

The Janitor

Category: Crying

written by Anonymous | April 15, 2017

Outside the OR, at a dictation desk in the cold, quiet hallway, I sat alone. I stared at the black-and-white floor tiles, my eyes tricking me into seeing diamonds, then squares, then diamonds. As if my chest were squeezed in a vise-grip, I could barely take a breath. My body was frozen in place, held stiffly upright by the hard chairback, the only thing keeping me from collapsing inward.

Snippets of random thoughts raced through my head: How did this happen? How do I go on? What do I do now? Nothing was making sense, nothing was there to guide me. I watched my hand reach for the phone, and, without realizing it, I called my office manager. "I can't move," I told her.

"You need to come here now," she commanded me, her voice steady and compassionate. My office was across the street, but it didn't matter how close it was, my heavy legs couldn't move.

"She died," I continued, in a monotone.

"I know. I heard all that happened. Get yourself up and come here."

Four hours in the OR, four surgeons working feverishly, four units of blood...one cardiac arrest.

I put the phone down. As I turned to look down the hallway, the janitor rounded the corner with her cleaning cart. "You look like you need a hug," she said. Without hesitation, she came up to me and wrapped me in her warmth. Slowly, my numb stiffness began to melt, and I felt a primal gurgling rise inside of me. I began to convulse in uncontrollable sobs—tears of fear and shame and loss and pain and hopelessness came flooding out of me.

As I struggled through the devastation of losing a patient, then reliving it many times during the investigation and lawsuit that followed, no one but this one kind soul held me and gave me space to cry. It took someone from outside the health-care field to see what I truly needed in that moment of crisis.

Anonymous