

THE STONE WALL, THE NIGHTMARE, AND THE LIGHT

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The loud sound of shattering glass made Chris jump. He could almost feel small pebbles of glass bouncing off his face. This was the third nightmare in two hours. Still half asleep, Chris tried to open his eyes. They wouldn't budge. His eyelids felt sore and heavy, as if they were weighted. Chris swallowed, but realized there was something blocking his airway. Thrown into panic, he tried to move his arms to his mouth. They wouldn't move either. Faintly, he heard the sound of a beep getting louder and faster.

"Shh . . . relax," a voice said. It didn't take long for Chris to know it was his father's. Chris felt his dad's grip on his shoulder, but couldn't acknowledge it. The beeping sounded like it was slowing down. It almost sounded like a heart monitor.

Am I in the hospital? Chris thought. His throat began to clench shut. It wouldn't move far because of the object in his throat. Maybe it was a tube. Maybe it was for food. Maybe it was for life.

"Chris, you there, tough guy?"

Yes, he thought. Chris couldn't understand why he couldn't talk. Inside, he felt himself screaming, begging for strength to move. Tightening up his body, Chris felt his muscles spasm. He pushed with force, concentrating on his right leg. Suddenly, he felt his leg go up in the air and come crashing down. Satisfied, he tried to smile, but nothing happened. He remained still.

"Ok buddy, just relax," his father said. He heard the squeak of the chair as his father leaned closer to him. "Some friends want to come in, ok?"

Chris couldn't do anything to respond; his body was again lifeless. Even his leg wouldn't move. Chris thought that maybe once his friends were here, he would be able to open his eyes, sit up, and understand. He heard footsteps and voices approaching, but it was a whisper.

"How are the other two, Mr. B?" Chris knew the voice was his friend, Rick. Other two? he thought. The other two. That's when Chris slipped back into the nightmare. But it wasn't a nightmare, it was real. The car, the road, the stone wall. The heart monitor sped up again, so Chris relaxed. All he wanted was to open his eyes and hug his father. He realized he'd done wrong. Everyone had warned him, but everyone deserves a second chance, right?

"Chris, get up out of bed!" Chris' friend Joe was shaking his ankle, always trying to be annoying. It felt good that his friends cared, but it hurt that he'd let them down. Chris then decided that within the next five minutes he would wake up. He would open his weighted eyes, take the tube from his mouth, and talk. He'd tell Joe to get a haircut, Rick to get guitar lessons, and tell Alyssa he's be in love with her since eighth grade. Then, he would just say he was sorry. So sorry.

"Chris is going to wake up on Father's Day for me, right?"

No, Dad, Chris thought. That's too long. I'm waking up now. He could hear his father's voice getting choked up and Alyssa sobbing.

"Only a minute or two longer," Chris heard a woman say. It must be a nurse. This was it then, now or never. Chris had two minutes to wake up and end the nightmare.

"All right Chris, these guys are leaving. How 'bout a thumbs up?" Chris heard his father say.

“Come on, Chris!” everyone started to shout. Chris began to push strength towards his right thumb. He could feel his pulse growing and waited for his nerves to succumb to the command.

“Please, Chris.” It was Alyssa. He imagined her blonde hair, her blue eyes, her small hands. He pushed even harder. As he slowly felt his thumb began to rise, he saw a light; like a dim flashlight. His three friends cheered as Chris’s thumb stayed upright. The light began to get bright, really bright. It soon became so bright that he wanted to close his eyes.

Close my eyes? he thought. That’s it, he must be awake. He was alive. Awake. He now could see something other than the horror of darkness that had taken him. He turned his head to the left and saw his father, tired with hope. To his right, he could clearly see Joe, Rick, and Alyssa. He reached out to touch Alyssa, but she faded away. The light became so bright, Chris couldn’t see anyone. Holding back his tears, Chris swallowed and realized that there was no longer a tube in his throat. Smiling, he felt alive; back to normal before cars, loud music, and the stone wall. With everything he could gather, Chris forced himself to sit up.

He rubbed his eyes, hoping to regain sight. The heart monitor began to accelerate. Chris put his hands to his chest to check for wires. None. Chris even realized he was wearing his favorite jeans and Yankee shirt. The heart monitor got louder. And faster. Chris swallowed as he was beginning to have a hard time breathing. He turned to see if his father was visible, but crashed backwards against the bed. Gasping for air, he could only focus on the light. He couldn’t move his head from side to side. The feeling of the tube jammed in his throat returned. Chris could still move his arms. He put them to his mouth but couldn’t feel the tube. Again, he heard the heart monitor. It lasted a few seconds, and then it was a long, steady beep. Chris felt like he was in a trance by the sound. He could hear his father crying, his friends’ yells, and the

voices of what he assumed to be doctors and nurses clearing the room. It all soon sounded like a soft cheer. It reminded him of his first home run when he was seven. That, of course, was before the stone wall, the nightmare, and the light.