

“I’m Here”

By Marcus Engel

I keep hearing sounds: a siren, the clamor of EMS workers, the click of a stretcher as the wheels fall into place. Breaking glass, a woman screaming, the CB radio squawking in the ambulance. I can't put these sounds in order. I can't listen to them. I can't pay attention to them. They just keep happening.

Someone shouts my name and orders me to lay still. The 'whoosh' of automatic doors. The taste of blood. A warm blanket. Pebbles of concrete under my hand. And pain. God help me, the pain.

I was blind – immediately, totally, permanently; though no one would say for sure until the doctors had time to do some exploratory surgery. But, I knew. Deep down, I knew.

Now, here in the emergency room, white hot pain and utter confusion were my guides on the road to hell. Hands ravaged me. Hands everywhere. Cutting off my clothes, re-positioning my body, grabbing my arms and shoving needles into my flesh. Gallons of morphine are pushed into an IV, it doesn't stop the pain, but it DOES get me so messed up on narcotics that I don't pay as much attention. The ability to think is completely shot. Memories don't hang around for more than a few seconds – then they're gone.

Exhaustion finally takes over and I fall into uncomfortable sleep. Even when I'm asleep, I hurt. *The Pain. Is. Incredible.*

I awake with a mental crash landing. As soon as I grasp "this." This horror. This blackness. This rape of every square inch of my body. I'm bludgeoned into seeing white flashes of light. Not truly visual images, but the mental flashbulbs that explode with sudden pain. And they never stop. Flashbulb explosions of pain. One after another. Pain is all I know. I surrender to the pain.

"Marcus? Can you hear me?" asks a female voice.

I dip my chin. A searing jolt slices my head back into place. I gasp. As I do, the sucking sound of inhalation comes from my throat. My throat? Not my mouth?

The owner of the voice slips her fingers into my right hand. With her other hand, she lightly traces two fingers up my forearm.

"Marcus, you're in the Hospital. You were in a car accident," comes the soft voice again, "Just rest now."

I obey. Back into sleep, back to the haunted terrors of hallucination.

Maybe minutes, maybe hours later, I slam back into consciousness. I find the familiar hand from before.

Everything below the neck aches with a dull pain, and everything above burns like dipping my head into a blast furnace. Fear and hurt take over. My breathing kick starts to the rate of a sprinter. Again, those same questions come.

"Marcus? Can you hear me?"

I'll do nothing to nod again and topple that boulder of pain. Instead, I squeeze the hand. She seems to understand. "Marcus, my name is Jennifer. You're in the hospital. You were in a car accident," Without thinking, I squeeze the hand again, just to show her I'm getting it.

She pauses. She gives my hand a soft squeeze. Then, the most comforting words of all, "I'm here."

I'm here. I don't even know where "here" is, but I know I'm not alone. I'm hurt, I'm helpless and I'm scared. I cannot be alone. I cannot be alone. And she's here. This Jennifer girl with her soft hand and quiet voice. She's here.

Jennifer doesn't say her title, doesn't give her background nor her credentials, just bare bones information. Nothing else is necessary; and she knows it. All I need to know is that in this world of black – this ocean of pain, I am not alone.

"I'm here."

Those two little words are a verbal embrace – a warm, safe place of protection.

I relinquish all independence, all pride and all needs to Jennifer.

Those words, "I'm here," give an anchor of security and reassurance; that reassurance is what I need most. I am not alone.