

In the Cold, Cold Night

By Megan Danaher

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Pulling the drink off of the shelf, his head swam. He witnessed something he wished he never had. He wasn't prepared. The arm... the leg... the blood... it haunted his sleeping mind and taunted the waking.

It was 3 years ago, to this day that Donny had married the love of his life. She was so gorgeous...an absolute dream of a woman, but it was gone to him now. Even the beautiful sunshine that they had created, Mary, was dwindling in and out of existence, only *fully* living in his mind.

His mother once got mad at their priest for even hinting the soldiers could be afraid to die in a war zone; but fuck, isn't that human? To be afraid of losing it all?

His phone rang.

Zoey.

Goddamn it.

"Hi Zoe." He said, slurred quietly.

"Donny, will you ever come out of the hole you dug for yours-"

He hung up. He was sick of hearing people telling him he should 'pull himself up by the bootstraps'; 'it will get better'; 'talk to me'. It was too much. They would never be able to understand the hell your mind goes to when you lose someone. The guilt. The shame. The going back and forth between trying to pick up the pieces of a shattered life, or rejoining your love in another life.

The only thing keeping him from ending it all was Mary, but even then, she would never be the same from the happy, jovial girl of three.

Extreme brain damage. That's what the doctors diagnosed it as. Several times, they had to pull her back from the brink, and on more than one occasion, they had asked if he would pull the plug. Maybe it was selfishness that held him back, or a hope beyond a hope, but every night, he prayed. Prayed that somehow... someway... that god would step down from his high horse and help someone for once, instead of going along with some "unknown and otherworldly plan".

"You fucker... listen to me." Setting down his glass, he walked towards the door. In the kitchen, the phone rang. He felt weak. The hospital only rang through the house phone, and his knees almost gave way. Bile hit the back of his throat as he made his way down the hall. 3rd ring. 4th ring. He threw up in the kitchen garbage pail, and finally gathered the courage to pick up the phone.

"Mr. D'Ambruso?" It was Doctor Kennard, her voice was hushed. Had it happened again?

"What happened? Is my baby girl-" He was panicking. Kennard wasn't speaking, only the quiet telephone static to make him manic.

"Mr. D'Ambruso, we need you to come in, something's happened." Still quiet. Still monotone.

"What-" no, no, not this...

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"I cannot stress to you further, the urgency of which you must arrive. I will fill you in when you get here." She was pleading in a non-empathetic way, but he knew that she was connected to Mary. Connected in a way that doctor should never be connected to patient. With care, and some would even call it love.

Hanging up, Donny ran to his room, gathered his coat, and leaving through the front door, something stopped him. The Christmas tree in the living room. Pink, Red, and Green presents under the tree. Some for him, others for Her, but above all else, most for Mary. He turned on his heels and picked up a gift that was from Her to Mary.

'From Mommy to Mary, you are my most dear sunshine and I hope you love this present that Mommy and Daddy picked out especially for you. With all the love in the universe, Mommy!'

He took the medium sized box, as he walked out of the house and headed towards the car.

[illegible]

"Donny, it's Mary." Doctor Kennard said as he neared the ICU.

“Just take me to her please, I have to see her...” Donny was crying, he hated everything about this Christmas, everything about his life at this moment, he just wanted to see his-

“Stop for one second, Donny!” She threw her hands out to stop him mid-stride. “She is responsive, she had another seizure right before we called you, but in the span of then until now, she began to respond as Nurse Jackie was changing her IV. She first moaned, then tried to speak. Don, she looks to be coming back to us.”

He froze, then a deeper feeling than he had ever felt before took ahold of him. He broke out into a sprint with Doctor Kennard following right after him. His heart swelled, something he never thought he would experience again. A love of his life was coming back to him, and it was a gift only to be given by God.

As he turned the corner, Mary was asleep, all of the doctors and nurses in the ICU gathered around her bed. Some crying, others shaking their heads in amazement. Donny walked quietly up to her bed, tears streaming more than they were before. Setting the present down on the foot of her bed. He sat down, gingerly taking her hand in his.

“Thank you for this... All of you... You never gave up, even when I was going to give up myself.” The room was quiet, silence only to be broken by a small voice.

“Mooma...?”