

THE PAINKILLERS

It was as if someone had triggered a million tiny staples into the back of his neck; like a bite from a great white. The lightning struck a transformer before ricocheting and striking the nape of his neck. He had been taking Lela, the families Shiatsu, out to the bathroom when the unfriendly bolt of electricity gave Joe a slap to the back of the head. The pain was overwhelming. The electricity fried his hair to gray ashes and his tongue went numb inside his mouth. His body shook in a spasmodic seizure before he fell to the ground. His eyes rolled around twice before turning white and his right leg continued to twitch while the rest of him went limp. Black and white smoke hung around his head like the end of a cigarette; like deathly smog. Joe was lucky to be alive.

At first doctors weren't sure if Joe would ever be able to talk correctly again. His family was just thankful he had survived; the same can't be said for little Lela. The zapping current of electricity traveled through Joe, through the leather leash and barbecued the dog's neck by way of the chain collar. The Shiatsu that had once been white had been zapped and burned into a charred blackish color. The Vet said that death had occurred instantly for the pup.

Joe did talk again, in fact had no problem at all other than the blistering burns and annoying rash that wrapped around his neck and chest from the medication the Doc prescribed for the pain. Joe was recovering superbly. All was fine as wine. Until five weeks after the accident. A bold, dark thunderstorm had come rolling in full of pride. The bombs of thunder were so loud they seemed to shake the house. Audrey, Joe's wife, took no time in noticing Joe wincing in pain and holding his bald scalp.

"It's just a migraine Aud. I'll be fine." He said in a painful moan.

"Joseph I think we should make you an appointment." She insisted.

"Stop nagging me!" He barked. "It's just the noise hurting my head. I'll be fine."

And he was fine, that is until the next time that clouds of thunder and lightning came marching in and making a ruckus.

The next three years would be a bad stretch for Joe. Sixteen months after he miraculously lived through being struck by lightning, on a rainy day in April, Joe's wife and son died. And although Jonesy had been born by the lightning; and there for every headache, that was the first night he grew a voice.

The Painkiller Joe thought. He could already hear Jonesy's voice whispering the words. He rubbed his bald scalp in an effort to smooth out the pain. The excruciating aches in his head started when the first clash of clouds came screaming through their living room walls. He sat slumped in the queen size bed with a pillow over his head. He had retreated to the upstairs guest room as soon as some stuck-up bitch had walked in and mentioned the start of the rain outside. A loud crash of thunder woke him from his temporarily catatonic state he had fled into. Liz would be worried about him soon, he still knew that much. But now he can't seem to collect any meaningful thoughts. It's as if he has lost his barrens inside his mind. Jonesy must be up to no damn good.

Joe slowly gets out of the bed and stands up. He sways a touch from side to side then closes his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose, trying to regain his equilibrium. He can't remember why he came up here in the first place. With that first strike of lightning sent a living nightmare into Joe's mind, he remembers that much, but the pain in his head has temporarily erased the memory of it. Dreams always seem to have a significant importance when you can't remember them. He tries to forget about the night he lost his wife and son and he desperately tries to get rid of the headache. A vague mist of intuition keeps whispering in his poisoned brain that the nightmare might have been about that tragic night.

On nights like tonight he has tried to literally beat the aches out of his head. He once smashed his skull on a bedpost resulting in an instant blackout. That didn't work, his head only hurt worse. That particular headache didn't stop until he went out at night to get "The Painkiller" as Jonesy calls them. Three hours later the painkiller finally kicked in and did its thing. That particular night he was able to ward off Jonesy and only a stray cat got hurt.

The aspirin sometimes helps but never really gets the job done. He needs a heavier dosage of a painkiller to stop the terrible headaches that have developed ever since Jonesy was created on the night of the lightning accident. Going to the doctor would be useless despite what Liz thinks. The medical field doesn't have the proper painkiller to get rid of his nasty headaches. Dr. Nava might try some mind reading shit on him; the dopey psychiatrist would never prescribe him the *right stuff* only good the shrink would do is give him a prescription for some quake-ass dope. So Joe is forced to get his own in his own way with his own painkiller. He needs the right kind of medicine to take away the pain but it's not like he can just go to the doctors or a CVS. It either endure the excruciating onslaught of pain until the storm passes or find "The Painkiller".

In a living room with two terror toddlers, is the last place that Rose should be on a Friday night. Rose should be out flirting with Chris O'Connor the staring point guard for the Shore Blue Devils at Malcolm's. Her friend Bradley and Rick are playing with their band tonight. The Five Fevers are good and Bradley is a magician on the drums. Instead of watching these two snot-noses eat their boogers, she should be sharing a burger and fries with Chris and playing with his drumstick. If it weren't for her stuck-up parents she would be to. All the other kids in school are getting help with their near future college loans. Like big deal that her parents are helping her by co-signing on her student loans. Like they are doing her a big favor.

A senior in high school and having to babysit on a Friday night in the summer is bullshit. *What a blowjob*. She thought sitting on the living room couch.

And that's exactly what this was pretty much, a *blowjob*. In fact she rather be giving Can't-see-my-own-dick-Frank Walsh from biology a B-J instead of being with these two little snot-nose brats. Fat Frank was the biggest, fattest kid in school. Rose had to be his lab partner once when he had a case of ringworm on his neck. Between that and the hairy mole that was planted on his right upper cheek she wanted to vomit. But tonight with these two little brats to watch, even Fat Frank sounded more appetizing than having to watch these the two demons.

Rose had no choice. She needed money for college. So babysitting and waiting on tables all summer long would be her biggest thrills. Yeah sure she should be partying and pre-gaming for the college frat parties she planned on being a part of. But for the most part life sucked.

"Jason and Zach lets go brush your teeth." She told the two boys that were in the middle of building a tower with Mega Blocks.

The brothers ignored her. Zach finished the tower with setting a red double block on top of the wobbly skyscraper. Meanwhile Jason the older boy had his four-year-old body halfway stuffed in the toy box. He came out with a plastic dump truck.

"Moo Zaah move." He ordered his younger brother Zach.

"Come on boys time to get to bed." Rose said while getting off the couch and turning off the VHS player and T.V, which caused the talking, singing, giggling purple dinosaur to disappear from the screen.

"Lets brush those teeth and I'll read you a bedtime story." She said fighting to keep the calm in her tone.

The dump truck collided with the Mega Block tower and both boys roared with laughter and amazement. They didn't show any indication that they were ready to settle down. Zach jumped up and down on his tippy toes and screamed. "Crush! Crush!"

"All right, enough you two, time for bed. Lets go or I'll have to call your mommy and daddy." Rose said although that was a weightless threat. She wouldn't want the Galandra's to think she couldn't handle their kids. As much as she dreaded babysitting the two demon children, the Galandra's paid twelve bucks and hour, twice as much as the Law's.

She scooped up Zach holding him like a running back holds a football and with her other arm grabbed Jason by the collar of his T-Rex pajamas.

Jason drooped his lower lip and gave an "Mhmm!" to protested. He tried to wiggle free from the sitter's grasp.

"No." was all the Zach said, the terrible-two's favorite word in his minimum vocabulary. "No no no no no!"

"Zaaaacky? Do you want me to have to call your mommy? She won't like that."

"Mommy." He said. "I aut mommy!" He cried.

Jason joined in, "I want my mommy tooooo."

As she practically dragged the brothers up the stairs to their bedroom she quickly thought of something to redirect their minds. "If we brush your teeth we can go read about Marvin." She said trying to make a deal with the boys. Marvin The Mouse was their new favorite bedtime story that Mr. Gualandra had turned them on to. He told the boys that Marvin was just like Indiana Jones; Marvin searched for treasure; only difference is that Marvin The Mouse went on journeys to find cheese treasures instead of gold. Last Saturday when Rose read them a Marvin The Mouse story they hadn't wanted to fall asleep but instead she had ended up letting the boys have a slice of cheese before they finally fell asleep. Hey whatever works.

Joe takes one last look inside the bathroom's medicine cabinet for he believes is "The Painkiller".

You know what you need Joseph you're just not looking in the right places. It right in front of you Joe.

He joins them back downstairs empty handed. He throws on his boots and black rain jacket. There was no more aspirin. He came up empty in both spots. Even the master bedroom's nightstand had nothing. It was time for "The Painkiller".

I won't go away this time Joseph. I need more than a hairless pussycat and the lightning doesn't show any signs of stopping anytime soon buddy boy. Jonesy explained.

If driving in the rain to get the painkiller meant demolishing the headache in his head he wouldn't mind dancing in the rain. This storm was a whopper. The lightning lite the black sky in bright rips of blue.

When his Audrey was still alive she use to wet a cold rag and put it on his forehead; that made the headache go away much faster than aspirin, and that was before he found the use of "The Painkiller". Back when Jonesy was just a thin meaningless layer of imagination. He had been able to fight the electrical pull of the lightning inside his head back then. But it has slowly weaken and breached in defense mechanisms. He has tried to make "The Painkiller" a last resort. Sometimes he could control the mind-stabbing attacks. But on nights like tonight, with the storm invading the sky, there was no relief. He couldn't control the raging beast scratching its claws at the walls of his brain.

Jonesy

He has tried his best to hold off from "The Painkiller" as much as he could but tonight it had gotten to the point where "The Painkiller" is his only solution. He can barely keep his left eye open all the way; the luminous light coming from the ceiling chandelier in the living room gauges the top of his eyelids. The pain stings the walls of his brain. And now it seems that his mind's sense of smell is recalling the foul stench that came from the cat. It sends a dagger of pain to the back of his ears. That was probably the case last week. He couldn't remember what happened, only the headache and a black cat in the alley outside Jersey Pride and Meats.

His mind takes a random attempt at remembering the nightmare but its too late... As he zips up his raincoat and heads outside his last thought (Joe's last thought) is: *It will have to be them first*

Flashes of lightning in the dark sky mixed with the loud claps of thunder inflict extra pain to Joe's head. His eyes are blood shot and watery. His eyes burn as if someone had thrown gasoline in his eyes and lit a match to his pupils. The rain outside falls in torrential sheets of silver. Someone must of squashed a whole sack of spiders and really pissed off Mother Nature, and now she's displaying her wrath.

As Joes stumbles down the cement walkway clutching the side of his pounding, hairless, head with a leather glove, *BA-BOOM!* A jagged streak of lighting zaps the dark gray sky turning it bluish-purple for a split second. The light penetrates violently against his skull... then black. Joe 's mind goes blank as if he has blacked out.

I'll take it from here kiddo. The lightning's my life baby

The storm outside Joe's house shows no signs of quieting. The war of clouds in the sky has only just begun. The war inside Joe's head continues to also battle. He is in desperate need of "The Painkiller". Somewhere in his mind he knows this, and he has become an expert on knowing *how* to stop the headaches. And although the intense migraines have forced his mind into a fugue state his body makes the necessary moves to release the demon that's fuming inside his head.

Jonesy takes control.

Joe winces at a cord of agony as a string of torment plays in his brain tissue. He fights his way to his car. The headache is killing him. The pain has spread to his jaws and lower neck and has slowly begun to creep its way down his spin. If he doesn't get "The Painkiller" soon the torture will wrap itself around his torso like an anaconda and choke the living hell out of him. Sure he can hope that the storm stops. That the slaps of lightning will submit. But if not then "The Painkiller" will be needed.

Joe fumbles the keys in his soaked gloved hands. He starts the car, turns on the windshield wipers to full blast. He drives to town, squinting to the point that the sides of his head feel like their on the verge of caving in. He's being told to stop at the convenience store.

After thirty minutes of strenuous struggling, Rose has finally got the kids to bed. Luckily for her the two boys are heavy sleepers. If they didn't wake up from that last clash of thunder, Thor himself couldn't wake these kids up with his mighty hammer.

Rose flicked on the lights and headed downstairs. The storm outside made the house creepy. As she headed downstairs to the living room (late night with Jimmy Kimble was just about to start) a loud bang rang over the house. A domino affect of loud crashes set off. *BA-BA BA-BOOOM!* The sky outside sounded like a battlefield in Gettysburg. Clouds of cannons blowing each other up like the 4th of July. Rose scurried to the living room couch. She could see from the bay window behind the flat screen T.V, a green light sparked in the distance. The whole house went pitch black as a long *Whoop* sound took away the electricity.

Rose was heading into her freshman year of college; she was an adult and didn't believe in all that horror shit. But she could not deny the slithery hand of fear upon the nape of her neck when the transformer blew out the power. She was scared to death.

The boys were still sleeping; thank the heavens hallelujah! Rose used her smart phone as a flashlight

"I love you technology." She whispered to herself but not with much confidence.

The flashes of lightning in the dark house gave her a chilling sense that a paparazzi of psychopaths were taking pictures of her inside the dark house. The need to pee suddenly occurred to her. But she didn't want to go in the dark bathroom. Some sick maniac would be waiting on the other side of the shower curtain, just waiting for her to pull down her panties. She would hold it for now. Girls can hold piss in forever.

Using her phone for light, Rose went searching for the circuit breaker. The raindrops pounding on the roof sounded like a million tiny bugs trying to break in. She reached the laundry room crossed her fingers and switched the main breaker to **ON**. Nothing happened. She tuned around to go back to the couch and hide under the covers. That's when she jumped.

One of the creepy crawlers from the roof had gotten in, some kind of freak insect that had been zapped to life by the daunting bolts from the sky. It crawled on her hand that held the cellphone. It shook in her hand. She dropped the phone and ran to the couch and—

It wasn't until she was huddled up under multiple blankets and got control of her edgy mind that she realized the deranged bug was really just a text message.

Rose made her way back to the laundry room. Mrs. Galandra had sent her a text, not a gooey bug.

May b home later then we thought roads r bad going 2 wait out storm
She tapped the **INBOX** icon on her screen again.

Sorry

Rose wouldn't have minded, an easy twelve bucks an hour while the little brats were fast asleep. But this storm was starting to freak her out.

Rose texted Mrs. Galandra's phone: **ok np**

And it really wasn't a problem. But then her phone alerted her with three small beeps. Her phone was on low battery.

The pain in his head is making Joe want to vomit. He clenches down on his jaw and grinds his teeth to try and ward off the excruciating pain. It's almost unbearable. He needs some relief from the sick pain. The streets have vanished and the sheets of rain have taken their place. He can't see anything other than when a bright strike of lightning zigzags in the sky.

Rose checks on the two boys who are sleeping like dead road kill. She found a Buzz Light-Year flashlight on a dresser. Rose tuned her phone off when it read **3%**. Just in case an emergency. And worst-case she could always run across the street to Ted's Foods N Such to make a call with the payphone. Hopefully that has power. She's almost positive that they had a payphone outside under the **No Loitering** sign. *Yeah its ancient but if I need to make a call in an emergency it will get the job done.*

For the rest of the night she'll make camp out on the living room couch. She thinks about going around the house and making sure that all the windows and doors are locked. But before she can decide for herself an explosion of thunder and lightning go off outside. She points the Buzz Light year flashlight in front of her and heads to the safety of the couch. And just when she is cuddle in the protection of the warm blankets.

The doorbell rings.

Much like his current headache, the rain was beating on the aluminum roof of the car. *Plip-plip-plip-plip-plip-plip-plip* He needed "The Painkiller". He pulled his car in a parking spot. With the car idling he opened the glove compartment on the passenger

side shuffled the insurance papers and parking tickets until he found what he needed. He re-hid the 22mm in between his pant's waistband.

He was told to go across the street.

To the house Joe, The Painkillers are inside waiting for you

He had never seen such heavy raindrops before. He wasn't sure if it was his headache making the raindrops seem stronger, or the raindrops making his fucking head hurt more. But it didn't really matter. Either way Joe's head felt like it was going to burst. His head felt like a piece of chewing gum in some little league baseball manager's mouth, gnawing and chewing... blowing bubbles and popping. He could picture it somewhere deep in the chambers of his mind, (back when he still had a son) watching his son play in a game. The third base coach (some piece of shit father who only was a coach so his son wouldn't ride the bench and be the batboy) squatting down on his knees, his big fat ass in the air, half an ass-crack smirking to the poor families on the benches, squinting over to second base as if the little kid was even paying attention to him. And there was Joe's head now, inside that mouth, being munched on.

Pop! Pop! Pop!

If Jones didn't get to this painkilling soon, his skull was going to go, *POP!*

Joe bit down on his tongue as hard as his brain would allow him.

"Fuuhck!" he screamed with a lisp because of his damaged tongue. A trickle of blood got lost in the downpour on its way down to the ground.

"Don't curse!" He was told.

Joe slapped himself across the face in retaliation to the self-inflicted pain.

But the pain in his mouth distracted him enough to forget about the pain in his brain. It had gone to his brain, from his skull, to his head, then back to his brain. Much like lightning finding ground. Next the headache would reach his mind and take it over. The lightning would find its ground.

He needed "The Painkiller".

Rose tiptoes to the front door. Buzz leads the way. She stretches her hand out to turn the lock and unlatch the deadbolt. But she gets frozen in place by a thunderous bang.

It's just the storm. Don't freak the fuck out Rosie. Get a grip.

A firework finale of lightning, lights up the black outside. It's bright enough to flash her eyes worse than a welding spark. Before she can unlock the door, she needs a second for her eyes to readjust to the darkness.

I should be at Chris O'Connor's house getting laid right now.

When Rose's eyes once again get adjusted to the blackness, the doorknob turns itself.

Buzz Light-Year crashes to the ground.

The rain and his intense pain in his head blurred his vision. He pulled out of Ted's, the local convenient store. The electricity was out and the payphone didn't work either. But screw Ted and his Food N Such. Because that such didn't include "The Painkiller" Joe needs. He could have thrown a rock through the window and grab

some aspirin but this headache is well past that point. Nothing will help but “The Painkiller”.

He looks across the street. It’s as if the headache has somehow produced a spore (*A lightning generated spore*) and the spore is now directing him. Showing him the way to “The Painkiller”.

Jonesy watches the car pull up.

He hides behind a corner. Five minutes later a girl walks out and gets into a parker car.

The car drives away and Jonesy makes his move.

Rose is nailed to the hardwood floor. Her heart is pumping into overdrive while the rest of her body is numb and unresponsive. She is dumbfounded. She might not have gone around and check if all the locks were good but she knows that ever since the Galandra’s left that the front door has been locked. But that evidently doesn’t stop the tall man dressed in a black rain jacket from opening the door. Rose’s knees buckle and she drops to the floor, joining the Space Ranger. She wants to scream for help. Maybe the neighbor will here her and call for help but her tongue is twisted in fear.

Dear God help me, dear God help me, please, please, GOD! She prays in her head. Then another killer comes in behind the man. Now there are two intruders. Rose feels helpless. The fear has not only cut off her tongue but has also made her cower into the fetal position. The horror of this moment has forced her to shut her eyes and when the man puts his hand on her she is sucking her thumb (like a toddle) like a baby.

The man clawed the cringing girl by the shoulder.

“Rose what’s wrong? Is everything okay?” He asked.

Then from behind the man, “Are the boys safe?”

Rose slowly hatches from her makeshift shell. Mr. and Mrs. Gualandra helped her to her feet.

Mrs. Gualandra said, “ My phone had no service and then when I tried calling you your phone went right to voicemail. We decided to take a chance in the rain.”

Feeling queasy and discombobulated from the scare she just had, Rose took deep breath before explaining. “Myphonediedandthepower... andthestormIwas scared... I thought, I thought that sah-sah-someone—

“Shhhhh” Mr. Gualandra put his forefinger to his mouth.

“Rose calm down honey. You had a scare is all. Now are the kids okay?” Mrs. Gualandra asked concerned, but attempting to be as soothing as her motherly worried mind would allow.

Rose told them that the two boys were asleep upstairs and undisturbed. “I’m sorry Mr and Mrs. Gualandra.

“Oh no harm done, Mr. Gualandra hates my colleagues and their stuck-up friends anyway.

Mr. Gualandra handed Rose a fifty-dollar bill and saw her out the front door.

“Drive careful in this.” Mrs. Gualandra called from the front porch.

Rose waved goodbye and got in her car. The Gualandra's watched her pull away then closed the door on the torrents of rain. They hung up their jackets and kicked off their shoes.

"What a night huh." He said to his wife. They both headed into the kitchen.

Elizabeth Gaulandra took a wine glass out of the kitchen cabinet. "Want a glass hun? You look like you could use one."

"No thanks dear. I think I'll head up to bed."

"You sure? From the looks of you driving home a nice glass of wine may do you some good babe." She asked and poured herself a full glass of red Merlot.

He gave an Oscar Award winning giggle. "Yes I'm positive. I think I'll just head up to bed now. I got one whopper of a headache and it's *killing* me. He placed a gentle kiss on his wife's forehead, pinched her nose and stared for the stairs.

As he reached the upstairs landing Liz called, "You want me to bring you some aspirin?"

In a whispery yell, leaning over the bannister he said, "No need dear, I've got The Painkillers."

Liz Gaulandra was about to ask if he could check on the little ones when she heard a yipping scream. A high screeching sigh escaped her mouth. "AHA" Her tongue and throat went as dry as the wine in her hand. The glass of red Merlot slipped from her grasp and crashed on the floor, spilling a puddle of blood red on the kitchen floor. AS she hiked up her black skirt above her knees and started sprinting for the stairs, she heard more screaming followed by two throats crying for help.

When she reached the boys bedroom what she saw scared her to death.

Her husband Joseph had their two toddlers Zach and Jason clenched in the crook of one arm. In his free hand he had a pistol. The dark eye of the gun swung back and forth from the two boys to his wife. Outside clouds clashed causing a thunderous roar to shake the house, seconds later a blade of lightning sliced the sky.

Inside Joe's mind Jonesy continued to breath life through the electrical pull of the lightning. Jonesy and the teeth of the headache gnawed at Joe's skull.

In a wicked cackled voice Joe said, "Take three Painkillers one a day before bed for best results."

A loud finale of thunder blasted.

Three gunshots went off.

Jonesy fled to the deep caves of Joe's mind.

The headache went away.

