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## My Small Goals

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MY SMALL GOALS

*Monday*

I dusted the light fixtures, deleted old emails, put my pills in a plastic pill box. I washed dishes, dried them, then set them in the cabinet. I peeled and chopped carrots into neat little sticks, a dozen per bundle, three bundles. I made hummus from a recipe on the Internet. I read an article about celebrities with psoriasis. And another about how to make a fortune without leaving home. I did three sets of thirty crunches.

Dr. Fitzsimmons said, "It's anger turned inward."

Dr. Luongo said, "It's a loss of the sense self-efficacy, which means a loss of the feeling that you can get things done."

"Fundamentally," they said, "it's a loss of confidence."

"In what?" I said.

"In yourself," said Fitzsimmons.

"In everything," said Luongo.

"What should I do?"

"You're doing it," said Barbara, the nutritionist. "Eat well, exercise, rest. Watch the carbs."

"What else?"

"Don't drink, of course."

"What else?"

"Give the medication a chance to do its work. Don't worry. Set small goals for yourself, things you think you can achieve in a short period of time. Give yourself rewards for your accomplishments. We'll see you next week," they said.

## *Tuesday*

I pumped the bicycle tires to regulation psi. I emptied the compost into the big bucket and carried the bucket to the back of the yard. I called to leave a message for Brenda re Todd's orthodontist appointment, but her answering machine was full. I used to be the captain of a Special Weapons and Tactics Squad (SWAT). I changed the vacuum cleaner bag. Well, there were some complications. The cardboard aperture on the bag was only three and half centimeters in diameter and the plastic tube which feeds into the bag measured 4cms. The box of bags listed the brands of vacuum cleaners which are/should be compatible, and listed, as well, an 800 number for support. I called and waited twenty-five minutes, but never spoke to a customer service representative. With a damp rag, I wiped Todd's soccer trophies until they sparkled. I polished the plaque in my office. Chief Hostage Negotiator, it says. It was given to me after my team successfully quelled a riot at the state's supermax prison. There were no fatalities, no injuries even, except for the prisoner/hostage who'd bitten off one of his fingers in the midst of a panic attack. I extracted the finger from the prisoner's clenched teeth, put it in my pocket and within hours a surgeon sewed it back on.

## *Wednesday*

I called Brenda again; same result as yesterday. I called the company which makes vacuum cleaner bags and waited ten minutes before connecting with Imamu in sales. He told me that it was raining in New Jersey and that he'd come from Nigeria where he had a wife and three daughters. I liked the music of his voice. Did he ever imagine he'd be selling vacuum

cleaner bags for a living? I asked. No, he said. He laughed. "I have never imagine my life," he said. He told me his name means spiritual leader before he transferred me to customer service and I heard nothing but a high-pitched squeal. I completed the moderate Sudoku in the paper and I read about a university student who gunned down six classmates before shooting himself. No one saw it coming. I read about a man who turned a weed-wacker into a small propeller for his inflatable boat. I read advice for a woman whose husband denies he snores. Once we leapt out of a helicopter onto the roof of a twenty-eight story tenement. We were caught in the cross-fire of rival crime families and we had to army-crawl to the nearest cover. Tim caught a bullet in the scapula, very near to his heart. I caught one in the backside. It took four hours for our snipers to reach their proper coordinates, then thirty seconds to neutralize the assailants. I removed the bullet from Tim with a pair of needle-nosed pliers sterilized in alcohol. I flipped Todd's mattress, washed the sheets and pillow cases. Before bed I feasted on carrots and hummus.

### *Thursday*

At 2:46 a.m. I heard a loud bang followed by a hissing sound. Why was there orange smoke emitting from my mailbox, plumes of it? I felt sure it was Barry's idea, the crazy fucker. No, upon further thought, it had to have been Kevin, though Barry probably executed the plan with great enthusiasm, the crazy dumb fuck. I don't miss the work, but sometimes I miss my team. I guess maybe they miss me, too.

Unfortunately, a neighbor called the fire department. I told the captain of the crew to please step back and he told me to please step back. "Have it your way," I said. He chopped the four by four post with his axe

and my mailbox tipped forward, spilling its contents onto the pavement: a fifth of Jim Beam (broken), a pack of Newport 100's (my old brand) and a smoke grenade, of course. The cigarettes were very tempting. I put them in the glove compartment of my Sentra wagon, and while I was at it, I collected some of Todd's loose CD's and returned them to their proper cases. On my way back to the house, I picked up a couple of pressed logs from the shed. I split them, and fed a few pieces into the woodstove. A dark brown crust had formed on the surface of my hummus, but it was easy to remove with a spoon. I ate the celery I'd been saving in the crisper, then tip-toed back to bed. I lifted the quilt as gently as I could so as not ... and then I remembered ... Brenda hasn't shared my bed in more than six months. Nights can be disorienting.

*Thursday (daytime)*

I sat on the edge of my bed and rubbed my feet. They looked old and withered. I pretended my hands were not my hands and for a moment took some comfort in the caress. I pushed myself toward the kitchen, pressed the button on the coffee maker, but apparently I'd forgotten to put any grounds in the filter. I watched the pot fill with water. Anger turned inward? I took the bowl with the remaining hummus from my fridge and threw it at the sliding glass door which leads to the deck. The glass door cracked but didn't shatter, leaving a pattern like streaks of lightning, like Neptune's trident, and the bowl fell to the floor sending up an ugly fountain of bean paste. "How's that?" I said, as if I weren't alone. "I'm turning my anger outward," I said. I went back to bed.

## *Friday*

At noon I made coffee, considered changing out of my robe. There was a message from Brenda on the machine: “Todd’s going to a dance tonight. Sorry, I forgot to tell you, honey. After, he’ll spend the night at Phillip’s. He’ll see you next week. Or, I should say two weeks because of the wrestling tournament in Windsor Falls.” I had the feeling that I should feel something other than relief. And another feeling, difficult to describe, like terror but muted. Something like the time we tried to defuse a bomb at the high school gym and failed. Seconds before the explosion we plunged into a swimming pool. I fear that one day, maybe soon, I’ll forget what I should feel, i.e. what’s normal. Okay, I thought, no point in running out to Safeway for groceries. No point washing the partially dried hummus off the wall. In it, I thought I saw the profile of a swan, slightly elongated. And it looked like an upright vacuum cleaner with a curved handle. And it could have been the figure of a man on his knees, his head bent in supplication. Curiously, it was all of these things, but only ever one at a time, and as hard as I tried, I couldn’t see the changes coming on, which is to say I couldn’t identify the moment of change or some activity of my mind which caused the man, for example, to become a swan or a vacuum. I don’t know how long I sat staring. Later, I called the 800 number. A voice said, “This is Gary, how can I help you?”

“I want Imamu,” I said.

“Sure,” said Gary, “but he’s helping a customer, I’ll have to put you on hold.”

I nodded, which of course is useless over the phone. “Are you there?” said Gary.

“I’m here,” I said. “I’m holding.”