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DR. TIME

by S.A. Schneider

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"Good morning, dear. Time to wake up."

I groan, or try to groan, at the sound of my wife's voice. I love her dearly, but why does her voice sound like nails on a chalkboard in the morning. Maybe it's just me. Probably just me.

I hear her starting to stride down the hall, her brisk steps seeming to pound into my head, and I valiantly sit up. There, hope she's happy.

"Oh, good, you're up. All right dear, I've laid out your clothes, do you need help dressing?" she asks this sweetly, but do I detect a hint of malice, maybe loathing, in that tone? Could just be me. Probably not just me.

"No dear, thanks," I croak. She gives me a smile as she leaves. I don't smile back. I think she's starting to hate me, not that I could blame her, right?

Once I struggle the clothes on, I shuffle to the door, glancing at the clock as I pass it on the stand. Really? Is that just one more mockery, that it takes me over 20 minutes to get dressed. Just to get dressed?

As I continue shuffling down the hall, I hear her light steps from below and then her voice floats up.

"Dear, are you at the top of the steps yet? Should I start breakfast? I just don't want it to get cold."

Yeah, it would suck to have cold eggs, life's tragedies. Ok, maybe I'm feeling a bit of self-pity this morning. Yeah,

probably.

I gather my strength and roar, "No," and then cough for half an eternity.

"What was that dear? I couldn't quite hear you," she says. "It's ok, I'll wait a bit."

All right, all right, so it was more little a kitten whine than a roar, leave me my fantasies.

Hearing my plodding feet on the creaky stairs, she says she'll start breakfast. At least it's something to look forward to. My stomach growls and I grimace. Damn. Even that hurts. When your stomach says it's hungry and it hurts, that's when life really starts sucking, right? Forget the 'my hair hurts' stuff, if you can't enjoy eating, why bother? Sorry, maybe it's just me.

She's already sitting and almost done eating by the time I clomp into the kitchen. Rising to help me, she stops and sits back down after my glare catches her eye. I haven't lived this long, and with this pain, just to be treated like an invalid. Is that what I am? Yeah, ok, so what. I don't want to be treated like one and I won't be. I'll die first. Maybe.

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"Hello Mr. Sanders, let me help you."

I can't summon to strength to glare or tell the nurse no as

she grabs my elbow, guiding me through the door. The trip here has taken most of the day and I'm done in. I feel my arm trembling as I try to lift the cane for the next step. The nurse is on one side of me with my wife on the other, holding my sagging body from hitting the floor unceremoniously. All right, let's be honest, they are carrying me with my feet dragging.

Once I'm in the room waiting for the doctor, I recover some of my strength.

"I'm getting pretty darn tired of this," I wheeze out.

My wife, my lovely, supportive wife, looks at me and for an instant I see some anger and loathing before the all too common pity settles on her features. I want to yell at her, I want to scream. I sit catching my breath.

"I know dear, it has been hard. But try to remember the good side, you are still here, we are still together. Originally the doctor didn't think you would make it six months, and here you are, two years later and still with me."

Was that a bit of sarcasm and resentment I hear in her voice. Could be. Probably is. Not that I blame her. Yay me, I beat dying only to end up so miserable I think it would be preferable to be dead. I'm pretty sure my wife would agree with that assessment. Probably.

"This isn't living. This is dying alive," I mumble. I don't care if she hears me or not.

"Dear, the doctor will figure this out and you'll get

better."

"Will he?" I make an effort and glare at her. "I mean, he thought I was going to die and was wrong about that, huh? Wasn't he?"

She looks at me, serenely, but I know I see some anger seething beneath the surface. Not that I blame her. Not really.

"We must have faith, dear. You're alive, that's the important part."

I don't bother arguing with her, it would take too much strength. But she's wrong. She doesn't have to live like I do, live like I'm dead but just can't stop breathing. Except I wish I could stop breathing, it hurts so badly.

The door opens and there is the doctor. Bright sunny smile plastered on his face. I hate him. Thanks for telling me I was dying, doc, only to be wrong and then tell me you have no idea why I'm in such pain anymore. Thanks.

"How are you feeling, Mr. Sanders? Still alive I see."

I'm going to punch him right in the nose, pow. I want to punch him. At least I'm thinking of punching him, I'm too tired to actually raise my arms.

"I think he's doing better, Doctor. Yesterday he had more energy, didn't you dear? I think the pain has been less on some day, too, right dear?"

I nod my head, more like a bit of a jiggle. What the hell? It doesn't really matter anyway, the doctor hasn't been able to

do anything for me.

He examines me while asking more questions, which my wife answers. I just sit, I don't care any longer. I do wish he had been right about that original diagnosis and I had died, believe me, that would be better than this existence I've been living.

"Well, Mr. Sanders," the doc starts, sitting on his stupid little stool while looking at my wife as much as me. "The good news is, you are still alive. You seem to be a true miracle of science. I am glad to have been wrong in this case."

He smiles. Maybe it's the pain of continuing to stay sitting, but that smile looks malicious to me. I turn my eyes to see if my wife has caught that, but she's just beaming looking at me and then back at the doctor.

"It is wonderful, Doctor. But he is still in such pain, more pain than he ever had before your diagnosis. Isn't there anything we can do now?"

"Well, Mrs. Sanders, I'm not sure. I mean, just being alive should be considered a gift. Yes, a great gift."

He pauses and again I think I catch a hint of something almost sinister in his smile. Maybe it's just me. Probably it's just me.

"Mr. Sanders, I'll send the nurse in to take some blood. There are some new treatments I've been trying with some patients that may help you. We'll talk after your blood is analyzed."

He rises, shakes my wife's hand than lifts mine to shake it. It hurts moving, even when it's not me causing the movement. Then he's gone. Gee, thanks doc, big help.

I need to pee, and if I don't start to the restroom now, I will likely pee my pants before I get there. After some fussing, my wife just holds the door for me as I glide out, slowly, like a snail. Luckily, the restrooms aren't far and I think I can make it.

After just a few steps, I'm tuckered out and my left knee is screaming in pain. I can't help it, I need to rest. Will I be back on the ball court with the guys shooting layups soon? Doubt it, I can't even get up the strength to turn the game on TV. I angle towards the wall, no a door, falling into it more than a controlled lean. To my surprise, I don't stop. The door isn't latched and I fall into the room. Just great, now I'll probably pee my pants before I can get up. Then, I pee my pants anyway.

What I see is the most horrific thing I've ever witnessed. Is it just me? Am I hallucinating? Could be, but I don't think so.

On the patient table is a man, similar in age to me. Standing in front of him is the doctor. But that is where the normalcy ends. The doctors head is split and folded open, the top half of his head laying back like someone cut open a ball. His mouth, where the split occurs, has a hose, no, a tube, projecting out of it and attached to this other patients head.

There are what look like balls of glowing light flowing in the tube, not out of the patient as you'd expect in some cheesy horror movie, but from the doctor to the patient.

Before I can comprehend any of this or call for help, the doctor, half his head still lolling back, jumps and the tube snaps back from the patient and down the doctors throat. Crazyly, it reminds me of a measuring tape when you flip that little switch to drag it all back in. Once the tube has disappeared, he turns as his head rights itself back together.

"Oh, Mr. Sanders, that was a bad thing, a very bad thing. You should not have seen that, no you shouldn't. And here, I've done so much for you. I mean, look at you, still alive even when you would have been dead with any other doctor."

He looks at me sadly, slight shake to his head. What insanity is this? I must be really insane. Am I insane? Probably. Feebly, I strain to pull myself back, away from this monster, to the door and safety. Casually, he steps over me and shuts the door. Well crap.

"Mr. Sanders, I'm afraid we may have to change our deal. I have had such a wonderful track record. So many patients that have gotten to live. Me, that was me, giving that to them. And you, I might add. And I was close, really close, to fixing the problems - the aches and pains your body experiences when it knows it should be dead. The pains of the dead on the living, you might say."

The doctor steps closer, way too close, like right up next to me.

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Sanders, that you won't get the chance to experience that. I truly am sorry, I thought you might be one of the first. You really shouldn't have come in here. It makes the suffering you've had mean nothing."

I think he may have said I'm sorry once more, I'm not sure. I was too busy focusing on his head splitting again and that tube stretching out right towards my ...