

Keeping Vigil

Category: Palliative and Hospice Care
written by Tina Arkee | May 23, 2025

Here, in this place where time refracts and sleep/wake cycles are no match for fluorescent lights and incessant telemetry alarms, you exist in a liminal space.

You are neither here nor there, clinically tenuous at best. Your stick-and-poke smiley face tattoos – the first things I noticed when I admitted you not long ago – are a foil to the reality of your situation. Decompensated cirrhosis. Multi-pressor shock. No loved ones at bedside.

The end is coming. Just days ago, you predicted it yourself, delirious and gasping for air, moments before a machine started breathing for you. Jaundiced and wide eyed, you are an unexpected prophet, and I am unsettled by your revelation.

The message spreads. I make phone calls on your behalf and hold the phone to your ear, bearing witness to confessions that were years in the making. Listening to a father speak to his son for the last time, and to a son speak to his father for the last time, feels like interfering with something sacred.

Here, in this place where time refracts, the cacophony of critical illness dimming as drips are paused and telemetry alarms are silenced, I hold your hand as your heart marches toward oblivion.

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