

Medicine

Intensive Care Medicine

A Poem in Honor of the ICU

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In chambers cold with sterile light,
Where day and night blur into white,
There lies the realm of breath and steel,
Where life is gauged in what we feel.

No ticking clocks or ringing chimes—
Time here is kept in different rhymes:
The pulse oximeter's quiet beep,
The ventilator's measured sweep,
The whisper of an IV drip,
The shuffle of a nurse's trip.

This is the land of in-between,
Where battles rage yet go unseen.
Not fought with sword, nor bomb, nor gun,
But with compassion, one by one.

A child sleeps with lines and leads,
A rhythm watched by those who read
The language of machines and signs—
Of lab reports and shifting lines.
They read the EKG like lore,
And check the pressures more and more,
Seeking life within the wave,
Racing time they hope to save.

Here, doctors do not speak in haste,
Their words are measured, never waste.
They weigh each risk, they scan each chart,
Each note a map of someone's heart.

The residents with sleepless eyes
Wander like ghosts 'neath morning skies,

Yet still they press with purpose true—
What else is there but pushing through?
Their hands are trained, their minds are steel,
Yet still they break for what they feel.
A failing lung, a crashing vein,
They fight the code, they fight the pain.

And nurses—oh, the sacred art,
Of mending body, guarding heart.
Their care is woven in the thread
Between what's living and what's dead.
They clean the wounds, adjust the flow,
They listen when we need to know.
They hold the hands that cannot speak,
They're brave when families go weak.

And still among the endless pace,
There is a strange and quiet grace.
The scent of antiseptic rooms,
The flicker of the monitor looms—
These are the songs of vigilance,
Of holding hope in balance, tense.

A man who once was strong and tall,
Now lies in gown and breathing stall.
A soldier, maybe, or a priest,
Now battling his final beast.
The tubes obscure what once was proud,
Yet in his chest, the heart is loud.
And in that beat, the staff finds cause—
To keep him here, despite the odds.

Another room holds someone's wife,
A mother clinging on to life.
Her child sits with tear-streaked face,
Praying to fill her empty space.
The nurse adjusts the oxygen,
And gently smooths the linen in.
For even when they cannot cure,
Their kindness is a form of sure.

And often there's the silent loss,
No trumpet sounds, no martyr's cross.
Just screens that dim, and pumps that cease,
A final breath, a fleeting peace.
They pause a moment, lower lights,
Record the hour, close the sights.
And then move on, for others wait—
No time to mourn, nor contemplate.

But later, maybe near the dawn,
When coffee steams and others yawn,
They share a word, or sigh, or stare—
The grief is present, everywhere.

And then there are the miracles:
The breath that comes when all seems still.
The child who laughs despite the wires,

The old man who regains desires.
A wedding ring returned with joy,
A mother hugging her sweet boy.
These fragile wins are deeply kept,
For every time they deeply wept.

This place is not for weak of soul,
Nor those who seek a simple role.
It takes a heart that bears the weight
Of life and death and tempting fate.
It takes a mind that thinks with speed,
And yet a heart that dares to bleed.

There's beauty in the smallest things:
The light that through the curtain clings,
The meal a nurse forgets to eat,
The patient's note left on a sheet:
"Thank you for staying by my side—
I know you fought so I survived."

It's here where humans are most real,
Stripped of all but what they feel.
A man may own the tallest tower,
But here he's humbled by his power.
A woman known for brilliant mind
May simply want a hand to find.

And so the ICU becomes
A chapel for the beat of drums—
The drums of hearts that try to stay,
That cling to one more hour, one day.

The walls remember all they see:
The silent hope, the dignity.
The final words in trembling tone,
The child who walks again, alone.
The lovers holding one last kiss,
The hands that shake, the chance they miss.

All echoed in the sterile air,
A sacred weight beyond compare.

And through it all, the staff remain,
Half holy saints, half forged by pain.
They laugh, they cry, they drink, they scream,
They run on hope and caffeine dreams.
But still they come, they never rest,
Each shift another daunting test.
They learn to hold and let things go,
To care, and still not let it show.

Not every story ends in light,
Not every battle ends in fight.
But every life they strive to mend
Is honored to the very end.
And so the field of ICU
Is filled with those who dare and do.
Whose greatest power lies not in might,

But in their will to guard the night.

And when the world is fast asleep,
They hold the ones the world can't keep.
And in their hands, there flickers on
The fragile light before the dawn. ■

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