



The Room

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(Our dojo shares space in a local community centre; this means that we must set out the mats before class and put them away afterwards. It is but one thing that makes our dojo unique.)

The empty room waits, brooding over a faint sheen on the gritty, chequered floor, a hint of potentiality. A shadow enters, and opens the door to a storage room on one side, cutting off the dim gloaming that enters through the plate glass window. The closet is dark and musty. A square, hulking shape looms inside.

The shadow resolves into a man as he snaps on the light to reveal a row of *tatami* stacked on end like dominoes. He sighs and reaches for the first one, leans it against his shoulder, and carries it into the dark room. Having forgotten to turn on the light, he juggles the mat on one arm, sidles over to the switch, and flips it on with his free hand.

Shuffling across the room, now bright in the hard fluorescent light, he drops his burden in the NE corner and fusses over its placement like a roofer laying the first in a row of shingles.

It has begun.

A second person enters the room and says, "Aren't you done yet?" Grinning broadly, he's happy to be there, and they trade friendly jibes as they carry and place *tatami* after *tatami*, nudging them gently into alignment with their feet.

The room is changing in the face of camaraderie. The energy is light and anticipatory.

Now several people lug mats out of the closet. They're cheerful, exchanging light-hearted complaints about sore backs and having to work between meals. At last, all the *tatami* are in place.

Those who are wearing *dogi* stretch and warm up on the mats. The others leave to change into their uniforms. Someone hangs the picture of *O'Sensei* with great deference and respect.

The room is bright and alive now; all vestiges of darkness are gone. It has become a *dojo*, a place where everyone is your friend and all strive to be at their best.

It's a wondrous transformation.

The class bows in, and the next hour is sweat, harmony and acrobatics. Expectations are exceeded as barriers crumble in the face of earnest endeavour.

The air hums.

Finally the class lines up, moves into *seiza*, and bows out. Drained in body yet full in spirit, they put the mats away, revealing the bare floor.

The light is turned off and the room returns to waiting.