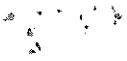


A Final Farewell

She sat in the stark, chilled room located off to the side. Hidden away from the main ward like an enigma; a shameful secret that no one wanted to acknowledge out loud. The lights were dimmed and the only sound was the soft whooshing of the ventilator and the occasional muted dings of alarms yet the whispers and furtive glances highlighted the sadness and desolation to everyone around.

The busyness of the day had given way to the hushed stillness of the night. The never-ending darkness outside the window providing a reflection of the room; providing a black abyss that was mirrored back into her eyes as she primed her mind for the tasks that lay ahead. She gathered everything she would need and laid her supplies out precisely and orderly. Linens in the warmer, bathing equipment waiting patiently, an outfit chosen specially, laid out reverently and carefully. The stethoscope around her neck the only medical tool required.

One by one, she turned off the machines, silencing their alerts and darkening their screens. Each lead and wire was gently removed, careful, so as not to damage the fragile skin. Finally there was only the sound of the ventilator left. The slow, soft swish of air moving in and out, a measured, gentle pace keeping in time with the rise and fall of the pale, thin chest in front of her. It was time.



She turned the ventilator off and tenderly removed the tapes and then the tube. She deftly wrapped the newborn and lifted him out of his crib. She smoothly sat down in the rocking chair and laid the baby on her chest. Slowly she began to rock back and forth.

The baby's parents had said their goodbyes and gone home to grieve for their child, to mourn the loss of their hopes and dreams for his future, to try and gain some comfort in each other's arms. It was now the immense and noble responsibility of the nurse to offer warmth and comfort to the baby as he breathed his last breaths. It was duty that was both difficult and effortless. It was an honour and a privilege to provide warmth, comfort and a presence during a person's last moments but heartbreaking at the same time. As a nurse, every death is a failure of sorts. Even when she knows the baby will soon be free of pain and suffering, would not ever have been able to survive outside these four walls, the losses still hurt. Each one takes up a small space in her heart and mind, never forgotten, but each one gently nudged to the side to make room for the next charge.

She sits for hours in the chair, rocking back and forth, back and forth. Sometimes whispering to him, sometimes humming a melody. Listening as his breathing becomes fainter and the rise and fall of his chest slower and slower until it finally stops. He is gone.

She will now bathe him and gently dry him, dress him carefully in the outfit he was meant to wear home, and wrap him snugly in a warm blanket. A single, silent tear, her final farewell.