

The Watcher

by Judith Horth

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking. I cannot think as I once did, for my mind is dulled with the medicines They give me three little white pills each morning and one slightly larger pink one with my evening meal. I have no idea what purpose the tablets are meant to serve – all I know is that my brain, once busy with thoughts and schemes, has become quieter. I can no longer flit between past, present and future, considering what has been, is, and what might be, making connections between them. Now I have only the present and so I watch, observing minute details of behaviours and interactions that hitherto would have passed unnoticed.

They believe that I am so dulled that I warrant no consideration apart from the basics of feeding and watering me, drugging me, and making sure that I am maintained to at least basic standards of personal hygiene. Sometimes They fall short in one or more of these areas, but never in the administration of the drugs. Oh no, never in that.

I see the indignities inflicted upon the others, those who have no regular visitors and so remain hidden from the gaze of the outside world. I note the little slaps administered at each failure to understand a sharp command, I observe the bruises as, day by day, the blood seeps out of blue veins to stain paper-thin skin dark purple, blue-green, and yellow. I have seen others made to sit all day in soiled clothing, to be handled roughly and sworn at as they are cleaned up. I watch those who are left to sit at the table before a meal that they are unable to feed themselves; I see the gradual hollowing of their cheeks and sinking of their chests until finally they no longer appear in the dining room and an ambulance calls discreetly in the night to whisk them away. I have observed the wasting away of others as day follows day, each one alike and in offering nothing to excite or interest those who once were vital members of society. I recognise the look that settles in their eyes after only a few days, when they realise that these are their final days, that there is no escape, merely the grim certainty of that ambulance.

I witness all this and somewhere, deep in my consciousness, I am certain that They expect the same to happen to me. They look at me but do not see me. I am of little import to Them. They know nothing of who I am – or was. During the dark nights, my eyes closed, I see again the places I have been and the people I have known. I have had a life, have loved, and been loved, and those who love me will not let me be like the others. They will come, and I will tell them what I know of this place. They will take me away, take me home again. I just have to wait.