

One Sure Thing

by

Colin Pink

When I woke up I felt bad. There was nothing unusual about that. I often woke up feeling bad. Another day. Just another day, I thought. I wasn't looking forward to getting up. The thought of going to work, the journey there, the people there, the things I had to do, it all added up to a very good reason to stay in bed. Yes, stay put. The thought of work made the bed more comfortable every minute. And I was feeling ill. The more I thought about it the worse I felt. Maybe I could call in sick. Would they be suspicious? Yes. Did I care? Probably not. Would I feel guilty? Yes. I groaned. My groan sounded strange. It sounded not me. It was startling. I groaned again, testing it out, but it still sounded the same.

I told myself I had to get up. I ordered myself out of bed and sat on the edge feeling groggy. I sat there for a bit, gathering my strength to assume a vertical position. For a moment I thought about getting back under the covers but I gave myself another reprimand and under its impact got up and staggered down the hall to the bathroom.

I walked in and switched on the light. The glare dazzled me. The light bounced off the shiny surfaces of the bathroom and stung my eyes. I could feel them watering. I stood in front of the sink, resting my hands on it lightly, and I looked in the cabinet mirror. Nothing. And I mean nothing. No face. I blinked. Still no face. I sat down on the edge of the bath-tub and breathed deeply. It was turning into a shitty morning, all right. I blinked again and looked around the bathroom testing out my vision on the door, the towel rack, the toilet bowl, the rug, yes, everything there. Everything seemed to be working properly, so I got up and looked in the mirror again. Where my face should have been there was nothing. I mean there were no features. No eyes, no nose, no mouth, not even any wrinkles, no charming dimples, nothing. I

smiled. Nothing happened. I frowned. No change. The undifferentiated pale pink mass before me remained an undifferentiated pale pink mass.

It was not funny. I touched my face. And my long delicate fingers crawled across the pink surface hunting for my features but there were none to be found.

I stood there, looking at myself in disbelief for some time. Then I had an idea. I'd try another mirror. I walked back to the bedroom switched on the light and stood in front of the full-length wardrobe mirror. I was all there. All of me, that is, apart from my face. Gone. I sat on the edge of the bed and the room felt like it was rocking. Everything bobbed around me, as if the building had been cast adrift and was floating away on the tide.

Involuntarily I made a sound, which I'm ashamed to say was a whimper. I sat there for some time whimpering until the room stopped rocking and the sounds stopped coming. I made a decision. I reached for the phone, called work and told them I wouldn't be coming in today, I was ill, something I'd eaten. They said, 'You sound awful.' I said, 'I feel awful.' I put the phone down and crawled back into bed.

There had to be some explanation. Nothing like this had ever happened before. Why me? I tried to remember what I'd done last night. Last night I'd seen Francis. We'd gone out drinking. We'd both got very drunk. Nothing unusual there. We always got drunk whenever we met up. I couldn't remember exactly what we did.

I rang Francis but got his answer-phone. I left a message asking him to call me back urgently. I had to find out what we'd done. And what about Francis? Was he all right? Was I the only one without a face?

I must have fallen asleep because the sound of the phone ringing jerked me awake. It was Francis. 'Hi,' he said, 'You sound awful. Did I wake you up?'

'Yes,' I said. 'How are you?'

'Okay.'

'You're sure you're okay?'

'Yes, of course I'm sure. What's the matter?'

'I'm not.'

'What's wrong?'

'I can't explain on the phone. I think you'd better come over and see for yourself.'

'Is it something contagious?'

'I don't think so.'

'It's a bit awkward at the moment, can't it wait?'

'Trust me. This can't wait.'

'Okay. I'll be over in about half an hour.' He put the phone down. I looked in the mirror, just to make sure, but it was the same as before.

I made some tea, brought it back to the bedroom and drank it in front of the mirror. I wanted to see where it went; but I just ended up pouring it down my chest. It was hot and it hurt. After I'd mopped myself I had another go without looking in the mirror and it went down okay. I had to trust to instincts. I'd known where the right place was for the last twenty-eight years; there was no reason to suppose it had moved.

Francis was taking his time getting to me and the longer I waited the more fraught I felt. Eventually the bell rang; I could tell, by the irritating jaunty manner, it was Francis. He always seemed to regard any doorbell as an invitation to improvise melodies. By this point I was almost relishing the prospect of the look of shock and horror on his face when he saw me. I opened the door and stood there looking straight at him. I was anxious to see what kind of reaction my condition would get. He didn't look at all surprised.

'What's it all about then?' he said, brushing past me and walking into the kitchen. 'Got anything to drink? You know, tea, coffee?'

'What about my face?' I said.

'What about it?' he said, rooting around in the kitchen for tea bags.

'Isn't there anything unusual?' I said.

'No, same old ugly mug, I'm afraid,' he said.

I sat down, rather heavily.

He said, 'You do look tired.'

Yes, tired, I was. I got up and slowly walked to the bedroom, got under the covers and shut my eyes. It was too much effort to keep them open. 'Let yourself out,' I said.

I didn't care if Francis was offended. No doubt he thought I was rude. I fell asleep so I'm not sure when he left. It was dark when I opened my eyes again. I got up and I felt afraid to look in the mirror. But eventually I did and it was the same as before. But why didn't Francis see what was so obvious? That there was no longer anything there.

I went out and walked the streets. The people I passed looked at me no more strangely than usual. When I entered a supermarket there was no commotion. I caused no ripple, no disturbance to the grazing among the shelves.

The next day I phoned in sick again, and the next. I couldn't face the world. Literally I could no longer face the world. I was a blank. I was erased. I was so little myself that nobody noticed I was fading away. Today I looked at my hand. I noticed, as I wrote the above, that I can no longer discern knuckles, there are no wrinkles, lines, no identifying marks to my fingers at all. I turned my hand over and gazed at my palm. There was no life-line; no lines, in fact, of any kind, at all.

Today I phoned in sick again. I wonder what will be next. But one thing I know for sure – nobody will notice.

End

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