

# Imaginations

## Freedom to All Souls



Pain.

All I know is pain.

All I feel is pain.

The moaning pain of my stiff lungs' laboured, rattling intake and output. The methodical knife-twist in every heartbeat.

The rolling, throbbing pain in my skull.

The constant whimper of a stomach that has been fed without food for too long.

And, worst of all, the vibrating creak of my bones as I turn to stare at It.

That which bars me from relief.

That which has locked the gates of Heaven, and stands next to them, flipping the key and catching it.

The Stealer of Peace.

The "Wilsen Pressurized Heart-And-Lung Machine, Model SP".

It sits there, beeping in sync with the twists of the knife.

Tantalizing me each beep with the hope that there will be no next.

Its face covered with the dials and gages that feed the doctors their Measurements of Torture.

Its snakelike hoses creeping out from all sides.

Each one a chain that locks my soul in my body like a man locked in his house as it's being demolished.

My daughter, all thin smiles and fragile bounciness, grins into the room.

"Hello, Father! How are we feeling today?" she oozes. Release me.

"I brought you some more flowers! Aren't they beautiful?" she asks, setting the olfactory assault team down on It.

She has brought me more of the hateful plants, who live a useless life, yet still get to die when their lifespans are complete, as if to mock this unnatural charade generously called Life, and mock me as they fade back into the peace from whence they came.

"Cathy and I went to visit Ma's grave yesterday." she mumbles, then falls silent.

Oh, Heidi, my dear wife, why must I be kept from you by these horrid doctors? I long to join you, but the way is barred by plastic, pumps, and misdirected sympathy.

Oh Margaret, my sweet child, why do you torment me so? You think that you do me good by keeping me in this pathetic shell? DO YOU NOT SEE THAT YOU ARE MY WARDEN!?!?!?!?!?

All it would take is the push of a button, the pulling of a plug to end my ordeal.

But no.

You cannot let me go.

"Well, gotta go, Father." She pecks me on the cheek, and departs. The only true mercy she has shown me has been keeping her visits short.

But I have a trick left. These last few days I have been saving my energy up, and soon, I shall free myself.

Gladys, my nurse, comes in, her high heels doing a rhythmic click-snap. She looks at Its face, jots a few numbers down, then sighs and begins the daily ritual of sponge bath, sheet change, and enema. Despite all this, I like Gladys. She is the only person who does not try to pretend that I'm going to get better, and does not ask me questions which I am far too weak to answer. That, and she is the only person who still touches me.

I tilt my head over to glance at my roommate. He is a young boy, barely nine years old, who has frequented this hospital for cancer of the blood since birth, rarely being out of the hospital more than a month before being readmitted. I sympathize with the lad. he too is trapped in this place.

As soon as Gladys leaves, and the boy is asleep, I begin to gather myself. What I do will take the greatest effort I have ever undertaken, and I must have all my resources at hand.

I start to rise. It sits there, waiting. My bones vibrate like harp strings, my head pounds and throbs like there was a fireworks display in my skull, and my lungs begin to feel like a pair of bright red, overinflated balloons. All the time, it sits there, beeping furiously now, but still with that smug, self-satisfied look, as if it was telling me that even now, it would still triumph and frustrate my efforts.

At this moment I freeze, dangling on the precipice between the victory of will and the agony of can't. Then my ears detect the scip-scuffle of the nurses coming to my "rescue", and I realize that If I stop now and flop back into the ready comfort of my pillow, as my body is begging me to, I will have lost the last shred of self-respect I could ever have had, and would become the useless hull I seemed on the outside.