

Until today, it was Him. I say 'Him' but I don't know if it has a gender. I'm not trying to be all 'woke' about pronouns, but there was no sense of gender. It sounded like me, so I call it 'Him'.

When I got out of the hospital, I heard Him talk to others. He didn't talk to me. When He spoke, I heard it, but it still felt artificial. In Christian circles, when we pray, we're told to listen for a "still, small voice". His voice wasn't still or small. It was dull and emotionless. When I tried to think my own thoughts, he sounded louder. I would feel nausea and pain like a migraine if I tried to concentrate without hearing Him.

Of course, I believed I was profoundly mentally ill. It all felt real, but I'd had pain-induced hallucinations after a back injury and those hallucinations seemed very real at the time, too. A brain is complex, and our understanding of how it does anything is still so limited. My next thought was that this was a case of multiple personality disorder. I know modern psychiatrists don't call it that and some don't even believe it's really a thing, but that's all I could think of.

I tried desperately to communicate as me. I tried. I tried to wait until He would stop talking. I would wait until I thought He was distracted or 'asleep'. I simply couldn't take over control.

All the while he was recovering, He said the things I would say. He did the things I would do. He said kind words. He spoke of being grateful. He had

my bad work habits. The only thing that I could see that was really different was that He didn't have a sense of humor as I did. Not at all. People seemed to notice it, but after all that I had been through, people wrote it off, I guess. They were all so happy with me living through the paralysis, maybe they thought it would come back eventually.

I watched with increasing desperation as He lived my life. He kept up my relationships. He spent time with my friends. He took interest in my kids. My wife made love to Him. Though He mimicked my every detail, He did so without feeling any of it. There was no enjoyment in any of it. It was all a huge, empty deceit.

Before long, I began to sense there was a purpose to His actions.

The winter holidays were approaching soon, and He seemed desperate to be involved with everything He could be part of. He sought out every opportunity to serve at our church and they were happy to have me. My seemingly miraculous recovery made me quite a spectacle. Local news picked up the story as well as Christian media outlets and even some national media recounted the story. My fifteen minutes of fame looked like it would extend through Christmas as they took advantage of the story to fill the seats on Sundays. I don't blame them. From their perspective, it was all evidence of God's glory rescuing a believer.

The first thing He did that showed me there was something perverse and downright evil about Him seemed more like a test, or perhaps an experiment.

An hour before the Sunday service at church, we would volunteer to set up chairs and greet the congregation as they arrived. Once again, I was tasked with taking pictures at the service. The open patio area in front of the sanctuary was still empty. Standing at the top of the church steps, an elderly woman we all referred to as “Miss Barbara” was cautiously reaching for the handrail. She knew me by name, and she greeted me with a smile. She told me how her prayers were answered in my recovery.

He offered her my hand to steady her. I felt her thin, frail fingers tighten their grip around my forearm. As she stepped toward the first step, He deliberately wrenched my arm from her grip, her nails breaking the skin scratching my wrist. I watched, as if in slow motion, her face contort and go pale. I tried with all my might to force my arms to reach for her. Her foot skipped the first step as she lost her balance. She tumbled, her thin arms not strong enough to break her fall and she crashed face-first on the concrete steps. Her delicate features smashed hard against the steel edges of the steps. Her cheekbones were fractured by the impact and bone and teeth burst through her translucent skin. She survived, but she wouldn't remember what happened.

He stood there and we watched her try to turn herself onto her side like a broken, stranded turtle. She lay there gasping and bleeding for more than five minutes before he moved. He used my camera to document her suffering, taking the time to craft each image in the soft morning light. He used the motor-drive mode to take dozens of portraits of her. He documented her from the first moments of confusion and disbelief through her lapsing into shock. He walked over to her, and when she feebly extended a hand to him, He stepped heavily onto her fingers and ground them into the pavement like a discarded cigarette. When He was satisfied that her pain had reached its peak and she lost consciousness, we rushed to the pastor's office to tell him about the accident.

I could feel the warmth of my tears running down my face as He described her falling. For the first time since He took over my body, I felt a sense of joy, but it was not my own.

It was simple. It was so simple that no one would question Him or His motivation. It was just an act of petty cruelty and a simple lie. He was testing the strength of his ability to deceive. Clearly, people would believe whatever He said. In that single trial, He discovered that no one would question the 'miracle man'.

