

For Seven Days

by Stephen Heger

The fluorescents above a constant hum. A hymn.

The child lay on the bed as the parents worriedly hovered. Fretted and dreaded.

Tubes and wires led from the broken body to machines and computers that fed and cataloged every minute detail occurring in the collapsing system. Shallow breaths barely masked by the beeping of the machines and the hiss of the air being forced into the malfunctioning lungs. Electric pulses kept the heart pumping. Coursing. Feeding diseased blood through filters and refiners and purifiers.

They hung on on every word that dropped from the mouth of the specialist. Their mouths agape at what they gleaned. Hands shivered. Heads shook.

One left and another entered. Their eyes momentarily locking. Seething and disagreeing.

The priest, shrouded and dressed in black, stood in the room. He, with the matriarch and patriarch, locked hands and prayed for the survival of their offspring. Their bloodline and their unfulfilled dreams. Tears streamed down their faces for the suffering everyone had endured.

They caterwauled and screamed. Bodies shuddered. Today would be the day they sobbed and decried. Lied.

The sire spoke of that which the specialist had spoke and the priests face gnarled up into an angry fist and chastised him for even thinking of such a horror. A travesty. An abomination. For such

cruelty.

They prayed with vicious, willing hands as the little one suffered their folly. Keeping the child alive with machines and denial until neither could.

For seven days they had played god.

In a room that was crisp and clean and bright.

