

# The Lucky

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I heard the rumors.

Something was going around at school. Also at church. They said it attacks like lightning and leaves you feeling like a grenade exploded inside your body. The one mercy of the ordeal is that it lasts for only twenty-four hours.

Perhaps my home will be spared, I thought.

But then, last Wednesday, just after lunchtime, the school called. It is never a good sign when the school calls. And somehow I knew before I answered what it would be about.

It was one of my daughters. *And she had it.* (She will hereafter be known as THE FIRST, since she was the beginning.)

I went to the school and picked her up, spoke comforting words, and brought her home.

Later, I waited for the bus to come, bringing home my younger kids. I waited and waited. Strange, I thought. This bus is never late. All of the sudden I had a terrible premonition: the bus is late because of *my child*.

Sure enough, when the bus finally arrived and my younger two children got off, one of them shouted up the driveway, pointing to her brother, “Mom! Guess who just threw up on the bus!” (She will hereafter be known as THE TATTLER, and he will be known as GUESS WHO.)

But I didn’t have time to answer her because just then, THE FIRST threw up again. She had almost made it to the toilet. Almost.

THE TATTLER and GUESS WHO walked into the house, and GUESS WHO told me, “Mom I’m not sick. I just don’t feel well.” After which he went to my bedroom and threw up on my gliding rocker.

I put GUESS WHO in the shower for safekeeping while I attended to the messes. THE FIRST was now curled up in a ball on the couch, while THE TATTLER told me in detail about what had happened on the bus. “We had to climb *over the seats* to get off!” But less than an hour later, the dreaded plague hit her too. At least she made it to the toilet.

Now even I was starting to feel woozy. Would I be next? But I *couldn't* get sick—I had a critical rehearsal that night in preparation for a huge multid denominational concert, and I was the director. I couldn't back out, and no one could take my place. But how could I go when my children were unraveling before my eyes? My only comfort and hope was that soon THE SPOUSE would be home. He would be able to help me fight this battle.

In between washing and sterilizing and more vomiting (from all three), I went outside to get some fresh air, and lo and behold THE SPOUSE rolled up in his truck! Salvation! He got out, his shoulders slumped, his feet dragging, his face as gray as a sidewalk. “I don't feel well,” he said. All hopes for my capable partner to help save this sinking ship were dashed as soon as he walked into the bathroom and closed the door.

So now there were four. If they were not vomiting, they were writhing in pain or moaning into their pillows. Access to the bathroom trumped privacy, and locking the door was no longer socially acceptable. At one point, there was a *line* for the toilet.

Yet there was still one more child left to arrive home. When she walked through the door, she gazed around in astonishment. “What's wrong with everyone?” (We shall call this child THE LUCKY, for the Black Angel of Gastrointestinal Rage saw fit to spare her.)

I could only give her a look of desperation and go back to my work of caring for the victims. For the next two hours, the battle raged. Oh, the horror! The horror!

Eventually I had to leave for my meeting. I needed divine help to get through this rehearsal, lest I be victim number 5 in front of my choir. Before leaving, I found a room where there wasn't someone lying on a bed groaning. My knees hit the floor, and I begged God to preserve me for the next two hours so I could direct this choir. After that he could do whatsoever he willed. *Just please help me make it through this rehearsal.* I rose from my knees feeling hopeful.

There was just one more thing to do.

I located THE LUCKY, who was trying to escape reality via a computer game. I plucked out her earbuds. I knelt before her. I grasped her

by the shoulders. I looked through her eyes and into her very soul. I said: "I am leaving. You are the *only one* in this house who can help people. You need to take care of *everyone*. If someone throws up while I am gone, you must help them. I am counting on you. *You are their last hope.*"

And then I left.

I conducted the rehearsal without incident, though it went longer than I anticipated. Afterward, I thought I'd better go to the store and get Gatorade to help replenish dehydrated bodies. When I returned home, it was very late. I parked in the driveway, delaying the inevitable. I would have a lot to do when I walked in that door. I had left the house in shambles. I hadn't fixed dinner (what was the point?), and I knew that dishes and cups and crumbs littered the counters. I knew I would have to start the laundry and maybe even clean the carpet, especially if there had been more accidents while I was gone. I hadn't eaten since breakfast. Miles before I sleep, miles before I sleep.

I entered the house. It was dark and (mercifully) quiet. I walked into the kitchen and looked around with some confusion. Was this the same house I had left? The counters were clean. The table was clean. The dishwasher had been emptied. The kitchen was spotless. The living room had been tidied and put in order. Not only that, but there was a mug on the counter, surrounded by a glowing ring of battery-powered candles. A little name card was propped up in front of the mug with the word *Mom* written in curly letters. In the mug was hot chocolate—*still warm*—insulated by layers of marshmallows.

Had THE SPOUSE done all of this, even in the throes of his tribulations? Since my last memory of him was staring at the ceiling moaning, "Death, come quickly," that seemed unlikely. Did he somehow rally the other sufferers into making an effort to clean the house?

I crept into the bedroom where THE SPOUSE was resting uneasily on the bed.

"Thank you for cleaning the house," I said.

"The house is clean?" he croaked.

"Yes. It wasn't you?"

"No. But I know THE LUCKY was doing something in the kitchen for a long time. And when GUESS WHO threw up in his bed, THE LUCKY took his sheets downstairs and put them in the washer and started it."

*Really?*

As I lay down to sleep that night, I thought of my twelve-year-old daughter and marveled. I have asked, begged, and pleaded with my children many times to clean this or that, to watch out for their siblings, and

to take care of each other, and there are times I feel like I am shouting into a black hole.

But when a person, even a child, knows that they are depended on, that they are *counted* on, and when they can witness—firsthand—that *all hope is riding on their shoulders*, they find an inner impetus . . . not from obligation, or force, or even a sense of duty, but a motivation from an undeniable understanding of purpose. Then duty transforms to pure love, and obligation blossoms into charity unfeigned. And that is when someone goes from being **THE LUCKY** to becoming **THE HERO**.

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