

The Answer Not Blowing In The Wind

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(An Editing exercise from a scene describing a doctor's waiting room)

Blown indoors by a gust of wind, the young woman shivered and coughed with fever. She stood in the doorway of the crammed and shabby waiting room, shaking the rain from her hair and struggling with nausea.

Magazines were strewn in chaotic profusion, noisy children rolling and tumbling on the floor, and adults sitting around the perimeter in sullen silence or chatting - all seemed unaware of her entrance.

The door jamb, a welcome support as she gagged at the smell of soggy clothes and stale bodies. How long would she wait to see a doctor? A patch of black mould shaped like a coffin, in the corner of the ceiling, reminded her of how ill she felt.

A child crawled across the room and dribbled on her shoes. He needed his nappy changed and as she endeavoured to stop throwing up, a formidable-looking nurse appeared in the doorway of the surgery.

In a robotic voice, the nurse announced, 'Doctor has been called away to an emergency and won't be back for at least an hour. Those who can't wait must make another appointment.'

The walls closed in; the young woman's breath rasping and spluttering as she trembled. Claustrophobia and anger battled in short gasps. Overwhelmed, she ran outside to take her chances in the wild weather.

Alone in the carpark, she realised no one else chose to leave. The rain turned to icy sleet as the wind snatched and grabbed litter, tossing the debris like confetti. She shielded herself as best she could but grit stung her face, whipped at her legs. The tears she fought to contain flooded down hot cheeks. Blinded by the torrential rain, she struggled against the howling wind and staggered towards the fields to take a shortcut home.

The emergency service workers found her next morning, lying face down in a quagmire created by the swollen river. The havoc of the unseasonal storm kept the coroner busy. The young girl's death written off as unforeseen misadventure.

Not so the thirty deaths from typhoid fever. The source of the outbreak never discovered, although the victims all linked to the doctor's surgery. Every person recorded as present the night of the storm perished, even the formidable nurse.

A monument records the tragic year and the villagers remember the fever victims when a storm hits the tiny coastal town.

