

“Ms. Marjorie”
by Alexis McCauley

I glanced at the clock again, calculating just how behind I was. Four a.m. An hour before I must pass meds, so I need to finish my rounds quickly. There were still several assessments to complete before I could go to the med. Room. Blowing out a breath, I crossed into the next patient room. Luckily, he was asleep and remained so, as I took vitals and listened to his breathing. Making notes to chart later, I quietly walked back into the hallway. Checking one more off my to-dos.

Pushing the scout monitor ahead of me, I winced at the clatter the wheels made on the flooring and hurried towards my next patients' room. Before I can enter, another nurse stops me to chat. Maintaining my patience, by thin threads, I smile.

“Marjorie, you doing ok, hun? Need anything? “

“No, I'm good. Just trying to finish assessments before it's time to pass meds.”

“Ok darling, just don't wake anyone up.”

Did she really think I didn't know what I was doing? I mean, really? I've been nursing for over 30 years.

Scoffing at her warning, I resume my rounds, pushing her impudence to the back of my mind. *These new, young nurses think they know so much just out of nursing school. Some things just can't be taught.*

Continuing at a steady pace, I succeed in completing rounds and not too late either- 5:30 a.m. I am ready to start with meds. My patients should also begin walking up soon. What with

breakfast beginning just before seven. Leaving the monitor in the hallway and grateful I no longer make much noise as I travel, I head to the nurse's station. Do I have time to start charting ...better not; just focus on getting AM pills ready.

To better protect the medications, our administration had a padlock installed on the door to the med room and I had such a problem remembering the code. I recall the days when a lock wasn't necessary, sad how things change sometimes. Oh well, there isn't much I can do about the way things progress. I mean, they are even talking about making medical records electronic soon.

Shaking my head to clear my mind of all the new things I will have to learn for *that*, I worry about how much time these kinds of changes take away from my *actually caring* for the patient. Yet, no one else seems to feel the same concerns. *Damn. That code didn't work either.* Glancing over my shoulder, I try another combo of numbers ...nothing. *I really should write it down somewhere so I can remember it.*

As always, this gave me pause, maybe I am getting too old for this. Perhaps, I should step aside and let the younger girls take over. Then I think about their over-confidence, how they seem to humor me and regain purpose. *No, I am a good nurse; I have been a good nurse for more years than some of these girls have been alive. While they may not appreciate it, I can still offer model practices. Perhaps, even a learning lesson or two.* No, it's not quite my time to retire yet. Plus, no matter how difficult, there isn't much else for me outside of nursing. My kids are adults now, with their own families. And, now that Charlie passed away, I would only wander through our old house alone. No, this job kept me young. I am here for the long run, I think.

How long had I just been standing here? I need to get going.

“Ms. Marjorie? What are you doing, hun? It’s almost breakfast time.”

“Yeah, I know. Just trying to get into the med room. Can you believe I forgot the code again?”

She chuckles, “Oh, did you? That’s ok, I’ll take care of your meds. You have a visitor.”

A visitor, what? At work? It must be my kids, but why would they be here?

“Mornin’ mom. How are you?”

“Valerie?! I-I’m fine. What are you doing here? What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong mom, I came to say ‘Hi’ on my way home from work. Should we get breakfast?”

“Breakfast? No, I don’t have time for breakfast. I have to still pass my patients’ meds, and chart.

“Oh mom,” a flash of, was that pain reflected a moment across her features. “I hope you haven’t been up, bothering people all night.” Her eyes flew to the young nurse still floating just outside our visit.

The young nurse moved closer and placed her hand on my shoulder, “oh, no. Ms. Marjorie helps us on our nightly rounds. She doesn’t bother anyone. She’s a great helper. She must have been an amazing nurse.

Helper! When she was a nurse...Who does she think she is?

“Well, I just wish she would get more sleep,” my daughter does look concerned for a moment.

“Oh, don’t worry. She’s so used to having worked night shifts; she goes and lies down after breakfast. Sleeps well into the afternoon, she does. A lot of our patients are caught in a loop of their old routine. It’s part of the dementia. We have another gentleman who used to work at the treasury; he’s up like clockwork at 3 a.m. every morning to catch his train. Believe me, we’re used to it. It’s interesting. No matter how long ago, they just seem to hold tight to some part of the routine they are most familiar with. It almost seems like it comforts them.” She shrugs.

I glare at her and look at my daughter. She seems to be going along with this, I can’t believe it.

“I don’t know what you guys think is going on, but I am now *way* behind. Valerie, will you stay until I finish, then you can just take me home.”

My daughter and the nurse share a similar “look”, one I can’t quite interpret. My daughter’s shoulders tense, “Oh, mom. You *are* home. Remember? We decided after dad died that the house was too much for you to keep up with, so we found a little place for you in a senior’s community. This way you could live with others your age?”

The young nurse smiles at my daughter and moves closer to me. She envelopes my shoulders with her arm and begins rubbing my shoulder, looking at me. “Don’t worry Ms. Marjorie it’s hard for those who aren’t nurses.” Then she leans closer to my ear and mock

whispers, “they don’t understand once a nurse, *always* a nurse; we never stop taking care of people, isn’t that right!?”