

The Bliss of Everlasting Silence

Written By Miles Boone

As Matthew Harbinger awoke, he noticed a beautiful sunrise outside the window. He was an early riser by habit and getting earlier every day. He got used to seeing the sun and it helped him to calm down and sometimes the voices in his head quieted for a minute. They hadn't always been there. He remembered when he was a kid on the playground, there were never voices. He remembered the sun from then, much cooler, and his head was much quieter. The kids were nice and friendly and no one shouted in anger or frustration. He was just a smart kid with a lot of ideas about his future. "Ah, well it does no good to live in the past," he muttered as he got out his scrubs and white lab coat.

After getting dressed and watering the wilting, almost colorless, plants and flowers on his balcony, he made his way out of the hospital's dorm, downstairs, and out into the lobby. He decided to open up the doors to let some fresh air in. It was going to be hot, but the air was pretty clean. Maybe later he'd go down to the gas station and check in on the owner. Sometimes when he did that, the owner would give him a Pepsi he had stashed in the back. As he opened the doors, he noticed a line of people forming. As with each passing day, there seemed to be a regular batch of people coming and going from the small hospital he called home. There was never enough time for all of them, and supplies were always scarce. He did what he could to patch them up but their injuries, sicknesses, and mental state seemed to be getting worse as the tree withered.

He loved these people like they were his own but in reality, they were all strangers. After completing college and passing his medical schooling he decided to move to a big city closer to his parents as they were elderly and he wanted to be able to help them if they needed it. He'd planned on studying and taking his doctor's registration exam there. As the climate had already begun to change many moons ago, he abandoned these plans and his family decided to move to this smaller town where there was water and a so-called "life-giving" tree.

But his old parents and the rest of his family were unable to complete the journey as a group as the heat from the sun slowly melted away at everything they had. The voices started then. At first, they helped him, telling him to keep going and keep moving. He didn't hear or see as the others fell away. As they got closer and closer, he realized that he was the only one still making the travel. He arrived here with nothing but the clothes on his back and his memories of better times. He decided to plant flowers when he got there to mourn over the losses he had along the way. He tended them like children.

He talked to the flowers every day and treated them with kindness. As he cleaned up the dying blossoms from floors and opened the curtains of the patient window, he saw his first visitor of the day. "Why hello there again, child, what brings you here today?" The little girl smiled shyly at him and giggled. "My tummy hurts." Her mother marched angrily toward Matthew and began her usual list of complaints. Not enough medicine, no X-rays, his incompetence. It seemed that everyone was angry at him. Or maybe they were just angry at their plight. All of a sudden he just couldn't stand it anymore. The voices in his head were reminding him that he still had work to do and people to save as he had studied for so many years. He treated them all with kindness and respect, even those who were overly rude and self-centered but the voice never stopped. So finally he just lost it. He screamed at the woman until he was hoarse. She stared back in shock, the little girl began crying.

The next morning, he started his routine all over again. Sunrise, flowers, curtains, angry people, shouting, mostly from him. It went on for weeks until one late afternoon, an old lady who was tiny, with a hobbled back and crooked hands limped up to him. Matthew didn't think he'd ever seen anyone so old, but when she talked, her voice was strong. "Matthew, I know that you hear things others don't. And I know how to get rid of it." And she told him about the magical powers of the tree. But he couldn't do it.

His days continued on in a blur until a week had passed. The poor kid with the tummy ache was back and he just couldn't take the mom again. He walked out of the hospital and wandered for hours. When night fell, he headed toward the tree, removed a single leaf, and ate it. He slowly walked back to the hospital, closed the patient window, and trudged upstairs to his room. The voices urged him to continue on but for once, he just couldn't. He fell into a deep sleep.

He awoke at sunrise as usual. The first thing he noticed was the complete absence of the voices. All he heard was the sound of the hot wind and the few birds that remained chirping in the cool of the morning. He felt relaxed for the first time in years. He went downstairs, opened the patient window, and smiled. Without the voices, he finally felt that he was able to go and communicate with others clearly instead of bottling everything up and keeping it to himself. The little girl with the tummy ache was his next patient, her mother started in with the complaints and instead of replying with a shout, he said "how are you?" and really listened to what she had to say. He made her feel important and special. And instead of complaining, she said thank you.

Matthew didn't know what the future held for their town, but he now knew what he had to do for the town. He had to stay healthy to keep the town from falling into a state of panic and sickness.