

Excerpt from a WIP: *Fight/Cure*

The hospital's ER alarm pings five times. The robot voice is the same, but less urgent. *All available on-call interns please report to Trauma.* Rowan groans out of exhaustion. Then he remembers there's a pharm counter on the way. He decides to hit it on the way back from the call for a WakeD.

He hears some diagnosis happening around the corner from a voice he doesn't immediately recognize.

"Patient ran into the Admissions door three times. No ID, but DNA records indicate her name is Marsha Way. Thirty-two. Pupils completely dilated. Multiple lacerations, bruising on both arms, legs, face, and neck. Three bone fractures. Two breaks," Rowan walks in on O'Doole and two other staff members that are trying to get the patient into the remaining bed restraints. She recognizes Rowan, giving him implied clearance, and asks him to hurry. He tries to help, but the patient won't stop thrashing her clearly broken arms around. Her legs are already mottled with old and new bruises. They twitch and writhe against the ankle restraints. The scrapes and slashes are weeping iron red into the powder blue sheets. Her broken and in-tact bones pop and groan out of synch with her ragged breathing and hissing.

Rowan manages to keep her left arm down long enough to be restrained, all while she's trying to punch him with her free arm. O'Doole quickly snatches and restrains it. If she's feeling any pain from touches or the restraints, she's not showing it. Her yelps and groans could be out of protest rather than pain. She's starting to foam at the mouth. Pink froth stripped with more iron red leaks down her chin and into the gown's collar hem. A few of her teeth look broken from what little glimpses the staff can get into her mouth. Her entire face is beaten nearly beyond a human resemblance. Her head twitches and lolls haphazardly around her track marked neck.

No use asking if she wants to look away while they give her an IV. One of the ER staff finally tries to talk to her.

“Ma’am? Ma’am, can you tell us what your name is?” she asks. The patient spits out the froth and tries to steady her head.

“Marrssshh,” she hisses. More restrained twitching and thrashing.

“Marsh?” O’Doole asks.

“Ma-Marssshh... Marshaaa-,” her voice creaks like an angry old door.

“Okay, Marsha, we’re gonna give you an IV with something to help you calm down, okay?” The other staff member asks. Marsha nods, maybe. She blinks hard while the IV is administered. She manages to hold somewhat still. A syringe with Ativan gets mainlined into the IV. A few beats pass. Or a few hundred in Marsha’s case. Her heartbeat is nearing two-hundred BPM. 198. 196. 195. 196. 194. 190. 188. 180. Her breathing slows down in duo with her heartbeat. She stills. Her eyes fall closed. She lets out a long exhale. 175. 169. 142. 130. 119. 100. 89. Her chest doesn’t rise back up.

“Marsha?” Rowan asks. She starts flatlining. O’Doole and company try to get a response. One of them tries CPR. Rowan turns on the defibrillator. Marsha’s chest gets transdermal patches on her sternum and apex. He grabs the paddles and puts them on the patches. Someone asks for 160 Jz. The machine rings out a few pitches higher than the heart rate monitor. Rowan looks at O’Doole who’s now across from him. Her eyes go behind him, then back.

“You’re clear,” she says.

“Clear,” Rowan repeats. Marsha’s body jumps a little. Still flatling. 180 Jz. More ringing. Another shock. Still flatlining. 200 Jz. More ringing. Another shock. Flatline. He takes the paddles away. Her time of death is clocked at 4:26 a.m. Rowan moves the paddles further away

from Marsha's body. One of the ER staff takes them and turns off the defibrillator. Caitlyn sighs in defeat.

"You did good, Rowan," she says. Rowan tries to meet her eyes but can't lift them away from Marsha. Her chest convulses once. Then again. Her monitor shows no signs of life. Another convulsion. He wonders if the machine is faulty. Her whole body starts thrashing under the restraints again. Her eyes shoot open. Her pupils are still completely dilated. The heart monitor still reads zero. She can't have any oxygen flow to her brain. Marsha's body stays animated for another three seconds before collapsing back onto the bed. They check her for and confirm brain death. A few vials of her blood are taken. Rowan tries to close her lids. They're still warm.

The staff member that drew the blood orders for the body to be taken in for testing. There's no way Marsha signed off on that, but it's too late now. Rowan gets assigned to get her trip rolling. First, he has to take her body to the cooler, then her blood vials to toxicology. He's not sure when she'll get to go to the morgue. She probably won't be ready for embalming for another week thanks to all of the traffic.

He speeds up his gait to the cooler in case she reanimates again. He clutches the bag with her blood vials to keep them from moving around too much. This cooler could have been anything before the Pan hit. Now it's just a halfway point for corpses to wait until they can go to a lab or the actual morgue for an autopsy. A Necro-filing cabinet. There's no proper door, so much as a long compartment in the wall to feed the bodies into. They get automatically sorted and filed until someone is ready for them. Like sodas in a vending machine. He checks her wrist tag and punches her number into the keypad. The slot adjusts to fit her dimensions, pings twice and opens.

*Deposit body now.*

Rowan slides the gurney horizontally into the slot. A thin slab slides underneath her and lifts her up enough for him to remove the gurney.

*Please remove the patient transport.*

He removes it cautiously. The slot closes and pings twice.

*Patient Way, Marsha. Retrieval ID 04263409. Thank you.*

He checks the label stuck to the vial case and scan the code. The number matches so he can pick her up later. He contemplates getting a soda at some point, too.