

Ft Worth, Texas
Stat Laboratory 04:17
Carswell AFB

13 May 1986
weekend shift

Haven't felt much like writing lately. Something on my mind. A pair of white booties. Last Saturday night we all drew straws for cadaver retrieval. Jimmy hates going down to the morgue at night. I don't ask Dee to do it but tonight was her rotation. Nobody likes cadaver retrieval. Dead things don't bother me. I saw a man shot to death on Woodhaven when I was just five.

The black phone rang, a call from the MOD to come to the back door for sign-in. Dee said she'd get it. I set to doing the shift maintenance on the Astra-8 electrolyte analyzer.

Not five minutes passed and she comes back without the 'Remains-Log.' She comes to me, eyes all glassy. "I can't do this one." I told her it was her rotation that she had to sign the body in. "You do it. Please." I looked at nutso Jim. He shrugged like, 'You know I just hate dead things.' So Dee finished doing maintenance. I went for the body.

The scene: a black ambulance driver. A Hispanic woman and man. Late 20s. I was queasy because I don't see a gurney or a body.

Then I saw the bundle in the woman's arms. Possible SIDs. I sign. The ambulance driver keeps two copies and departs. She has to give me the body. She won't let it go. The man was softly saying, "It's time to let'er go now." She said to me over-and-over, "Please be gentle with her. Please be gentle."

Finally she departed. I took the steps down. Then came something odd. A foot fell from the pink blanket. White booties with silver bells. I took a step. The bells tinkled. Step. Tinkle. Tinkle. Tears came before I reached the basement.

Before I could unlock the large door, I was sobbing. I filled out the tag and

the log-book. I'm supposed to remove the booties - put the tag on. I couldn't. Putting those silver bells in that cold and dark drawer, more sobbing. I sat in a chair a few minutes looking at the silver door, just sifting on the cold. Thinking about it all. Not the why. I was thinking death had answered the why. But how does it serve for her life to end this way? Why are there roses that never bloom?

Then the phone rang. Jimmy said, "Heck you doin, Sergeant? We got four type-n-crosses. MVA." He hung up. It was a nonstop night for the Blood Bank.

End of shift, I sat in the morgue before pathology arrived. I held her. Held those cold bells. I felt a poet should say some words. I found none. Nothing.

I know now I have been wounded. It will take time for my soul to hear the message of a shattered heart. After this, I will long carry those silver bells.

G'night world, from the dead at the Carswell Air Force Base morgue.

MOD: on-call Medical Officer of the Day.

SIDS – sudden infant death syndrome

MVA – motor vehicle accident