

## Excerpt from Locked Box

Wrenching life back from death's door was a profoundly emotional and physical experience; no one was ever sanguine about their participation in this most intimate of existential tasks. Celine Arceneau was only forty, efforts to establish a heartbeat would continue for a long time.

Dr. Smythe verbalized what everyone was thinking. She called out to her patient. "Come on Celine, come on! Come back to us Celine, start that heart. Come on, you can do it."

Ellen and the team leader began the job of looking for reversible causes for the code; as the battle to save Arceneau continued, they talked through the medical possibilities that could have generated this situation in an otherwise healthy woman. It had been over forty minutes, and everyone was physically drained, especially Dr. Smythe. She locked eyes with the anesthesiologist, he nodded in the affirmative, then he made the wretched call.

"It's over. The time of death is 11: 59."

Ellen slumped into a chair, covering her eyes with her hands; the nurses and medical residents either leaned against a wall, emotionally spent, or wiped away tears of frustration. Ellen finally stood and confronted the team.

"Now, what the heck happened? The report from morning rounds said Ms. Arceneau was stable, responding to treatment, and now this?" Like the splatter from a paint ball, her reproach hit everyone.

"I want an autopsy, and I want Aashi Patel to do it. Get her on the phone for me."