

# Cardiac Ward

Category: Healing

written by Marsha D. Rappley | February 9, 2021

I cradle a fragile baby whose heart cannot support her growth. I have fed her, bathed her, changed her diaper, rocked her to sleep, and measured her meds in drips per second, all in the hope that she will gain enough weight to withstand surgery.

I take the baby to sit in the playroom because I know her eyes will sparkle to the sound of little voices. She coos as we sit among chattering toddlers with clanging IV poles.

Suddenly her eyes go dull, and she is limp in my arms. Blood erupts from her mouth with a guttural sound. She is choking. Blood is gushing, hitting me in my face, my neck, my chest. My throat is a spasm of panic. I can't call for help.

I hear "Treatment room! Treatment room, Maddy!" I clutch the baby tight against me and run. Doors are flung open. I lurch forward and someone begins pulling my arms open, peeling the baby away from me as my shirt stretches and snaps back against my skin, sticky with blood. The overhead lamp is blinding. My chest, where I just held her, is cold and wet. I am shivering as the team surges around me, edging me out.

A warm hand turns my shoulder, takes my arm and silently walks me to the locker room. "Shoes off," my nurse supervisor says, as she gently begins cutting away my stiffening clothes. She walks me under a tepid shower. The acrid smell of antiseptic soap burns in my nose.

Somehow, I get home. I make my way into bed. I don't know if I sleep until my alarm is screaming, "You will be late for work!" as it always does.

I park my car and carefully put my keys in their place. I feel each breath as I walk into the hospital, up the elevator and onto the ward. The nurse manager quickly comes to my side. "We didn't know if you would come back, Maddy." The cardiac surgeon sees me out of the corner of his eye and nods. His team turns and stares at me as one, a silent show of respect.

I don't know if I am back. I hope that someone told her mother that I loved her baby, and held her baby close. As she died.

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