

## Pain Game

*Matthew Naqvi*

POSTERS ABOUT ARTHRITIS, AIDS, cancer, asthma and heart failure covered the pale white walls. Clint wondered if any of these illnesses affected those beside him. He stared at the mole on his forearm and gave it a scratch. An elderly woman stared at him intently.

*Bet she's got high blood pressure.*

The woman shuffled in her seat and faced the plasma TV hanging on the wall.

“Mrs. Jankovic, the doctor is ready to see you.”

She rose from her chair and continued to watch as she trudged to the doctor's office.

*Good luck, you old bat. Your life is one step closer to finishing*

Clint pushed himself off the chair and approached the information board. Clint looked closely at the heart condition pamphlet. He had no idea that every ten minutes an Australian suffers a heart attack. Clint chuckled.

The door was hurriedly opened and a woman and a young girl came in. The woman's clothes were creased and her face a mess of make-up. The girl was pale, with a dazed look about her. Her mother grasped the girl's hand tightly and rushed to the counter.

Clint spotted the flu pamphlet and yanked it from the plastic rack. He flipped through it and got to the section about symptoms. *Let's hope that girl only has a cold. She's too young to be sick.*

Clint turned around as the receptionist ran from behind the desk and knocked repeatedly at the doctor's door.

“Doctor, we have a young girl out here who needs urgent attention!”

The doctor called for the girl and her mother to go into the adjacent office. After they entered, the doctor passed over her current patient and followed. The mother squeezed the girl’s hand and entered the doctor’s office.

Clint put the pamphlets back in the rack when he spotted the cancer one; it stood out. The image of a balding middle aged woman sent a shiver down his spine. Clint hesitantly reached out for the pamphlet and snatched it. He closed his eyes and exhaled. The words were a jumbled mess, or at least he thought so. Clint shook his head at the puzzle of words.

The woman and the girl suddenly stepped out of the office.

The receptionist called the hospital and warned them of the girl’s arrival.

“She’s going to be okay, isn’t she?” Clint stepped towards them.

“We need to get to the hospital, she’s feeling dizzy,” the woman cried.

“I’ll take you.” He shoved the pamphlet in his jacket and grabbed his car keys.

“Thank you,” the woman said as she grabbed the girl’s hand. “Let’s go, sweetie.”

The girl trudged along behind as tears flowed down her mother’s cheeks. They got into the car and Clint sped away in the direction of the hospital.

He swerved into the hospital’s ambulance bay. The woman and her daughter got out of the car and ran inside. He drove out and found a parking spot.

Clint bolted through the automatic glass doors—the vast space seemed to draw him in. The sterile surroundings and sickly smell of disinfectant made him smile. Death had found a home.

He moved to the triage nurse. “Did a young girl just come in?” Clint tapped at the desk with his fingernails.

“Which girl?” The nurse stared with befuddlement.

“A four year old girl and her mother. The girl looked very pale.”

“The doctors are looking at the girl now.”

“Where did they go?”

“Are you family?”

“A friend. Just tell me.”

“She’s in room twenty-one, level three but you can’t see her.”

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“Thank you.” Clint walked off and wandered around the building until he found the room.

Clint took a seat outside the room and stared at the linoleum between his feet. He gradually reclined into the seat and fell asleep.

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The world shook wildly. Debris fell from the buildings around him. Clint stumbled as the ground fell in on itself. Falling to the ground, he let out a cry.

When his eyes opened, he found the girl by his side, shaking him by the shoulder. She smiled, her tiny, white teeth shone bright. He grinned back and extended his right hand as he rubbed his face with his left.

“Hi, I’m Clint. What’s your name?”

“Susie.”

“It’s nice to meet you.”

She smiled and looked around for her mother. Susie spotted her by the water cooler and ran to her. Clint chuckled to himself. Little bitch got lucky.

The girl walked over, leading her mother to Clint.

“Thank you so much for helping us. Susie has a history of fainting and I thought it would be really bad.”

Susie sat on the ground playing with the toy bear given to her by the nurse.

“It’s nothing.”

“You’re a good person.”

“I just did what I thought was needed to be done.” Clint rocked back and forth in his chair.

“If only there were more people like you.”

“There aren’t.” He got up from his seat and stared down at the girl. He rubbed her hair and grinned at her.

Clint walked off with clenched fists. He headed back to the doctor’s practice, punching the wheel all the way. He strode back into the waiting room and sat in the same seat as before and sighed. An elderly man couldn’t stop coughing and wheezing.

*That’s more like it. On your way.*