

Crazy Beats Strong Every Time

by Alexis McCauley

I have days when I must remind myself that I chose my profession with great deliberation. That is to say, I continued to *pursue* my career and its path with said deliberation. I loved my job as ER Tech, most days. The position let me do everything from wound care, to casting broken bones, to CPR during a code blue. Having started my experience in Emergency medicine as an EMT in Arizona, this job was better paying and better staffed than driving around an ambulance. I had learned to manage pressure, and maintain my calm and common sense, no matter how overwhelming things got. This ability served me well. However, there was one day- one scenario- that no matter how much training, no matter how calm our staff remained, all of us were destined to lose control of the situation; and it hurt more than one person.

The patient, 18-year-old John Doe, was brought in via ambulance in full restraints and giving the crew abuse through the ugliest threats and obscenities imaginable.

“Leave me alone you commie instigators, you government robots!”

This was followed by an unending string of obscenities. Spittle flew from his mouth, and he would shake the entire stretcher he was lying on with his jerking and fighting against the restraints; this stripling who looked like he could barely support his body weight. His limbs were wiry and thin, his frame purely skeletal, yet he managed to move a 172-pound gurney. He harassed everyone he saw without scruple all while trying to free himself from the gurney. His story provided by the medic would wrench even the hardest heart who heard it.

This high school student had witnessed his grandfather’s suicide by shotgun 6 months ago and was the poor soul to call 911. When medics arrived at the house, this youth was holding his grandfather’s head in his lap and crying, desperately maintaining pressure to his head to stave off the bleeding (*a sadly futile effort*). The grandfather was dead on arrival at the hospital. The tragedy left this young man with demons stalking every corner of his existence, tormenting him.

How does one come back from watching the only caregiver they have ever known kill themselves? The answer is ... they don't. Soon after his grandfather's suicide, John Doe began using drugs to silence the darkness that seemed to pollute his conscious mind, which led to his trials and addiction to heroin. This traumatized youth brought in tied to a stretcher had decided his life was no longer worth living and attempted to hang himself in the apartment shared with his girlfriend. A cycle perpetuated.

The girlfriend called 911 when she found him and was directed to care until EMS could arrive. During her dispatcher-directed CPR, the patient became somewhat responsive, yet combative (*common amongst failed suicide attempts*). So, he was a spitting, angry, restrained teen when brought to our ER, with his less than a lucid girlfriend in tow. The slackness of her face and the hollow look in her eyes told us that she also fought the demon called heroin, the same as her boyfriend. One of those poor individuals fighting any number of internal demons that no one else can even begin to comprehend. Her soul was vacant and hurting, anyone could see this. And the two lost souls found diversion within each other and their shared habits.

* * *

The young man was placed in a room by the nurse's station where we could keep an eye on him. After several hours of shouting and physically wearing himself out, the patient seemed to calm down. During this moment of lucidity, he provided me with more details about his grandfather's suicide and his downward spiral into drug addiction, while I took his health assessment. He shared with me his growth self-loathing that drove him to buy a deadly 'cocktail' of drugs that would aid him in his plan to kill himself. "I figured, if I took enough drugs, I would not even be awake enough to bitch out of it. Ya know?"

No, I did not know. I could not even imagine, but I could most definitely *empathize* with his circumstances. How hopeless and devastating must it seem when your need for escape comes from

your own hostile mind and the destructive thoughts it encourages. How much he must have been suffering to feel death was the only or best answer. It was now my purpose to care for him and impart my warmth and consideration for his troubles. I acknowledged how difficult things sounded and seemed to him at that moment but proposed that he did not have to struggle alone. He was somewhere safe, where he could access numerous resources that could help him. He grew quiet and dropped eye contact turning his head away to stare into a corner.

I then left the room to inform the doctor of the possible 'cocktail' of drugs he had taken. He remained quiet after I left, the silence almost overwhelming after hours of screaming.

Unbeknownst to our staff, one of our nurses absentmindedly left his restraints key in the room where the girlfriend used it to release him from his bindings. As we watched the door slowly swing open over an hour later, I pictured that moment in a horror movie when the first victim dies...everyone just staring dumbly at the oncoming villain. We watched from the nurse's station as this scrawny, desperate lad walked out of his room with his girlfriend and her vacant eyes in a chokehold.

He screamed at us, "If you do not let me go, I will kill my hostage!!"

Shock ran through his audience as we began to question, how did he get out of restraints? How could he take his girlfriend hostage?

As a single entity, our staff reacted. A few nurses came out from behind the desk to slowly approach him, while others picked up the phone to call for assistance. Those of us approaching the couple kept our voice low and soothing, like a mantra for peace, "John we are only here to help you. If you stay calm, we won't even need to restrain you any longer. How about that?... Should we head back to your room?"

We needed to keep him and his girlfriend calm. Three of us kept up a slow skulk toward the room and the couple, maintaining an innocent, non-threatening appearance. Already, we had planned to separate the girlfriend from the guy in any way possible, as he had no weapons on his person. While

two male staff approached and distracted John, I made a quick grab for the girl. An empty shell of a person, she allowed me to yank her from her boyfriend's grip and toss her slack figure to the waiting staff and joined in the attempt to subdue our John Doe. The four of us tussled; the stripling fought with strength unknown in a sober, sane human being. He managed to take all three of us down and as a group, we went backward over the gurney landing in a confused heap on the other side. We tussled briefly in the tight slot between the wall and the bed before I managed to grab his two ankles and sit on his lanky legs while the other two male staff sat on his torso and shoulders. It took all our strength to keep him on the floor as he fought, with all his might, against us. It was not until three additional hospital security guards joined the fray that we were able to restrain this 110-pound young man once again for *everyone's* safety. Once again, he was secured to the gurney, and once again he was screaming at us.

"You fuckers are the antichrist! When I get free, I am going to kill every single one of you! I will chop your heads off and leave you to bleed! If I ever see you in a parking lot, I will make sure you don't leave alive. Fuck you!"

Shaking and attempting to take in any injuries, we begin to walk out of his room. A bald, scary-looking police officer with a full-on tactical vest and dual leg gun holsters stride into the room.

Getting within a breath of this boy's face, the police officer shouts at him "you better shut your mouth now, or you and I are going to have issues! These people are medical staff; you don't fuck with them while we are in your vicinity." He makes a sweeping gesture to two other officers surrounding his bed. I scuttled away from the room feeling quite guilty and a bit sad that these officers wouldn't be offering John any goodwill or tolerance now that he had assaulted three medical workers. I still couldn't help but feel pity and concern for the young man despite being one of the victims. He just was not in a good place and was completely unable to make anything but poor decisions.

Left alone in his room with the police officers and their threats, the patient quickly calmed and quieted down. It wasn't long until the tactical gear officer came back out to get statements from the staff members involved. Sadly, to attack a medical professional is a felony and this kid had attacked three of us, one of the male nurses was even being treated for a bad knee injury. Once he was sober and calmed down, we all agreed the best thing was to get him involuntarily admitted to an inpatient psychiatric hospital, which required those of us injured to forgo charges so long as he remained under an involuntary inpatient psychiatric hold until the state deemed him "better."

Of the two male staffers, one required knee surgery, and the other required physical therapy for an injured elbow. It wasn't long after this event that I was required to undergo back surgery for two severely herniated discs in my lower back that were causing damage to my sciatic nerve. This surgery required a two-day stay in the hospital and a total of six months towards recovery. I spent six weeks out of work, and almost four months on narcotics for pain. My prescription use made me think of John Doe and his reliance on the opioid Heroin, I began to worry about my developing pain medication dependency. I was lucky as I was able to rid myself of my need for these medications once they were deemed unnecessary, although I admit it was *quite* a slow, unpleasant process. Often, my thoughts would wander to John Doe; whether he had won the battle with his own drug use.

* * *

I walked into work two months after the incident, for my first shift since the surgery and my eyes were drawn to his old room. We all knew we did the right thing not pressing charges, but it was an ordeal that would affect the rest of my life. We each recovered from our injuries, and I like to think John Doe recovered from his. You can never truly understand the demons another human being is fighting, nor the trauma that torments their every waking moment. Never have I met two individuals so obviously in the tug of war for their soul as John and his girlfriend were. And I need to believe that John, and maybe even his girlfriend, got the help they needed to win the internal battle he waged for his daily existence.