



A Love Letter To Giardia Lamblia, The Single-celled Parasite Formerly Living In My Small Intestine

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Dear Gia,

I'm sorry I had to kill you. It really wasn't my first intention. You were such a small thing. The doctor told me you'd probably been in there since I first got sick in June. Fine, I said. Let you be there. I could use the company. But in truth we were doomed from the start, like any summertime romance or relationship based on deceit.

Maybe it could have been different if you'd been straight with me when we met. But you let that Philly cheesesteak take the blame for your mischief. I stopped eating at my favorite cafeteria for months. I sat shaking on the porcelain for three days cursing a sandwich that did me no harm while you sinfully feasted off its remains. I know you have no arms, legs, or central nervous system, but Gia, have you no shame?

And since you never introduced yourself, I never knew you were still around in July and August. You did your thing, and I did mine. Did you think I was ignoring you? Is that why you came back screaming like a bitch on flagella in September? Perhaps. But even then you made no introduction. "An ulcer," I guessed. "A virus," they suggested. And you sat there casually—implanted in the fibrous villi of my small intestine—and said nothing. It's always someone else's fault, isn't it?

Why did you even bother to stick around? Not for my sake, I'm sure. And don't give me that crap about how you helped me lose those fifteen pounds and hit my target weight. You know my days as a Calvin Klein underwear model are behind me. You were just out for yourself. When are you going to learn that a relationship is a two-way street? That you can't just take, take, take?

I had no choice, Gia. You know I think relationships are private. Special. But I was so depleted. I had to involve others. I had to go to the doctor. I did it for you. For us. Because there is no you without me.

I sat there in his examining room. Naked. Violated. He took samples. I bled for you. I let him inside me. (He asked me if it hurt, incidentally—something you've never done, I might add.) But you were good. You were inscrutable. "Irritable bowel syndrome," he said, as if my Gia could be defined and dismissed as a chronic condition instead of a force of nature.

But there was more. Stool samples. Nine vials for three days worth of collecting and dissecting. Were you there atop the Saran Wrap? Did you not think to say hello even then, when I was so close to you

and you were so close to the end? No, it must have been some other, lesser Gia. One of your sister parasites who was sealed for testing. Only a lesser Gia could be discovered.

I still can't forget the call that came days later.

"You have a parasite," he said. "And it's given you an infection in your gut."

"Yes, doctor," I said, but then I held my hand over the receiver because I knew he was only half right. "I've definitely been infected," I whispered, "but here. In my heart."

He insisted on medicating, indifferent to my claims of improvement, and that's all there was.

His prescription brought someone new into my life. Her name's Alinia, and I think you'd like her (all things considered). You have a lot in common. You both enter orally and cause diarrhea and searing abdominal pain. But those are just her side effects. I try to pretend, but it's just not the same. She could never be you.

I know I'm better off now, that only a fool loves that which causes him pain. But I never claimed to be a smart man, Gia. Just a good home for the right person. I'm sorry. I miss you.

Love,

Wayne