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Breathless

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She had gone in for surgery on her knee after a slip and fall at work. Laying in the recovery room she stared at the white walls. The doctor was in earlier in the morning and said she might be ready to go home in a couple of days.

This was punishment. She was lucky to be alive. She was rushing the order and bypassed the safety regulations of strapping herself in the harness. She had witnessed her supervisor do it several times and didn't think anything of it. A lack of judgment that almost left her crippled or dead. One wrong move, she had missed her step and fell into the pit landing hard on one of the razor-sharp blades. They unhooked the blade and rushed her to the emergency room.

Madeline thought she was going to lose her leg for sure. In her mind, it was a goner. Before the medics came, she passed out.

"Hey sunshine," her husband Cain came in and gave her a kiss, handing her a cup of her favorite coffee.

"Thanks, babe."

"Did you hear from Billy?"

"No," she frowned. "Not looking forward to that conversation."

"I don't blame you. It was dumb. You're lucky you're still alive."

"Yeah, I know," she grumbled. "It won't happen again."

"I gotta go pick up Charlie from your mom's or he's going to be fussing all night long."

He leaned in and kissed her on the lips. Madeline felt a shift in the air, sweat beading her

forehead. It was subtle but felt like a wave passing through the room. He pulled away and squeezed her hand.

She held on to it not letting him leave. Something was wrong! Something was terribly wrong. The air was different, it just felt different and smelled sweeter.

Her lungs were struggling to fill them with air. Looking at her husband wide-eyed, she felt scared. It was hard to breathe. Squeezing his hand, she opened her mouth and gasped, “I can’t breathe.”

He began yelling for a nurse. “Nurse! Help!” he pulled her hand off his and raced to the door, shouting down the hall that his wife needed help.

Her head felt light, and her vision began to blur. The room around her began fading in and out. Her tongue felt dry and heavy. Her chest hurt. The room was tilting, and it was slowly fading away as the room went dark. She could still hear her husband frantically yelling for help.

“Maddy! Stay with us, please,” he was pleading.

Madeline felt like she was being sucked into a long dark tunnel leading to nowhere. When she came around again, she found herself in another room, with over a dozen other people all looking around equally confused. She noticed that they weren’t all patients, one was a doctor, a couple of nurses, a janitor, the rest were a mixture of patients and visitors.

Someone had a tv on and there was a reporter talking about an epidemic that took the world by storm, where several people fell victim to the attack. Was it an intentional attack on humans?

“What’s going on?” she croaked as she forced herself to sit up.

“That’s what they are trying to figure out,” a man said to her.

“Do you think it’s a terrorist attack?” a nurse asked the people in the room.

“How doesn’t make sense?” the doctor replied.

“It happened to us globally.” A woman sitting on a sofa shook her head. “Hard to believe it was random.”

“Crazier things have happened,” the doctor was focused on the reporter.

“I don’t think they know any more than we do,” the pretty nurse shook her head.

“That’s a scary thought.” The second nurse pursed her lips.

“What do you think they are going to do with us?” the pretty nurse asked.

“They will keep us here for now. Seems to be a difference in the air quality.” The doctor replied.

“Globally? How?”

“I don’t know,” he rubbed his beard.

“Maybe our universe collided with another one?” the janitor suggested.

The doctor looked over at him.

“Hal, you watch too many of those conspiracy theorists.” The doctor laughed and shook his head. “You can’t believe everything you read or hear on tv.”

Hal shrugged.

“Maybe Hal is right,” the nurse looked over at Hal. “What do you know about those things Hal?”

“Not much, it’s mostly science fiction but maybe life is imitating art?”

Madeline sat on a stretcher with her legs dangling over the side. “Can I get a drink of water?”

One of the nurses came over and poured her a glass. Took her vitals and noted them in her chart which was at the end of her stretcher. She was struggling to wrap her mind around what was going on in the room around her.

Sipping the cold water, it felt like heaven as it slid down the back of her throat. What did she remember last? She had come out of surgery, and her husband had brought her coffee then she blacked out. Watching the news guy. It was a global attack of some sort. They didn't know what was causing it. There were 1,330,888 people affected by this worldwide. Only 250,987 were currently under medical supervision. The rest died? What happened to the rest of the people? It was over a million people who are what? Dead? Well, they weren't receiving medical supervision.

"We are still counting bodies. This is just such a tragedy, and we just don't have the answers..."

Her throat felt dry again. Sipping the water, she couldn't help but feel she was one of the lucky ones, or was she? Maybe she was dreaming this? Maybe she was in recovery, and this was some kind of nightmare.

"This is such a nightmare," a woman sitting beside the janitor shook her head.

Madeline didn't know what to make of this. According to the reporter, several people around the world became suddenly unable to breathe the air. Their lungs weren't used to the polluted air that everyone else was used to. The lucky ones who are in the surviving class were placed in incubators where the air was purified. Tests were being run on them. It was still unclear as to how they would be able to live normal lives after this.

Madeline looked around the room at the glum faces, they all seemed to be just as bewildered by this situation as she was. Her eyes fell onto the janitor; could our universe collide

into another one? How is that even possible? There was a medical expert on the news, suggesting that if our regular air was introduced to them gradually their bodies may adapt and then they could go about living normal lives again. Yet, it is still unclear how they were put into this predicament in the first place. Madeline felt sick to her stomach.