

The Domino Effect

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Jake always scoffed at the idea of falling sick. At 50, he was strong and healthy as a horse. Despite being an accountant with a desk job, he did an hour of yoga and an hour of walking everyday. He ate his vitamins, and his calcium and iron tablets. His regular blood tests showed everything was under control.

So when he had the viral attack and had to lie in bed despite his trying to will it otherwise, he couldn't understand it. The doctor told him that the infection was in the air and it could happen to anyone. He still failed to understand how he, who claimed to be as strong as a horse, could have the infection. "You should be as strong as an ox, next time," the doctor quipped, a twinkle in his eye. Jake did not enjoy the joke and thought it in bad taste.

His wife Sally, and the twins, hovered around him, asking about his health. He shouted at them, "Leave me alone, I'll be fine." So they tiptoed around the house, hushing and shushing each other, thinking he was asleep and resting. He could not sleep for the fever and pain would not let him, despite the medicines he had to take. His agitated mind made things worse.

But as he lay in bed, he slowly began to change. The medicines made him weak, and he did not want to get up from bed anymore. Even when the dosage stopped and he could have pushed himself out of bed, slowly and surely, building his strength up with meat broth and vegetables Sally served him, he found he did not want to.

After the illness, things began to change within him. He no longer wanted to make the effort required to keep himself going or keep himself on top of things. He had begun to enjoy being in bed, being waited upon.

A month later, since he had not recovered, so he said, he took voluntary retirement. Sally worked as a teacher, and they could live on her salary. The children were moved to a public school and eventually, they downsized to a smaller house. He told Sally, "The children will leave the nest, give them a few years, and then this house will be enough for us." Sally nodded, keeping her thoughts to herself.

Five years later, the twins, aged eighteen, left home, saying a quick goodbye.

That day, Jake was propped up against his pillows, reading a book. He gave his wife a cursory look. "Now you can give me all your attention. Isn't that great? Some soup, Sally, please."

She walked in with his soup, and he noticed that she was dressed rather well.

"Haven't you taken leave from work for today?" he asked, surprised.

"Yes, I have. And I am taking leave from working for you forever. Isn't that great?" she said, walking out, suitcase in hand, looking as strong and healthy as an ox.