

From the twelfth floor of the Nottingham Royal Infirmary, Luke watched the sunrise turn the sky the colour of blood. Beneath him the whole city slept, but here he stood, pushing through into the final couple hours of his shift. Even those who had gone out for Emma's leaving drinks would be tucked up in bed by now, probably. Loads of the old crew from medical school had come back to see her off and he knew the party would have been a right laugh, just like the old times. But instead, he'd been here all night. In the hospital. Again.

This was his fourth night shift in a row and it had been a bad one. The past nine hours were a blur, like every patient in the hospital had needed a piece of him. He hadn't had chance to stop, or to sit down, he'd barely had time to pee. His exhaustion was so complete that the world had a slanted perspective, as though reality itself was fuzzy round the edges. The only consolation was that all of this kept his mind off what was coming later. At last, things had settled down and Luke thought about stealing half an hour to find a quiet corner and rest his head – Christ knows he deserved it – but there was one more thing he needed to do first.

He had a bad feeling about Mrs Cunningham on Ward 6F. Nothing he could put his finger on, nothing that showed up on her obs chart, but something told him that he needed to check on her before the end of the night. If this were a normal ward round, his registrar Matt would come out with some shite about 'the enduring utility of clinical gestalt,' but then Matt was always trying to use fancy words in front of the boss.

A pool of yellowy light spilled from the nurses' station at the end of the ward. Soft and not-so-soft snores rose from the patients around him. Luke tread lightly. Mrs Cunningham's bed was by the window in the second bay on the left. *It's probably nothing*, he thought. He

pulled back the curtain from around Mrs Cunningham's bed, fully expecting to find her sound asleep. He was wrong.