Title: Flow Cytometry Saves The Day
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Summary: Flu ridden and fever-addled Shaun is a handful to take care of. Lea tries to rise to the challenge, but Shaun won't have it.
Author's Note: This one was inspired by one of my trusty fanfic guest reviewers, I hope I did it justice. And thank you so much!
I don't know if any Shaun sickfics have been written before, since I'm not much of an avid reader in this fandom. Similarities to other fics will be coincidental and not intended.
Timeframe: I would imagine this takes place some time early in season 5 (not yet knowing what is going to happen at the time of writing this fanfic, but assuming they don't immediately get married in the first few episodes).
Author's Note: Please do not share or upload this fic anywhere without the author's permission.

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Something is different today, Lea immediately knows it when she wakes up, because Shaun is still next to her, sleeping.

He has a meticulous morning routine, is always up at the first alarm, the one that she usually sleeps through because he switches it off immediately. His phone is beeping incessantly on his nightstand, and he's not moving.

"Shaun," she mumbles sleepily, her brain still wrapped in the last remnants of morning fog.

He just lets out a low murmur.

"Shaun, can you switch off your alarm?"

He doesn't react, and she sighs. Jesus Christ.

She reaches over him, almost lies on top of him, because how else can she reach his phone without leaving the nice and cozy confines of her blanket, blindly groping for his phone, hitting the screen repeatedly with her fingers and hoping she'll eventually tap the off button.

The damn thing falls silent after a few seconds, and she relaxes. Finally.

Rolling back onto her side of the bed, she turns her head to look at him. His face is somewhat flushed, his skin clammy, a few locks of hair wet and clinging to his forehead. Her alarm bells go off.

"Shaun," she repeats, now immediately more awake. "Are you sick?"

He lets out something that sounds more like a moan than a hum. She places her hand gently on his forehead.

"Shaun, I think you're sick. You're running a fever."

"My head feels weird," he mumbles.

"Yeah, no kidding. Is it the flu, do you think?"

“I don’t know.” He shifts in bed and turns away from her. A definite message of ‘leave me alone’ or ‘stop talking’ or ‘this sucks, I wanna die’.

“Tell me what your symptoms are.”

He doesn’t respond, and, uh oh. This won’t be easy. Non-communicative Shaun is a challenge on a normal day. Non-communicative *and* sick Shaun will be a whole other level.

“Shaun, please talk to me. I need to know if I have to be worried or call the hospital, or, I don’t know, call an ambulance.”

“No ambulance,” he says immediately.

“Okay, then what? Do you have a cold? Is your nose stuffy?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, what else?”

“I have a headache. And a sore throat.”

“Yeah, that checks out. Cough?” No, she’d have noticed that throughout the night.

He visibly shivers next to her. “I’m cold.”

“Yeah, okay, that’s the fever. Hold on.”

She gets out of bed and starts gathering up all sorts of things from the apartment—the infrared thermometer and the ibuprofen bottle from the bathroom, a glass of water from the kitchen, the woolen blanket that’s lying neatly folded over the backrest of the sofa.

She places the items on his bedside table and unfolds the blanket to drape it over his body. “Here, that should help. I’m gonna take your temperature, okay?”

He hums a tired *‘hm’* as a response. Not entirely unexpected.

101.5. That isn’t too alarming.

He still has the frame of mind to ask, “What is my temperature?”

“101.5.”

“That doesn’t require an ambulance.”

She actually has to smile. “No, it certainly doesn’t. I put a glass of water here on your table, and some ibuprofen if you want them. Do you wanna try and go back to sleep?”

“Sleep,” he mumbles.

“Okay.” She smiles a small smile. “Sleep it is.”

She walks over to the window and closes the curtains to keep out the harshest of the light, make it more agreeable for him. Just as she is about to leave him to it, he stirs and sits up, a sudden urgency on his face. “I have to go to the hospital.”

“No. No, you don’t. I’ll call in sick for you.”

“We have a very important surgery today. We’re operating on a patient with endometriosis, and they are flying in a specialist colorectal surgeon from San Diego because the case is very complicated. Dr. Lim said it was very important that we pay close attention, because she wants us to learn the same technique at St. Bonaventure Hospital.”

“Dr. Lim will understand that you’re running a fever and are in no shape to actively *or* passively participate in any surgeries today.”

“No, she won’t.”

“Yes, she will.”

He sucks in a quick breath, and then sneezes three times in quick succession. Lea looks at him. “Gesundheit. And that is exactly why you’re not going to be at the hospital today. Can’t have you sneezing into open chest cavities.”

“The surgery will be in the abdominal region, and we are wearing masks in the operating room.”

“And that makes it better, how?”

He looks at her, the confusion painted all over his face. “Abdominal surgery is not better than chest surgery.”

He wipes his nose with the back of his hand, and Lea lets out an involuntary, “Ew. Okay. Shaun,” she crouches down in front of the bed to emphasize her point. “I will bring you tissues, and I will make you some tea, and you will be staying in bed today. Or the couch if you wanna be adventurous. You will *not* be at the hospital. Do you understand me?”

He doesn’t say anything, but his head is bobbing slightly from left to right, and she lets out a long-suffering sigh.

She goes to find the box with the tissues, places it right next to the ibuprofen and the water glass. Shaun is still sitting upright in bed, his hair all messy and wet at the tips, and she gives him her best intimidation stare. “Shaun, no getting out of bed unless it’s to go to the toilet or the couch, okay?”

His mind seems a million miles away, and she’s not actually sure it registered. But first things first.

Her phone call is answered on the third ring. “Dr. Lim.”

“Yes, hi, it’s Lea. Dilallo. Shaun’s girlfriend.” Why is she explaining this, Lim knows who she is. They’d downed tequila shots together in Guatemala.

“Yes, what can I do for you?”

“Yeah, I wanted to call in sick for Shaun today. He’s got the flu, or at least I think he has the flu. I mean, it very much looks like the flu.”

There’s a brief pause at the other end, then a hesitant, “Okay.”

“He’s running a fever, and he seems little out of it, and… I, uh…” She draws in a breath. *Breathe, Lea.*

She starts again, “He was ratting something off about needing to be at the hospital for some important surgery you said was mandatory to attend, and even though I told him you’d understand he’s in no shape to come into work today, I’m not sure if it really registered. Can you maybe talk to him?”

“Yes, I can do that.”

She sighs in relief. “Okay, great. Thank you!”

Lea goes back to the bedroom, finding Shaun in very much the same position as before, except now he’s wrapped the woolen blanket around his shoulders. He looks both adorable and pitiful at the same time.

She holds out the phone to him. “Dr. Lim wants to speak with you.”

He hesitantly takes the phone, and Lea retreats to the living room, wishing she could be privy to both sides of that conversation. All she can hear is his, “Yes,” and, “Yes,” and, “No,” and, “I understand.”

She goes back to the bedroom when she doesn’t hear any more conversation, looking at him intently?

“And?”

“Dr. Lim said I should stay home today.”

“Well, Dr. Lim is very smart, and she is also your boss. So are we in agreement on this?”

“Hm. Yes.”

“Okay, excellent. Do you still wanna go back to sleep?”

“I am not tired.”

“I can make you some buttered toast, and we’ll see where you wanna take it from there.”

“I’m not hungry.”

“Yeah, I figured. So we’ll postpone the eating to later. How about I bring you your laptop, and maybe some books, or your headphones for that podcast you keep talking about?”

“Okay,” he readily agrees. “And the medical journals from my backpack.”

“Medical journals it is.”

When she checks on him half an hour later, he is sound asleep, the *Surgical Science* journal splayed across his chest mid-article. She carefully takes it and puts it on the nightstand, making sure to mark the page that was open.

It's there and then that she decides to let the hospital know she will be working from home today.

She spends an hour checking and answering e-mails, and quietly checks on Shaun again. He's still sound asleep.

What was it that her mother always used to make her when she was sick? Chicken broth with garlic and ginger tea. That sounds like a good idea, except they have neither ginger nor garlic in the house.

Looks like a trip to the corner store is in order.

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Her excursion to the 7-Eleven takes a lot longer than she wants. Some kind of issue with the registers that takes forever to fix, until finally they let her check out and pay for the groceries.

The apartment is quiet when she gets back. She places the groceries next to the stove and quietly pokes her head into the bedroom. The bed is unmade but empty.

She turns around, because wasn't the bathroom door open? Yep, it certainly is.

"Shaun?"

There's no answer. She checks the couch for good measure. There's no Shaun to be found. "Goddammit," she sighs, fishing for her phone in her purse, dialing his number.

"This is the voicemail of Dr. Shaun Murphy. I can't answer your call right now. Please leave a message." Short and to the point. She wonders how long he's practiced recording it in one smooth go.

She decides to leave a message. "Shaun, I don't know where you are, and I'm worried. Call me back, please?"

She dials the next best person she knows, who answers the phone quickly.

"Hello."

"Glassy?"

"Lea. What is it?"

"Is Shaun at the hospital?"

He seems to hesitate. "I'm not sure. I haven't seen him today."

"Could you go and look?"

There's another pause. "Can I ask why?"

"Yeah, he's got the flu, and he should be in bed, but as it turns out, Shaun seems to hate the bed, or the couch, *or* the apartment, especially when there's important surgeries going on that apparently he's been told he shouldn't be missing. I went out to get some fresh ginger root, and now he's not here. So the only logical conclusion is…?"

"That he'd go to the hospital."

"Yes, exactly."

Glassy sighs. "Okay, I'll go find him."

"Thank you," she tells him. "Be gentle with him. He may be a bit cranky."

"I will do my best."

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It's three quarters of an hour later that there's a knock on their door. Lea opens, and there's Glassy with a befuddled and slightly guilty looking Shaun next to him, his cheeks still flushed.

Glassman raises his eyebrows. "It seems you lost something." He gently gives Shaun a nudge so that he takes a step forward.

She laughs. "And you found it. My hero!"

Shaun actually walks into the apartment, complaining, "It doesn't smell right in here."

Lea and Glassman share a look. She purses her lips. "Is he…?"

"Delirious? No, I don't think so. He's got that sensory thing going on, with the…" Glassman makes a wavy hand gesture, "You know what I mean."

Shaun turns to them. "Why are you talking like I'm not here?" His voice sounds nasal and clogged, and it's actually kinda cute.

She faces in Shaun's direction. "Because you are sick and should be in bed and not privy to this conversation."

"But I *am* privy to this conversation. This particular viral infection does not affect my heari—" He doesn't get to finish the sentence when another sneeze works its way out of his nose.

Lea walks up to him and gently places her hands on his upper arms, turns him around and pushes him forward towards the bedroom. "You, Mr. Murphy, will put on your pajamas and go to bed. You will not emerge from the bedroom unless it is a matter of certain urgency, and urgency does not include leaving the apartment to go anywhere, *especially* the hospital. Do you understand me?"

"Yess."

"Good. Pajamas. Now. I will check on you in a few minutes."

Closing the bedroom door behind him, she looks at Glassman, who has in the meantime pulled up one of the chairs at the kitchen island. She sighs. “I swear, herding a horde of kindergarten toddlers is easier than this.”

He smiles at her. “He can be a bit of a handful.”

“What do I do with him?”

“You seem to be doing just fine.”

“Yeah, except when he decided to be a stubborn idiot and take a bus to the hospital to nearly pass out in surgery.”

“If it’s any consolation, he wasn’t actually *in* surgery. He was watching from the gallery.”

“Annoying the other surgeons through the intercom, I’m guessing?”

Glassman smiles. “Something like that.”

“I hope you told him that it’s okay to take a few sick days. He seems pretty hung up on that whole surgery thing.”

“Excelling at his job is very important to him, and I think the way his brain works, he tends to hyperfocus on things. He’s going over it in his mind, over and over. And then it amplifies and becomes a compulsion, and that’s when he takes busses to the hospital, or freaks out over nothing, or wakes people up at 2 am to help him solve a puzzle.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right. And apparently fever-addled Shaun brain means even more intense hyperfocusing. Yay me.” She gestures towards the coffee maker in the corner. “Do you want some coffee? Tea?”

He gets up from the chair. “No, thank you. I should get back to the hospital.” He points a finger at the bedroom door. “Would you mind?”

“No, go ahead.”

She watches from the kitchen as Glassman softly raps on the door, then takes a step in and holds a brief conversation. He closes the door behind him again.

Before he leaves, he tells her, “Call me if you need anything.”

“Thank you for bringing him home.”

“Thank *you* for taking good care of him.”

Lea puts on the electric kettle and starts chopping up the ginger root into small pieces before she pours hot water over them. She adds a teaspoon of honey to the mug for good measure and takes it into the bedroom.

Shaun’s eyes trace her idly as she sits down on the edge of the bed. “I made you some ginger tea. I hope you like ginger, I guess I should have asked. I’ll drink it if you don’t want it.”

He seems undecided, or maybe he's just out of it.

"You should try to drink something," she adds. "You know, stay hydrated."

"Okay," he says, his voice raspy.

She watches him sip the tea, tries to gauge whether he likes it, or doesn't. Probably he can't taste or smell much right now anyway.

He lies down again after a few sips, putting the mug back on the nightstand. She places a hand on his thigh. "How are you feeling?"

"Not very good."

"Yeah, I bet. Do you want an ibuprofen? It'll help with the headache and the fever. Maybe it'll let you sleep a bit."

"Okay," he agrees, and she helps him get two pills out of the bottle to wash them down with water.

"All right, I'll let you get some rest."

His eyes are already closed, and she gets up from the bed.

"Lea?" His voice is nasal and small and miserable.

"Yes, Shaun?"

"Can you stay?"

"Of course I can."

She lies down on her side of the bed, feeling the warmth radiating off his body, even through the blankets. He scoots closer and practically snuggles against her, and Lea has to smile. Apparently fever-addled Shaun brain also means he gets clingy. Not something she would have expected, but here he is—the ever surprising mystery that is Shaun Murphy.

It barely takes two minutes until his breaths even out and he falls into an exhausted slumber. She stays next to him for much longer than that.

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Some two hours later, Shaun emerges from the bedroom, bleary-eyed and disoriented. He makes a beeline for the bathroom and comes out a few minutes later.

She looks up from her work laptop. "Hey, sleepyhead. Feeling better?"

"Hm. Not really." He blows his nose into a tissue.

"Aw. Sucks to have the man-flu, doesn't it?"

"*Man*…flu?"

“Yeah, it’s… No, forget I said that.”

He squints his eyes and squeezes them shut for a moment. “My head hurts.”

“Sounds like more ibuprofen is the way to go.”

Immediately, he says, “N-no. Recommended maximum dosage is 400 milligrams every four to six hours. I took 400 milligrams two and a half hours ago.”

“Well, okay, then how can we help make you feel better?”

“You can’t. 92 percent of rhinovirus and adenovirus infections in otherwise healthy patients resolve on their own without a strict medication regimen or intervention. Until then, I will just have to suck it up and die.”

She laughs out loud, his sense of humor is such a delight when it comes out. She closes the gap between them and lightly touches his arm, steering him to the couch. “Here’s what we can do in the meantime. Why don’t you get settled on the couch, and we’ll see if we can find you something nice and soothing to watch.”

He makes a face, so she continues, “Okay, maybe not the TV then. What else can we distract you with? Some medical textbooks? Something online? A few nice and easy Sudokus, maybe?”

“I don’t like Sudokus.”

“Okay, striking Sudokus from the list.”

“I want to call the hospital, I want to know how the surgery went.”

“No, nuh-uh, Shaun. No hospital today. The surgical department doesn’t dissolve into chaos because you’re not there for a day or two. There are plenty capable surgeons at St. Bonaventure who can take care of patients today.”

He looks at her. “Why are you not at work today?”

“Because… I’m working from home today…?” she says carefully.

“You are home to make sure I’m not going to the hospital.”

“Y….eah. There is that.”

“Being at the hospital will make me feel better. There is a lot more distraction there. There isn’t much distraction here.”

“Okay, I’ll try not to take that personally, but can we go back to the part where you said that 93 percent of all common cold infections resolve on their own without intervention?”

“92 percent,” he corrects immediately.

“Okay, 92 percent. I’m sure there’s also statistics that say they resolve faster with bedrest and taking it easy.”

He ponders that for a moment. “There are, but I do not recall the exact numbers.”

“And what do we learn from that…?” She looks at him questioningly.

“That I should have paid more attention during the infectious diseases curriculum.”

She sighs a resigned sigh. “Bedrest and taking it easy?”

He sneezes again, fishing a tissue out of his pajama pants pocket. “Ugh.”

“Yeah, I know this sucks.”

He gets up and goes to the bedroom, and when he comes back, he has his cell phone at his ear. Lea shakes her head. She knows exactly who he’s calling.

She lifts a punitive finger, and she knows he’s seen it, because he quickly averts his eyes and turns away. Still, she lets him make the phone call, because she knows he will not relent if she doesn’t, and then it’ll fester and coalesce into a big Shaun thing, and none of them need that today.

“How did the surgery go?” she hears him ask, and she wonders who he’s called. Not Lim, she assumes. Probably Park.

There’s a lot of medical jargon, and a lot of questions from Shaun. At some point, his voice becomes slightly irritated, and he starts pacing up and down near the dining table. “Yes,” he says, then, “That is not good,” and, “Yes. No, I am not allowed to come in today,” and a few more yeses and nos before he hangs up with an, “Okay, goodbye.”

“So how did the surgery go?” she asks him.

“It went well, but the patient is not doing well in post-op.”

“Shaun…” she says with a mock-threatening undertone.

“I know. I can’t go to the hospital. That’s what I told Dr. Park.”

“I heard. And you won’t.”

“I already did.”

“Yes, and Glassy drove you back here, and that’s what he’s gonna do a second time if you sneak out again. Which you won’t, because I will be here, watching you like a hawk.”

“You… do *not* have very good bedside manner.”

“Look who’s talking. I made you ginger tea, didn’t I? I also made you chicken soup. Are you still not hungry?”

“I am not hungry.”

“Aw, Shaunie. What are we gonna do with you?”

He lifts his right index finger. “I have to— Hm.”

He grabs his laptop off the table and plops down on the couch, his computer in his lap. Lea shakes her head. It’s gonna be a long day.

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A few urgent e-mails and a coding issue have Lea distracted for the next hour or two. She has a conference call in five minutes, and she plugs her headphones into her laptop, hoping it won’t be too distracting for Shaun.

He is still firmly planted on the couch with his laptop. She knows he’s been looking at lab results and imaging that he probably got one of the first-years to e-mail to him. He’s been mumbling things to himself, and she’s seen him do that spacing out thing, staring at nothing, tracing invisible patterns into the air. It’s actually kinda cute, and she relishes the rare opportunity to see his brilliant mind at work.

The conference call starts—another software company presenting their capabilities to fish for business with St. Bonaventure. Unique offerings, bespoke solutions, bla bla bla.

Lea is in the middle of asking for details on their HIPAA compliance, when Shaun suddenly jumps up from the couch, loudly exclaiming, “I know what’s wrong.” He pokes the air with his right index finger for good measure. “I have to go.”

She panics, quickly excusing herself to the phone conference audience before she pulls the headset off her head.

Shaun is already in the bedroom, rummaging for clothes to put on.

“Shaun, remember what we agreed on?”

He gives her a two-second look, then turns his attention back to the wardrobe. “I know what is wrong with the patient. We need to run a flow cytometry test.”

“I’m sure you do, but I’m also sure you don’t have to physically be at the hospital to get that test run.”

“I don’t, but it will be easier and faster.”

“It will also be detrimental to your health, and possibly to other people’s health, and I swear to God, if you go to the hospital, I will sic Glassy on you, just like this morning.”

He stops pulling things out of the wardrobe and gives her that look—the innocent, sheepish one that she finds hard to resist. Not today, though. “Nope, Shaunie, that wet puppy look won’t work on me today.”

She quickly grabs his phone off the coffee table and holds it out to him. “Call Park. Call the lab. Call one of your first-years. I’m sure they can run the flow cimtometer thing without you.”

“Cytometry,” he corrects her.

“Yeah, that thing. You,” she playfully pokes him in the chest, “do not need to be at the hospital for this.”

His face falls. “Okay.”

“Okay,” she repeats with a relieved sigh.

He’s already dialing the phone, then excitedly announces without a greeting, “I know what is wrong with the patient. You need to run a flow cytometry test.”

Lea can only shake her head.

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It takes another long two hours of Shaun getting immersed in medical patient details on his laptop, two more phone calls to the hospital (once Asher, once she’s not sure), until he finally exhausts himself enough to doze off into a slumber, his head in an awkward position on the couch pillow in the corner.

Lea smiles, hoping he won’t wake up with a crick in his neck on top of everything, and draws the blanket up over him, resisting the urge to brush an errant lock of hair from his forehead for fear of waking him up.

The tissue box on the coffee table has been thoroughly diminished, and there’s a wastepaper basket filled well with used ones next to the table. The irritated red skin around his nose pays tribute to how his day has been. His body temperature is still up, but at least he looks peaceful and tired. Maybe there is hope for him yet.

He sleeps right through dinner, and she decides his recuperation would better be served in bed.

She crouches down next to the couch, softly touching his hand that is dangling out from under the blanket.

“Shaun?”

He seems really out of it, and she has to gently shake his shoulder for him to awaken. He looks bleary-eyed and disoriented, blinking a few times. His voice is thick with sleep and fever and swollen sinuses. “Is it morning yet?”

“No, sleepyhead, it’s just after 9 pm. You should go to bed.”

“I’m tired.”

“Yeah, I bet.” She softly touches his forehead. “You’re really warm, I think your fever has gone up.”

“Body temperature varies during the day by roughly 0.9 degrees,” he mumbles. “It usually increases in the late afternoon and evening.”

“Thank you for the human physiology lesson, but not what I was getting at.”

“I will go to bed. I need to brush my teeth.”

“I think you can sleep one night without brushing your teeth. You haven’t eaten anything all day anyway.”

“I had ginger tea. There was honey in it.”

“And maybe so, but I don’t think your teeth will rot from one missed toothbrushing routine. Come on.”

She peels the blanket away from him, and he visibly shivers, but he sluggishly gets up and shuffles into the bedroom. She follows him in and watches as he crawls miserably under the covers.

“Want me to take your temperature?”

He just hums, and she takes it as a yes. “You should take another ibuprofen to get the fever down.”

“How high is it?”

“102.4 now.”

“Hm.” He’s already half asleep. She decides not to press the matter. Sleep might just take care of it.

His phone dings in the living room, and he opens his eyes. Always being on phone message alert comes with the territory of being a surgical resident. “Hold on,” she tells him.

She doesn’t have his unlock PIN, but the message he just received is still displayed on the lock screen. It’s from Park and it says, *“Flow cytometry saved the day, patient is recovering nicely. Feel better, we’ve got this.”*

She smiles as she goes back into the bedroom. His eyes are closed, and she’s not sure if maybe he’s already asleep.

“What did it say?” he asks sleepily.

“That your patient is doing well and that your flow thingy saved the day. And Alex hopes you’ll feel better.”

The smallest of smiles appears on his face.

“Can we switch off your alarm for tomorrow morning?”

“Okay,” he mumbles.

“I need your finger.”

“For what?”

“To unlock your phone.”

He lazily pokes his right hand out from under his blanket burrow and she helps him place his index finger on the fingerprint sensor.

“There you go. There’s a message from Glassy, too. He sent you a Get Well GIF. It’s kinda tacky.”

His voice is barely audible now. “I’ll look tomorrow.”

“Yeah, okay. Want me to stay for a while?”

“Yes.”

Oh yeah, clingy Shaun. How could she forget? She lies down on her side of the bed. He’s got his back turned towards her, so her fingers come up and gently play with the hair in the nape of his neck.

He’s probably already fast asleep, but she stays for another ten minutes, just to make sure.

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What Lea learns over the course of the next day is that only slightly fevered Shaun turns from adorably clingy to attention-monopolizing pain in the butt. He’s restless and cranky, and she snaps at him more than she means to.

She prays for him to be well enough to go back to work the next day, because she’s not sure she can handle another day of him being homebound and at least 85% disagreeable.

Tonight is the girl’s night out that she’d planned weeks ago with her friends. She calls one of them to tell them she’s not coming. Jessica tries to convince her to move it to another day when she’s free, but Lea insists they should still meet and have fun without her.

Their streak of Shaun finding fault with everything she’s doing continues, and her fuse finally blows over dinner. The chicken soup is too hot, and she has apparently put the spoon on the wrong side of the bowl. He finds the soup too salty—it tastes just fine to her—and they are out of the tissues with aloe vera, and why did she not buy more of them when he had put it on the shopping list last week?

That’s not all, it’s a long list of complaints, and she can’t help but slam her spoon down on the table.

The sudden noise of metal on wood makes him jump in his chair, but she doesn’t care.

“Okay, fine. I suck at following shopping lists, and you don’t like my soup, the one that I spent an hour making it from scratch, with fresh garlic that I bought especially for you yesterday, using the organic chicken that’s freaking expensive, and the baby carrots instead of the large ones that you say are too chewy.

“Yes, maybe I placed the spoon on the left side of the bowl instead of the right side, but you know what? It doesn’t fucking matter! The spoon is still usable, and the soup will still taste the same, and any normal person would thank me for making them chicken soup when they’re sick instead of picking apart every little thing that isn’t a hundred percent like they expect it to be!”

He has that deer-in-the-headlights expression, and she knows she just dropped a bomb that came out of nowhere. He looks like he doesn't know what to say, like he's acutely aware that saying anything now could be the wrong thing. And it probably will be.

His voice is hesitant. "Your chicken soup is very good."

"No, Shaun, it's not. It's too hot and too salty, and you probably don't even like the garlic but maybe had the frame of mind to not point out that *one thing* specifically," she spits at him, not trying to hide the exasperation in her voice.

He stares at her without quite meeting her eyes. "What… what do you want me to say?"

She shakes her head. "I don't know. Nothing. Just eat the damn soup. Or don't, but please don't try to pretend that you like it when really you don't."

"Is… that not what you just said I should do? That I should pretend to like your soup because you put a lot of effort into making it?"

She leaves her half-finished bowl of soup on the table, gets up and grabs her phone and earbuds before she slips on her sneakers and a jacket. "I'm taking a walk."

She leaves without waiting for a response from him.

Walking past parking garages and office buildings of downtown San Jose at dusk doesn't do much in terms of clearing her mind. Her *'Fast and Furious'* alternative rock playlist only provides marginal distraction, and little lifting of spirits.

Snapping at Shaun was stupid, and she hates herself for it. None of it is his fault. She knows it's irrational, but she also hates his autism—just a little bit—and that makes it even worse. Are they back to when she stood before him and told him she didn't want to be with him because he had ASD?

No. She knows that's not where she stands anymore. She loves him just the way he is, or maybe because of the way he is. But she also has to admit to herself that the autistic part of him is harder to love during trying times, and making the extra effort to navigate around it isn't always that simple.

By the time she gets back to their apartment building, her anger has subsided, making way for guilt and willingness to reconcile. As she unlocks the door, she hopes he hasn't fled, which she knows is a real possibility.

Maybe it speaks to the state of his health, or maybe he's grown and risen to the occasion, but he's there, on the patio, the blanket drawn around his shoulders, idly fiddling with the triangle-shaped Rubik's Cube. It's not lost on her that he's chosen the chair furthest away from the door, over in the corner.

Lea takes her time taking off her jacket and shoes. The dining table and counter look meticulous. He's cleaned and tidied everything. She wonders if he ate the rest of the soup, but maybe that's not important anymore.

She carefully ambles over to the patio and stands in the doorway, leaning against the doorframe. He focuses a little too intently on his Rubik's Cube, the plastic pieces creaking slightly as he idly moves them.

"Can we talk?"

He seems undecisive. "Are you going to yell at me?"

She lets out a pained breath. "No, Shaun, I'm not going to yell at you. I'm sorry I did earlier."

He looks thoroughly uncomfortable. "I think I did something wrong, because you yelled at me," he shrugs his shoulders, "but I don't know what I did wrong, so I don't know how to fix it."

"Yeah, and I wanna talk about that." She pulls up one of the chairs. "Sometimes there's just things you *can't fix*, and you need to learn how to deal with them."

"How can I learn how to deal with them when I don't know what they are?"

"No, I wasn't talking about you. I was talking about me. Like me not blaming you for your ASD."

His gaze meets hers for a short moment, then flicks away. "You… blame me for my ASD?"

"No. I mean, maybe a little. Sometimes. I know it's not rational, and I know it's wrong to feel that way."

"I have ASD, and that can't be changed. Does that mean you no longer want to be with me?"

"No. God no, Shaun. But this kind of thing will probably happen again. I can try not to let it get to me, but I'm also human, and I get upset sometimes. Or, you know, frustrated. And then I might snap at you, even if I know it's not your fault.

"And I hope you know it doesn't mean I hate you, or I hate your ASD. I'll hate it in the moment, maybe, but then that will go away, too."

He clicks another row of Rubik's triangles into place. "Okay," he says, but she isn't sure she's making sense of the whole conversation.

"Thank you for cleaning up the dishes."

"I ate your soup. It was salty, and I don't like garlic, but it was very smart to use it because it can have anti-microbial properties."

She looks at him for a long moment. "And thank you for not running away."

"Why… did you think I would run away?"

"Because you hate conflict, and you hate when I'm mad at you, and sometimes you try to escape those situations by running away from them."

"I don't like it when you're mad at me," he confirms. "But then usually we talk, and afterwards you're less mad at me. Sometimes we have sex after that."

“Ah, geez, Shaun. I’m not having sex with you right now.”

“I… don’t want to have sex right now either.”

“Okay, I’m glad we’re in agreement on that. How’s your cold?”

“It is annoying.”

“Yeah, no shit.”

“My temperature is 99.7.”

“That’s good. Sounds like we’re on the home stretch.”

“I think I would like to go back to work tomorrow.”

She gives him an encouraging smile. “Sure, if you’re feeling up to it.”

He narrows his eyes, seems to ponder something for a while. “Would you like me to stay home if you get sick?”

Oh. That’s an interesting question. “Yeah, maybe. I guess it’d depend.”

“On… what?”

“On my crankiness and frustration level, and your level of problem solving moxie.”

“You think you will be frustrated with me when you’re sick?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. You were pretty frustrated there for a while.”

“I was. But you made ginger tea, and buttered toast, and chicken soup. That made it less frustrating.”

“I’m glad to hear it.”

He blows his nose into a tissue. “Lea?” he asks.

“Yes, Shaun?”

“Did you cancel the meeting with your friends because you don’t trust me?”

Whoa. Where did that come from? Her first instinct is to resort to a white lie, but what would that accomplish? “Maybe a little bit.”

“Do you not trust me to stay home when I’m sick and you’re not here to watch me?”

She purses her lips. “I don’t know. Maybe it wasn’t so much that, and more that I wanted to be here for you? Being sick isn’t fun, and maybe I thought it would make you feel better not to be alone.”

“I haven’t been alone for two days. You… watched me like a hawk. I know why you said that, hawks have very keen vision.”

“I did watch you like a hawk, didn’t I? Was that annoying for you?”

He shrugs. “A little.”

“Don’t start being modest now. You hated every minute of it.”

“It would have been more annoying to be alone.”

“No, if you’d been alone, you’d just have gone to the hospital and irritated everyone there.”

“Dr. Glassman would have driven me home, and then *he* would have watched me like a hawk. I prefer it when *you* watch me like a hawk, you are a lot less annoying than Dr. Glassman.”

“Oh wow, thank you for *that* glowing endorsement.”

He pulls his little grey notebook out of his pocket and opens it. “Based on your viewing habits, I have concluded that you like watching *Sweet November* after we’ve had a fight. You’ve done it three times in the last five months. Would you like to watch *Sweet November*?”

She can’t help but smile. And he is right, it is one of her go-to comfort movies. “So now my choice is between having sex with you and watching *Sweet November*?”

“I already said I don’t want to have sex tonight.”

“You did, but you *really* hate romance dramas. Can we not pick a movie that we both like?”

“If you don’t want to watch *Sweet November*, do you want to go out with your friends?”

“No, I want to watch a movie with my sweet and awesome and sick boyfriend who keeps tabs on how often I watch Keanu Reeves movies when I’m upset. So, pick one. What shall it be, Shaun?”

“*Inception*.”

“Nope, negatory. Not in the mood for brainy mind-fucks. How about *How To Train Your Dragon*?”

His mouth curves into a smile. “I like *How To Train Your Dragon*.”

“*How To Train Your Dragon* it is.”

They settle down on the couch, and while Lea readies the DVD player, Shaun makes sure to announce that he showered while she was out. He’s also wearing a fresh pair of pajamas. “I didn’t smell very good.”

She laughs. “Well, thank you for that. You were very cuddly yesterday. A shower certainly helps if you’re still in cuddle mood.”

“Hm. I don’t know.”

“That’s okay. Come on, let’s get this party started.”

“It’s… not a party, it’s a movie.”

She looks at him, trying to figure out if he made a joke, but can’t really tell. And maybe it doesn’t matter.

She takes the remote control and pushes the Play button, her arm tentatively around his shoulder.

“This is Berk. It’s twelve days north of Hopeless and a few degrees south of Freezing to Death…”



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Missing Scenes from ‘Flow Cytometry Saves The Day’:

What are they doing down there?

Shaun’s nose touches the glass of the gallery window, wishing he could be in the OR with the surgical team. But his nose is tickling and running, and he knows Lea was right that it would put the patient at risk.

He switches on the intercom, hoping the OR team hasn’t muted it.

“Hello, I’m here now,” he announces. “I have a URTI and a fever, so I can’t be in the OR.” He points to the TV screen that’s mounted to the side wall. “I can see muscularis infiltration by the nodule, how wide is the distance of the inferior border of the most distal bowel lesion to the anal verge?”

Multiple heads perk up and look up at him. He suddenly feels uncomfortable. It's Dr. Lim who speaks first. "Dr. Murphy, very good of you to join us. Did you not call in sick earlier today?"

"Lea called in sick for me. I want to watch the surgery."

He can hear Dr. Lim saying, "Dr. Hussaini, meet Dr. Murphy, one of our fourth year residents."

An unfamiliar masked face looks up at Shaun.

"Hello," Shaun greets back, already focusing his attention back at the TV screen. "Can I know the distance of the lesion to the anal verge, please?"

Dr. Park answers. "The distance is 68 millimeters."

He can see they've exposed the left adnexa and the pararectal space and ovarian fossa. "How are you planning to separate the ureter and bowel?"

"We'll be using Dr. Hussaini's new low pressure aquadissection technique."

Ah yes, he can visualize it perfectly. He recalls the video he watched in preparation of the surgery. What's annoying is that the field of vision on the screen is wrong, he can't see what he needs to see. "Can you please move the camera 25 degrees to the left?"

He thinks he hears a sigh from someone. It's Dr. Andrews. "Dr. Murphy, are you sure you should be here today?"

"I am fine," he reassures them, although he knows that his brain is sluggish and the throbbing headache isn't helping anything. "I would like to see the ovarian fossa better."

Someone adjusts the angle, and, yes, that's it. They need to mobilize the ventral rectal wall from the nodule, and he watches as the team gets to work. They work with focused precision, until… "N-no. No. You need to move more to the right to avoid injury to the hypogastric nerve."

"Thank you, Dr. Murphy," Dr. Lim says. "The hypogastric nerve is clearly visible for us, we know how to avoid it."

Did Dr. Lim sound annoyed? Has he said the wrong thing? He looks through the window, but her face is angled away.

"Shaun." It's another voice, much closer. He whips around. Dr. Glassman.

"Hello, Dr. Glassman." He points to the window and the surgical team downstairs. "The surgery is going well."

"I can see that." Dr. Glassman steps closer and mutes the microphone. "Lea said you've got the flu and you're running a fever?"

"I have, and I am."

"Then why in God's name are you here?"

“I want to watch the surgery. Dr. Hussaini is teaching a new low pressure aquadissection technique, and I want to learn it.”

Dr. Glassman steps next to him and seems to watch him very closely. Shaun feel uncomfortable again. Why is he being scrutinized? He takes half a step to the left.

“Shaun, you should go home, get some rest.”

“I want to watch the surgery,” he insists. Why doesn’t Dr. Glassman understand that this is more important than his stupid cold? The cold will dissipate even if he doesn’t go home and stay in bed.

“I know you do, but this isn’t doing you any good. And quite frankly, I think you’re also distracting the surgical team with your Twenty Questions.”

“It wasn’t twenty questions, it was only three. Four, if you count the one I had to repeat.”

“Yeah, okay, but you’re still being a distraction. Do you like distractions when you operate?”

He ponders that for a moment. “Only sometimes.”

“Would you like an eager medical student asking you to describe every step of your lead surgery in meticulous detail from up on the gallery?”

“No, I wouldn’t. That would be very distracting.”

“Well, there you go.”

“But Dr. Andrews says this is a teaching hospital, and questions are important if you want to learn.”

“Dr. Andrews is a smart man, but I’m sure he didn’t have this in mind.” Dr. Glassman makes a vague pointing gesture into the air.

“Am I being annoying?”

Dr. Glassman is smiling. “A little bit.”

Shaun’s face falls. He doesn’t want to be annoying. “Okay. I will only watch and not talk. That’s not annoying.”

Dr. Glassman sighs, and Shaun isn’t sure why. “How are you feeling?”

This again? Why is everyone asking him that? “I have a headache and my throat hurts. My sinuses are swollen and secreting nasal discharge. They are common symptoms for an upper respiratory tract infection, although it makes it hard to concentrate.”

“And what would you tell a patient who came to you with those symptoms?”

“I am a surgeon. I very rarely treat patients with upper respiratory tract infections.”

“Yes, I know. But humor me for a second, will you?”

“I would tell them that they should get bed rest and treat the symptoms with analgesics or decongestant agents, and see a doctor if they don’t resolve within a week.”

Dr. Glassman seems to look at him very intently. Is he waiting for something? “Did I answer the question wrong?”

“No, Shaun, you very expertly made my point.”

Shaun doesn’t get it. What point? What is his sluggish brain missing?

“Shaun, how about we go home, hm? Because you *should* be in bed, zonked out on analgesics and decongestants, sleeping off that fever that has your brain all muddled.

“There’s a very capable surgical team down there, and they’re recording the whole surgery. You can watch the video later, and learn all you can from that. There isn’t much you can do up here, and I’m sure Dr. Lim and your colleagues can teach you all this, the next time this kind of surgery is being performed here.”

“But it’s much more informative when I can also see the patient on the table, and not just a surgical field in a video recording.”

“You’re right, but you’ll always have missed opportunities in your life, but that doesn’t mean they’re missed forever. The next one will come along, and the next. And sometimes missed opportunities can turn into something even better.”

Shaun frowns. How can staying at home in bed be a better opportunity than watching a new surgical technique being taught first-hand?

Dr. Glassman switches the microphone back on. “Dr. Lim, if you don’t mind, I will take Shaun home. He’s in no shape to be here today.”

Shaun wants to protest, but Dr. Glassman is raising a finger, which makes him keep his mouth shut.

Dr. Lim’s voice comes through the intercom. “I wasn’t expecting him to be here today in the first place.” She looks up at him from below. “Dr. Murphy, please take a day or two to recuperate. No one expects you to come in when you’re sick.”

Why is everyone insisting that he’ll be better off at home? They don’t know how— Ugh. He closes his eyes to try and fend off a wave of pain jabbing at his temples.

There’s suddenly a steadying hand on his elbow. “Whoa, whoa.”

He straightens, and Dr. Glassman’s touch lessens. “This headache is very annoying.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet. Come on, Shaun. Let’s get you home.”

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There’s a knock on the door, which Shaun immediately knows isn’t Lea. She knocks differently. Usually, she doesn’t knock at all.

Dr. Glassman's face pokes in through the door and he takes a step in. "Mind if I come in?"

Why is he asking when he's already in the room?

"You feeling okay?"

"Hm. No." He has a fever and his brain is all mushy. His thoughts are all in the wrong order and he can't focus. Wouldn't Dr. Glassman know what it's like to have a febrile viral infection? Shaun knows he's had several of them.

"Yeah, that's understandable. You need to get some rest and take it easy, Shaun, okay? Going to the hospital right now isn't good for you. And you know what it's like. You get annoyed when your patients don't follow your medical advice and instructions, don't you?"

"I do."

"Well, now you're a patient, and these are my professional medical instructions. Stay in bed. Stay home. Take it easy for a few days until you feel better. And then you come back to the hospital with your mind fresh and in focus to do good work. How about that?"

Shaun ponders this for a moment. He thinks he can still do good work right now, and the new surgery technique was very interesting. Still, he wants to do right by Dr. Glassman, so he agrees with an, "Okay."

"Okay," Glassman echoes. "Feel better. And try not to go on Lea's nerves too much. She's being a saint right now, and you're lucky to have her."

Wait, what is Dr. Glassman saying? Has he said something wrong to Lea? "Has Lea told you that I am going on her nerves?"

"No, but I know you, and you can be a little intense when you're sick. You know what, don't worry about it. Just focus on getting better. I'm going back to the hospital now, all right?"

"Okay," he confirms.

"Bye, Shaun."

"Goodbye, Dr. Glassman."