

THE LITTLE GIRL

A cacophony of BP machines, clattering syringes and scalpels, nurses' orders and confused voices rang throughout the emergency room. The endless movements and sounds would have been frightening for any eight-year-olds. But not this eight-year-old girl.

She was dressed simply. Wearing a forest green shirt and a grubby blue sweater over it with well-worn jeans and grey Crocs that were too big, this little girl was the picture of concentration. Without anyone seeing her, she stood on a stool to watch an emergency cricothyrotomy. Despite all the distractions, her grey-blue eyes never left the resident's hands. Her small and lithe frame was at a complete standstill.

The little girl never left throughout the entire procedure: from the first cut, to the insertion of the tube. With her complete stillness and eyes wide open, she seemed to be spellbound by the quick, graceful, precise motions. By this time, her mouth was just very slightly open; as if in awe. And as suddenly as the cricothyrotomy had started, it ended. Quietly, the little girl slipped away. She sighed and leaned against the spotless, sterile wall; gradually slipping further down until she sat on the immaculate floor. This was why she loved the emergency room best — so many things happened all at once. At that moment, the same doctor who had done the cricothyrotomy was bustling over to a patient in danger of coding. Plus, more and more civilians were streaming in constantly.

But then again, sometimes merely watching bored her to death. She could not wait for the day when she herself could be the one rushing gurneys to the operating theatres or attacking complex surgeries. With nothing else to do, she crossed the room to the nurses' stations. The little girl climbed up onto one of the high stools to face her favourite nurse, Izzie.

"Hi Ruthie," Izzie said as she noticed the little girl. "Busy day, isn't it?"

"I'm bored Izzie!" Ruthie whined as she laid her head on the marble bench top. "I DO NOT like just watching procedures! I really want to do something.....surgical!"

Izzie chuckled, her dark raven eyes twinkling as she moved the piles of files "You're too young Ruthie! Relax! Anyway, since you want to do something, why don't you go around cheering patients up. You used to love that."

Ruthie frowned, "The last time I did that was ages ago...."

Izzie shrugged and re-tied her stubborn russet hair back into a bun. "At least, there'll be something for you to do!"

"Fine, but if it doesn't work, I'm going to follow you around for the rest of the day! Deal?"

"Deal!" Izzie smiled.

It did not take long for Ruthie to find a patient. She strolled along the makeshift wards in the E. R. when a patient caught her eye. A woman in her thirties with dark eyes, mildly freckled skin and long dark brown hair was staring listlessly at the cubicle curtains.

She looks like she needs cheering up. Ruthie knocked gently on the I. V. machine. The woman looked up at Ruthie and smiled tentatively.

"Hi, I'm Ruthie!" she said boldly. "Could I get you anything? What's your name?"

The woman looked startled at first, then spoke tentatively. "Water please... I'm Cristina."

Ruthie cocked her head. "Are you sure you just want water?"

"What else is there?"

"Tea, coffee, cocoa, coke, lemonade and a lot of juice."

Cristina raised her arched eyebrows. "The nurses didn't say that."

"That's 'cause they want the good stuff for themselves! You know, to get through shifts & surgeries..."

Cristina broke into a peal of laughter. The flush it brought to her pale cheeks made her look merry. "Coffee, then," was all she said.

Ruthie got the coffee for Cristina and within minutes they were chatting away like old friends. From the subject of the ghastliness of the cubicle curtains; to fast food; to the oddities of interns and residents, Ruthie was in her element — and Cristina was having a lot of fun too! She liked Cristina; she was animated and made her laugh. There had been an awkward moment though.

"So, why are you here?" Ruthie had asked.

"Oh, a car accident; nothing major though." she had replied. "What about you?"

"My dad works here, so I'm always here!"

"Your mom works here too?"

"She and my dad got divorced when I was really little, so I don't know her."

Cristina frowned. "What's your dad's name?"

"Tom Altman. He always tells me about what goes on when he's operating, do you know, there was this one time when —"

"You really don't remember your mom?" Cristina cut in abruptly, looking at Ruthie in a searching, somewhat knowing way.

Taken aback slightly, Ruthie replied innocently. "No, I don't. Must have been because my memory didn't unfold properly yet; that's what my dad's friends say!"

And only then did they resume their cheerful camaraderie. Still, Ruthie felt slightly uncomfortable now; although she did not know why. And then her father came.

"Oh Ruthie you're here!" he said as he pulled the curtain aside. "The nurses said..." he stopped short. "Oh my God.... Cristina?" That was the first time Ruthie had seen her dad; Thomas Altman, Chief of Surgery, look so stunned.

"Hello Tom," she said, very low, not meeting his gaze directly. "How...how have you been?"

"Fair enough," he said, his voice clipped.

Cristina turned to look at Ruthie. "She's got your eyes, you know...and your smile," she told Tom.

His eyes shifted into focus as he gazed at his one well-beloved daughter. "Yeah," he said with a fierce rush of pride and love, "she does." And then his face darkened. "And she isn't going anywhere! Especially not back there!" In a smooth motion, he scooped Ruthie up and carried her off.

In the whirl of motion, Ruthie could only barely make out the words: "I'm her aunt! I have a right to know her too!"

Ruthie's thoughts were swimming in excitement. If Cristina was her aunt, then she was her mother's sister! But then, where was her mother? And why didn't her father want her, Ruthie, to know her own mother??

Written by Debra Grace Lim Jia En
13 years old
English Champ @ Literacy World