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The Day of Trouble

by Sue Hitchcock

“Oh, God!” groaned Fred as the pain in his left arm increased. He had never believed in God, but the habit of calling on God instead of shouting “Help!” made the imposition on those nearby more polite. He felt sick and was offered a glass of water, but eventually paramedics were called and they arrived as he was wondering if this was IT. A cold stethoscope penetrated his shirt and then he was wrapped in a blanket and ferried in a sitting-up stretcher from his office to the ambulance via the lift, where he was stared at by annoyed colleagues who had to wait for the other lift or use the stairs

At least the paramedics were reassuring. The hospital, somewhat familiar, looked different lying down. Some of the strip lights flickered and the floor seemed remarkably bumpy, every bounce worryingly like the first shot of pain in his arm. The reassuring words offered by the nurse and the porter were inaudible through their masks, but they sounded kind.

Then he became a lump of flesh only. Needles were inserted, wires attached with sticky disks of plaster and an oxygen mask was placed over his mouth and nose. Was there any point in staying alert? He relaxed and might have slept, if the thought did not keep returning, that he might see the tunnel of light he had heard about, and then start to float above himself, as his soul considered abandoning his body.

Maybe he slept. He couldn't tell how much time had passed, when several doctors began a discussion by his bed. He kept his eyes shut and listened.

It had been a cardiac incident, though the particular details, shown by the electrocardiogram, were just magic words to him.

“We’re taking you to I.C.U. Mr. Lloyd!” and all the attachments accompanied him on another trundle through the mysterious corridors.

As the days passed and the ward became his home, he reflected that he still didn't know the truth.

“Call on me in the day of trouble!”

He had called “Oh, God!” but it was the NHS that had heard.