



GARY GRONEL

The hypochondriac

“I think I’m dying, I need to find a pharmacy! That minimart will do, before the storm kills me. I wonder if they have a medicine counter”.

You’re constantly ill, you show the symptoms of every disease you’ve ever heard of, whether from TV or other people. You’re a true artist: You’ve managed to get into three open-chest surgeries without a single exam or existing pathology.

Your masterwork was blackmailing Robert Garland, the infamous surgeon, into treating you for appendicitis. After months of stalking you caught him snorting coke in the hospital, and you threatened to publish the photos if he refused to patch you up. You’d planned everything, even a system to get the pictures to a local newspaper if you died on the operating table.

Indeed, for all the thrills you get when you’re under surgery, you find the idea of dying to be terrifying: Corpses scare the shit out of you, giving you bouts of catatonia and incoherent crying.

Your condition is probably due to the insane envy you felt towards your brother, who was diagnosed with leukemia and died when you were still little boys. Your family only had eyes for him and his health, while you struggled to catch their attention by harming yourself, going so far as to attempt suicide. Then your brother’s condition worsened and they forced you to donate some of your marrow: You hoped you’d become their hero through that sacrifice, but then Daniel died,

ruining everything. The memory of that morning is crystal clear. You woke up a few days after the transplant, only to find him dead by your side; yes, his therapy had left your family destitute, and you shared a single bed in a tiny room.

Ever since that day, you’ve taken a dangerous path: to make people love you, you stuff yourself with the heaviest medication you can find, and all you get in return are unstable health and the looming presence of death over your shoulder. You’re only comfortable around doctors and nurses, because whenever they write you a prescription you know you have their full attention.

Profile

You don’t have a stable job: Who would want an employee with your record for medical leaves? When you get fired, you just look for something else; you only care about the health coverage.

You’re obviously ill, though not in body: After Daniel’s death your mind snapped once and for all, and all you’ve done ever since is digging yourself deeper with obsessions and reckless medication.

Structure

You’re a disaster. You stumble around clumsily and inevitably bump against people and things alike. Sometimes, when the impact is stronger than usual, you rub the hurting limb and mutter under your breath, cursing the offending party.

You often hold your hand over your forehead like you’re checking for fever. Imaginary pains run through your abdomen, symptoms of ever-new ailments. During these fits you grit your teeth and grip your belly in a vain attempt to find relief.

Acquaintances

Robert Garland, the doctor you caught snorting coke in the hospital and promptly blackmailed, exchanging your silence for an appendix surgery. Less-motivated doctors hadn't been able to find any sign of inflammation, but dear Bob is a genius and being his patient is a privilege to you.

Trice Hetad, a girl you know nothing about. She's no less of a stranger than the other customers here, but she reeks of death: She scares the shit out of you. Still, a storm is raging outside the store and a guy like you has no hope of surviving this weather. Will you be able to stand the girl's presence? She's bad news, you feel it in your guts.

