

Heaven Can Wait

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Extract

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Chapter One

What would you do if you thought you were about to die?

a) Scream and alert everyone in the immediate vicinity?

b) Tell no one and freak out on your own?

c) Pretend it wasn't happening

Me, I pulled up my knickers and burst into tears.

I'd been worried about my health for a week. I was exhausted, my ankles were puffy and my wee was as frothy as a yellow cappuccino. According to the print-out in my hand that meant only one thing; I had an incurable, possibly fatal, disease.

My wedding was in less than forty-eight hours and breaking bad news to my fiancé was about the only thing that wasn't on my enormous 'to do' list. But I had to tell Dan. According to the Internet there would be twice-weekly visits to the hospital, dialysis machines, maybe even a transplant. That was a lot to take on, for any man.

Be strong, Lucy, I told myself as I opened the door to the living room. You can do this. Just be strong.

*

Dan was slouched across the sofa watching a documentary about the mating habits of a spindly yellow spider. His arms were crossed behind his head, his dark hair ruffled, his jaw rough with stubble. He was wearing low-slung jeans and his favourite top – a faded black Jimi Hendrix T-shirt that showed off his broad shoulders and strong arms. That was the thing about Dan, he could throw on any old thing and still look effortlessly gorgeous. Not that he cared, he was one of the least conceited people I'd ever met – which made me love him even more.

As I walked into the room he shifted his long legs to make space for me on the sofa, but I perched on the armrest instead. When the female spider bit the head off the male and ate him, Dan grinned across at me, his brown eyes shining with amusement.

'Given the choice between that and three-hour chats after sex,' he said, 'I'd definitely go for death by head-chomping, every time.'

He looked puzzled when I didn't laugh and I looked away at my hands and twiddled with my engagement ring. Oh God, how was he going to react to my news? Would he cry? Shout? Faint? Worse?

'Dan,' I said, 'I've got something really important to tell you.'

'What's up?' he said, his eyes still fixed on the screen.

'It's bad news.'

'Is this about the wedding?' He turned the television down, twisted onto his side, and gazed up at me.

‘What’s happened now? Baker put a lily instead of a rose on the top of the cake?’

I took a deep breath. ‘I think I’ve got late-stage kidney disease.’

The remote control clattered to the floor as Dan sat up and grabbed hold of my hands, crushing the Internet print-out I’d been holding.

‘You what?’ he said, his eyes searching my face. ‘You didn’t tell me you’d been to the doctor.’

‘I haven’t.’

‘Then how do you know you’ve got kidney disease?’

I squeezed his hands and rubbed my thumb over his fingers. He was obviously in denial. The Internet had warned me he might react like that. ‘Because I looked up my symptoms on the web.’

He frowned and rubbed a hand over his jaw. ‘What kind of symptoms?’

I stared at the TV. It felt weird to be discussing the state of my urine with my boyfriend. It’s not something you really talk about, even if you have been together for seven years.

‘My wee’s frothy,’ I said. ‘There are bubbles in it and the Internet says frothy urine is a symptom of kidney failure.’

Dan laughed so hard he slipped off the sofa and landed on the floor. I stared at him open-mouthed, then reached forward and thumped him on the arm – hard.

‘Why are you laughing, Dan? Stop it, you’re freaking me out.’

He propped himself up on his elbow and reached for my hand. 'Sorry, Lucy. I shouldn't have laughed, not when you're at death's door and all. How long have you had these so-called symptoms?'

I counted the days in my head. 'About a week. No, definitely a week. They started last Friday.'

'And what did we buy on Friday that you said we really needed?'

I wriggled my hand out of Dan's grip and glared at him. There was me, pouring out my heart, and he was talking to me about food shopping. What the hell was wrong with him?

'I don't know, Dan. What *did* we buy?'

'A new toilet freshener that's supposed to get rid of limescale in a flash.'

'So what?'

He raised his eyebrows. 'You're not the only one who's seen bubbling urine in the pan for the last week.'

'What?'

'Lucy, you absolute doofus,' Dan said, poking me in the side, 'you've been weeing on the toilet freshener. You put it at the front of the toilet and it sticks out. That's what's been making our wee frothy.'

I stared at him in astonishment. 'So I don't have kidney disease?'

'No, Lucy,' Dan said, rolling his eyes. 'You don't.'

I burst out laughing. 'Oh my God,' I gasped. 'I'm such an idiot!'

Dan leaped back onto the sofa and pulled at me until I toppled off the armrest and landed on top of him.

He smiled up at me and pushed my hair back from my face.

‘What would I do without you, Lucy Brown?’ he said and kissed me softly.

I held his face in my hands and kissed him back. I felt like life just couldn’t get any more perfect. And I was right, it wouldn’t.

By the end of the next day I would be dead, but not from kidney disease.