

## Blood Samples and Wooden Virgins

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The hospital's name reads like a Tinder profile. It's too long, too self-aggrandizing, printed like watermarks on the bedsheets. I ask nurse M., as she checks my blood pressure, what she thinks of the hospital's name. I don't see anything wrong with it, she tells me, before an auxiliary brings my belongings into my box, now safely bundled in a white bin bag, my social security number printed on a sticker.

It's like an airport, I suppose; a lot of waiting involved. Several types of waiting, now that I think about it. A woman outside is waiting on someone to look in her purple cornea and tell her what they see. There's a two month-old baby out there too, one who woke this morning, suddenly allergic to its mother's milk. And then there's my waiting, the post-ictal sort. They're going to keep me in observation, because I wasn't entirely fine when they rolled me in. In five hours or so I'll be asking how much longer, and my nurse will say an hour, but she'll forget about me, so I'll be waiting three hours instead. Then the last bus will leave without me, and I'll have to call a taxi. I'll have to eat cold poached pears as dessert come dinner time.

Nurse M. tells me they need blood and urine, so I say fine, alright, but I know I have no say in it. I ask if I can go to the toilet so I can avoid the bed-pan, informing her that I know the drill, two tubes and all, but she says no, that I'm not allowed to move around yet. Fine, I guess.

I always forget the rubber. I know the nurses put the band around my bingo wings, but I tend to merge this with the blood-pressure sleeve, whenever I think back to my little waiting sprees. I've put on some weight, I tell her, looking at the blue rubber as she preps her needle. Get me a bigger band next time. It's one size, silly, she laughs, and there it goes, scarlet filling two tubes with different coloured lids. Out she heads, wheeling it away whilst an auxiliary comes in with a bed-pan, and asks if I want her to wait outside. When I'm done I think I might have spotted the bed. Maybe it's just sweat. A great deal of exercise; lifting one's bottom over a bedpan.

The sliding door is still half open. There, behind what looks like a reception desk, are two glass

pipes raising to the ceiling. Nurse M. is carrying my blood, and to my utter dismay, when she places it beneath said pipe, it is suctioned right out of her grip.

Us epileptics have access to different plains of consciousness. That's a perk, I guess. Believe it or not, it goes beyond our own minds. I see the plains of others, little hills and crags from half finished watercolours. I see a plain there, in my blood, now trapped in a plastic container, being sucked upwards, towards a toxicity lab. My blood is well known around here, with its pastel cocktail of Tegretol, Keppra and Vimpat, and nothing else, because I'm too scared to go out and look for cannabis even though studies say it's beneficial for us epileptics.

Before I tell you what my blood is seeing, please keep in mind that from their point of view, that ascent up the glass pipe is in fact painfully slow. So they don't see it all in a blur. They know what's above them and beneath; about a million plastic blood containers, all heading towards the lab, all laughing like sheep at the blood that follows. This is a race. This is rushing in a manner they never thought possible, radically different from the usual plumbing.

They slow down by a maternity ward, a tearoom, to be specific, midwives crowding round a newspaper defaming this institution. Last week one of them mistook a glittering rubber alien for a sixteen to eighteen week-old foetus, after finding it floating in a toilette. They'd called the police, and the press followed, until a police woman recognized the alien as the toy that it was. They wound up making national news, and they came to work today to find an alien spray-painted in the staff's car-park.

Blood continues upwards, through an aquarium, populated solely by jellyfish in pinks and blues, artificial moonlight bouncing off their floaty limbs. They watch envious as the immortal dance, and Blood pushes against its lid, trying to speed up the ascent. But the scarlet tubes are in a zoo for these marine creatures, and all crowd around to stare at what sooner or later will decay.

They're getting closer to the lab. Blood can smell it; chemicals, rubber gloves, lasers and robots, probably. But first they stop by a bakery, to watch yeast dissolve before it's added to the

dough. Blood travels north, through a nondescript circle of brain-washers, and higher still, through a dozen ceilings, until the tubes are pulled out of the pipe. All save mine, which skids past their rubber clad hands.

A golf-course appears covered in snow. It's shallow enough, or so my blood thinks, as it falls out of the pipe and hopes someone from the lab will climb up and find it. But my blood sees me, and by definition itself, running across the cloaked grass, calling for Robby, my lovely sheepdog, who'd thought golf was all but a game for little doggies like himself.

Robbie chases after that one lonesome golfer out in the snow, and I stop running, left ear going numb, head suddenly made of a rubber band too tight for my bingo wings. And under all that rubber, a sparkler ignited, but still contained. I can't feel the snow yet, I just know that my eyes are still open, not blinking, not seeing the spikes and drops behind them.

My blood doesn't see the explosion, nor does it feel the earthquake. Blood likes a good convulsion, believe it or not. Blood's always flowing in the same direction. A seizure shakes things up a little bit.

Nurse M. walks in as I'm finishing my standard dinner, and looks down at the cold poached pear, smiling in sympathy. "Mingin', isn't it?"

I nod, looking up at the clock on the wall. I'm tired now. Or maybe it's just the usual irritation, that dying need to move and wake up.

I'm sure she's here to tell me that the doctor will be doing rounds soon, and that I'll be discharged. I look up at my monitor, where my low blood-pressure from six hours prior is still visible, and then up at her.

"We're going to need another blood sample," she tells me, because apparently someone in the lab contaminated it. There's nothing of interest in my blood, I tell her, in those words or maybe others, and she looks at me the same way she's looked at another fifty patients today who had the

nerve of complaining. She takes blood from my wrist this time.

At least now I'm able to walk to the toilette, and unhook myself for a while. I love these toilettes, so I do. Everywhere else is too noisy, too crowded, lacking all concept of privacy. When I'm in my half-open box I look like a wooden virgin on display at an Easter procession. In here, in the toilette, I have a mirror, an identity, a poorly fitted gown. Can't lock the door, though. And for some reason all patients wait until you're already peeing to pull the door open. I've done that to others though, so no hard feelings.

Back in my box, I decide to sit; wooden virgin doing a little yoga. Tomorrow I won't be able to move. I can tell. There's no pain yet, but just like Robby was able to yelp and warn that one golfer of what was about to crash through me, I too know of the stiffness to come. I roll my shoulders back to life and try to not think of tomorrow, when I'll either binge or not eat at all. *Stock up on healthy food*, I tell my husband through a voice message, and he offers me two cry-laughing emojis. He finishes up at midnight. If he takes his time with my blood, we might be able to head home together. No need for taxis, then.