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It's What You Can't See

by Victoria Watson

When the baby stopped breathing it seemed like the room inhaled people instead. They were everywhere, pushing past me, forming a wall of humans, all plastic aprons and gloved hands. I only saw their backs and heard them talking fast in short sentences to each other. None of the words made sense and I lay back with my heart ticking inside me surrounded by my own blood and silent terror.

The world stopped spinning in that moment, the exhaustion had slipped over my eyes and just as I believed the endurance was over and that I would be looking down into a small piece of life, I was shut out and blocked from the very thing that minutes before had been a part of me.

The machines beeped and yet the missing cry was all we heard. The irony of this pregnant pause was not lost on me as I lay there unaware of my own body yet hardwired to the body they were studying. All the pain evaporated and I was soaring above, terrified, waiting to be reunited.

Yet still I heard the words of my father, warning me of all the things that were truly fearsome. Not the monster under the bed, not the bad dream, or the dark or even the stretch of open water mouth wide before me.

The basis of all human fear, he thought. A door closed, still ajar.

I knew then it is those things that as children we thought we saw, the bits we could not quite see, just out of reach or not fully heard. We fill in the gaps and make up the rest. We see strange shadows on the wall and believe them to be gruesome bodies full of malice and intent. The heap of clothes or the dressing gown hanging on the back of a door become our worst nightmare. Or so we think.

Then we grow up and we rationalise those gaps, we make sense of the world and the only monsters are the ones where tiny fragments of hope, of happiness, of love are snatched from us when we least expect it.

I watched the green backs of the medical team encircle my baby like vultures over prey and I filled in the gaps; life had become death and I lay back willing to trade.

No one dies of a broken heart but some near deaths come when all that we love has no fight for life. We just have to watch while no crying he makes.

When I hear praying, I am startled to discover the whispered promises are coming from inside me. A hand is placed on my arm and I look in wonder at this foreign entity touching me skin to skin. I cry for the beeping to stop; I cry for the crying to start and I cry for any God to answer me.

Only when I have watched all hope fade from my partner's face, do I hear it. The smallest noise, weak and almost inaudible. It is more like a kitten mewling for its milk, than a child shouting with life, but nonetheless I hear it. And that tiny noise floods through me with the same message. I am still here; I am still life.