

A SENSE OF URGENCY

By Allen Amundsen

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A Sense of Urgency was debuted by Candace Nguyen as Emily. The author would like to thank Candice for her hard work and insight in developing the narrative.

Cast: EMILY is a young woman in her late twenties.

I have always had a bizarre fascination with death. Well, with my own death, to be specific. I often think about what I would order for my very last meal—in the unlikely event that I would ever be on Death Row, of course. If I was about to be executed. . . I would want my last meal to consist of: Sautéed Foie Gras with apple terrine, Olive stuffed leg of lamb, steamed asparagus with lemon butter, pan seared diver sea scallops, white chocolate mousse for dessert, and a bottle of Gundlach-Bundschu cabernet sauvignon. . .

. . . You know, something simple.

I would absorb every element of my last meal on planet earth: the cascade of ecstasy, the swirling flavors of heaven in each bite. My eyes would tear up as each hurricane of sweet aromas bathes my face, and I would savor each moment. The plate presentation would assault my eyes: the deep mocha of the meat, the vivid jungle green of the vegetables, the serene yellows and milky whites of the potatoes, the sugary daydream hum of chocolate. . . and the dark bloodlines of the wine as it makes my face feel flush and warm.

I would force the warden to play Antonin Dvorak's Cello Concerto from Bose speakers as I devour each forkful of nirvana into my trembling mouth, awaiting my imminent demise.

I am not on Death Row. . . but, in a way. Because I am waiting, isolated, wrapped in shadows. . . I am on a senseless journey (no more taste, touch, smell, sight, sound.) In time, I will lose them all. . . a sense of urgency washes over me and I am crashing towards a dark corner destiny. But somehow. . . I feel fine.

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I don't enjoy being cooped up. It's been five months, and I am still here. The star freak—I mean patient—at a special oncology clinic in Marin County. Sure, it's quiet, tranquil and relaxing. . . but still. . .

My physician is named Dr. Kline. She is the smartest woman on planet Earth. And when her perplexed green eyes met my tearful gaze five months ago, my world crumbled inside. The words fell from her lips in slow motion: "Emily. . . it's. . . unusual. . . I have never seen anything like this. . . I looked through the literature on brain tumors. . . There was nothing. . . You are the first. . . The first to ever have this. . . mystery." Wow. Finally. . . the first at something. Auntie Sunshine would be so proud.

Her name wasn't really Sunshine, she was born Martha May, but ever since the Summer of Love, Sunshine was the moniker that she wore proudly—as bright and vibrant as the skirts she wore. Exploding in supernova groovy colors, a dead giveaway that screamed HIPPIE.

My Auntie Sunshine is my only family. My parents passed away when I was very young and she became my de facto mother-aunt-grandmother-guardian angel. Auntie Sunshine is the person that I trust the most. She is the strongest woman on planet Earth. She looked breast cancer in its disheveled face and defeated it.

We were having our weekly Sunday brunch together. It took me awhile to explain the details of my new condition:

"What is it that you have again?" Auntie is always curious. "A brain tumor." She laughs. "Pssh—a little chemotherapy will take care of that in no time, honey!" "My doctor says that what I have is. . . different." Auntie Sunshine let out an agitated gasp. "Doctors? What do they know?" "But my doctor is really smart Auntie." "Yeah, well my Doctor said that I had no chance of survivin'. None at all. But I showed that old quack, didn't I?" "Yeah, Auntie. . . you did." "Well there, it's settled. . . whatever this mess is in your skull. . . you're gonna whup it. What's the story. . . did you black out or something?"

The story goes like this: I woke up on a Saturday morning, refreshed, renewed—I had had a horrible week at work—I shuffled downstairs, flipped on CNN, and brewed a pot of Good Morning America. I sat down to caffeinate and ruminate and I spilled the scalding hot coffee all over my forearm (Klutz, Klutz, Klutz!)

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There was something strange about this. I didn't feel anything. I should have been screaming my guts out, because of the scalding hot liquid. But I didn't. I didn't feel the burning. I should have felt the burning. But I didn't feel it. . . not a thing. . .

Naturally, I had a bit of a freak out. (Scaredy cat, hypochondriac, warp drive worrywart. . .) And I went to the Emergency Room and they didn't know what to do or say. I waited 'til Monday and barged into my physician's office, Dr. Kline, the smartest woman on planet Earth. And I cried, because I couldn't feel anything. My skin was a frozen sheet, and I couldn't sleep, I could only cry, and dream the worst. . .

Dr. Kline tried her best to soothe my fears: "Calm down, Emily, Calm down. . . we will find out what's wrong."

Crying, hysterical, I lied down for a flurry of tests: Cranial CAT scan, MRIs, bloodwork, and lots of waiting rooms and stale magazines. Then. . . Dr. Kline's green eyes of confusion and my heart caved in when she said the words: Unusual. . . First person to ever have this. . . Mystery.

Dr. Kline booked me into the oncology clinic and it's been nothing but a parade of tests, observations, pills, scans, and x-rays.

I'm the Anomaly: I have a new set of friends nestled in my cerebral cortex, this mob of mischievous cells. This critter has lodged itself into the part of my brain that regulates the sensory electrical impulses; those little blue sparks that allow me to touch, taste, smell, see, and hear. . . I have a traffic jam in my central nervous system. No surgical tow-truck can bail me out, because doing so would make me a brain-dead vegetable.

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