

## **Just Another Night Shift: Margaret Hardy**

Hospitals are busy noisy places, a cacophony of human and mechanical sounds by day, less so by night. Except say in emergency departments or intensive care units where there is always activity and sometimes even bedlam.

As I arrived at the ward, a group of people rushed into the lift and jostled me as I exited. Their eyes red-rimmed, hankies and tissues tightly clutched in hands and the young girl sobbing probably meant a death on the ward. The sound of the sobs stopped when the lift doors closed. I stood there gathering my thoughts before I arrived at the nurses' station.

The mood at the nurse's station is sombre, the evening shift keen to give handover and go home. Indeed, there was a death and my encounter at the lift was the family who had just said their final goodbyes. The ward fell silent once the last of the evening shift left the ward. My fellow nurses and I went about our routines without speaking. On the first round we made sure the patients were settled for the night. We trod softly as we passed by each bed, careful not to be a disturbance.

Even though it was a warm summer night I shivered as I entered the deceased's room. Alone with my former patient I closed my eyes and said goodbye. I heard my name softly whispered. I opened my eyes. A shadow appeared across the foot of the bed. I took a deep breath and slowly looked around. The wardsman had arrived to take the deceased to the mortuary.

We wheeled the trolley along vacant, low-lit corridors; I felt edgy. At the mortuary there was no sight of the attendant, so we filled in the register and put the body into the correct position in the refrigerator. It was eerily quiet in the dimly lit mortuary, our only company the dead temporarily stored in the refrigerator. A sound, a gentle rustle. Out of the corner of my eye I saw movement. The sheet covering a trolley by the wall fell to the floor. A body exposed. The wardsman and I froze. Suddenly the body sat bolt upright. We were about to run when there was a loud shout.

'Stop'.

So, we did.

A surprised face, bathed in torchlight, stared back at us.

We had disturbed the sleeping mortuary attendant.