

Booklet Code: SS-1307 Step 1 View all

STEP 1. 1000 words or less

Enter your Scenario responding the the IC Scenario Writing Future Scene.

Changing

Norway is a trusting place. Trust is a luxury few can afford but they can afford it here, in the great shadow of education and stability. Trust means that the automatic doors of the hospital will open for anyone. Trust means that a woman with a baby walking with a purpose gets swiftly guided to the maternity ward by the nighttime AI receptionist. Trust means that she is left in the pediatric ward unattended. Trust means none of the doors are locked.

Liana's tiny lungs shudder as she coughs in her sleep, muffled as best she can in the fabric of the blanket. She had bought a hospital swaddle blanket from Luni, a woman in the camp who had an emergency c-section. She had paid an exorbitant price for the blanket, trying to make any contribution possible to help pay Luni's hospital bills.

The screens around the pediatric cribs look a little different to the photographs in the medical journal she had dug up on the shared Holo-screen at the camp. She traces the lines of jargon, looking for anything she recognises as crucial: the diagnosis, the treatment type, the listing of the drugs in the self-regulating saline, the government issued ID barcode at the bottom of the display.

There are so many cribs, so many options to find the perfect match.

She chooses to believe it's a good thing.

There's a small lump in a crib labeled as a six month old female, tuberculosis, on an auto drip of infant friendly painkillers and hyphaebactin. Only a month older than Liana, who is stirring in pain in her arms. She shushes her gently, flinching when her tiny lungs are ripped apart by a harsh wet cough.

The heart rate monitor of the cot beeps as she slips her hands under the swaddled bundle. She can't think of it as a baby.

There's the briefest stutter of the vitals display as she lays Liana in the cot and she freezes, feeling her lungs contract around the sterile air. No alarm sounds but she counts her seconds in her head, slipping the infusion patch off the skin of the bundle's arm, and tucking it into her daughter's swaddle.

The screens around the cot blink a bit before settling back into the same blinking, counting neutrophils and antibodies and pathogen load. Her sigh rattles against the lump building in her throat.

She risks a final kiss to the baby soft skin of her daughter's forehead, mask pulled down for the barest of seconds.

She will never know how much her mother loves her, but she will feel it, every day that she is well, every day she is not hungry, every day she lives in a house in a country that is not ravaged by disease and climate change, where her citizenship buys her an education and a healthy life.

The bundle stirs slightly in her arms. She pulls away, double checking that the saline is pressed tightly to Liana's skin, none of the priceless solution being wasted.

And she turns. And she leaves. And she says a silent prayer for her daughter. For the family that will bring her home. She does not pray for the bundle. Not yet.

The receptionist does not appear as she steps out of the pediatric ward into the maze of the hospital. She wanders the halls until she finds the nurses station, pausing to take in the sheer affluence. The control display of the auto pharmacist contains names she's never seen before. The whole wall is a screen of words on tiny boxes, thousands of medicines guarded only by a card swipe and the will of the card holders.

"What are you doing here?"

The shriek that falls from her lips and the way she curls over the bundle in her arms is instinctual and condemning.

"I." She steps back, before hoisting the bundle higher in her arms. "Please, I need treatment for my daughter. She has tuberculosis." As if to prove her point the bundle pressed against her chest lets out a rattling cough. The nurse flinches back, fabric of his mask wrinkling as he scrunches his nose.

"You shouldn't be here. No ABR patients should be brought to public health facilities unless they have a confirmed place on a secure ward."

"I didn't know, I'm not from here. Please, she is sick."

The crows feet at the corners of his eyes flutter, turning down. "I'm sorry ma'am, but I'm going to have to escort you out."

"Okay." She bows her head in what she hopes looks like shame.

She keeps her head down as he walks ahead of her, counting under her breath the steps towards freedom.

He pauses in the soaring glass doorframe of the hospital. She waits for him to condemn her back to watching her daughter waste away with hope just out of reach. Her heart climbs up to wrap around her trachea.

"Not to assume anything ma'am, but are you from the refugee settlement? Have you tried the clinic there?"

"I have." She swallows back the lump in her throat along with all her words, that the clinic is stocked with empty pill bottles and hollow eyed doctors who have seen too much. "I will."