

## Room Twelve

*By Kelly Eggink*

Collapsed. Unresponsive. Unable to obtain an airway. Pressure labile. ETA 5 minutes.

Lights and sirens. Room twelve is filled with a flurry of eager proficiency and crisp orders. Adrenaline is coursing, voices are calm. We live for the worst, our greatest moments come through their tragedy.

First breath. There is no greater distress than the absence of air, the clawing feeling of suffocating. We can fix that. We can make him breathe. We can force air into his lungs. We can make machines do what should be the intrinsic work of the soul.

Then blood. Nurses' hands rush to obtain it. It is the price of entry in to our sacred healing halls. It had a holy significance for our ancestors. With the sweet smell of iron and a brilliant primordial hue, there is nothing so tangibly indicative of life, now so unceremoniously taken.

But today our ancestors may forgive us. Today may be a blessed reprieve from our morbid endeavour. Hope dawns as we realize we may already be too late. His eyes are glazed over. The only breaths that enter his body are those we give him.

Imaging confirms what we have already begun to expect. Bright white lines of fresh blood wind through the folds of his brain. They slowly suffocate what had just hours before been a brilliantly creative mind, reducing it to little more than cells crying for oxygen.

There is a collective a sigh of relief: this is devastating. There is too much blood for the head to hold. In room twelve we have cracked ribs, we have drawn blood, we have lacerated skin, and we have tranquilized patients in the name of healing. Today would be different. At last the peace this room so badly needed.

The catastrophe that has taken his brain has left his heart lost and confused. Unsure of what to do without its master, it swings from rampant anxiety into despondency, slowly accepting the inevitable.

There would be no prolonged suffering, no confused offering of a recovery that may never come. There would be no agitated nights burdened with caring for a body they are unsure still holds the one they love.

There is one emotion today: grief. For once it is mercifully allowed to be experienced untainted. No more invasion of the temple. No more blood taken in the name of medicine. No tormenting question of when it is time to let go. His family are consumed only with the simple agony of loss. We swore an oath to do no harm and this surrender feels like our greatest success.

The air in the room twelve is muffled as it always is before a soul leaves: the warped space between the here and the hereafter. The only sound is the loud silence of the family's tears. I imagine his dying is a beautiful thing: to pass in his sleep knowing the life given is now at its end. How envious would it be to be surrounded by the ones loved in our waking moments while the mind is already adrift anticipating the next journey.

When it is my time let it be at home. And if it cannot be at home let it not be in room twelve. Let there be no lights, no alarms, no lines, no electricity to deny my last peace. It is not a battle but a journey, and I want to finish it well. I will go gentle into that good night and pray I am granted the grace to embrace the dying of the light.