

# MOVING ON

As I gun the small car around a curve in the road my cell-phone rings softly. I'm running a little late – it was a shit of a day at work – and I guess that it's Sarah calling. Probably wondering where I am. We're supposed to be all going out for dinner, for my daughter's birthday and I should have been home twenty minutes ago.

I glance across at the little phone, lying on the vacant passenger seat, to see who is calling. At that moment the other car hits me, broadside, right on the driver's side door. It comes careering out of a side street, far too fast to take the corner safely and clearly ignoring the Stop sign it has practically flown through.

I half glimpse a blur of blue as the car punches into mine with a sickeningly loud scream of metal tearing metal. The width of my car is practically halved in an instant and I feel every breath in me abruptly leave.

My car spins a full circle, bouncing over the roadside kerb and on towards the trees and bush alongside. The other car seems to have fused with mine and scrapes and squeals alongside, locked in a grim embrace. Then, abruptly, it breaks free as we reach the trees, rolling away to disappear into the bushes somewhere behind my field of vision.

I didn't see the other driver, nor can I now see the road I have just left. Blood is seeping down my face, blurring my vision. I struggle to breathe and feel nothing much beyond a swaying and spinning inside my head. I may be upside down but I'm really not sure.

I should be scared but oddly realise that I'm more concerned about messing up the birthday dinner than anything else. I want to call home and try to look around the car for my still ringing cell-phone. I can hear it somewhere off in the distance, but all I can see through my haziness is a dim impression of the car's dashboard lights and its splintered windscreen. I try to move, but can't. My body simply won't respond.

With the persistent trilling of the cell-phone beginning to frustrate me, my sight blurs even further before unexpectedly clearing sharply. Now I am outside the car, lying on my back, staring up into the evening sky through the trees. A bicycle wheel is spinning in a tree above me, with a red reflector thing lodged between its spokes which flashes at me every time the wheel completes a turn. Suddenly the dark shape of a very large man moves into my line of sight and stands there, looming over me. Then he's gone. Darkness falls abruptly and I'm back in my car, pinned in my seat, with blood washing down my face.

That damn cell-phone is still ringing insistently. My chest shudders as I fight for air. I think I hear a voice calling out somewhere nearby. Then the ringing cuts off abruptly. The silence is frightening and I shiver, although I'm not cold.

Pain suddenly shoots through my forehead like a bolt of lightning and the darkness descends again, this time enveloping me completely.

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My hospital room smells clean and antiseptic. It's dimly lit and there is a half-drawn curtain around my bed, shielding me from god-only-knows what. Someone has just left the room, I think maybe a nurse, and the door clicking shut behind her has awoken me.

Staring through the night gloom at the panelled ceiling above I try to get my head straight. I begin to recall a car accident and wonder hazily if I've been badly hurt.

I can feel crisp white sheets and cotton blankets and can just make out white painted steel tubing visible beyond the bumps my feet present beneath the blankets. Oddly the bed doesn't feel right somehow. It seems too large for standard hospital issue. Too comfy.

I'm pleased to see my feet though and hesitantly try shifting them, careful that I might send pain shooting through my body. But, other than some stiffness down my right side, there's nothing unusual and my legs respond easily. I'm not dancing yet, but I am relieved.

Encouraged, I raise my right hand and check my stomach and chest. Then I bring my left hand up for both to complete the journey to my face. My arms seem to be working fine and my head is still in place, excellent. And it feels like my face is still all there too. Two ears and a nose. Even better. But I think I may be missing a tooth or two. Damn, that'll be expensive to fix. And I find a bandage of some kind around my head, but it isn't too tight.

Thank god. I'm effectively in one piece.

It's still very dim in the room and I gingerly lift my head to try and see around, discovering that moving makes my head hurt. There is a window at the foot of my bed with patterned curtains drawn over it. Lights from either the road or neon signs glow through the thin material.

I wonder how my family is feeling. I'll have missed little Katherine's fifth birthday dinner, undoubtedly ruining the occasion. I'm annoyed at myself and resolve that Daddy will make it up to her. She'll forgive me, I feel sure.

I have no idea what time it is and can see no clock in the room. I'm disappointed there is no bedside vigil, but I understand. It must be very late and the kids will have school tomorrow. Sarah will come and see me in the morning. And if I only have a few aches and bruises to deal with then I should be discharged fairly quickly tomorrow. We can have Katherine's birthday dinner tonight, or tomorrow night, instead.

Moving my head slowly I look carefully to my left. Damn, but that smarts. Another bed is across the way and there is a sleeping mound beneath the blanket. Shame. There's no such thing as a private room these days. At least he isn't snoring.

Through the gloom I catch sight of two posters on the wall above the other bed. One looks like a fat guy wearing a mask - like the lone ranger. Big letters spell out The Incredibles above him. He's not familiar. I narrow my eyes. The other one is more obvious, it's Batman. You're kidding me. What on earth is a Batman poster doing on the wall of a hospital room?

Foolishly I try to sit up, but a thunderstorm of pain crashes around inside my head and the darkness washes over me again.

I wake as a nurse draws the curtains back from the window. Its morning and light streams in to show me that the nurse is tall and dark and quite attractive.

'Good Morning,' I try to say, but the words come out somewhat higher and thinner than I intended. I cough to try and clear my throat.

The nurse turns and looks at me. She smiles and moves to my bedside, gently laying an open hand lightly against the side of my face. I'm surprised at the intimacy, but I don't pull away. She leans over to look down at me. There is concern and some tenderness in her eyes, but I can't help being distracted by a flash of lacey bra through the uniform buttons. She looks to be barely in her twenties, and probably stops traffic in that uniform.

'How's the head feeling, tough guy?' she asks.

I'm almost lost for words. Is this girl coming on to me? I'm almost old enough to be her father. I must be still asleep and dreaming, but I try to reply anyway.

'It's good...' is all I can manage. My voice again sounds somehow wrong, but I'm quite distracted by the pretty young nurse. I cough again and wince as the pain returns.

'Hmm...' she murmurs, obviously not convinced. Stepping back she checks the chart hanging from the end of my bed. She looks at me again over it, saying nothing, seeming to expect questions or demands that aren't forthcoming. I offer up a winning smile and she appears bemused by this. Returning the chart to its hook she shakes her head just a little as she moves to push the curtains further back from around my bed.

'Are you hungry? The breakfast trolley has already been around but I can get you a little something if you like?' she offers softly.

I try and pull myself up onto one elbow and suddenly realise how hungry I am.

'God yes, please. What are my chances of steak, egg and chips?'

She frowns, returning to the bedside and motioning me to stay lying down, which I do fairly quickly as my brain is now thumping at my eyeballs from the inside.

'You need more rest, don't try and get up yet,' she says, then pushes a button near the bed-head. A quiet motor whirs softly, raising me into a semi-sitting position. 'And it's a big No-Can-Do on the heavy cholesterol, young man, but I think I can find you something that may once have been eggs. Will that do?'

Young man? My head is pounding, but I appreciate her sense of humour.

'Sounds good enough,' I respond. Again my voice feels oddly unfamiliar, but I've given up trying to cough the frog out of it. 'Any chance of a coffee? White, no sugar.'

The pretty nurse looks puzzled. Then she shakes her head lightly, leaving the room saying simply, 'Back soon.'

I watch her go and delight in finding the view from behind easily as intoxicating as that from the front. Doesn't every man love a girl in uniform?

Turning back from the door I finally survey the hospital room in full light. My bed is nearest the door with a window facing it. Once again I find myself thinking that it seems to be a pretty damn big bed. Things have changed since I was last in hospital.

The previously sleeping mound in the bed beside mine is now awake too. I'm startled momentarily to see that it's a young boy, probably only about twelve or so. Surely that can't be right. Don't they put kids in a separate ward? He's reading quietly, a large hard-cover book, Harry Potter and the something-in-a-smaller-font-size. I've never heard of it. It seems an awfully big book for a child. The boy has big ears and very short hair, almost shaved. He ignores me and I decide not to try and start a conversation.

Above him, on the wall, are the two posters I'd glimpsed last night. The fat Incredible's guy is wearing a red suit while the Batman poster is for a movie called 'Batman Begins' starring Christian Bale. I don't recall seeing that one, it must be an oldie. And what happened to George Clooney; isn't he the current Batman? Mind you, they do keep changing actor. I can't help but think that these are pretty obscure choices of art, really – for a hospital ward.

Then, from the corner of my eye, I catch a glimpse of a young face at the window. Looking over I see a blonde haired boy with a large bandage around his head, staring at me through the window. The boy's face is bruised and a little scratched. He looks about nine, or maybe ten, and he seems a little confused.

After a moment I realise that this boy isn't outside the window but in a hospital bed, propped up and staring at me. His eyes widen in surprise and his mouth falls open.

Suddenly I can't breathe and I feel sure my heart has stopped beating. I raise my hand to my head and the boy in the window's reflection mirrors me, gently touching a blonde bang of his own hair that is poking through the bandage.

This isn't possible; I can feel the hair on my fingertips.

I stare in utter shock at my own reflection.

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