

Night Float

By Anne Tan

The doctors on the night shift
are a skeletal crew
haunting the wards looking
for the sick and dying
whose alarming vital signs and
distressing symptoms attract our eye.
By the end of the fifth night shift
I knew all the dying on my ward.
Each had a unique story and
with each, I travelled a different journey.
All ending in the same place,
a place we all must go.

For it does not matter if we are
clever or foolish, rich or poor,
alone or surrounded by loved ones.
Despite the medical advances,
there is no pill that stops the clock,
or lets the music go on and on.
Everything I did was in vain.
Interventions to address one issue
only caused their own complications.
I was playing a game a chess
where every move I made
was thwarted by a cleverer opponent.

Fluids given to prop up blood pressure
drowned lungs
Antibiotics given to treat the infections
fried the liver and kidneys.
A tube inserted to feed
caused bloatedness and vomiting.

By the end of the week,
we were all worse for wear.
When the nurses called
to inform me yet again
about the deteriorating state
of one such patient

I replied, quoting Paul McCartney:
'Let it be'
Not because I was 'letting them go'
but because
there was nothing more to be 'done'.
There was only 'being' left.

Being with,
Being there for,
Being loved,
Being held
Being present
Letting be