Fever

Lights were flashing everywhere. People were dressed to the nines sitting around white cloth tables eating lobster with sides of caviar, and they were all waiting to see the main event... me. Emerging on a polished, black stage was a man, who looked twenty years his younger because of all the plastic surgery he had, wearing brown slick hair and a smile that all talk show hosts master at the age of five. Along with that devilish smile was a black suit with a sleek, navy blue tie. Standing next to him was a beautiful woman about half his age with long, curly, blonde hair wearing a long, red dress that sparkled at every angle.

“Hello everyone,” said the co-anchor full of enthusiasm. “My name is Richard Richardson.”

“And I’m Hilary Greene, and welcome to the 85th annual Davis Awards Ceremony.” As she ended the interrupted sentence, the crowd started cheering like no tomorrow.

“Now as you know Hilary, the Davis Award is presented to one male or female who has done wonders in the world of medicine and medical studies.”

“That’s right Dick,” Hilary said taking one step away from her co-host. “Once you are given this award, you are golden. The recipient for the Davis Award this year has done wonderful things in the world of medicine.”

“That’s right Hilary. The recipient of this award has done numerous open heart surgeries, millions of kidney transplants and has found a cure for cancer and old age. Ladies and gentleman please welcome the winner of the 85th annual Davis Award, Michael Thatcher.”
Before I knew it, there was a spotlight on my face and people all around me were shaking my hand, congratulating me. Once everything had finally sunk in, I realized that I had made it to the big leagues. I had just made a name for myself. So I decided to bask in my infinite glory by waving at my loyal subjects while I went up to the podium to claim what was rightfully mine. But before I could get a word out, everybody was shouting my name. “Michael! Michael! Michael...”

“MIKE!” I opened my eyes to the disappointment of just one person. “Mike, get up! Dr. Wilson just paged us down to the clinic, and you know how she gets when her doctors are late.”

I glanced up at him remembering what had happened to us the last time we were late, and both of us made a quick shudder. Once the thought of being late had finally sunk in, I rushed out the door. “Thanks Dew,” I said as, running towards the door and looking back at the chubby, curly-haired guy I called my best friend.

“Dude, no problem,” he replied, trailing far behind. “But could you slow down a bit? This jiggle can only jog so far.”

“Well maybe if you cut some of those curls from down your face, you might actually be able to see where you’re going.”

“Hey, somebody’s got to make you look good, so you can be ‘The Next Face of Medicine’,” Dewey laughed as we rushed down the hall.

“I wish. But come on. We’re probably late,” I said, running through the white halls of Philadelphia Christ Hospital until we finally got to the clinic. Upon arrival Dr. Wilson was already talking to the doctors on her service. So we tried to sneak up behind the other doctors as if we had been there the whole time. And the plan was almost a success until-
“Dr. Thatcher, Dr. Smith, so glad of you to join us today.”

Both of us looked up to find Dr. Wilson, a woman in a long, blonde, ponytail, blood-red scrubs that matched her lipstick, and a long, white lab coat.

“Hel-hello, Dr. Wilson,” Dewey stuttered.

“Now as I was saying, as you all know, spring is coming, and you all know what that means... it’s allergy season,” she said in a medium voice which never wavered. “So far this year we’ve gotten twice as many allergy cases than last year, so I need every doctor who’s not a surgeon to try to get through as many as possible. In most of these cases all they’ll have is a fever and a runny nose, so just prescribe some allergy medication and send them home. You will probably get cases like that all day, so just keep everything moving. Two of you will be with one attending to see how it’s done. Then you all are on your own. If you keep this system moving, then you’ll do just fine. YOU TWO,” Dewey and I shot up as she quickly pointed to both of us, “you two are coming with me.”

Dewey and I followed Dr. Wilson down the hall to Room 5. Inside was a man in a regular patient’s gown with a blonde comb-over that did not look good on him. “Dr. Thatcher, please present the patient.”

I grabbed the patient’s chart and began to read aloud what it said. “Here we have Richard Meyer. He came into the hospital with red eyes, a mild fever, and moderate sneezing.”

“Hi, Mr. Meyer. My name is Dr. Rachel Wilson, and I will be acting as your doctor today.” It was almost a magic trick the way her serious face turned into a happy and welcoming smile. “Now I am going to do a quick exam to make sure everything else is
okay.” As she examined him she noticed small red spots on his right arm that had not been on the chart. “Now, Mr. Meyer, when did this rash appear on your arm?” she asked him.

“I didn’t notice it until just now. Why? Is something wrong?”

“No, everything is going to be just fine. From all of the symptoms that you’ve told me, I believe that this is just your allergies starting to kick in. To help your symptoms, I’ll prescribe some medicine for your allergies and some ointment for that rash of yours. You will be ready to go in a couple of hours.”

“Thanks, Doc.”

“My pleasure. Now if you have any questions or concerns, have a nurse page Dr. Thatcher or Dr. Smith.” As I shook his hand, I took a look at his arm and saw the severity of the rash. After that we left the room and Dr. Wilson turned toward us. “So now that you’ve seen me do this, you should be able to do the same thing to all of your other patients,” she said as her magical smile immediately disappeared. “Do I make myself clear gentlemen?”

“Crystal ma’am,” replied Dewey with a sarcastically serious face.

And we did exactly what she said. Ever since we had treated Mr. Meyer, we had gotten patients with the same exact symptoms. So we did as we were told and prescribed some allergy medication and sent them on their way.

“So much for ground-breaking surgeries,” I said.

“You never know, dude. This could turn out to be our big break. We could cure the common cold,” Dewey patted my shoulder.

That was Mr. Meyer. As soon as I realized who it was, I got Dewey and we ran to his room. When we got there, nurses were surrounding him, trying to calm him down, but all he could do was scream. We fought through the nurses and saw his hands full of blood and his arms and legs with numerous scratches, some all the way to the bone.

“What happened?” I had never seen anything like this in my medical career.

“I don’t know,” replied the nurse, “One minute he’s fine, and the next we’re here trying to keep him from scratching himself. We tied him down, but he kept trying to escape.”

“Okay, what I need you to do is get me one bag of morphine, STAT!” The nurse hurried out of the room to get what I had requested. “Mr. Meyers? Can you hear me sir?” Meyer, lying on his back and tied up, looked up and started murmuring words like ‘It’s so dirty’ and ‘I have to clean it.’ “Okay Mr. Meyer,” I yelled in order to make myself clear, “I am going to try to examine you to see what’s wrong with you.” Dewey and I put on a pair of gloves and tried to examine Mr. Meyer, but before I could even lay a hand on him, he jerked away screaming, trying to break away from the shackles keeping him tied to the hospital bed

“GET AWAY FROM ME,” he screamed, “IT’S ALL FILTHY! I HAVE TO CLEAN IT!” Mr. Meyer struggled, and struggled and after a few seconds loosened his hands from what was tying him to the bed. The nurses tried to hold him back, but that only made him crazier, waving his hands trying to back the doctors from the scene.

“Where is that morphine?” Dewey yelled, trying to regain some control of the situation.

“It’ll be here in a few minutes,” replied a nurse. After about a minute, the doctors
were able to grab each of the patient’s limbs and tie him down, but he still tried to resist. Finally the morphine, along with a psychologist, arrived and Meyer was quickly sedated.

“It appears that your patient is suffering from what seems to be a rare form of Schizophrenia, Dr. Thatcher. From what I can tell, to him, everything around him is dirty, and if it touches him he feels as if he is filthy and tries to scratch it off,” said the psych consult.

“Well, what do you suggest we do?”

“I’ll keep him on the Psych floor and will evaluate him there. We don’t know anything about the illness right now, but I will get back to you as soon as I know more.”

“Thanks.”

Dr. Stenson, the psychologist left the room and went to take Mr. Meyer up to the psych ward. After the doctor left, a beep came over the intercom, and I stopped to listen to what the announcer was going to say.

**Code Red Room 10. Code Red Room 10.**

**Code Red Room 21. Code Red Room 21.**

**Code Red Room 7. Code Red Room 7.**

“Dear God,” said Dewey, “What is happening?”

Over half of the clinic rooms were called into code red, and there were barely enough doctors to tend to them. All of the patients showed the same symptoms as Mr. Meyer. All day people were being brought into the psych ward, diagnosed with the same rare form of schizophrenia. After all of the madness was over, and when most of the doctor’s shifts were almost over, Dr. Wilson called a staff meeting in the lounge.
“As most of you know, there is something wrong with many of the patients in the clinic. We do not know the source of this, and we don’t know how this spreads. But we do know this; the clinic was swept for a virus and came back clean, so we are not the cause of this. We believe this to be coming from an outside source, but we do not know how it is spread, so be on the lookout. Make sure that you are always wearing gloves when tending to a patient and try to be on the lookout for symptoms of allergies or the flu because that is what all of the other patients experienced before going into their ‘episode’. If you feel the slightest bit sick do not, I repeat, DO NOT go to work or go into the ER for inspection. We will need you all to come in early because the way this is spreading, we will have a wave of people infected with this by morning.”

As Dr. Wilson kept going on about handling the patients, I looked down and noticed something, a scratch on Dewey’s arm. “Dewey, when did you get that?” Dewey looked down on his arm and was just as surprised as I was when he saw it.

“I don’t know. It was probably when that psycho went ‘ape’ on us. Don’t worry, it’s not bad. It’ll be gone in the morning,” he said reexamining the cut again, “So do you need a ride home?”

“No I think I’m just gonna stay in one of the empty patient beds in case something else happens.” Dewey and I went our separate ways for that night; he went back to his apartment and I stayed in the hospital. The next morning all the doctors who weren’t on-call were paged to the meeting room of the hospital. I didn’t see Dewey there, so I took out my phone and dialed his number.

“Hello?”
“Hey dude, where are you? Wilson paged us an hour ago.”

“Hey bro, I don’t think I’ll be able to make it to work today. My allergies are acting up.”

“Oh, okay. Well, your ass better be here by tomorrow,” I joked.

“Ha-ha.” There was that sarcastic voice he always used. “Thanks. Bye.”

I hung up the phone and Dr. Wilson told us to start on new patients, but before I did that, I decide to check on Mr. Meyer, the patient from yesterday.

“Mr. Thatcher, we experienced some complications with your patient,” said the same psychologist that tended to him before, “In the middle of the night Mr. Meyer experienced another episode. We tried to calm him, but this episode was too much on his heart.”

“What are you trying to say?” I asked.

“Mr. Meyer passed away last night around 11:00.”

Rattled by this news, I could do nothing but get out of the building as soon as possible. As soon as I opened the door, news reporters crowded around me, flooding me with questions.

“What is wrong with all the people in Philadelphia?”

“Have you found a cure?”

“What is this ‘Spring Fever’ going around?”

“How do you get it?”

I tried to make my way past the reporters as best as I could and bolted for my apartment. As soon as I got there, I went off to bed to take a nap. A few hours later I got a call from the hospital asking me to come over. I grabbed my jacket and headed over to the
hospital for a quick consultation. I found my way to the meeting room where I saw Dr. Wilson and Dr. Stenson, the psychologist, their faces straighter than ironed laundry.

“Um, Michael you might want to take a seat,” said Wilson with tears in her eyes. So I sat down and try to embrace what they might say.

“Dr. Thatcher, it seems that your friend, Dr. Dewey Smith had contracted the virus sometime earlier,” said the psychologist. “This morning Dr. Smith’s landlord complained of hearing disturbances in Mr. Smith’s room. He opened the door to find your friend in the same conditions as Mr. Meyer. They tried to take him back to the hospital, but it was too late. Your friend was pronounced dead on arrival earlier this morning.”

It was as if my world had stopped in that one instant. I couldn’t believe the words coming out of his mouth. “Show him to me,” I demanded.

“Dr. Thatcher, I don’t think that would be the-”

“SHOW ME,” I further demanded, and they had no choice but to follow my request. So they took me to the basement, where the morgue was, and had a medical examiner show his body.

“We’ll allow you some time with him,” Dr. Stenson said leaving with Dr. Wilson.

I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. Here was my best friend, a lifeless body on a metal table. Before I knew it, puddles of tears poured from my eyes. But then it stopped, and I regained control of this situation. “Dewey, I promise you that I will find a cure for this even if it kills me.” I left the morgue and was about to head out the door to find a cure for what killed my best friend, but before I could leave Dr. Wilson stopped me in my tracks.

“Dr. Thatcher I know you’re trying to find a cure for this thing, I was wondering if
there was anything I could do,” she said.

“Thanks for the offer, but this is something I need to do alone,” I tried to run off, but she stopped me once again.

“Then here take this,” she handed me the keys to her lab, “I think you’ll think better in there.” I grasped the keys tightly in my hand and gave her a nod to reassure my thanks and ran up to the lab. I took thousands of samples from past patients with this and looked under a microscope to try to find any similarities, but there were none. Every cell was different. And no matter how much I would hit a breakthrough, I would fail in finding the cure. So instead of staying there I decided to try some research at home.

I ran up the stairs of my apartment building and tried not to touch anything, but the minute I reach my hand for the doorknob, I saw it. A rash was growing on my right arm, and I knew I’d been infected too. I opened the door and turned my TV on to the news to see what had happened since the fever. The minute I turned on the TV, a news anchor was speaking about it.

“Hello Philadelphia, and welcome to WKZT News. Right now I am currently standing in front of Philadelphia Christ Hospital, where what we call the “Spring Fever” has started. An unnamed source has told me that so far there have been no survivors, and we do not know how this spreads. So please be on the lookout. If you notice people with flu or allergy symptoms, or feel these symptoms yourself, you may be infected.”

“Dammit,” I thought to myself. I needed to find this cure fast. I looked at my arm again and realized that there is no time to waste. So I researched on my computer viruses with flu-like symptoms and common cures for them, but there was nothing there for me to
see. I still continued to look for hours, but it was no use. So I decided to go into my bed and lie down for a few hours to clear my head.

I woke up from my long nap and saw that it was 9:00 am, and came to one harsh realization; this was the last day that I would mentally be able to find a cure before the worst part of the fever kicked in. My high temperature and coughing made me want to lie down, but whenever I felt like this I looked at the rash on my right arm as motivation to find the cure for what killed Dewey. I typed on my computer as fast as I could and went to any possible sites that might have been able to help me find a cure, but nothing was successful. So I got up from my desk and paced back and forth, thinking of what might have caused this fever and might be the cure. And then it hit me. “I’d been looking in the wrong place,” I thought to myself. In order to find the origin of this sickness, I needed to go to the place where it all started; the hospital. So I grabbed my bag of research and head for the door, but before I reach the knob I could already see the fever spreading.

Dirt and grime made their way over the doorknob and onto the door. “Oh no,” I thought to myself realizing that this is the final stage of the fever that has no form of recovery. I tried to convince myself that this is all just some illusion, but that doesn’t stop my mind from falling for the tricks that the fever plays on me. Before I knew it, the ceiling was oozing with filth and grease. I tried to run from all of this, but there was nowhere to run. And then it became inevitable to me that I could not run from something inside of me, so I walked into the only “clean” corner of my apartment and surrendered my mind to the fever that had taken, and will continue to take, so many lives.