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Cured

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Peter Spaulding removed his sunglasses and squinted through the sunlight as he hesitated outside the hospital—a massive, dark green tent covering a patch of Kenyan earth. His stomach rumbled. Hungry, he glanced at his watch. Five o'clock.

He was thirsty, too, but he'd run out of bottled water. Everyone told him not to drink well water unless he wanted to spend the next two days in the bathroom, a putrid hole in the ground at the edge of camp.

Back at Harvard, Peter probably would have had a salad, but the lettuce would have to be rinsed with water, so that was a no-go. Who knew how much longer he'd have to survive on protein bars as he played what his doctoral advisor described as an "advocate for the malarial initiative" and flexed his "adventure muscles"?

Adventure muscles? I don't have a single adventure muscle in my body.

Peter inhaled deeply, dipped his head as he entered the tent, and gazed up. Two gigantic trees, covered in chop marks from the handmade axes that had cut them, pierced the thick canvas, stretching the material high into the air. Kenyan men and women talked among themselves and exchanged words with the nurses, doctors, and

scientists who tended to patients. The tent smelled of disinfectants and sanitizing solutions. Second-hand hospital equipment hummed and displayed vital signs. Patients hooked to beeping machines suffered in their cots, soaking their beds with sweat and other bodily fluids.

One brightly dressed Kenyan woman caught Peter's attention. She was speaking with a tall, dark-haired German doctor he'd come to know in the past couple of months—Dr. Leon Becker. The woman was cuddling a squirming infant and pointing to a tiny red mark on the child's arm.

Peter watched Dr. Becker's angular face as the doctor nodded and pressed the soft skin around the inflamed bump. As a scientist, Peter could only watch and let the doctors do their work, but he approached the bed, curious.

"My daughter was bitten by a mosquito." She rubbed the child's head, which was covered in a thin layer of black hair. As the woman explained her child's worsening condition since being bitten a week before, Dr. Becker examined the infant. He stared at the ground absently as he gently pressed the baby's belly, checking her spleen.

"You can help her?" the woman asked, finishing her explanation.

"Yes," Dr. Becker began, avoiding the mother's eyes, "we can help your daughter." The mother showed no signs of noticing Dr. Becker's detachment. Her expression told a story of absolute faith in the West's seemingly infinite knowledge and magical technology.

Dr. Becker noticed Peter and waved him closer. "This is Peter Spaulding," he told the mother.

"He's from the Harvard Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases."

"*Jambo*," Peter said, immediately regretting using the Swahili greeting.

His presence felt foolish. He wasn't a doctor here to treat patients, and it would be three years before he obtained his PhD, assuming he made some inroads with his research on antimalarial drugs.

"Your daughter has malaria, ma'am," Dr. Becker explained as he fiddled with a bag of intravenous solution. "This bag of fluid contains medication that'll make her feel better."

Once he'd finished hooking up the IV, Dr. Becker stripped off his latex gloves and threw them in the trash. He turned to Peter and whispered, "It's *Plasmodium falciparum*."

Of the five species of malaria, *P. falciparum* was the most lethal. Peter had swirled colonies of the parasites around in a beaker hundreds of times, trying to find a way to beat them, but he'd never been able to. It had always been an abstract problem for Peter. He'd never seen the parasite's effects up close, so tragically effective in the human body. The child couldn't have been more than a year old.

As Dr. Becker discussed the child's condition with her mother, speaking of her enlarged liver and inevitable demise, Peter studied the mother's face. He expected her to cry or maybe get angry and shout like other parents had, like the ones who now clutched at their children, understanding they had only hours to live.

But she didn't get mad. Nor did she cry. Something did change, though. Hope drained from her face, and her faith in the doctor crumbled.

She glanced at Peter, and their eyes locked.

What can I do for her? Nothing.

Peter wanted to leave. He wanted to go back to where things made sense, a life of quiet experiments, exams, presentations, and beers with friends after the lab.

"Well, I'm going to check on the others," Dr. Becker announced, scribbling notes on a chart. "We will do everything in our power to help your daughter, ma'am." He then walked to the far corner of the tent, leaving Peter with the mother and patient.

"My name is Amara," the mother said.

Peter introduced himself. "What's her name?" he asked, glancing at the infant.

Amara was still caressing the child's head. "Her name is Malia."

"The doctors will do everything they can," Peter echoed.

Even as he spoke, Peter knew the medication flowing into Malia's arm probably wouldn't stop the infection; the parasite had likely developed a resistance. The doctors were smart, but for as long as Peter had studied the disease, malaria had proven itself smarter.

"The doctor does not believe anymore," Amara said, looking down at Malia.

"Believe?"

"He does not believe he can help us. I can see it." Peter carefully searched for words. "Malaria is a challenging disease."

Amara tilted her head. “Do you believe?”

If she had seen through Dr. Becker, she would see through Peter. She likely knew this tent, this conversation, was agonizing for him, and that Peter had wanted to leave ever since he’d arrived.

“I’m not really a doctor,” Peter muttered, feeling uncomfortable.

Malia coughed and scrunched up her face. The soft pout turned into a breathless cry. As the mother began to rock Malia, her eyes filled with tears. “Please help!”

“U-um,” Peter stuttered. “I-I-I will try.”

Malia started wailing, provoking other children to cry as well. Voices lifted all through the tent, trying to calm the sobbing children. Tears streamed down Malia’s face.

Peter ran through the tent, hurrying past distressed families consoling the unwell. He burst through the exit and into the hot African air. Gazing up at the sky, he inhaled deeply.

The aroma of meat roasting over a nearby fire filled his nose, but the odor of a cigarette tainted the fragrance. Peter turned his head to see Dr. Becker staring idly into the village and smoking. The doctor inhaled and blew out several smoke rings.

“So, do you believe?” he asked without turning his gaze from the sunbaked huts. Blowing out more smoke rings, he chuckled. “She asked you that, didn’t she?”

“Yes,” Peter replied.

“Of course she did. They all do. And you know what? When I got here three years ago, I believed. I thought we could stop this thing. But

people like you have been working on the malaria riddle for decades. And what have you got to show for it? A few drugs, many of which the parasites evade."

Dr. Becker shrugged. "Let them have their faith, I say. It's all they've got. Now, if someone asks if I believe, I say yes and move on."

"Will Malia die?" Peter asked.

The doctor nodded. "I doubt she'll make it a week. Two, if she's lucky." He threw his cigarette on the ground and crushed it underfoot. "But you don't have to worry about that anymore."

"What do you mean?"

Dr. Becker reached into his coat pocket and handed Peter an envelope. "Your advisor sent this letter. You're going home early."

Peter opened the envelope and pulled out a plane ticket to Boston.

* * *

It had been a few days since Peter returned from Kenya, and he hadn't yet recovered from the seventeen-hour journey. If the brown coffee stain on his lab coat hadn't expressed his fatigue, his messy hair, the bags under his eyes, and his general dim-wittedness certainly would have. While he often reveled in the emptiness of the lab—in particular, his isolated section of bench space—it had been difficult to focus lately. The soft ticking of the machines, usually relaxing, only added to his malaise.

The spreadsheet on the monitor didn't help lift his spirits either. It displayed the results of an experiment he had run the day before, showing

quantities of *P. falciparum* cultured in Petri dishes. In addition to the standard cocktail of nutrients the parasites needed to thrive, experimental populations were subjected to a drug formulation he'd developed from medical literature. Nonetheless, the data presented high rates of growth in all populations, including those subjected to Peter's compound.

Another failure. What's new?

Since he had begun as a doctoral student in Harvard's Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases two years before, every one of his antimalarial formulations had failed. A few dozen unsuccessful experiments were considered normal, but two years of disappointment had put him at his wit's end.

Frustrated, he closed his notebook and shoved it across the granite-topped lab bench. It bumped an opened cylindrical bottle and tipped over a large tray of pipette tips, spilling them across the bench and onto the floor.

"Someone's a little hungover from their African adventure."

Andrea Malloy and Chris Livengood, two of Peter's lab mates, strolled into the lab. Andrea walked by a mosquito-crossing sign and pulled a flyswatter off the wall. She stepped over the pipette tips on the floor and smacked the swatter on the bench just to annoy Peter. He rolled his eyes.

Andrea was a fifth-year grad student and a hippie intellectual: big brain and superior attitude cloaked in a deceptively laid-back disposition. She wore a flannel shirt and baggy jean shorts, with socks pulled up to her calves. As she leaned over to squint at the numbers on Peter's computer

screen, the scent of body odor and sweat assaulted his nose. He knew she must have come from the insectary, where she bred mosquitoes.

"You know, you're right," she stated, inspecting the spreadsheet. "You should have been a doctor." She smirked. "Looks like another letdown."

Andrea studied the genetics of the malaria parasite. Her work generated mini successes every day, discoveries like new genes and molecular mechanisms—publication-worthy stuff. She seemed to delight in reminding Peter of his fruitless doctoral concentration—career path, even—and that medicine would have been easier. She loved to recap how impossible basic research was, as well as how much soul-crushing disappointment was involved. The work was dismally funded, and they were always battling for hard-to-win grants to back experiments that, in all probability, would fail and, if successful, would have only a slight impact on the scientific community. Meanwhile, a friend had graduated from medical school and just finished his residency; in two years, he'd be making six figures. With two post-docs ahead of him, Peter would be lucky if he earned that in ten years.

Nonetheless, every time Andrea had Peter thinking about the challenges of their chosen professions, he reminded himself of his passion for the puzzles science offered. While he liked to complain about the futility, he knew he had made the right choice. And while Andrea thought she was so cool with her "mosquito lab," who the hell wanted to cut up spit glands all day?

Chris, a second-year grad student studying the transmission of malaria from mosquitoes to hu-

mans, dropped to his knees to help with the mess. "How was your adventure?"

Why does everyone insist on calling my trip to a disease-infested camp in the middle of the African wilds an adventure?

"Yeah, it was quite the learning experience." Peter didn't want Andrea to know that he hadn't enjoyed himself. No doubt, she'd tell their advisor who had dispatched Peter to see the "true" effects of malaria because he had believed Peter was far too removed from the disease, too theoretical.

Peter thought back to the Kenyan hospital, to Malia, and to her mother, inquiring whether he believed. It didn't take much introspection to see he did not.

"Trivia night at Shay's," Chris said. "You coming?"

Typically, Peter was first in line for trivia night at the bar, but he was too tired. And he couldn't shake Malia's face from his mind.

One thing was now true: The illness wasn't just a puzzle anymore.

"I want to try a couple more formulations." He distractedly clicked open a file on the computer.

"Suit yourself," Andrea said as she and Chris headed for the exit. She hung the flyswatter back on the wall.

Peter frowned. Had the trip made that big an impression on him? Who *actually* changed in two months? Would one more late night in the lab cure malaria?

The African trip had been intense. *But I could use a little fun.*

"You know what?" He shut down the computer. "Wait up! I'm coming." As he grabbed his coat

and shut off the lab's lights, he remembered the plea from Malia's mother, asking for his help, and the empty promise he'd made to try.

* * *

Amara set her daughter down in a small crib. Malia's fever had worsened since Spaulding left several days before. Whenever the fever did break, chills took its place, causing her to shiver despite a cocoon of blankets. When the fever returned, Malia's skin turned crimson as her body heated like a small fire in Amara's arms.

Amara dipped her nose into a colorful bouquet of flowers her brother had delivered. The arrangement's sweet aroma wafted hopefully, providing a temporary relief from the hospital's constant despair. Her brother was just exiting the tent, followed by the tribe's shaman, who had spent the night with Malia and the family. Amara considered herself wise for seeking counsel not just in the West's magic, but also in the ancient intelligence of the tribe's spiritual healer.

Throughout the night, the shaman had rocked the sick baby in his arms, blessing her while in a trance, humming prayers and chanting as he tried to draw the bad spirits from her body. Just before the sun rose, he had received a vision from the spirit world: an image of a young man carrying a gift for Malia and a boon for the hospital.

Amara knew it had to have been a vision of Peter, the young scientist who had left without a goodbye. The shaman was predicting his return.

* * *

Late for his rounds, Dr. Leon Becker approached the hospital with the heavy taste of liquor still on his tongue. Coffee in hand, he skimmed the daily report. Apparently, they'd lost a child in the night.

As he stepped into the tent, he passed the exiting shaman. Leon pitied the hopeful Kenyans who followed him, believing that a few waves of the witch doctor's hands would magically enable their loved ones' immune systems to outmaneuver malaria.

In many ways, though, he also envied the families of the sick and their unwavering faith. He'd yet to see hope change the course of the disease, but perhaps the delusion helped suspend rationality, providing its own kind of solace.

More than the families and their faith, Leon envied Peter Spaulding and his quick visit, his psychological distance from the sick and, most of all, his escape from Africa and the madness that had transformed Leon from idealistic hero to determined cynic these last three years, causing him to detach from the ones he'd once hoped to cure. Every day, he thought about going home, but who would do this important work if he left?

Shaking himself from his thoughts, Leon surveyed the tent, and his gaze landed on Amara. He walked over, said hello, and looked the child over. He tugged on her IV and squeezed the clear bag of antimalarial medication, which had no doubt lost ground to the parasitic infection. He made a few notes on Malia's chart, remarking that the disease had progressed classically. He suspected Malia's kidneys would fail soon, followed by anemia and possibly respiratory distress. Using his penlight, he inspected Malia's retinas for whiteness, which

would indicate that cerebral malaria had set in. He made a note when he found them normal.

"Do you think the scientist who left will come back and help Malia?" Amara asked as he wrote.

Leon understood the reference to Peter, and the answer was no. The "advocates for the malaria initiative" never returned. Certainly not any from Harvard, who couldn't wait to leave the moment they'd arrived.

"Yes," he lied, faking a smile. "We spoke before he left. You and Malia made quite an impression on him."

"What is 'made an impression'?" Amara asked, looking confused.

"It means he thought highly of you and Malia."

A strong wave of self-hatred washed over Leon then. He hated the doctor he'd let this place turn him into. He hated his disillusionment, his excessive drinking, and the man he'd watched himself become. But he hated Peter more: his dispassion for humans and his ruthless pursuit of grades, degrees, and titles.

No, he wasn't going to lie for Peter Spaulding anymore.

Leon tore off his gloves. "You should know something. Do not put your faith in that man. He hated this place from the moment he arrived. And he is *not* coming back."

Flustered, Amara put a hand over her mouth. When Malia started to cry, she picked her up and turned to Leon in desperation. "B-but the vision…"

Leon snorted. "That man you call a shaman, who whispers chants over your sons and daugh-

ters . . .” Leon jabbed his finger at the tent’s exit. “He won’t cure anyone. And he *certainly* won’t help your daughter!”

Lost in rage, he didn’t try to temper his volume, which rose as he pointed at Amara. “To you, and all the others with misplaced hope, let me share *my* vision. Most of these children will die, including yours, and mark my words, you will never ever see Peter Spaulding again.”

Amara’s eyes filled with tears. The hope instilled in her by the tribe’s shaman, her faith in Western medicine, and the motherly strength she’d nurtured throughout Malia’s sickness all disintegrated, replaced by a profound sadness for her dying child and a hopelessness from which she’d never recover.

* * *

With a commanding lead in trivia night, Peter’s team of Harvard doctoral students, affectionately known as the Mosquito Crew, was in good spirits at their favorite bar, Shay’s Pub, as they relished the momentary respite from lab work.

“13.8 billon years,” Peter whispered to Chris in answer to the trivia question the heavyset man on the stage by the bar had just read. Peter took a sip of his beer and sat back while Chris wrote the answer on an index card before handing the card to a waitress. The young woman delivered every table’s card to the stage.

Still holding the microphone, the host straightened the cards and repeated the question: “Okay, the Big Bang took place how many years ago? Let’s see what you all came up with.”

He lifted the first card. "10 billion years ago." He slid the card to the back. "13.8 billion years ago." He read the next card and chuckled. "Okay . . . 25 years ago?" He shot a sarcastic look at the bartender. "Hey, Joe, no more drinks for the table that thinks the universe began in 1997."

The bar erupted in laughter.

The trivia host read cards from four more tables, including the Mosquito Crew's, then paused dramatically.

"The correct answer is . . . 13.8 billion years ago."

Everyone at Peter's table began clapping and laughing, excited over their fifth consecutive win. Chris offered Peter a high five.

"Are you getting a degree in physics too?" Andrea asked arrogantly, frustrated that most of the night's answers had come from Peter. He ignored her and took another sip of beer while the host prepared the next question.

Chris leaned toward Peter. "Ah, she's just pissed she has to clean up mosquito crap all day." Peter chuckled. "Wouldn't theoretical physics be nice? All they need is a pad of paper and a sharp pencil. It takes me five hours just to prepare a single experiment."

"And ten seconds to watch it fail." Chris laughed.

"Funny."

"Ah, but they're theorists," Chris mused. "We're experimentalists. It's where the glory is."

"I don't know, man. I'm beginning to wonder if all this failure fulfills some dark psychological need." Peter sat up. "You know what I've been thinking a lot? Whether we've been mistaken in how we approach the fight against malaria."

"What do you mean?"

"The parasite is just too clever. Perhaps we can't really attack it head-on."

"You think too much, Pete." Chris slapped him on the back, then took a sip of his beer. "Tonight, just have a good time."

He was right; Peter always had a tough time shutting off his brain. It'd been even more difficult since returning from Africa. The puzzle had become an obsession. Malia had made everything so tangible, which made Peter's efforts that much more urgent.

The host began again. "Okay, ready for the next question, everyone? Here we go. In Ancient Greece, the storyteller Aesop wrote this popular fable to illustrate the moral 'slow and steady wins the race.'"

Andrea bounced in her seat and leaned across the table. "The Tortoise and the Hare," she stated with enthusiasm. "The Tortoise and the Hare!"

Chris turned to Peter, looking for approval. Peter nodded. The same answer had popped into his head, but stirred by the question, he'd remained silent. As he watched the woman collect their card, a jolt of energy hit him.

He spun in his seat. "What if we ignored infection cycles?"

"But that's the traditional approach," Chris answered, obviously disappointed the malaria talk was continuing.

"And after all these years of trying it that way, we *still* don't have a cure. What if we concentrated on the body's natural defenses?"

"But the parasite changes too fast for the immune system," Andrea chimed in.

"Indeed," Peter said. "It's just like the story of The Tortoise and the Hare. The parasite runs circles around the immune system."

"Strengthen the immune system?" Chris asked, his curiosity piqued.

"And make the tortoise as fast as the hare!" Peter catapulted from his seat. Euphoric, he ran for the door, weaving through tables. As he pushed open the bar's front door, the host announced, "And the answer is The Tortoise and the Hare."

* * *

Sitting in the driver's seat of a rental truck, Peter grabbed the foam box containing his prototype drug and pushed open the door. Stepping out onto the harsh Kenyan landscape, he marched toward the medical tent he had thought he'd never see again. Only a week before, just the thought of joining rounds in the hospital would have made him nauseous.

Now, as he walked toward the entrance with the foam box tucked under one arm, he felt useful for once. He'd spent eighteen-hour days in the lab after sprinting out of Shay's, testing a variety of formulations to boost the immune system's production of antibodies.

He ducked through the entrance and made his way toward Amara, relieved she was still there. She rocked in a wooden chair, gripping her unconscious child in her arms.

"You came back!" Her eyes held a mixture of joy and disbelief. She looked down at Malia. "You can help us now?"

Peter placed the foam box on the bed, lifted off the lid, and began unpacking its contents. He pulled out a syringe filled with a cloudy solution, cautious of the inch-long needle at the end. "Inside this syringe…"

"What do we have here?" Dr. Becker interrupted, sauntering toward them. "Jonas Salk?" His voice rang with as much surprise as the woman's had, though his words were laden with sarcasm.

He knocked on the foam cooler as if it were a door. It was clear he wasn't happy to see Peter. In fact, he seemed downright hostile. In the two months Peter had spent in Kenya, Dr. Becker and he had gotten along well, but it was scorn that had bound them. They'd shared many meals criticizing the hospital and those within it, complaining about Kenya and sharing their contempt for the entire system. Misery loved company.

Now, Peter just pitied the tortured, beaten-down cynic before him.

"I've created a drug that I believe…"

"You've created nothing," Dr. Becker broke in. "You tinkered in the lab for a few days and came up with a potion that, in all likelihood, is ineffective and causes a host of side effects." He pointed at Malia. "This child is in a coma. She has cerebral malaria. Do you understand? It means she's going to die."

"I believe I can save her," Peter maintained calmly, trying to avoid a confrontation. He set the syringe on the bed. "This treatment doesn't directly attack the blood stage of the parasite's life cycle. Instead, it stimulates the immune system to manufacture more antibodies."

"So now you want to start injecting people with it, is that it?" Dr. Becker snickered. "I can only imagine what kinds of immunological reactions that stuff will cause. Did they even teach you about anaphylactic shock at Harvard?"

Peter's heart pumped faster. "Leon, please."

"You're all the same, you American students! You come down here, so idealistic, believing you'll change the world, hoping you'll cure malaria, of all diseases! I thought you were different. That you were a realist. But look at you! All pumped up with pride, thinking you've got the cure. And when it doesn't work, when it fails like the others have, what will you do? That false zeal you're feeling right now will vanish. You'll go back to your easy life, sipping beers and snacking on peanuts in Harvard Square, talking about how you took your shot once. And I'll be here, tending to the sick, watching this wicked disease evolve."

Normally, Peter would have engaged the doctor, but quarreling seemed trivial when so many around them needed aid. Dr. Becker shouted more accusations, his face enflamed, spit spraying from his mouth.

Suddenly, Peter pictured a reflection of himself. A self he might have become had he never returned to Kenya. Dr. Becker was right, the Peter Spaulding who'd gotten on that plane a week ago had hated this place, and he *had* wanted to escape. But he'd returned. And that life of chasing grades, fretting over getting published, and laughing away time at bars was over. Finally, he cared about the people his research might cure.

Furious, Dr. Becker motioned to a guard, a large African man with crossed arms. "If you think

I'll just let you waltz in here and treat my patients with some cockamamie remedy, you've got…"

The doctor abruptly fell silent, his gaze glued to Amara, who held the syringe Peter had left on the bed. The inch-long needle was buried in Malia's arm, the plunger fully depressed.

Dr. Becker pushed Peter out of the way and ripped the empty syringe from Malia's arm. "Why did you do that?" he demanded, dumbfounded.

Amara stared at Peter. "Because I believe."

* * *

Peter watched Amara's face glow in the moonlight. She grinned at him and then nodded in the direction of the tribe's shaman, who led vibrantly dressed men and women around a blazing fire, twirling and singing in celebration of Malia's recovery.

"You saved my daughter," Amara said. "Just like our shaman said you would."

Peter smiled in contentment as he watched them dance. As the roaring blaze crackled, he stared into its hypnotic center, watching tiny bits of ash ignite, fly off, and dissolve in the star-filled sky.

Malia let out a healthy cry as she shifted in her mother's arms. It had been a week since her mother had given her Peter's drug. She had come out of the coma the day after it was administered and had improved every day since. Peter smiled as she whimpered, still awed by her recovery, which seemed like a miracle. In science, the path from theory to bedside was an arduous, unpredictable journey, yet in Peter's case, it had happened with

blistering, unprecedented speed. He'd finally gotten that win he was looking for.

"Well, she'll live," Dr. Becker declared. He wore jeans and a blue T-shirt rather than his usual button-down shirt and white coat. "There's nothing I can do about that cry, though."

He grinned at his quip, and Amara and Peter chuckled cautiously. The doctor seemed sheepish, but they were still guarded since he had yet to apologize for his behavior.

"She experienced a few more fevers after she came out of the coma, but all in all, the drug worked." Dr. Becker shook his head and scratched his jaw. "I still can't believe it actually worked."

He interlocked his fingers and exhaled as if to say something, then paused.

"You know, Peter . . . I just want to say . . ."

"I know," Peter assured when Dr. Becker couldn't seem to find the words. "And I'm sorry, too." He took a deep breath. "The infected aren't the only ones who suffer."

Dr. Becker nodded. "Your medicine might just put an end to that." He smiled. "What will you do now? Head back to Harvard? Accept praise for having created the drug of the century, the cure for malaria?"

"Malia's just one child," Peter protested. "We'll need more testing."

"That means years of planning, millions of dollars for research, large-scale manufacturing, and clinical trials."

"It won't be easy." Peter paused. "But I . . . have faith."

Dr. Becker nodded, looking impressed. "So, I got a call from your advisor yesterday. He wondered where you were. What should I tell him?"

Peter looked at Amara, the baby in her arms now sleeping. "Tell him thank you for sending me here. Tell him I've found all the humanity I need right here."

"You're staying?"

Peter looked into the bonfire and nodded.

"You'll need a good doctor to deliver all those shots."

Smiling, Peter stood up. "Let's talk about it over dinner."

"Just like old times." Dr. Becker grinned, but the expression soon softened. "One thing's for certain, Pete."

"What's that?"

"You made me a believer."

About the Author

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