



The Reality Division

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MR. BRIDGE? MR. BRIDGE? CAN YOU SEE ME?" I know it's my name, but I don't know where I am or how I got here. I sees a blur, and my eyelids are sticky. There's a man talkin' to me, and a bright light.

"Yeah," I says, but my tongue feels like a dead fish, and kinda tastes like one, too. And *ob man*, am I thirsty. My jaw muscles feel like they're made-a sand and my lips feel like when you drink Tequila wrong. The man gets closer each time I blink. He's a doctor.

Ob God, what did I do last night?

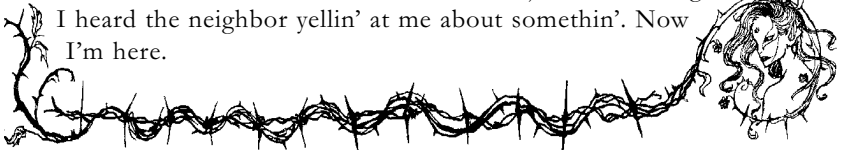
"Well," he says, lowering a light. "You're a lucky man. Welcome back to the world. I'm Dr. Ackerman. You've been in a coma, Mr. Bridge."

So I sits there and listens to this story about how I contracted Lyme Disease, that I had an allergic reaction to some drug I can't pronounce, that I slipped into a comatose state for two years, and that a living clause in my will kept me alive with help from my personal inheritance. At first I thought he was full of it, but I started to recollect. I was out pickin' apples with that nerdy girl from Accounting. I knew I shouldn't-a dated her.

That inheritance was supposed to be for when I retired, so I could lay up on some beach for the rest-a my life. A little bastard tick took it all away from me.

But two years? Come on. Last thing I remembered I was havin' a beer out back the house, watchin' the game on my portable. I had the day off 'cause that tick bite was sore and I had got back from the doctor after some shots. Seems like just minutes ago

I heard the neighbor yellin' at me about somethin'. Now I'm here.



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“Where’m I?” I moan as my eyes focus on a couple other doctors in the room.

“New York,” he says. I wanted a little more detail but I think he didn’t want to overwhelm me with information.

A couple bright lights really bother me.

“Can yooze turn them lights down?” I mumble at him like the Godfadda. My tongue don’t hardly remember how to move no more.

“You’re optically hypersensitive. Your eyes have been closed for years, Mr. Bridge. They’ll adjust.”

“How can it be years?” I says. “I was just in the back yard....”

“Comas are like that,” he explains. “Even when you sleep, you can perceive the passage of time, but during a coma there is no time perception at all. It’s as if it never happened. It’s normal, but very confusing.”

My eyes get clearer after I blink the gook out, but the lights are still annoying. I come to think they ain’t light bulbs, though. I don’t know what they are, but they’re big and wiry and don’t stay put. I begin to stare at them as doctors and nurses probe me, turn me this way and that, play with my arms and legs, change my hospital gown, sponge me down, move me from bed to bed, and say all sorts of things to one another I don’t understand. Whenever they ask me a question, they have to snap a finger to get my attention, ’cause those lights spook me.

Am I thirsty? Yes. But they won’t let me have a beer.

Hungry? Yes. But they won’t let me have a steak.

Pain? Stiff. But I can’t take a hot tub.

“Let’s turn you on your side, Mr. Bridge.” “Try to lift your head, Mr. Bridge.” “Look this way, Mr. Bridge.” “This will pinch a little, Mr. Bridge.”

“Call me Bobby, for Christ’s sake,” I says.

These light shapes follow me as Doc Ackerman pushes me in a wheelchair into his office.

“We can’t locate next of kin,” Doc says. “Is there someone I can call?”

“I’m single,” I says, watchin’ the light shapes float along with me. I can see more clearly now and they look kinda like big glow-in-the-dark wasps. They got long danglin’ legs and flaps like wings that wiggle and curl. They remind me a lot of those tiny things in the deep ocean. “My parents are dead,” I add.

“Do you have any friends I can call? Co-workers?”

My mind is numb. There’s Frank and George at the factory. Leeches, both. I’d rather they not know I was awake. They’d start borrowin’ money as soon as I found out how much is left.

What about the girly-geek? Brenda, her name was. Nah, she’s the one who got me into this mess. What about Karen? But we just broke up a month ago...I mean two *years* and a month ago. She went messin’ around with that Puerto-Rican guy, I’m still sure of it. Probably they got kids now.

“I’ll think about it,” I said, starin’ at the glowin’ wasps.

Doc Ackerman follows the direction I’m lookin’.

“Do you see something that bothers you?” he asks.