

THE INVISIBLE



Lulu Wei and Hal Ames

Drawing by Lulu Wei

The morning was cold as Dr. Nick walked out of the hospital. He had spent the better part of a week trying to help a patient who came to him with a strange disease no one had ever seen before. He was exhausted and ready for some time off.

Dr. Nick is a doctor in Boston, Massachusetts. He has lived there his entire life. He is comfortable in his apartment, which he shares with his dog named Matthew and his cat named Louis. His neighbor helps to take care of the animals when he is at work. Her name is Anna. She is a veterinarian, so she loves animals.

Nick and Anna are very good friends. One might even say they are boyfriend and girlfriend, although they do not agree.

Nick's family lives not too far from his apartment, so he sees them often. His little sister, Cindy, is always excited to see him. She loves his animals, and she plays with them whenever she can. Her parents don't like pets. Cindy dreams of the day when she can have a dog or a cat.

Dr. Nick's office is close to the hospital. He is a family doctor, which means he sees many patients every day. Sometimes he is so tired when he gets home, he just eats a bowl of noodles and goes straight to bed. Anna keeps Mathew and Louis at her apartment on

those days.

It was a Monday when Colin Smith walked into his office for a general check-up. He needed to give a report to his employer. Colin was the last person on the list. Dr. Nick was ready for the day to end, when he went to the room where Colin was waiting for him.

“Good afternoon. I’m Dr. Nick. How are you today?”

“I’m doing well. I just need a check-up for work. This won’t take long, will it?”

“It’s the end of the day, so we’ll just check you out quickly and then you can be on your way home.”

Nick began his routine of checking the heart, the lungs, the ears, the eyes, the throat, and his reflexes.

Then he noticed something unusual.

“Have you always had these red marks on your back?”

“Not that I know of. No one has ever said anything.”

Dr. Nick looked at the red marks on his back very closely. They were different than anything he had seen before. It was like the skin was being eaten.

Dr. Nick pressed on one of the marks.

“Does this hurt?”

“No, not really. Is it supposed to?”

Dr. Nick didn’t respond.

“Roll over on your stomach. I want to see how this looks.”

Colin did as Dr. Nick asked.

When he looked at the back of his legs, he saw the same thing, and they seemed to be getting bigger.

“Nurse, come here and bring me a table with my tools on it. I need to do a biopsy. Hurry, I need it now.”

The nurse did as Dr. Nick requested. He took a small sample of the tissue from his back and then went to his lab to look at it under a microscope. The tissue looked alive. It was growing. That was very unusual.

He returned to the room to speak with Colin.

“I think we need to get you to the hospital. We need to check out those red spots on your back, and I don’t have the correct equipment to do that.”

“Huh? I feel fine. Why do I need to go to the hospital?”

“You have something strange on your back that I have never seen before. We need to have a laboratory specialist look at what is going on. I will arrange transportation for you to get there.”

“I can drive myself. I don’t need an ambulance. They’re too expensive.”

“OK, I will meet you at the emergency room, OK?”

“Sure, I will meet you there.”

Colin got dressed and left.

Dr. Nick cleaned up and finished his paperwork.

“Suzie, I’m going to the hospital to meet Colin. Would you mind locking up the office?”

“Not at all. See you tomorrow.”

Nick drove the short distance to the hospital and waited for Colin to arrive, but he never did.

After an hour he called Suzie to see if she had his address, but she had already left the office.

He went to the office to get the information on how to contact Colin. Nick was afraid that if Colin got close to people, whatever he had, would be contagious and they might get it as well.

He looked through the paperwork for the patients that day and found Colin’s address and phone number. He called him on the phone.

“Hello, this is Colin.”

“Colin. This is Dr. Nick. Why didn’t you meet me at the hospital?”

“I don’t have insurance, and I don’t think I am sick. So, why should I go to the hospital. It is very expensive. You haven’t told me why.”

“You have a very strange thing going on with your back. It appears that something is eating your flesh. I saw it under a microscope. We need to find out what it is, and I mean now. If you don’t, you could be dead in just a few days. Do you want that?”

“Uh....., no.”

“Then I suggest that you come back right away. I will do my best to keep the costs down, but if you don’t do this, it could be very bad for you.”

Colin agreed to meet Dr. Nick back at the hospital.

About thirty minutes later, Colin walked into the emergency room and met Dr. Nick.

“I have you already checked in. I just need your age.”

“I’m 53.”

“I’ll let the administrator know. Just follow me back to one of the observation rooms. I have a couple of doctors who I want to see what I am talking about.”

Colin followed him to the room and took off his shirt. The red marks were even larger than before. Whatever was going on it was getting worse.

“Nurse, would you get a skin specialist for me. I have something I need to show them.”

A few minutes later the doctor came to see what Dr. Nick was talking about.

“I don’t see anything to get excited about. It isn’t important. Why did you have me come in here when I have other patients to see?”

“You can’t see that this is getting worse? I looked under a microscope and saw something eating his flesh.”

“I don’t see it. It looks like a bad rash to me. Just give him some medicine and send him home.”

“Aren’t you even going to look at a slide to see what’s going on?”

“I don’t have time to waste on this. Just send him home.”

Dr. Nick got upset. Why didn’t the other doctor believe him. However, he did as the other doctor told him and sent Colin home.

He went to his office and sat down at his desk. Something about this did not seem

right. He went back to his lab to look at the slide again. What he saw surprised him even more. The slide was completely blank. Nothing was there at all.

“How did this happen? The parasite must have finished the skin sample, but where did it go after that?”

He went through his other slides, and every one of them was blank. It appeared that the strange sickness had continued to find things to eat.

Dr. Nick looked at himself, but he did not find anything wrong. He had worn gloves the whole time, so they must have worked.

As he headed home, he got a call. It was Colin’s wife.

“Quick, you need to come to our house. Something is wrong with my husband!”

Dr. Nick looked up the address on his phone and then input it into his GPS so he could find the fastest way there.

When he arrived, Colin’s wife met him at the door.

“He’s in the bedroom and he’s screaming. He’s in a lot of pain. What’s happening?”

“I don’t know, but we’ll find out. Don’t go in the room. If you have children, they need to leave the house right now!”

Dr. Nick was very serious about protecting the family. He called 911 and requested an ambulance to come.

When they got there, Dr. Nick instructed them to be very careful because the parasite could jump to them.

The paramedics could not believe what they saw. Colin’s skin was bright red and looked like it was falling off his body.

He told Colin’s wife to be careful of the sheets on the bed and to wash them.

They wrapped him in a plastic sheet and transferred him to a gurney. On the way to the hospital, Dr. Nick stayed with him. They gave him medicine to stop the pain, and an IV to keep his fluids up.

The ambulance driver called the hospital to let them know they were coming.

A team of nurses were waiting when they arrived.

Colin was taken to the emergency room and immediately put onto a hospital bed.

The doctor who had looked at Colin earlier arrived.

“What’s going on here?”

“This is the patient I had you look at. He is back and the infection is much worse than before. We need to find out what’s going on. I’m afraid that this is very contagious, and if we don’t get it under control, it could cause an epidemic.”

“What makes you say that?”

“When I went to my lab to look at my slides, they were all blank. All the tissue samples I had taken were gone. I’m not sure where the bug went after that. I checked myself, and I don’t see any infection yet, but it might be possible. We need to get him into isolation now!”

The doctor agreed, and Colin was rolled into the intensive care unit (ICU) where the infection could be contained.

Dr. Nick went with him.

Once he was settled in his room. Dr. Nick spoke to the nurses.

“What can we do? If we don’t find an answer soon, he might die.”

Some specialists were called to see what was happening. They took samples and sent them to the lab to be looked at.

Meanwhile Colin was kept quiet by pain killers.

When the lab results came back, the doctors were shocked. What Dr. Nick had said was true. Something was eating Colin’s skin. It was something they had never seen before.

They asked Colin when he first notice the infection. He told them he didn’t know anything about it until Dr. Nick noticed it at the clinic.

“That means he just got it.”

“Where were you before you went to the clinic?”

“I was at work and then I waited two hours in the waiting room before I went into the examination room.”

Dr. Nick called the business where Colin worked.

“Hello, this is Dr. Nick. I am with Colin Smith and he has a skin problem. Have any of your other employees complained about their skin being red?”

“Not that I know of. They have all gone home for the day.”

“Can you give me their addresses and phone numbers so we can contact them, please. It’s very important that they check to see if they have an unusual rash. You need to check yourself as well.”

Dr. Nick gave the phone to a nurse who took down the information and then began calling the other workers.

In the meantime, Nick called his office manager Suzie and asked her to return to the office and contact the patients who had been in the waiting room with Colin to see if they had any problems.

While they treated Colin and tried to find out how to stop the infection, Dr. Nick got a call from his nurse.

“We found one of your other patients who has the same thing. She will be arriving shortly. I gave her instructions on how to not spread the infection to anyone else. No one else has any symptoms.”

Dr. Nick shared the news.

“We have another patient coming. Let’s get ready.”

The second case arrived about twenty minutes later and she was put into isolation as well.

“I think my office needs to be checked, and Colin’s car should be checked out as well. While we are at it, we should also have people go to his house. He went home instead of the hospital”

Many doctors and nurses were running around making sure the two were not exposing anyone else. They tried to make them as comfortable as possible.

The crew that went to Dr. Nick’s office found the skeleton of a mouse under a chair in the office. When they looked at it under a microscope, they saw the bones were completely clean, but the bones were still wet.

Over several days, many things were tried to kill the parasite, and then they had success. When they used ultraviolet light, the infection stopped. Whatever it was, it did not like ultraviolet light, in fact, it killed it.

A notice was sent out to other hospitals in the area to be watchful for other infections and that ultraviolet light was the only cure.

Dr. Nick's office was cleaned from top to bottom, including using ultraviolet light to kill any and all parasites, viruses and bacterium that might be in the rooms.

Dr. Nick left the hospital satisfied that he had done all he could to stop this new disease. It is still a mystery as to where it came from.

That's another story.

The End

VOCABULARY: (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. illness _____ | a. hospital bed |
| 2. entire _____ | b. to look at carefully for a period of time |
| 3. veterinarian _____ | c. can be caught easily |
| 4. parasite _____ | d. complete, whole, everything |
| 5. gurney _____ | e. sickness, ailment |
| 6. microscope _____ | f. medical assistants |
| 7. expensive _____ | g. something that lives off another |
| 8. contagious _____ | h. Doctor of Animal Medicine |
| 9. observation _____ | i. device to look at small things |
| 10. paramedic _____ | j. cost a lot of money |

TRUE / FALSE:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Dr. Nick is a veterinarian. | T / F |
| 2. Anna is his girlfriend. | T / F |
| 3. Colin Smith had a cold. | T / F |
| 4. Colin did not want to go to the hospital. | T / F |
| 5. Dr. Nick's nurse called his patients. | T / F |
| 6. Two people had the parasite. | T / F |
| 7. Dr. Nick lived with his parents. | T / F |
| 8. The second doctor sent Colin home. | T / F |
| 9. Dr. Nick's office was filled with parasites. | T / F |
| 10. Ultraviolet light killed the parasites. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. Who took care of Matthew and Louis for Dr. Nick? _____
 - a) Cindy
 - b) his parents
 - c) they stayed home alone
 - d) Anna

2. Why did Colin go to see Dr. Nick? _____
 - a) check-up
 - b) blood test
 - c) he had a fever
 - d) he wanted medicine

3. What was eating Colin's skin? _____
 - a) bacterium
 - b) nano-bots
 - c) insects
 - d) parasites

4. Where did Colin go after his visit with Dr. Nick? _____
 - a) hospital
 - b) work
 - c) home
 - d) a party

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. What were the names of the animals Dr. Nick had?

2. Who lived on the same floor as Nick?

3. What was the name of Nick's office manager?

4. What did the cleanup crew find under a chair in Dr. Nick's waiting room?

5. What device did Dr. Nick use to see the parasites?

6. What did the second doctor say to do with Colin?

7. Who called Dr. Nick about Colin screaming?

8. How did Colin get to the hospital after going home the second time?

9. How many people got the parasite?

10. What was the cure for the parasite?
