

Trouble in Zoolandia

“Don’t you dare, general, don’t you dare say a word,” the mayor threatened in a low voice, holding the poor man’s collar.

Shivering, he saluted, with fear expressing through his deep blue eyes.

“I don’t want anyone to know it, especially the media. Who could have thought of the consequence if this is spread among the people, or worse, spread outside Zoolandia.”

“And most importantly,” Mayor Meerkat turned to be worried after all. “I don’t know why there is such a hideous virus emerging from nowhere...”

Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the city, Dr Hippo was looking through a microscope in full concentration. He wanted to capture the appearance of the virus, and the reason for its virulence. He remembered clearly in his head that Mayor Meerkat would not take no idea as an answer. He was given three months to look into this mysterious pathogen and suggest medications.

That was a stormy night. He was called to the Grand Town Hall to meet with the mayor. He was entrusted with the patients and the secret. Besides him, nobody knew anything about that virus. He settled his patients in his lab at the far end of the city, where no trees grew and all citizens were not supposed to trespass. For weeks now he observed that the virus didn’t cause any deaths, but a tremendous pain ran through the blood of the patients. They screamed and screeched through days and nights, and begged Dr Hippo to treat them, or otherwise, kill them. Given its sudden rise, the helpless doctor could do nothing, either relieving the pain or cure them. No pain killers could ever stop the suffering. He was not able to give euthanasia as well, as the government had withheld the decision for legalising it for so long, claiming there was still an ongoing debate.

“Crash!” Dr Hippo was interrupted by a loud noise. He suspiciously turned towards the wards. His lab was at the very end of the corridor, where there are separate rooms at both sides.

Totally there were about 20 patients, with new cases being discovered everyday, with the help of surveillance cameras installed by the mayor all around the city. The advanced technology enabled the cameras to screen for the virus. The mayor would send secret agents to kidnap the patients when they were asleep, and wiped out memories from the ones who knew them.

Dr Hippo alertly walked through the corridor. He noticed one door was ajar. He carefully opened it and saw a mess was made inside. The curtains had claw marks and the floor contained red footprints. The patient, Mr Beaver, was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, a loud screech broke the silence and Dr Hippo turned around, only to see Mr Beaver covered in blood and his eyes showed craving for the doctor’s blood. He was like all other patients in the previous days, where no extra symptoms were developed besides experiencing great pain. Now the patient in front of Dr Hippo was like a zombie. The doctor ran and the zombie followed him, chasing him through the floor, until Dr Hippo was cornered. He said to himself that was his doom, but that was when the zombie stopped for a moment, stared at him, and collapsed. Dr Hippo slowly stood on his shaking legs and checked on Mr Beaver. He found

that he was choked to death as there was a lot of blood in his windpipe. He had never seen such a thing before and was petrified.

Carefully, he obtained a blood sample from the deceased patient and noticed that the virus had mutated. He suspected the revolutionary pain-killer drug he developed was a cause for that mutation. The drug was able to reduce the torture that the patients are undergoing to just a tiny discomfort in the limbs but the virus may as well have grown stronger. Fortunately for the next few days there were no patients turning to a blood-thirsty zombie.

Dr Hippo immediately reported to Mayor Meerkat and received a command for a visit to Town Hall. Once at glance, the mayor dragged the doctor into his basement office.

"No one's following you, right?" The Mayor suspected.

Dr Hippo shook his head.

Entering the code, he led him to his desk.

"You may have to stop giving the patients your drug, doctor."

"But they would be in great pain if I don't do so."

"Which is more valuable, life or reduced suffering? You don't know who would turn into a zombie the next day!"

"But I can't stand seeing them in great pain!"

Dr Hippo realised he had lost his manner and calmed himself down.

"There is no cure for the disease, mayor," Dr Hippo said hopelessly. "Why couldn't you just authorise the use of euthanasia?"

"Because..." the mayor hesitated. "Because...not everyone is on board for this idea. Some are saying no man deserves to choose death and it's simply too risky. You wouldn't know who would get hold of the drug and do bad things, am I right?" Mayor Meerkat explained in a soothing yet cunning smile.

Dr Hippo had words in his heart but just couldn't let out. For years the Anti-euthanasia Organisation had gathered petitions to refrain the bill from passing in the congress.

"But..." The doctor tried to continue.

"No buts, Dr Hippo, a law is a law."

Dr Hippo was let go and escorted back to his home. That night he tossed and turned, remembering every word the mayor had spoken. It was like a thorn stabbing to his heart but he couldn't take it out. No one had greater power than the government.

Then it struck him.

The next day, he woke up at the break of dawn and travelled miles to the Scorching Savanna, where his best friend, Mr Lion, lived. He knew his pal would leave for work at the news station as early as the sun rises. To his expectancy, he found Mr Lion was already neatly dressed when he answered the door.

Unfortunately, Mr Lion had no idea who the man was standing in front of him, as his memories about Dr Hippo were cleared when he was assigned the duty. Desperate to remind him, the doctor has no way to retrieve the memory deep from his best friend's brain. He tried to mention the best memories they had when they were kids but nothing seemed to work.

Annoyed by this madness, Mr Lion pushed Dr Hippo away, but that was when he noticed the watch on his wrist, on which it was engraved "to my best bud".

Then it all went flushing back to his mind. "I remember I gave my best friend that watch on his 18th birthday...but I just can't remember who it was..." Mr Lion started to drop tears. Dr Hippo smiled with a sparkle in his eyes as well. They hugged tightly with the sun shining on them.

"Alright, I'm gonna be late," Mr Lion brought Dr Hippo to his car and drove to work. On the way, Dr Hippo explained every little detail to him and he had a favour to ask. Shocked by the news, Mr Lion pulled over on a deserted highway and started panicking. Dr Hippo soothed him and reassured that everything would soon be fine. Slowly calming down, Mr Lion understood why Dr Hippo would find him--- the media has a greater influence than the government.

"So let me get this straight, you want us to broadcast to the whole city about this new virus thing and how it is causing great pain, just to get support for legalising euthanasia?" Mr Lion questioned.

"Yes."

Stunned and confused, Mr Lion replied. "Alright then."

"Do you know why the mayor wouldn't just approve the use of euthanasia?"

"Everybody knows that, the Anti-euthanasia Organisation bribed him."

Mr Lion suddenly had a thought. "Just one problem, how would you persuade the public?"

"You'll see." Dr Hippo said with a confident smile.

After half an hour, they arrived at the news station, the Roaring Radio. It was the most popular broadcasting company in Zoolandia and had an audience of 90% of all citizens. Mr Lion quickly got the anchorman the top news for today and there went the morning news session. He read through it with shock and fright and Dr Hippo could almost hear the entire city gasping.

Soon enough the message reached through households rich and poor and everyone knows about the virus. Of course, words had also travelled into the mayor's ears and he was furious.

"That traitor!" He yelled in his office and at the same time, the whole building could feel a quiver.

One thing led to another, soon the public regained knowledge about the kind of pain some people were suffering in the city. For decades, Zoolandia had developed a perfect healthcare system and diseases were rare. Scientists had found methods to keep the city healthy and none of the citizens were aware of agony. Nobody knew what pain was and how it felt. However those who forgot their family or friends who were infected with the virus still couldn't remember a thing. After seeing a video Dr Hippo has recorded in his lab, all of the citizens felt the tremendous torture these patients were experiencing and were speaking in one voice--- legalise euthanasia at once.

The mayor, despite knowing all citizens were asking for the same thing, didn't summon the congress to formally discuss the issue. Instead, he gathered his own team of photographers and held a live broadcast in the conference hall.

"Fellow citizens, what you are hearing about the virus is all fake news. Don't be fooled by that mad doctor. The video is obviously recorded from a movie scene. There's no need to panic. Nobody is suffering..."

Suddenly the door at the entrance squeaked open. For a second, everyone stared suspiciously but there was nothing but silence. Suddenly out of nowhere, a horrifying figure with ripped clothes and sharp fangs stood there at the entrance. The cameraman turned towards it and the whole city witnessed its savage in the hall. It jumped and climbed, scaring everyone inside the hall, making them scream like little girls and ran for their lives. On the other side of the entrance, Dr Hippo was waiting until everyone had left to unplug a wire and the zombie disappeared.

The live broadcast made the crowd gasp in horror. Dr Hippo went in front of the camera and told the public, “no one deserves to be in endless pain and no one would like to see their loved ones in agony. For weeks I have been watching my patients moaning and I could do nothing to help. It is like my heart is torn to a thousand pieces. Could you stand seeing your beloved person being tortured? I bet you can’t even imagine. So please, everyone, do me a favour and vote for a pass in the use of euthanasia.”

Dr Hippo’s words of truth touched people’s hearts. Soon after, the congress passed the bill and the mayor was charged for misfeasance in public office. Dr Hippo arranged visits for the patients’ family and friends, and they finally remembered. Although they have no knowledge of the disease, they certainly felt the pain their loved ones were going through, almost like a hundred times more tormenting. One by one, they agreed to end their lives and torture in the hands of Dr Hippo.

One morning after a week, Dr Hippo met Mr Lion for coffee.

“That trick you used was brilliant.” Mr Lion applauded. “But aren’t you afraid of the zombie?”

“Oh that’s not real, “ Dr Hippo chuckled. “That’s just a hologram.”

He was reading a news story on his tablet, with the headline, the Virus Magically Disappeared After Wreaking Havoc for Months. Dr Hippo grinned for relief.

Nobody deserves to be in pain and not have a choice to end it, and those who are seeing their loved ones being tormented would suffer even more.

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