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Witness

Two twenty-two A.M. casts its resolute red glow onto my nightstand, outlining an accumulation of Chewy bar wrappers, a knot of charger cords, and the gold ring I haven't worn in months. The air vent grumbles, building up to a groan that rolls into a sigh as warm air emerges. My dog snores at the foot of my half-empty bed. My stomach turns and I pull the comforter over my head and admit that reentrance to sleep has been denied—my bed a solitary dinghy, lurching against a stormy sea of flickering shadows as the trees outside my window sway in the moonlight.

The yellow of my quilt reminds me of whipped butter, running like snot down a bready pancake's face. Butter like bile coating sweet pancake flesh forsaken in viscous syrup. I close my eyes to block out the yellow. But the yellow is inside my eyelids now. It drains from my brain into my stomach then surges like a tide up into my throat, that mess of acid and color. I sit up, the twinge of nausea overriding the comfort of warmth, then glance over at my dog. He stirs, eye glinting in the darkness. I carefully remove the covers and he nestles his head back into the crook of his leg.

My path is revealed in the light of my fallen iPad, my interminable marathon of *Friends* having run on without me. I sidestep piles of laundry and shoes, shopping bags rustling against my legs as I navigate through the darkness. Toilet seat now up, I lean my back up against the wall and sink to the tiled ground. My mouth waters as I peer into the bowl, body shaking. I try not to think about my kitchen trash bin with its empty pizza box dribbling melted ice cream devoured single-handedly. I imagine the grease and cream mingling in my stomach. My anxiety swells, now irrepressible. I lean over, hair falling into my face as I retch. The theme song emanates from my bedroom. "*I'll be there for you...*" it repeats.

I lay my head on the ground, the chilled tile greeting my cheek like a mother's hand on a fevered forehead. I shut my eyes, anticipating a fresh wave of sickness. I wonder who else is

awake in my city, in my neighborhood. Are any of them sick too? I shudder with an ache surpassing nausea.

My bathroom door startles me as it creaks open, followed by the gentle clicking of paws. My dog approaches my face and takes in a succession of short sniffs —his eyes meeting mine with a quiet reverence. He lays down, body pressed against mine, unbothered by my warm tears peppering his head.