



A Touch of Light

by Nicola Burnell

It is several minutes before I understand what's going on. Electronic beeps keep perfect time to the swish and sigh of the ventilator that fills and empties my lungs. I sense people around me, busy people, too busy to notice that I am trying to open my eyes so that I might see the light of the world, one more time.



Little Pond, by Jo Salata

I recall the moments before the light went out. I was lying flat on my back as my blood spewed all over the ecru tiled floor of the hospital corridor. The ceiling, lit by a row of oblong lights, whizzed over me as my gurney and I sped toward the open elevator. Aware that this could be the last journey I'll ever make, I count the lights; one, two, three, grasping at every detail of what is left of my life.

Once inside the wooden paneled elevator I am relieved to find myself lying directly beneath a huge light. Its warmth reaches out to me; waves of soft, subtle comfort seep into my body, offering a promise of safety. The elevator creaks and groans. This would be a fine time to get stuck, I muse. She died waiting for the elevator repair man, my epitaph would boast. I want to laugh, but my belly hurts too much to move.

I raise my head just in time to see the tight ball of my uterus lunging toward me, forced upward by the blood filling my abdomen. I've seen the movie Alien, who hasn't? and I swear that I half expect a monster to burst right out of me.

Fear thickens on my doctor's face. His skin glows a murky gray and his eyes collapse into dark holes that offer no suggestion of redemption. I bury my gaze into the light above me, praying for a sign that this, too, will pass.

I'm not ready to leave yet. I've beaten every other drama in my life, why should this one be any different? I find myself routing inside of me, searching for some thread of hope, as I listen to my blood tap tap tapping to the floor.

Frantic voices discuss my case as I lie helpless as a fish flapping on the deck of a boat. I want to share in the dialogue that is taking place about two feet above me. But I know that what I have to say is not important. I am no longer in control of my destiny. I am just another body, another case to get through before the next shift change.

I feel like I'm drowning as the machines around me explode into a chorus of beeps and chirps. Doesn't anyone hear this? My chest tightens as my heart pounds so hard that I expect it to explode. I want to scream for help but the tube down my throat forbids me. I try to thrash my arms and legs but I am paralyzed. I wait for the light to go out.

The air is heavy with the scent of rhododendrons in full bloom. I sit on the edge of a big rock that leans into the crystal blue lake, my legs dangling into the cool water. My friend is waiting for me, as usual. This rock is our sanctuary, a place we run to when our minds need to escape. We met here many times before cancer finally stole his breath. But death failed to separate us. I lie backwards on the rock, stretching like a cat under the glorious afternoon sun.

"What happens now?" I ask him.

"We wait," he replies.

There is chaos around my bed as hands tug at the myriad of tubes inserted into me. Moments later, I am breathing again. My god, I must look a sight! I can only imagine what my hair is doing. If I don't tame my curls with a water spray and mousse I look like one of the "Wild Women from Wonga." How long have I been lying here? What day is it? Where is my baby?

The elevator door slides open. As I am rushed down another hallway I count the string of lights above me. I am parked in the center of an operating room and told to "relax". I scan the room for light but can see no farther than a few feet away, where trays of instruments lay in wait for their turn to slice into me. Surgeons fly into the room like green-swathed banshees, swirling and hovering over me with curiosity flashing in their eyes. They are all speaking at once, delegating and organizing the proceedings. Everyone in the room is intently focused on my body; prodding, pulling and jabbing at my skin. "What about me?" I scream, but no sound passes my lips. "What about ME?"

I am startled by the sudden illumination of the circle of lights that hang above the operating table. They are so bright. Is this the light people see when they rave about their near-death experiences? I stare into the lights, waiting for the fabled tunnel to show itself.

"Can I go back?" I ask my friend.

"No. You must stay here."

He is staring out over the lake to where distant hills dissolve into the sky.

"Can I ever go back?" I persist.

"That's up to you," he smiles. "I have something to show you."

I follow my friend along a short path that hugs the edge of the lake. He leads me through some rhododendron bushes and into a clearing where several groups of children are gathered.

"What are they doing?" I whisper, sensing a sacred tranquility in the air around us.

My friend puts his finger to his lips and nods toward the children. I watch in silence as they lay their hands upon each other in a gentle, ritualistic manner. A calm, warm energy encompasses me as I feel myself being drawn to them. I want to join them, but my friend pulls at my arm and motions for me to return to our rock.

When the beeping subsides I am left to contemplate, once again, the hisses and gasps of the ventilator. I try to move my head but it feels frozen to the pillow. I send my attention to my toes. Not a twitch. My fingers are as still as stone. Is there nothing I can do for myself?

"You're doing just fine," a voice announces to the left of me.

A warm palm settles on my hand, soft as a feather. Another hand rests on my shoulder. The warmth from her hands begins to emanate up my arm and along my neck. It travels through me, like running water, soothing every inch of my body.

The circle of lights grows so bright that I am forced to turn away from them as surgeons rip out the staples that had sealed the Cesarean tear in my belly, less than an hour earlier. There's more panic as voices exclaim that the bleeders can not be located without removing the uterus altogether. No more children for me. How the hell did this happen? A man appears at my side, introducing himself as the anesthesiologist.

"Put her out," someone yells.

"She's too unstable," the new man hisses back.

I catch his eyes with my own and hold his gaze with every ounce of will that I can muster. These are possibly the last eyes that I will ever look into, and I want to hang on to them for as long as I can.

"If you go back," my friend explains, "you will have work to do."

"I don't understand," I reply. "What kind of work?"

"You will know what to do when it finds you."

"Finds me?"

"Exactly." He stands up and slides off the rock.

"Will I see you again?" I ask.

I don't want him to leave, but I sense that I must stay on the rock, alone.

"I'm always here," he assures me.

Tiny crystals caught in the rock's surface glisten in the sunlight. I run my palm over one of them and feel a slight tug. I hold my hand over the crystal and wait for the pulling to stop. It increases until my palm is pulsating with a hot energy. I feel my body relax as the energy swims over me, as if a hundred tiny hands are hovering inches from my skin. I lie back and surrender to the peace entering my soul.

The nurse moves to my other hand and shoulder. Once again a warm energy flows into me. I can still hear the machines and bustle of the I.C.U., but none of that frightens me now. I am wrapped in a profound sense of calm and safety.

"Don't stop," I silently plead.

The nurse squeezes my hand as thoughts of my baby flood my mind.

"Your baby is doing fine," she says. "He's adored by everyone in the nursery."

My thoughts race to my three-year-old son who had been dropped off at a friend's house six days before.

"Don't you worry about your other son," the nurse continues. "He'll be in to see you as soon as you come off some of these machines."

This news sends my heart racing again. Within seconds the machines are in a frenzy.

"Well, I guess you heard me," she says. "Why don't I go and get that little baby down here to cheer you up?"

Minutes later my infant son is lying on my chest. Although I can't see or hold him, I can feel him breathing. I hear the click of a camera. "There, now you have a lovely picture of the two of you together," the nurse announces. "I'll tape it to your bed frame, along with the other photographs we've taken of him while you were gone from us. He's four days old now and boy is he handsome."

Before leaving the hospital, I ask the I.C.U. nurse what she was doing with her hands when I was on life-support.

"Just a little Reiki," she replies.

A few days later, my friend Nancy stops by my house after seeing my car in the driveway. We hadn't been in touch for months, but when she sees me lying on my rented hospital bed her eyes carry the message I've been waiting for.

"I dreamt you died in childbirth," she says, resting her hands over mine. "How did you make it back?"

I explain how I'd hemorrhaged after a routine Cesarean and had needed a transfusion of twenty-one pints of blood. She listens with understanding when I say the spirit of my friend came to help me and show me the vision of the children in the field.

"He must be your Guide," she explains. "You have come back to help others."

"How do I do that?" I ask.

"By telling your story," she replies.

Her hands emanate the same calming energy I had felt from the nurse in the hospital.

"Do you know Reiki?" I ask her.

"I'm a Reiki Master," she nods. "I can teach you everything you need to know."

Within two months Nancy had initiated me into the sacred art of Reiki healing. This began a journey of enlightenment that completely changed the course of my life. My brush with death gave me so many gifts. I am a Reiki Master now, and I have seen miracles occur in strangers. I know exactly how that nurse must have felt when she watched me heal and finally leave that hospital bed.

My friend still talks to me, whenever I think about him, and our sacred rock. And yes, he has shown me more visions for me to

work towards, but they are for other stories.

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