

Waiting

Ruth Goldblatt

His steps echoed as he slowly trudged the empty corridor. The sounds made by his faltering feet sounded loud in the deserted hall. He stuffed his handkerchief in his pocket and then pulled it out again. He wiped his dripping forehead and his clammy hands—the fingers cold and stiff. The bright light of the chart room made him blink, and he turned back down the long hallway. His head was low, his chin almost resting on his chest. Dark lines were etched on his face, and his eyes were deep and heavy lidded.

A white-clad figure walked briskly toward him. As he heard the sound of footsteps he turned his head, but the eyes he met were strange and unconcerned. The steps continued down the hall. He shivered and pulled out his handkerchief.

There was a straight-backed chair in a small room. He walked in and sat down stiffly, perched rigidly on the edge as though ready to run. He rested his head in his shaking hands as a tear slipped through his wide-spread fingers. Another tear, and then he wept, quietly and unnoticed. Finally, he stopped and stood up unsteadily.

The dim corridor seemed longer each time he trod its length. Every time a footstep resounded he straightened in expectation, only to be met with unknowing stares.

"Why don't they come? Why don't they know?" he said aloud. The sound of his words was hollow. A cleaning woman looked at him inquisitively. He felt hot and embarrassed, and he retreated to the other end of the hall.

He stood looking at the sky beginning to lighten in the east. As he watched, the world came alive. Delicate pinks softened the stark lines of the cold gray buildings. Rays of early sunshine caused the snow on the branches outside the window to glisten. The heavy load of sleeplessness and worry began to lessen as he watched the miraculous birth of the morning.

He turned quickly when he heard the soft step behind him. His tired eyes searched hopefully for an answer. The silence was ominous. He sat down despairingly on the hard, straight-backed chair. A deep sigh escaped his lips as he reached nervously for his handkerchief.

"She died in her sleep," the nurse said. She rustled out of the room and he was alone. The sun shone brightly through the unshaded window.