Reaction

by John Wentworth Chapin

Thomas walked out of the emergency room and around to the main door of the hospital, a spring in his step. He rode the elevator to the seventh floor alone, a familiar path. His arms still itched, despite the Benadryl and prednisone. He pushed past the door with the biohazard symbol and entered.

Jim was asleep in bed, a morning news show on TV droning overhead. He looked even thinner, if that was possible. His ears seemed oversized, hanging loosely from his head. Thomas stared at his dying friend for a few minutes before Jim woke with a start. Blue irises peered out of a pool of wet red, not an iota of white. He had been so damned handsome.

“What happened to you?” Jim croaked, his voice still scratchy from an extubation the week previous. They thought he would die.

Thomas's lips were swollen like trial-sized toothpaste tubes. Fingers of angry red welts crossed his face and neck. Thomas said, “Allergic reaction to penicillin. Spent the night in the ER. Nothing serious.”

“Does it hurt?”

“I'm trying not to scratch it. But it's fine. I thought you'd like to see me like this,” Thomas said.

“You look awful,” Jim said. He smiled and closed his eyes.

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