time to a scraping sound. It's light, but its simplicity makes my skin crawl. When I finally open my eyes I see the figure standing over me, sharpening an old fashioned straight razor on a tan leather strop. I can't even bring myself to sanely contemplate what fresh hell is being prepared for me.

The scraping stops and the strop is carefully rolled up and placed upon the rolling tray. I brace for some quick slash to my body, tearing a bloody smile in some soft, sensitive, possibly even personal, area of my flesh. To my surprise, my captor leans in and gently strokes my hair. The blade touches my scalp, right at the edge of my forehead, so I tense again in expectation of another scalping. The stroking hand never ceases. I even hear a low cooing from him and, God forgive, it actually starts to relax me.

The free hand slides back over my hair, flattening it tight against my head. I feel the razor begin its work, slowly shaving me. He takes his time, making certain to get everything perfectly

smooth. The cool air feels almost nice against my newly shorn skull, and would be in a completely different context. Once he has finished with the top of my head, he moves to my face. My eyebrows are gone in a few brief strokes. A couple more swipes and the fine hair above my lips is no longer.

He works his way down the length of my body in a similar fashion, cleaning me of all hair, no matter how fine. The blade scrapes down my arms, even over my fingers. It runs across my chest, down my legs, over the tops of my feet, even smoothing out what stubble had grown in the places I normally shave myself. The occasional times when the metal would nick me, the blood was quickly, and gently, dabbed with cotton. I was so confused by this apparent change of heart.

He finished up and meticulously cleaned the blade. He disappeared from my limited view and, after a few moments of silence, I heard something that sounded like the clattering of the handle on a metal bucket. The bucket was then set on the bed down near my feet. Metal tongs gripping a wad of cotton padding dipped into the bucket. When he lifted it back out, he tapped the tongs on the edge of the bucket, knocking off droplets of excess liquid. Was my newly gentle tormentor going to bathe me, too? He brought the cotton over the top of the bucket and even before the wadding touched me, I felt a few drops hit my calf. Oh, God. Not water. Acid!

Wood splinters loudly from the other room. Voices, manly authoritative voices flood the air. Several people entered, surrounding me in shades of blue. Dark blues of police. Light blues of EMT's. Where did my torturer go? Wait...this is my bedroom. My own bed. How? Faces, too many faces, fill my vision. Questions, too many questions, fill my ears. A light is flashed at my eyes. Fingers are snapped in front of my face.

During the ruckus I hear someone warn, “Watch the mirror,” then a shattering sound. What mirror? My grandmother’s mirror? I turn my head and briefly see the partial reflection of my makeup-free face in the one shard still attached to the antique floor mirror before my view is blocked by light blue legs. I feel my body lifted from the bed onto another. I start to roll.

then...

darkness...

I wake in a different room. A sterile room. Machines, beeping, curtains. Through the window I see people standing in the hall. My parents. My boss. A...is that a doctor? The door is open, so I hear snippets of their conversation.

“...severely dehydrated...”

“...didn’t show up this morni...”

“...dn’t seen her since Friday...”

“...debilitating manic depress...”

“...need long term observation...”

“...had an incident in years...”

I tune them out. I don’t want to hear anymore. I roll over onto my side. From this position I can see out the window to the early autumn day. Most of the leaves on the tree there are still green, but some are lighter green and a few are yellow. A blue jay lands on one of the branches.

It hops over to a cluster of berries hanging from the branch above it and plucks at them. I watch it eat until it flies away, free to soar on the wind. So beautifully free. Tears blur my view. I try, unsuccessfully, to blink them away, so I just close my eyes, blocking out the entire world.

then...

darkness...

The End