

## The Unseen Visitor

By Paloma P.

*I've always overheard people say I don't understand things. I don't get why. I can understand just fine. I just can't tell anyone that.*

My head swirled and I held on to the wall of the waiting room to keep from collapsing. *Ugh, this bites*, I thought. Mother guided me back to my seat and stroked my hand to comfort me. *Why am I here?* I wanted to ask. *What is wrong?* But I couldn't. And Mom made no effort to explain.

My mother other left me to join my father, who was talking to my doctor in a very hushed voice. The doctor murmured something inaudibly. Mom fell into Dad's arms, sobbing. What was going on? Why wasn't I okay? It was all too much to take. The cacophony of crying of babies in the waiting room, the incessant *beep-beep, beep-beep* of the machines, all combined with the feeling that the world was doing one-eighty's all around me, drove me insane. I passed out, exhausted.

I woke up in a hospital room. No one was there. I felt *awful*, my head throbbing as if someone had been using it for a drumstick. I tried sitting up but was held back by tubes attached to my arms. I needed my mother. I yelled, hoping she could hear me from outside of the room. No response. I screamed for her again, ripping the tubes from my wrists, kicking and flailing, doing anything to escape. I was so helpless, so *stuck*. I heard footsteps from the hallway. Mom was coming! I knew she would save me.

A medical team burst into the room and took hold of my arms and legs, strapping them down. I shrieked in pain as they reinserted my tubes. Why were they doing this? They huddled around me and I realized that my mother was not among them. Where was my mom and why wasn't she with me? I had never felt an isolation this overwhelming. I cried, barely able to breathe between each sob. Even though my room was full of people, I felt truly alone.

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*Ouch...* My entire body ached when I woke. I was shivering from head to toe with cold, but somehow, I was sweating a river. I turned my head and saw, to my utmost surprise, that Mother was sitting next to me, tense and distant. I reached for her as far as my restraints would let me and she turned, her face relaxing the slightest bit. She stroked my forehead.

*Mom...* I wanted to say, but I just couldn't.

Her eyes softened, "I'm sorry, Cami," her voice broke. "But it looks like you'll be here for a little while longer, okay?" I nodded, knowing she would expect me to be brave.

I wish I had realized how long she really meant.

On one of my better days, I went out for a walk in the hallway outside of my room, my IV machine rolling behind me. While on the way I came across an old man sitting against the wall, weeping into his hands. I sat down next to him and placed my hand on his shoulder to comfort him. I knew what it was like to be that sad.

He seemed a little surprised that I didn't speak, but when I shook the old man's hand, he smiled at me, wiping a tear from his eye. I had made him *happy!* I saluted to him, knowing it would cheer him up. He laughed and saluted back. Mission accomplished. The nurses in the hall stared at me weirdly from a distance. They must have been jealous that I had a new friend.

The doctors gave me a medicine that made me feel really lousy, which I don't understand. Aren't medicines supposed to help people feel better? Mom's visits became less and less frequent, and Dad never came at all. Mom said it was "just too hard" for him. And I *still* didn't know what was wrong with me or why I was trapped. Nobody ever explained. Was it because they thought I wouldn't comprehend their words anyway?

The old man came back to the hospital every day to talk to me. A whole year passed. We kept each other amused during our hard times. And when we said greeted each other every day, we always saluted to each other. It became our special little joke.

It soon became harder and harder to leave my room. I just felt so *sick*. My hair started coming out in clumps. What was going on?

One day I woke up and was being wheeled out of my room and through the hallway. Everything spun around me, and doctors called out to their nurses, their voices urgent. Something was very wrong with me.

Suddenly I remembered the old man. He would be waiting for me and not know where I was! I mustered my last remaining strength and jumped out of my moving hospital bed. I ran, evading the stunned doctors. Out of breath, I found the old man in the hallway. He looked up at me, smiling, and saluted. I saluted back just before I collapsed.

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A voice. "... We don't have much time. Have you notified her mother?"

Another voice. "Yes, she's on her way."

I couldn't see anything except darkness. But I could hear things. The murmurs of medical words I didn't understand.

A third voice joined in the mix. "When she ran off, she saluted to someone. I didn't see anyone there."

The first voice again. "Yeah, she's been doing that every day. Coping, I guess."

Then I couldn't hear anything, and in the darkness a beam of light began to form. I got up, suddenly feeling much better, and walked close to it. The old man appeared from the source of the brightness and held out his hand to me. I took it and we walked into the light together.