

Lady in Blue

I dreamt that I was walking through a mysterious dense forest. It was cool, but with every step into that infinite space between tree trunks, a ray of sunshine would spread warmth throughout my body in its entirety. It is peaceful here. I feel safe. I hear very little, but I see a great deal all around me. I see beauty at its finest. I wish I could stay here forever and become spirit.

“If you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it.”

(Josh Groban – ‘Pure Imagination’)

A meal tray sits in front of me. I must no longer be dreaming. My senses are dull, but gradually, I hear the soft clinking of cutlery, the rhythmic chewing of food, and the occasional cough or splutter. Upon my downward glance, I see food. There is toast, already buttered, some jam, a scrambled egg, porridge, and a cup of white tea with one sugar, just as I like it best. Then I startle and spill my tea. There are voices. There are people all around me. Who are they?

“Margaret dear, you have some visitors this morning. Would you like to eat your breakfast in your room with company?” Company? I already had company in the dining room. The others present there were just like me; silent and observant, greying and losing hair, with wrinkled skin, with mismatched clothes and attempting to eat. Oh yes, eating. I must remember to eat. But alas, I am already eating. How did that happen? A gentle hand is spooning food into my mouth.

Lady in Blue

On Mondays to Fridays, I wake to a familiar voice, soft and kind: “Margaret dear, it is time for your shower.” Gentle arms guide me into my slippers and walk me to the bathroom, where a spray of warm water welcomes me into the morning. My teeth are brushed with care, my wispy hair combed and parted, a medium sized pad applied, my clothes dressed onto me, then came the non-slip socks and a pair of comfortable court shoes.

These hands, this voice, they all belong to a lady in blue. She must have a whole wardrobe of blue clothes for Mondays to Fridays. Her face, it is young. I have seen it before, but I cannot remember her name. Her name must have been whispered into the wind many eras ago. She remembers my name though. She treats me as family. I like my lady in blue. I miss her most dreadfully on Saturdays and Sundays.

Mid-morning, I hear her voice: “How’re you feeling this morning Margaret?”

“I don’t want to tell you dear.”

“Why would that be Margaret?”

“Oh I wouldn’t want to ruin your young innocent ears dear.”

“You won’t Margaret. You can tell me.”

I had to pause there. “Well you see, I feel WRETCHED, absolutely wretched.”

My lady in blue merely smiles. I know that she has understood me, because she took me to the toilet and I got a new pad, medium sized.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“Margaret! You’re not listening to me! I will call the Sister, I will. Sit down! Calm down! Don’t you dare throw that cup of tea at me!”

I have become non-verbal. Somebody help me! I am shaking. I am angry. There was no sugar in my breakfast tea. The shower was too hot and scalded my back. I am dressed too thinly. I will become cold. Oh, where is my lady in blue? It must be Saturday, or maybe Sunday. I cannot remember. All I know is that I am overwhelmed and confused. Where has my memory gone? How did I end up here? I disturb my breakfast tray. I try to run. I trip and fall. I feel the sharp pain, right before darkness sets in.

Sirens. Where have I heard them before? I wake to a strange face, to lights shone into my eyes, to worried voices. I try to look away but my head won’t move. Somebody has taped my head down! I am frightened. I scream and I keep screaming. Another sharp pain, a rush of cold fluids, then I fall gratefully into sleepless slumber.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

“Margaret dear, come play on the piano. Come play while you wait for afternoon tea. It will be here soon.” So I play. I don’t need to think. My fingers have a memory of their own. They produce the music; sweet enchanting music. They run along the ivory as familiar as day. I cast my mind to my dream forest. It needs music, yes, something to complement its beauty; perhaps piano music but on the harp. That would suit. A stranger can play it.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I wake and I fumble. It is much too bright here. There are many voices. I strain my ears to hear, as though underwater. I think I can hear a particular voice carrying on, but continually punctured with words that I cannot quite make out:

“Margaret.... bed 12... Alzheimer’s... fall... ambulance... unilateral hearing loss... hypertension... IVC in situ... nil next of kin... patent... 200ml an hour... known to Dr. Farthing... antibiotics... culture... Waterlow... Ontario... fluid balance up to date... for transfer... highly agitated... skin integrity... yes she’s also autistic... non-verbal at times.... not for resuscitation.”

There is someone approaching my bed. She wears spectacles. Her clothes are maroon. I have a desire to run. My heart is pounding and I sweat. I need to remember to breathe; 3 seconds in, 6 seconds out, turn my mind to nothing, and keep my body present.

“You must be Margaret. Hi, I’m Kate. I’m the nurse looking after you today. You’re due soon for your next dose of antibiotics. I hear that you like your cups of tea with milk and one sugar. I’ll make sure there is one at lunchtime for you. It’s ok to be frightened. No place feels like home after all.”

She sounds kind, this nurse. I wonder why I need a nurse? Am I incapacitated in some way? Did I fall and hurt myself? Am I in trouble? Have I lost my voice? Antibiotics...she said I’m due for antibiotics. Ah yes, antibiotics, the most famous of which is penicillin, first discovered in 1928 and has saved countless lives ever since. Its known discoverer: the

famous Alexander Fleming. Alexander... my son... I named a son after Alexander Fleming. Oh where is he? Where is my Alex? He must know that his mum isn't home!

"Alex? Alex! ALEX! Where are you? Come back Alex! Oh it's not true... you can't be... you need to breathe Alex! Breathe for your mama! How can you be stone cold already? Oh Alex! He's asthmatic. It's asthma. It is just asthma. I need to call 000. I need help!!!" I am suddenly gripped by fear and my face wet with tears. My sweet darling is no longer breathing. I yell, I shout, I cry my loudest and most mournful cry for help. I must reach the phone, I must. There is simply no time left.

"Margaret, Margaret! Look at me. You're in hospital. You're sick. You had a fall. You have an infection. Come and hold my hand. Tell me who Alex is. I can help you."

"Oh will you? Will you find Alex? Will you get him help? He needs his puffer."

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Drip, drip, and drip. It's rather mesmerising to watch. It's rhythmic. It's measured. It's predictable. I know not what time of day it is, or indeed what day it is. I am confined to a bed somewhere unfamiliar. I'm tired beyond anything. At least there are clean sheets to sleep under. I like to sleep with the sheets and blankets pulled right up to my chin. It's a very comforting feeling; and if I lay my head a certain way and my ears are pricked just so, then I can drift off to sleep "hearing faraway music coming from the stars in the sky."
(Roald Dahl – the BFG).

Lady in Blue

This time I dream of my childhood home, no I am remembering I think. I run down the cobblestone path with many other children. There's a nurse with her bicycle, her blue dress and white habit on, and her medicine box waiting at the end of our lane. We also know that she has lollypops hiding. It was vaccination day to save us from dreadful diseases, and this one nurse would do all the kids in town. She had the softest features and a smile that was never wavering. She would cuddle the young ones who got a wee bit upset after their needles. I will remember her angelic face for the rest of my life, I think.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

I wake to a sunny day. There is my lady in blue waiting to greet me. Whoever she is, she makes me feel safe. Her smile is heartwarming.

"Margaret dear. You gave everyone quite the fright on Saturday. I'm sorry I wasn't here to be with you. You're all better now though. Your head wound is fine and your infection is clearing. Dr. Farthing was happy for you to continue your medications back here. It is time for your shower now." Bless her. She understands me. She explains everything so well. I must have been ill then. Who is Dr. Farthing?

Her gentle arms guide me into my slippers and walk me to the bathroom, where a spray of warm water welcomes me into the morning. My teeth are brushed with care, my wispy hair combed and parted, a medium sized pad applied, my clothes dressed onto me, then came the non-slip socks and a pair of comfortable court shoes.

“Margaret dear, would you like to play the piano this morning?”

“Oh yes. Where is it?”

“Right here Margaret, in the lounge room.”

“But I forgot how to play.”

“You will soon remember. But ah, here comes Sister Judy. She has your medications.”

I stare at the little cup. It is transparent. Inside, I could count all the tablets. Sister Judy, whoever she is, says very little and waits expectantly. Should I swallow them then? I look towards my lady in blue for reassurance.

“Margaret dear, take the tablets one at a time. These tablets you take everyday. The little white ones stop your tears. The red one gives you more energy. The yellow ones are the good oils from a fish. The little pink one is for your heartbeats. The big round ones are your vitamins. The green and white ones are new, to clear your infection.” That makes more sense. I take them slowly, one by one. Some are more difficult to swallow. I drink the water hungrily. Sister Judy then walks away. I think I’ve seen her before.

I see my lady in blue moving towards the trolley laden with trays. I watch her graceful movements as she removes one tray, balances it carefully on the table, turns to make the tea and coffee, delivers that tray to another like myself, speaks comforting words to them and helps butter their bread. I know that it will soon be my turn. She never misses anybody under her care. Everybody she will take great care with. That only seems fair. I wouldn’t want to be an unnecessary bother in any one else’s way.

Lady in Blue

All around me, the soft clinking of cutlery begins, the rhythmic chewing of food spreads, and the occasional cough punctures the air. Upon my downward glance, I now see food. There is toast, already buttered, some jam, a scrambled egg, porridge, and a cup of white tea with one sugar, just as I like it best. I try to give my best smile to my lady in blue. She smiles back with her gentle kindness.

The lady in blue... her name is Arella. I remember! I must remember for tomorrow, and the day after, and forever after that. She is my guardian angel. I think I will play a song for her after my breakfast and cup of tea. I am home at last. That trip to the hospital wasn't pleasant at all. How is it that I am remembering everything all of a sudden? Arella's blue attire, come Mondays to Fridays, that must be her work uniform. It suits her complexion well. She is my personal care nurse. Her head, her hands and her heart are all in this job.

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Ah, here comes the lady in blue. Oh I can't quite remember her name, but she knows me well. She ensures that I live with respect and dignity. I trust her with my life. Why else would she be inside my home?