

Breckenridge

Category: Courage

written by Rachel R. Baum | August 28, 2022

Here's what happens when your insides twist and lock. The key? Well, there might not be one.

At first, your innards are just tender. Maybe it's only the havoc of your upcoming vacation. *What the hell*, you think. *It will go away on its own, right, like a pimple or a hangover.*

You pack your bag on Thursday, coax cash from the ATM, purchase an extra tube (smaller than 3 ounces) of toothpaste, and lie down when whatever it is that's roiling inside gives you grief. Friday you head to the airport, where you languish until a plane takes you, in misery, to Colorado.

As the plane lands, you think what if you were landing instead in Siberia or Honduras, someplace where you don't know the words for *agony* or *dying* or *save me*. But luckily you're in Denver. And you acquiesce when your companion insists, *Don't be a fucking martyr. You need to go to the ER.*

An X-ray paints a grayscale picture of a coiled snake. Yes, this is an emergency. Phone calls get made, you are whisked away and tucked into an accordion of a bed. Decisions, decisions: surgery is indicated—no, imminent. The chief resident declares he *could* extract the reptile that has hunkered down in your innards, but perhaps it's best to wait for the attending surgeon, who has faced down such creatures before, destroyed the evil segments, then pieced together your innards like cables connected to modems, making the wires sing and the tiny green lights blink. Yes, you say, *I want that guy.*

Later, you perceive a reliable, constant spark, a bleached, clean smell. You are on the other side, the right side, the bagless, alive side. You send blessings to the gifted soul who figured out how to deliver morphine at the touch of a button. Under the blanket is a miracle of resilience and recovery, stitched and scarred.

Soon, releases are signed and, once again, you are a traveler, impatient for a glimpse of home. Giddy, restless, harnessed to a window seat, you watch, with grateful reverence, the curve of the mountains as they float, tilt, and blur into a tunnel of sky that passes below and away.

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