

Clean Blood: The Pain of Losing Your Son - Fiction

By Matthew Kelly

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Imagine this ...

You're driving home from work next Monday after a long day. You tune in your radio. You hear a blurb about a little village in India where some villagers have died suddenly, strangely, of a flu that has never been seen before. It's not influenza, but three or four people are dead, and it's kind of interesting, and they are sending some doctors over there to investigate it. You don't think much about it, but coming home from church on Sunday you hear another radio spot. Only they say it's not three villagers, it's 30,000 villagers in the back hills of this particular area of India, and it's on TV that night. CNN runs a little blurb: people are heading there from the disease center in Atlanta because this disease strain has never been seen before.

By Monday morning when you get up, it's the lead story. It's not just India; it's Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and before you know it, you're hearing this story everywhere, and they have now coined it as "the mystery flu." The President has made some comment that he and his family are praying and hoping that all will go well over there. But everyone is wondering, "How are we going to contain it?"

That's when the President of France makes an announcement that shocks Europe. He is closing their borders. No flights from India, Pakistan, or any of the countries where this thing has been seen. And that's why that night you are watching a little bit of CNN before going to bed. Your jaw hits your chest when a weeping woman is translated into English from a French news program. There's a man lying in a hospital in Paris, dying of the mystery flu. It has come to Europe.

Panic strikes. As best they can tell, after contracting the disease, you have it for a week before you even know it. Then you have four days of unbelievable symptoms. And then you die. Britain closes its borders, but it's too late. South Hampton, Liverpool, North Hampton, and it's Tuesday morning when the President of the United States makes the following announcement: "Due to a national-security risk, all flights to and from Europe and Asia have been canceled. If your loved ones are overseas, I'm sorry. They cannot come back until we find a cure for this thing."

Within four days our nation has been plunged into an unbelievable fear. People are wondering, "What if it comes to this country?" And preachers on Tuesday are saying it's the scourge of God. It's Wednesday night, and you are at a church prayer meeting when somebody runs in from the parking lot and yells, "Turn on a radio, turn on a radio!" And while everyone in church listens to a little transistor radio with a microphone stuck up to it, the announcement is made. Two women are lying in a Long Island hospital, dying from the mystery flu. Within hours it seems, this disease envelops the country.

People are working around the clock, trying to find an antidote. Nothing is working. California, Oregon, Arizona, Florida, Massachusetts. It's as though it's just sweeping in from the borders.

And then all of a sudden the news comes out. The code has been broken. A cure can be found. A vaccine can be made. It's going to take the blood of somebody who hasn't been infected, and so, sure enough, all through the Midwest, through all those channels of emergency broadcasting, everyone is asked to do one simple thing: Go to your downtown hospital and have your blood analyzed. That's all we ask of you. When you hear the sirens go off in your neighborhood, please make your way quickly, quietly, and safely to the hospitals.

Sure enough, when you and your family get down there late on that Friday night, there is a long line, and they've got nurses and doctors coming out and pricking fingers and taking blood and putting labels on it. Your spouse and your kids are out there, and they take your blood and say, "Wait here in the parking lot, and if we call your name, you can be dismissed and go home." You stand around, scared, with your neighbors, wondering what on earth is going on, and if this is the end of the world.

Suddenly, a young man comes running out of the hospital screaming. He's yelling a name and waving a clipboard. What? He yells it again! And your son tugs on your jacket and says, "Daddy, that's me." Before you know it, they have grabbed your boy. "Wait a minute, hold on!" And they say, "It's okay, his blood is clean. His blood is pure. We want to make sure he doesn't have the disease. We think he has the right blood type."

Five tense minutes later, out come the doctors and nurses, crying and hugging one another - some are even laughing. It's the first time you have seen anybody laugh in a week, and an old doctor walks up to you and says, "Thank you, sir. Your son's blood is perfect. It's clean, it is pure, and we can make the vaccine."

As the word begins to spread all across that parking lot full of folks, people are screaming and praying and laughing and crying. But then the gray-haired doctor pulls you and your wife aside and says, "May we see you for a moment? We didn't realize that the donor would be a minor and we need... we need you to sign a consent form."

You begin to sign and then you see that the box for the number of pints of blood to be taken is empty. "H-h-h-how many pints?" And that is when the old doctor's smile fades, and he says, "We had no idea it would be a little child. We weren't prepared. We need it all!" "But... but... I don't understand. He's my only son!" "We are talking about the world here. Please sign. We... we... need to hurry!"

"But can't you give him a transfusion?" "If we had clean blood we would. Please, will you please sign?"

In numb silence you do. Then they say, "Would you like to have a moment with him before we begin?"

Could you walk back? Could you walk back to that room where he sits on a table saying, "Daddy? Mommy? What's going on?" Could you take his hands and say, "Son, your mommy and I love you, and we would never ever let anything happen to you that didn't just have to be! Do you understand that?" And when that old doctor comes back in and says, "I'm sorry, we've got to get started. People all over the world are dying," could you leave? Could you walk out while he is saying, "Dad? Mom? Dad? Why... why have you abandoned me?"

And then next week, when they have the ceremony to honor your son, and some folks sleep through it, and some folks don't even bother to come because they have better things to do, and some folks come with a pretentious smile and just pretend to care, would you want to jump up and say, "EXCUSE ME! MY SON DIED FOR YOU! DON'T YOU CARE? DOES IT MEAN NOTHING TO YOU?"

I wonder, is that what God wants to say? "MY SON DIED FOR YOU. DOES IT MEAN NOTHING? DON'T YOU KNOW HOW MUCH I CARE?"