

rounded by family and neighbours from the other two houses — men, women and children. The men were silent and sad-faced. The women, dressed in black, were wailing loudly. The man on the floor was groaning and banging his head.

The circle opened as I approached with my medical bag.

“What seems to be the matter?” I asked. The question sounded rather simple-minded to my ears, but eventually I determined that the man was not as close to death as I had been led to believe. He had a pain in his head. Further interrogation localized it to his right ear. Here was something I could check. I found an auroscope among the instruments in my bag.

I knelt beside the prostrate patient. He stopped pounding his head on the floor long enough for me to look into his right ear. What I discovered there was a bug. It had entered his ear backwards, and its two eyes were staring back at me through the speculum of the auroscope. Periodically, in its effort to escape, the bug would agitate, and the resulting vibration caused the patient to resume his groaning and frenzy.

It was an Italian household, so I knew there would be olive oil. With the patient turned on his side, the affected ear uppermost, I poured a spoonful of oil into his ear. The buzzing stopped.

I was thanked profusely. The patient was instructed to come to the office the next day for removal of the dead insect. Then I left with benedictions and much gratitude for saving a life.

In a torment of anxiety and anger I wound my way back to home base at the hospital, back to my wife whom I had been forced to abandon in the moment of her extremity. I burst into the hospital, to be met with the grave, pale face of my employer.

The baby had been born dead. My wife was alive. She had lost a great deal of blood but would survive.

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Every night when I lived in the ICU

Every night when I lived in the ICU
I floated on dark blankets in deep, warm water.

Every night when I lived in the ICU
I drifted to and fro, to and fro,
and the dim light and night-quiet of the hospital
drew me down
quiet.

Every night when I lived in the ICU
my breath was measured by the vent of the man
in the curtained bed beside me.
The rasp of his machine carried my breath along
with the rise and fall, rise and fall,
of his barrel chest
and I caught my breath in the darkness of the night
when the alarm sent soft-footed nurses
to scold him into breathing.

Every night when I lived in the ICU
my sleep carried dreams around me,
dreams of travel,
of crawling, creeping,
dreams of floating away,
of sinking.

Every night when I lived in the ICU
a sentinel nurse kept watch
in the shadows at the foot of my bed.
hourly first, then every two, she drifted up
to pull me back from the dark water of my sleep:

*Who are you?
Where are you?
Why are you here?*

She shone a light into my eyes.

*Who are you?
Where are you?
Why are you here?*

Every night when I lived in the ICU
I slept, tethered with tubes, buttressed with bedrails and
carried, gently, in the hands of those
who kept company with me and welcomed me back
from the exile of pain and fear that had carried me to that place.

Every night when I lived in the ICU I climbed higher
every night when I lived in the ICU

*Who are you?
Where are you?
Why are you here?*

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