

THE LEGIBLE SCRIPT

A LITERARY JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

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From the Editor

To All Readers of This Year's The Legible Script,

For years, reading, much like writing or painting, has been used as an escape by those who take part. While some are attempting to escape the normal everyday stresses of life, others merely hope to be transported to another time and place. In all cases, these activities possess an importance and worth well beyond those innate to them.

To the average medical student, the thought of "escape" is an almost constant companion, a frequently present cognition that represents one of the many important bonds that ties medical students together. Whether it be an escape from the monotony of class, the stress of tests, or from the early mornings, late nights, and lack of exercise, each student currently in the midst of medical school can attest to the value of a planned reprieve. For the past five years, The Legible Script has served as a conduit for this creative energy, this need to produce and create something outside the confinements of medical knowledge, research, and application.

As we have been accepting submissions since last fall, it has been interesting to observe that in many of the submitted works, an overriding medical theme pervades. In the same breath, it has been refreshing to see just the opposite in many of our submissions as well; those pieces of wit, humor, philosophy, or personal insight that cause one to smile, reflect, or remember.

This year, as Editor-in-Chief, I had the privilege of reading nearly every submission that entered my in-box, yet purposefully removed myself from the responsibility of deeming works printable versus not. As has been the case from our first edition onward, the overwhelming majority of submissions were incredible. However, as with any publication accepting works from across the country, we received our share of pieces that made me scratch my head and wonder "Why?" It was this latter grouping of works that kept things fun, and in many cases, made reading hundreds of pages in a day more endurable.

Throughout this entire process, I had the chance to interact with an untouchable assembly of fellow USF students. God has been good this year, as He always is, and has given me the opportunity to learn and grow by working side by side with a number of talented individuals. It was their hard work, attention to detail, and humor that made this experience such a pleasure. The Legible Script has progressed mightily this year, and has become a proud publication of the University of South Florida's College of Medicine.

I trust that you, the reader, will enjoy perusing this year's The Legible Script as much as I enjoyed overseeing its creation. Taking the helm of this edition felt more like a reward for some good deed than a job, and I am excited about sharing this journal, the result of our labors, with everyone.

God bless,

Jeremy J. Corbett, Editor-in-Chief
University of South Florida College of Medicine
Future Emergency Medicine Physician
University of Kentucky Medical Center, Lexington, Kentucky

Introduction

Where's the Stethoscope?

It was the first day of my first clinical rotation in medical school in 1975. I was at a patient's bedside trying to feel like a doctor and to remember everything I had learned in physical diagnosis class. I introduced myself as a second year medical student. So far, so good. I put the stethoscope on the patient's chest to hear her murmur. Silence. . . . I moved it around and reversed the diaphragm. Still silence. . . . In one ego-deflating moment, the mystery was solved by the patient. "Excuse me, Dr. Klasko, shouldn't that thing be in your ear." My career was over. I had, in my haste and excitement, forgot to put the stethoscope in my ear and it was still attached to my neck. I was desperate. As a twenty year old, second year medical student, I made up a story. "Well, here at Hahnemann we have a new technique where we can feel the vibrations against our neck." "That's why I come into the city," the patient retorted. "You have all those new techniques." I thought that was the end of it. While I had a nagging feeling of ethical compromise, the crisis had been averted. Actually, not quite. The next day on chair rounds, our chair of medicine was ill, to be replaced by the dean of students. At a previous patient's bedside, he had admonished one of the residents who had "sugar-coated" a lab finding with the explanation that he did not feel the patient would want to know "the whole truth." "Patients entrust us with their families, their health and in some cases their lives. The least we can do is give them back the truth." Next stop on rounds, the patient I had seen a day earlier. At this point, the dean launched into a missive on accurate physical diagnosis. "I want you all to listen carefully to this patient's murmur. First I'll show you the proper technique." he said. At this point, like observing a train wreck about to happen, all I could do was sit by and watch. "How come you're not using that new technique that Dr. Klasko taught me, you know the one where you feel the vibrations against your neck?" the patient asked the venerable internist.

Two hours later, I walked out dejectedly from the dean of student's office. No, my career wasn't over, I wasn't going to be spending the rest of my life selling pretzels on Broad Street, but I did learn a valuable lesson. A lesson that I have lived throughout a successful private practice and academic career, residency and student education career and throughout both this and my previous dean's role. The difference between a good and great doctor has almost nothing to do with how many differential diagnoses you can memorize, or how quickly you can

tie a square knot, or even how many quotations you can muster from the New England Journal of Medicine. It is the ability to be an honest and caring health steward for the patients that are under our care. It requires honesty, empathy and communication skills, all of which require both innate ability, but just as with surgical skills, require constant practice. As an OB-GYN who has delivered over 2,500 babies during my practice career, the strongest bonds I have had with patients and their families have occurred when "something went wrong." Explaining to a 41 year old patient that her baby has a congenital malformation or to a patient with previous miscarriages that once again her dreams will be shattered does not require skills that are taught in a lab or in textbooks. It requires you to be an empathetic human that realizes the position and high regard in which your patients hold you. It means that you need to take on those difficult tasks yourself and not delegate it to a third party.

I ran into a patient last week that I had not seen for twenty years. She came up to me smiling and introduced me to her young adult son. Tears welled in her eyes and she said, "I never got a chance to thank you, Dr. Klasko, for what you did." My assumption was that I delivered the strapping, athletic boy standing next to her. Fortunately she recognized my uncertainty and baled me out. "I know that you delivered thousands of babies and you may not remember me. But I had a stillbirth and two miscarriages. You stayed with me, told me the truth, and encouraged me to hang in there and try again. I may not have appreciated it then, but I realized that honesty, caring and empathy is what gave me the strength to have him," as she pointed to her son who at this point was clearly disinterested in his mom's previous obstetrical history.

For me, it was a reminder that I had come a long way since 1975. Oh yeah, now I put the stethoscope in my ear before I start a physical exam!

Stephen K. Klasko, MD, MBA,
Dean, College of Medicine
Professor of OB-GYN
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Tampa, Florida

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Poetry

First Place

Alfredo Rodrigues

Monica Kidd, *Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty of Medicine*

Alfredo lifted his shirt,
speaking scars and nothing more.
Tonight a copper penny sunset stopped traffic,
dizzy with asphalt
and lies.

Second Place

the anatomists

Andrew Thurston, *Baylor College of Medicine*

it's not
without trepidation
that we map
the human shape:
we are grave cartographers -
draped and gloved -
and our steps are soft
in trespass.

we catalog an absence:
the empty hills, the canyons
where rivers flowed -
the lakes where children
swam (and drifted) -
dry now, and so cold.
on stained paper,
we mark the
seasons of habit.
with sticks we
dig for things.

,

but there are
things that
digging
won't reveal - the
smell of rain,
a whispered
promise, fear.
all we can know is:
once, a man
slept here.

in the end
(with legend set and
needle point aligned),
we strike a match and turn
it tall to ash.
and with the skin
the footprints
peel away -
the end of
mapping, and
the end of
day.

Third Place

The Ornament

Anastasia Shiriaeva, *Florida State University College of Medicine*

Men want an ornament
To brighten their life,
So they look and find a young, dumb, fruitful wife.

She is bright, luminous, clear,
She is soft, tender, ginger, sincere,
She sparkles and shines
Inspiring and bringing only the best,
She protects husband's esteem,
Builds him a nest,
Forgives, loves, respects.
Oh, how men love these ornaments they can control,
BUT
What if I'm noisy, rattle, and prattle?
What if I'm darting with edges at times?
Could a man ever love something so extraordinary?
Could I ever meet someone for whom I'd give my nature up?
Hmmm, if only he was a sturdy and stable enough tree,
I would be that obedient decoration.
Although, there is one catch in my kindness,
You see, NO ONE else would ever be permitted to hang on my tree.
Oh, what a terrible ornament I would be!

Dear

Heather Goode, *University of South Florida College of Medicine*

Sylvia, I can no longer be there with you
shaking and sobbing alone in the dark,
you can reach out but I won't have a hand for you
-we can no longer be friends.

Inside the bell jar, you counted my pills for me
inside the glass, where your words felt like gold
cursing and mocking the world we could only see,
planning our deaths all along.
Whispering (now is our chance) as you jumped down but
tired of falling, I clung to the sides,
climbing my way through the blackness and sharpness and
fighting my way to the stars.

Inside my white coat I thought I could fool you but
breathing you always and knowing the truth that
outside the bell jar your words are now folding me
tighter and closer your lips
pressing near. Tired of fighting I reach out my
hand to you - whispering, whispering (please).
(your voice is my invisible disease).

Epithelial Frontier

Douglas P. Olson, *George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences*

The skin was the toughest part.

My cadaver did not jump when I cut her.
I was more surprised that she remained lying
motionless on the stainless steel table.

Her skin was laid open.
The white incandescent lights shone down
 Reflecting off my steel blade
 Reflecting off her pink nail polish.

Skin provided Definition
 Purpose
 Individuality

Somehow, skin defined a whole person.
It defined humanism.
The removal of skin in many ways ended that humanism.
My person became, in an instant, a corpse.
It was because of me and my actions.

She remains a deceased woman.

Now that the skin is gone,
We dissect her flesh.
We dissect our souls.
We wonder about her life.
We reflect upon our own.

Through my cadaver's death, there is life.
Her body is a mustard seed.
Her gift of privilege will forever endure.

Without uttering a word,
Without moving a muscle,
Without performing an action,

Without taking a breath
She has taught me volumes
 About medicine
 About life
 About responsibility
 About myself.

The skin was the toughest part.

Midnight Wind

Kate Gadberry, *University of North Texas - Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine*

Rustling through the tree tops
Pulling, tugging at the branches
Like a child to a mother's hand
Yearning to play.

Blowing through the branches
Scattering, batting at unwilling leaves
For a never ending game
Of hide and seek.

But the trees hold their peace,
Slumbering, sleeping
To awake with the
Morning sun.

The Last Time

Meghann Kaiser, *University of California, Irvine, College of Medicine*

Mr. R and I went out for coffee last night
to the 24 hour diner down the street from the hospital
because even in dreams
the retired Army barber would never pay four-fifty for a Starbucks cappuccino

And it did not matter that he had died
last Sunday afternoon, four days ago already
or that I was just a med student
not his friend, not even his doctor, not even his nurse

He wore a crumpled blue hospital gown flapping open in the back
and white-gray gym shorts two sizes too small for him
with muddy blood stains from when he had pulled out his IV
his beard was overgrown, scruffed and gnarled exactly like the last time I saw
him

But he was sitting up at the counter with his cup of coffee
talking to me, and his left eyelid did not droop
over one constricted pupil the way it had
as he sat in his wheelchair, the day I discharged him home to his wife

He said he had been doing well; I told him that was good to hear
then he slid off his stool, straightened his gown
like a three piece suit, and strode out
the door, a single string of bells ringing in his wake.

DNR

Andrew Jacques, *Wright State University School of Medicine*

Kitchen table discussions of
gray-clouded Ohio days, full
of uncertainty and tears,
loss more than pain.

How we got here?
disrespectful prostate cells
growing every which way,
like they own the place.

IV poisons dispose of my hair,
make me wretch hourly - on the dot.
Radiation bakes my insides, precisely
they say. "Precisely?" I inquire.

So when all is said and done,
you and I
signed our names. Dated it,
Xeroxed copies tucked inside manila-yellow charts.

No tubes down my throat, IV's
In my neck and groin, no
catheter jammed in my penis
sterilely monitoring urine output.

Let my heart quit,
slowly, without ceremony.
Hold my pulseless
hand until it grows cold.

But you feel so... so
Lonely. Like one
more goodbye might make a difference.
All the doctors

look so eager, so torn.
They don't get to recite
the drugs they've memorized,
yelling out orders like the captain

in a submarine movie. Slowly sinking.
So... so you change my mind. And
everything begins before we know it-
the shoving of tubes in orifices.

"More than 5" a coy resident
in a dirty white coat
with tired eyes notes
to a short-coated, curly-headed boy.

Compressing my sternum,
spying the electrical green line
to find the
"lub-dub, lub-dub, lub-dub."

And spend days and hours behind the door
marked ICU FAMILY CONFERENCE ROOM
crying, wishing the goodbye
wasn't so long.

Diprovan drips robbed
me of words. My mouth half open
chomping on the endotracheal tube, looked
so... so horribly lifeless, my eyelids taped shut.

Just enough to lie
that there might be another 4th of July or
Christmas turkey carving.
Did I understand what I signed?

Doing it now
might mean you're responsible, right?
I just hoped you
wouldn't have to

kiss a mouth
chapped by 100% oxygen,
crowded by a plastic tube
goodbye.

Three Pound Miracle

Barbara Swenson, *University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences*

So ended the newborn lecture.
The attending physician
Moves us students aside,
The brand new mother
Taking our place at the incubator.

Her hands clasped to her chest
Suppressing impulse to touch
The three pound miracle
Inside the glass case.

"Chance of survival?" says
The physician, for his
Students' ears only.
"Ten percent, at the most."

Eyes of the mother
Hold tight to her child.
A whole ten percent
Chance for life.

"As you may notice,
Tape covers its eyes
Which are still fused
Into one. Quite like a Cyclops."

Mother's lips soften
Drawing into a smile. Why the tape?
Must be to protect his eyes
From those bright glaring lights.

"With lungs like that,
So underdeveloped,
Three days
Is the most it'll survive."

Her hand caressing the glass,
The mother sighs. With her tiny,
Tiny beloved,

She has this moment,
And the next, and
The next.

Father

Mark Collins, *University of South Florida College of Medicine*

Father's day epitaph
Another life has come to pass
Its envelope here beneath this grass
What's done is done what's not is not
And now below the envelope rots
One life given to the corpse below
To make a difference go against the flow
To be a diamond in a world of stones
A voice amid many yet standing alone
To be a candle in a darkened room
Throwing out light and cutting the gloom
Seeking first those things meaning most
Without wavering in light as a specter or ghost
But swiftly came the reaper all chances now gone
Only difference here made is in the health of the lawn.

The Meteor Shower

Peter Rohloff, *University of Illinois College of Medicine at Urbana-Champaign*

There is a hill close to home:
rounded, barren, near the sky.
We've made the pilgrimage often,
you and I
dodging cowslips on narrow trails
As clouds creep in to
scar the night.

Tripping in excitement:
stiff-necked, wondrous, foggy breath
and runny noses
Hands clenched, feet dew-drenched
and Tori says,
'I remember the time it rained
and the spring
came out.'

Fecundity

Monica Kidd, *Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty of Medicine*

The grass wears its lip gloss
after last night's rain.
It is the time of green
of bending shoots,
every inch teeming
with small legs
itching for noon.

Grow sweet child,
be ravenous.

my five cents

Wendy Chang, *Tulane University School of Medicine*

my eyes
meet yours
and i drown in
two pools of milk
chocolate
that must drain to your lips
since your voice
exudes the sweetest
music
that even a mumble
morphs into beethoven's fifth
fills my ears with violins
crescendos til i smell
the saccharine symphony
ooze from every pore
in your skin
sticky fingertips tango
between locks of my hair
your touch tangles curls
swirls cocoa jammed strands
tongue twists me into
sugary bliss as
we kiss the
hershey
melts
and i float
on a nickel of hope
that the flavor
never
fades

The Procedure

Barbara Swenson, *University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences*

Off-white floor spans polished under fluorescent bulbs.
Surgical table is tilted, patient on board.
Her limbs stretched outward, a mantis pinned on display.
Left arm drinks IV fluid, ankles nestle in stirrups.
Shades of blue to match the sky, fitted drapes
Balloon up and over, covering toes limp from spinal sleep.
Only one patch of skin stands revealed,
All but swallowed by the surrounding blue.
Other times covered by the skimpiest bikini,
Now lies exposed, shunning any prior modesty.
Gowned in aqua, a figure lingers
Not four feet away from those suspended feet.
He's counting, recounting a splay of silver.
Four of each instrument has he laid out.
Each with its own purpose.
"Ready to do counts, Mark?"
The figure nods, countenance voided by bonnet and mask.
"Go ahead, Jane." He fogs his eye shield.
Edging towards the table of blue, scrub nurse Jane
Peers at the sponges piled on a row of Kellys.
One by one they count again.
Fifteen minutes gone by, all is ready.
"Okay, Jane. Page the doctor. We're go."
Page goes through. "He's on the way."
From behind the drapes, the anesthetist peeps.
He snatches a glimpse at the clock.
Quarter hour more has elapsed.
A clutter and the sliding doors part.
Enters a man grandioso, masqueraded head to foot.
Holds his hands up, scrubbed and dripping.
Mopping his digits, scrub nurses gown and glove him.
Attention to the square of bare skin amidst the blue,
He takes his throne, flags his left palm up.
"Scalpel."
How hushed is the room in its sterility.
Snip.
The adhesion is relieved from the vaginal vault.
His head held erect, the surgeon rises.
"That's a wrap, folks. Prepare for recovery."

Degowning, he snaps off his soiled gloves.
From the room he struts, looking forward
To the next challenge presented by the day.

Remembering

Christopher Brown, *The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University*

She speaks to me in gerund,
loving you
with a beauty born deep
in defiance of her father's flame-flicked eyes.

rubbing me
"Pack your suitcase, I'm sending you away"
Terrified, panic-pulsed and six with pigtails--
His empty threat the tablecloth of fear
lying crisply underneath
the tragic china of her life,
lives to come
Cuddling me

Her Beauty palpable, purified
Paparazzi bulbs flash now
And in the vacant space between
illuminations she emerges,
leaving you
A shy wit who spoke to me in gerund
and sutured with precision cool perfection

Marriage Sketch

Sonia Chopra, *University of Miami Miller School of Medicine*

She is your daughter, three times
as small as you remember and now all you see
is the crown of her bowed head,
always bowed and covered, just as her eyes
follow the same simple pattern;
look down,
trace the path of coarse, male heels,
nod gracefully, femininely

if they were not so much your own, you might
have forgotten the impish dimple in her cheek, the quick arch
of her eyebrows

so many piercings:
two in each ear and one in the nose.
although it is tradition, you winced
each time a new orifice was tagged to her body;
a fresh golden hoop to tie a rope to
and be led away with

her world is red;
the pith of a clumsy scraped elbow
but too, the raw jolt
of a sudden biological maturity
she is just learning to deal with

deep swirling designs etched into her palms flow
over lithe wrists and farther down
to the tops of pale, peeking feet
that cannot thunder when they fall, only tinkle
lightly,
as the bells and silver filigree
weights that manacle each ankle

rouged lips and first blushes ready for selling,
burnished crimson sari falling
like thick liquid over midnight hair, bowed head, subtle
collarbone, sober breasts; soft parts

she would rather keep as her own for now
but knows how utterly impossible

Pre-rounds

Andrew Mebane Southerland, *The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University*

I saw a man today,
Humble before death,
Lying in damp sheets and
A sullen stench.
His humility transparent.
My lips opened and tried to speak
But no words appeared.
My brain reluctant to address this counterpart,
A prisoner jailed in a failing body.
Then, in trembling transgression,
"What is your name, sir?"
A reply without words,
Rhythmic oscillations screamed back
And his chest pounded to its mechanical maestro,
A harmonious conductor marching calmly
In the corner.
A morbid sign language indeed,
But understood.
And in a brief second I knew everything about this man;
That his name was already known
Amongst the thick, written records in my hand,
Already forgotten in the unkempt records of time,
But remembered well in the hearts of others.
Then, clumsily, I defined him, with calculations and large words,
And even touched him once or twice,
Before writing his daily obituary
as I had the day before.
Then contently, I departed
And took my memory
across the hall
To see another.

Fourth Ventricle

Kristen Heinan, *Eastern Virginia Medical School of the Medical College of Hampton Roads*

To see the house of the soul,
the study where it draws revelations,
the easy chair in which it generally rests.
I dare not breathe here.
One whisper might frighten it away,
and then what?
Soul, please stay.
Can you feel that we've been here?
Do you know what we've seen?
We have seen the place of magic
that generates the breath
that flows throughout the body,
a swirling, rushing caress
of energy that radiates out
in beams to dance with the sun.
We have seen the place where essence resides
and composes the music
that drives the heart
and courses through the blood
and resonates in all the hollow places,
making them rich and full.
We have seen the waterfall
that inspires spirit into the little water droplets
that cascade down the spine
and propel the body to movement.
We have seen, at the center of the brain,
a ventricle, the fourth one.
Its steady, tangible presence lets us know
to tiptoe carefully,
mere mortals were not meant to tread here.
Hush, just gaze.

Sweet Remorse on Tuesdays

Ruby Barnes, *Baylor College of Medicine*

Like always, he offers her the last piece of confection
With his Xerox paper hands
She opens the yellow wrapper using only a finger and a thumb.
The hard candy has no smell but it makes her teeth ache
setting her world on edge
to whirl on its coat rack
trailing dizzy apologetic men that clutch its soft floppy brim.

Petty candy, she muses,
that's what they call it.
As if candy could hold a grudge
by the hand and pull it up from the floor.
As if candy's smirk could mean anything but
fructose corn syrup.

Still, she ponders the taste
and maybe she's been happy too long.
It coats the inside of her mouth
making her feel powdery,
silvery. Too quick

for sun dresses and feta cheese
every Tuesday at Ruth's underneath the
alder boughs and the canvas awning
that's ripped in the corner.

She brushes off the specks of sugar from her
long slight fingers

dreaming of the open mouths in the upturned faces
of chocolate skinned women
With red string trailing down their bare backs
and mosquito netting at their hips
swaying in time to the mandolin being plucked by sturdy hands.

To Carlie, Who Cried

Meghann Kaiser, *University of California, Irvine, College of Medicine*

There are so many things I have not understood.
She used to cry out, in the middle of the night
with real tears, and reach for me
when she was only three months old. I was so worried
I took her to the doctor
but the doctor sent me home.
He said not to worry, you are still new at this.
All the children cry.

Now, it is the grandmotherly pastor's wife who tells me
To let it all out. It's okay
to cry. Perhaps someday
some good will come of all this.
like that young man who wrote "Peace Like a River." After
his whole family died in a tragic shipwreck,
he sat down with his faith and a pen.
His grief comforts so many.

But nineteen years later I am still new at this.
My desperation does not come
in iambic pentameter.
It is not beautiful,
it leaks out the corners of mouth
it thickens on the valves of my heart. I cry
Because I saw her come out of me in my own blood,
Which I gave her to eat and breathe

But now
my own blood rots while I stand above her.
There are so many things I have not understood.

Untitled

Kristen Heinan, *Eastern Virginia Medical School of the Medical College of Hampton Roads*

the dance man,
winding, fluidic,
through hollow light and rich shadow.
no radio.
music ebbs from his elbows,
flows from his fingertips,
seeps from every orifice and seam
with an allegro audacity,
occasional accidental harmony
with chinking of the coins he is collecting-
sweet B flat for a burger,
or a cup of coffee to warm the fingers,
so another soliloquy can scrounge up some supper
or at least another high-
Soul lives in the clouds,
Blues is when it falls down,
wasted, diluted, washed up by the rain,
draining with the oily street clutter
into the gutter
And lengthening silences,
As he surrenders to the sea within.
And my island grows smaller--
This floor, this ward, this room, this bed,
This mind--
Memories, dreams unfulfilled,
And the sounds of the night shift.

The Hospital, At Night

Cindy Carson, *Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California*

It is never really dark here,
Or quiet.
The janitor's slow steps,
The slap of a mop.
The nurses pad purposefully,
But do not stop here now.
Beyond the window, the traffic rumbles
Around the island of the ill.
We are two castaways on this forgotten shore,
Watching the tide ebb.
In the shadows, I can hear his laboring breaths
And lengthening silences,
As he surrenders to the sea within.
And my island grows smaller---
This floor, this ward, this room, this bed,
This mind---
Memories, dreams unfulfilled,
And the sounds of the night shift.

Autumn's Passing

Michael Zacchilli, *University of Massachusetts Medical School*

winter's first breaths;
a faint arctic breeze chills the air
and cracks Autumn's tranquil facade.
without ceremony, the curtains draw shut
as cold fate begins its relentless press.
and in twilight's soft glow, winter's claws-
an icy mist pierces Autumn's breast

Autumn denies the cold ruin.
her smoldering warmth fills each day
and forestalls the grip of that cruel wind.
spirit animates strained limbs with vibrant life...
but night brings assault on Autumn's bastions
and her light succumbs to dusk's silent march.
the crimson sun sets prostrate each evening,
a silent plea for time, for enough time.
the shadow plague takes no heed
and dark tendrils take hold.

Autumn's fiery contempt
rages against winter's despair;
a shroud of red fury
turns back the cold sting
and quivering limbs
fight back the harsh wind.
she resists with all her life
until only death remains

but too soon Autumn's limbs are still.
cold shadow invades her deepest sanctuaries.
the fiery resistance is spent and dispersed
and life leeches from the discarded vestige.
desolation marks the passing of her fury and
resigns her crimson hues to an earthen embrace.
the harsh wind gathers Autumn in its arms
and whispers death with rasping sighs.

in the days of Autumn's departure
her fiery spirit forsakes struggle

and glows like the setting sun-
a single beacon of comfort to
shed light on winter's dark truth.
with her last rays of life
Autumn eases the sharp sting
of the coming frost.
behind a veil of pure white tears,
Autumn welcomes the embrace
of winter's silent shroud.

Autumn's passing...
her body ravaged by cancer,
her spirit endures.

Living On Carrots and Cosmo

Crystal Cunningham, *Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty of Medicine*

I look at what can't be me
Nude and poised in the glass
Sixty Watts from the bathroom bulbs
Enhance a thin third rib grooved
Below tanned breasts,
Handsome trophies for gentlemen.
Protruding iliac tuberosities fashioned with a
Distorted self-image admiring
emaciated obliques and a
Pretty post-pubescent triangle
Decorated with a thin layer of fiery red fur
The doctor writes for pre-albumin and a 1200 calorie menu.

Prose

First Place

Dirt and Water

Jessica Lenore, *University of California, Irvine, College of Medicine*

"This is Jackson. Transfer to the Red Line," the polite male recorded voice bellowed throughout the train as it slowed to a stop, and the metal doors slid open. Almost instantly, the murky, underground train depot was filled with travelers, shoving past each other and scurrying about like the mice that ran under the tracks on either side of the platform. Eyes never met. Strangers never spoke. Only the insane smiled.

Mrs. Hubbard had heard rumors about the dangers of Chicago's public transportation system and had purchased a bottle of pepper spray especially for her first day of work. Her knuckles were bulging at the tightness of her grip to the strap of her tan designer bag. The job as an office temp was supposed to get her out of the house, away from the boredom of a garden that seemed to never grow weeds, and free her from the large, immaculate house, decorated with collections of odds and ends kept cleaned and polished-"spotless and priceless but useless", she considered them. But she hadn't anticipated the transition from her life to what she found herself in the middle of now.

Gary didn't think she was ready to dive into city life, but she would prove him wrong. She would prove that she didn't belong at home cooking and cleaning and just being the best damn housewife in the West. West suburbs, that is. She was no Donna Reed, and she wanted to get involved in the fad that had all her girlfriends at the country club getting part time jobs.

The brown leather pumps that always got her to and from the local supermarket with ease now chewed blisters into her feet. It felt like she was wearing a pair of bear traps, and the simple spool heels stabbed her with each step. A quick ride to the downtown office building where her husband worked and they would be on their way in the safe haven of their Lexus. He was waiting for her there like a knight on his stallion, rescuing the princess from the dungeon of the city.

This will be over soon, she hoped as she was pushed off the train by the mob. It seemed she couldn't walk fast enough. She stood near a garbage can and peered around to make sure no one was standing nearby. Free of spectators and potential thieves, she eased her grip on her purse and tried to peek inside. She pushed aside the black tube of pepper spray and a bright red lipstick. Anxiety overtaking her calm demeanor, she snatched the Kleenex that blocked her view of the rest of the purse and scanned the bottom. Keys, eyeliner, mints. No. Among all the essentials she carried, she did not see it. Her fingers trembled as she unzipped the side pocket and peered inside. With a relieved sigh, she withdrew a small leather flip. Frowning in deep concentration, she flipped past recipes and phone numbers until she found it.

Jackson-change to Red Line down stairs, through tunnel. Up stairs. 'Howard' train. 4 stops. Good luck, honey.

The crowd seemed to melt away as fast as it had appeared, leaving Mrs. Hubbard to wander along the platform in search of stairs. *Red Line downstairs*, she repeated in her head. She'd been warned never to talk to strangers on a train and figured the rule applied to her journey between trains as well. *But how will I find my way?* she thought in desperation. The unanswered question echoed in her head, leaving her battling her own uneasiness. With no staircase in sight and a cold fear quickly growing up from her belly, she reached in the pocket of her trench coat to find her cell phone. "Dial Gary," she spoke into the receiver, but the tension in her voice made it unrecognizable to the small contraption. "Dial Gary," she said again, and it buzzed. She peered at the phone in frustration and felt her heart skip a beat at the message "SEARCHING FOR SERVICE" on the tiny screen.

What could be wrong? Her thoughts raced faster than the oncoming train on the other side of the depot as she tried to understand why her cell phone would not allow her to call for help. Images flashed in her head of the myriad of things that could go wrong between finding the staircase and getting to her husband. Tears threatened to come as she stood gripping the useless contraption, a lost soul swimming against the current of new bodies, rushing past her in every which way, everyone going somewhere, nowhere, anywhere, but knowing exactly how to get there.

Of the many voices passing her, one stood out, that of a girl, giggling and then yelling into her phone as she passed, "I'm losing reception; I'm undergr-hello? Hello?" Finally, the girl, probably a teenager chatting with her boyfriend about goodness-knows-what, hung up and fell back into the collage of voices and people.

Underground, Mrs. Hubbard thought sheepishly. *No reception underground*. She closed her eyes and tried to melt the fear that sent tremors down her spine. The phone would not help her right now. She coughed and released a quiet, shaken sigh. She had to be strong.

Maybe this is all Gary's fault, a little voice whispered in the back of her mind. She frowned at the thought and took another glance at the instructions. Vague...almost too vague. Like it was written by someone who didn't really want the destination to be reached. Or by a husband who's trying to prove that his wife can't find her own way through the city. She stared at the "good luck, honey" that now seemed to mock her. The three words of encouragement now dripped with sarcasm. Was he somewhere now laughing at her, waiting for a call so he could say "I told you so"?

Anger seeped into her veins and made her set her lip with new determination. She'd find the stairwell. And she'd do it on her own. Turning, she noticed a man sealing a brown, rumpled-looking cigarette with his tongue several feet away. She walked toward him with a polite smile on her face. He was part of this

world. He would know. As he sucked the cigarette and took three short, quick inhales, she tapped a trembling hand on his shoulder.

"Excuse me, sir," she said, and tried to hide her apprehension. He turned to her and spewed a cloud of potent, odd-smelling smoke that left her coughing and sputtering. His laughter followed her as she blindly wiped at her eyes and sucked at stale air to cleanse her lungs of the narcotic attack. The white cloud surrounding her head left her eyes burning and a sudden dizziness almost overwhelmed her. She reached out to catch her balance and found something round and metal as her cough subsided to humiliated whimpers. Looking down at her hand, she could almost hear angels sing as she realized that she was gripping the head of a long banister leading further underground.

She was at the head of a long stairwell, where the heavy-laden and overweight could be found gasping and shifting their loads midway their descent into the brightly illuminated tunnel below. Each concrete stair and the banister were painted red and speckled with phlegm and cigarette butts. As people rushed past her and down the stairs, she fell into the crowd. Her gaze was emotionless and glued to the braided head in front of her as she re-secured her grip to her purse strap. Her expression was firm.

The crowd seemed to slow at the base of the crowd and she frowned at the hindrance to her journey. As she approached the site of congestion, she noticed a woman carrying a sky-blue tote bag, overflowing with diapers, attempting to wheel a large carriage down the staircase backward. Mrs. Hubbard studied the woman's chapped lips, which she gnawed on as she glanced back and then eased the carriage down another step. A faint, almost inaudible whimper came from beneath the large yellow blanket that hooded the carriage. "Ssssh," the woman spoke, and Mrs. Hubbard wondered if she was attempting to comfort the child or stop herself from cursing as she struggled with the bulky bag and the carriage.

Mrs. Hubbard squeezed impatiently between a couple nearby, but still reached the bottom of the stairs at the same time as the woman, and their eyes met for a brief moment. As the woman smiled politely, a bit out of breath, Mrs. Hubbard glanced at the bag and then quickly looked away, furrowing her blank expression into a frown until she saw the woman wheel the carriage past her. She relaxed the grip on her purse a bit, but then tightened it again as someone, a tall blonde man in dirty painter's overalls, brushed past her.

She stepped away from the crowd that flowed upstream toward the end of the tunnel into which she'd just descended. Peering around briefly, she reached into her purse, this time with just her fingertips. She felt around until she found the smooth, cool surface of her antibacterial hand gel. She couldn't go a step further until she cleaned the filth of the banister from her hands. Who knows who had touched it-and with what? The thought made her shutter as she squeezed the transparent liquid from the bottle. She rubbed in the cleansing potion and

released a quiet sigh of relief. Satisfied, she peered down the tunnel to her destination.

The stairwell waiting on the other side of the tunnel seemed almost a mirage to her, and she didn't think she could get there fast enough. Soon, she would be back home and then this whole ordeal would be over. A one-block-long tunnel was the only thing between her and the train to her husband, and it seemed the length of a football field as one of the newborn blisters began to throb.

People die in tunnels, friends had told her. She breezed past the bookbag-toting woman and the man with the headphones that doubled as earmuffs who bobbed his head, oblivious to the world. She didn't trust his feigned inattentiveness and made a special effort to ease a bit further away from his side of the tunnel before she passed him.

She glanced over her shoulder as she headed to the other side of the underground tunnel, a growing sense of claustrophobia relieved by the brightness of the fluorescent lights overhead. Her steps were unusually quick, especially as she passed other travelers in her fast-forwarded trek. Painful shoes or not, she would not let one of these ruffians attack her. She wiped her brow of the beads that formed as she tried not to look at the people she passed.

The shriek of someone behind her almost made her jump out of her skin. She didn't look back, but instead belted for the stairs. She would not die in the tunnel. A second shriek melted into laughter, and she felt a bit foolish as she reached the ascending stairwell, breathless and panting, and glanced back to find a group of rowdy teens wrestling in violent horse play.

"Teenagers," she muttered under her breath, and resisted the urge to scold them. Instead, she rushed up the stairs and away from the group that followed. As she found her way to the top, she looked at the sign overhead. HOWARD. It pointed toward the left track. As the rumble of an approaching train became louder, she mentally prayed that the train was hers. Peering down the track in both directions, she saw the bright yellow headlights of the north-bound train and her insides flip-flopped gratefully. This will be over soon, she reminded herself again.

"Spare change, miss," a voice from behind her spoke. She gasped, caught off guard, and spun around to find a tattered old man standing before her, a dirty palm extended. She looked at him with disgust, appalled that he would approach her so boldly.

All hope was gone from the eyes that stared at her, pleading for pity. The kinked grey hair and beard were matted, and layers of dirt caked what small portion of his face was not covered with hair. He wore a long, black coat decorated with lines and blotches of more dirt. His pants were too big and hung over his scuffed black boots.

"Spare change, miss," he repeated, and she held her breath to avoid inhaling whatever disease or misfortune had him smelling so foul. She felt cor

nered as he stood before her, and she willed the train to stop as it sped past her and slowed.

"I ain't gonna hurtcha, miss," he said and lowered his hand as she looked at him in silent disapproval, counting the seconds until the train came to a complete stop.

"You have a nice day, miss," he offered. She gave the smelly, ragged figure a once-over look before pulling her purse possessively to her chest and backing into the opening doors of the train. The male recorded voice overhead announced the train's next destination.

The seats were set up with pairs running on either side of the train, and she scanned the train car quickly for a vacancy. An empty pair of seats near the back of the car stood out now, and she rushed over to claim the one nearest the window. She didn't want to be near the aisle, where professional pickpockets might try to run their games. She sat down and scooted to the window. A graffiti-covered wall was her only view.

Her heart pounded as the familiar smell of funk entered her nostrils. She turned her head and found the dirty old man looking at her from the aisle. Her heart pounded as he peered through her. Beads of sweat formed on her brow. She prepared herself to lie.

"I don't have any-"

"It ain't right to treat people like dirt," he said, and looked away, almost as though she wasn't worthy to look at. He held his head like a man who was once someone. She sighed again, partly relieved to see him sit down in the aisle seat in front of her where she could keep an eye on him. She threw his remark in the back of her mind and tried to ignore him.

The doors slid shut, and the train pushed forward. She glanced at her watch and fidgeted in her seat. She looked down at the expensive bag she'd been clutching so tightly and then realized that she had no reason to worry. This old man was a harmless, filthy bum. He couldn't harm her. The thought gave her comfort.

Again the train slowed as it approached the next stop, and a small mob of people stepped onto the train. Another spark of fear made her shiver as she watched odd characters pass by the vacant seat next to her. A man almost jumped through the doors before they closed, a bit out of breath. Looking all around, he seemed to be almost calculating the perfect seat. When he spotted her, all bundled up in her trench coat and clutching her purse for dear life, he walked to her and sat down.

"Ma'am, does this train go to Grand?" he asked as the journey continued, sincere confusion in his eyes.

She hesitated and looked him over. Neat slacks. Blue jacket. He probably wasn't a threat.

"I'm sorry," he added. "I'm from the suburbs." She laughed, a bit

relieved, and confessed.

"Me, too," she said, and he shared in her laughter as the train pulled off again.

"Ben Adams," he said and extended his hand. She shook it fervently and smiled.

"Sandra Hubbard," she spoke.

"I once had a cousin named Sandra..." he started a brief conversation about coming to Illinois from the South. The loud overhead recording interrupted him with "This is Grand," as the train decreased in speed.

"Well, I'll be getting off here," he said, regret in his tone. "Pleased to meet you." He extended his hand again and she gripped his for a goodbye handshake.

As he took her hand, his grip tightened and he slid so that her side was pinned painfully against the window.

"Give me your purse," he whispered and revealed a shiny blade, the length of his finger, in his other hand. Her heart began to race. "If those doors open before that purse is in my hand, you die, lady," he whispered, and poked her side lightly.

It took everything in her not to cry. The world was spinning now, and her breath was uneven. Her eyes filled with tears and she pleaded for help with them. "Someone save me," she begged without speaking, but she couldn't say a word as the blade dug deeper into her coat.

"Give me the bag, broad," he said, and tightened his grip as the train came to a stop. In seconds, the doors would fly open and her blood would be spilled all over the train. She tried to make eye contact, but everyone seemed to make an extra effort to look at the ground. Didn't they care that she needed help? Why was everyone looking away? Her eyes fell on the muddy, kinked head in front of her, and she willed him to turn around.

Before she could so much as gasp, the purse was under his coat and he was out of his seat. She wanted to scream, but something in his gaze stopped her as he motioned with a finger to his throat that screaming would only make matters worse. Her body was convulsing as he spun to exit the train.

Suddenly he stumbled and was on the train floor. His blade glided across the floor and under someone's seat unnoticed, and her purse was in plain view. Unnerved by the eyes peering at him, he rushed off the train before the doors could close again.

She stood to pick up her purse, which lay on the train floor waiting to be claimed. As she squatted, a dirty, hairy hand gripped the strap and lifted it to her.

"I tripped 'em," the dirty old man said, and held the purse out to her, dangling by its straps. "I don't believe in steelin'."

She couldn't bring herself to thank him and could only look at the purse that now looked a bit scuffed and dirty. But it was still valuable, despite the dirt

that covered it. Nothing a little bit of water couldn't fix. She reached out to claim it. As she gripped the strap, he took her hand so that she was forced to look at him. He didn't lower his gaze, but peered directly into her eyes.

"I hope ya learned su'm," he spoke and released her hand only after she nodded. She was too worked up by all that happened and had no desire to sit back down. Instead, she stood at the door and waited for her stop. She closed her eyes with relief as the recorded voice announced the station and the doors slid open. Stepping off the train, she took a quick glance back and found the man still staring at her, an unreadable expression on his face. She nodded at him, too choked up to speak, and let the doors close behind her.

His scratchy voice echoed in her mind. I hope ya learned su'm. Indeed, I have, she thought, and used her fingertips to find her antibacterial hand gel.

Second Place
7 minutes post-call

 David Russell Scott, *University of Colorado College of Medicine*

"Well, he has to reach his 72nd birthday. That's coming up in February."
 Her voice still lingers as my overweighted coat-pockets flap against my scrubs.

"Then we'll have been married 50 years."
 My shoes squeak as I peel around a corner, almost running over a COPD patient going outside for an early smoke.

"Do whatever you gotta do, we trust you guys."
 Up I go, oh wait, hmm what's the code for the stairs? 10#... no... gotta go the long way.

"You can ask my wife these questions, she knows me better than I do by now."
 See a caffeine machine - 75 cents, push large, push regular, push strong.

"I worked a long time changing out furnaces."
 Must find computer.

"What's that, Asbestos? Yeah, I practically swam in the stuff."
 Ugggh! Crap, I really did just bump into someone - damn, a long-coat. Looks upset, "uhh excuse me," I yell back.

"Excuse me, it's not like me to cry - he's just been so healthy so long."
 My mind races, what did I say to her then?
 "Dave, buddy, you ready?"
 It's my resident, what time is it - shouldn't have gotten that coffee. I muster, "Don't worry about me, I'll see you guys in five."

"How much do you think I lost sweetie?"
 There's a computer.

"You must have lost fifteen pounds since August. He usually eats like a horse."
 CT reports, where, where, here. Code, need another code. Here we go.

He laughs, "She's a good cook."
 I hope I marry a good cook. 50 years is a long time to eat well.

He coughs, and suddenly he is sick again.
 His cough sounded so dry. Like mine after watching football at the College Inn.
 Why-won't-this-load? Should I switch computers? Not time, stick it out.

His clubbed nails jump out at me.
 How long have they been transforming? Why does that happen? I look at my nails.
 His daughter hands him a tissue. His eyes follow her.

Finally the CT report opens, "Axial CT 10/09/04 Upper thorax shows." Where's impressions, scroll, scroll...

"Take as long as you like. I'm in no hurry." He laughs again.

There! Impressions: scan,scan,scan,sc.."pleural thickening and calcification c/w mesothelioma." Drink a sip of my coffee, "pleural thickening and calcification c/w mesothelioma."

72, 50 years, healthy, daughter

Mesothelioma - a friend pimped me about this at Deidrick's coffee shop - now

it's on this monitor telling me why a man is dying.

How many letters are in it? 12, 12 letters.

"Then we'll have been married 50 years. It's easy to remember since it falls on his birthday."

12 over 50 years is what? Why am I doing math?! - numbers, wait - 30 seconds 'til the team meets - 30! Conference room is a 40 second walk.

Mouse clicks, close, close, close, papers in clip-board, shoes squeak.

"No, I don't mind you asking. We met at a baseball game. He was sitting behind me and asked me if I wanted to go dancing afterward."

My resident, "Hey Dave, you see the CT report?"

"Yeah. I did."

"We can take off his effusion, but after, then he's gotta get home."

"When do we tell them?"

"We'll tell them now."

"Then he married me and the rest is history" She smiles and her eyes light up.

My shoes squeak again. My resident is a good doctor.

His shoes and mine are touching down at the exact same time.

Two messengers carrying the last piece of a puzzle that nobody wants to see.

When we get there, I think I know what she'll say and the look he'll give her.

I'm grateful that she let me understand.

"He has to reach his 72nd birthday. That's coming up in February."

I can see their room now. The daughter is outside on her cell phone.

We swing wide of an intern impatiently waiting at the caffeine machine..Push large. Push reg..

"How long do you think? When they ask?"

"No tellin', could be a month, could be six."

I lean my coffee against the wall, my hand is shaking.

The daughter is hanging up the phone.

The wife is stationed at his bed.

He is watching her.

My resident moves forward.

February - that's in four.

"Good morning, come on in..."

Third Place

Hippocrates Practices Medicine in Topeka

Zach Jacobs, *University of Missouri - Columbia School of Medicine*

"With purity and with holiness I will pass my life and practice my art"
- The Hippocratic Oath

Hippocrates practices medicine in Topeka.

Abigail told me this as I lay in bed.

He is from the island of Cos, she says. He was born thousands of years ago. You should go see him.

This is the first thing she has said to me in awhile. She sits on my bed squeezing a pillow that she brought from her house. Her thin lips are turned down and she is not wearing make-up. Her hand is cold and on my leg. She says her uncle was cured by him. She says I need to go. She says she doesn't know me anymore. She can't look at me like this. My knees hurt. My nose is bleeding. She says she is close to leaving if I don't stop vomiting soon. I say I've been drinking. That is why; but she doesn't believe me.

We find Topeka settled in the dust of eastern Kansas. Hippocrates' office building is white and set apart from KFC loaded with fat people to our right. Plenty of parking. I watch mom in the parking lot with her kids. She is holding one by the hand; the other runs wherever.

Abigail comes around the Camry and helps me out of the car. Once again I notice that she is thin and I am thinner.

Walking into the office, we find a framed Polaroid of Hippocrates along with Aristotle standing with their arms around each other. They are drunk. Smiling as old men, their beards are close to entangled-white and off-white tangles of disheveled hair mingling in a restaurant.

A secretary sits behind a large fern situated on a gray plastic counter. She is pissed when she sees me. I ask why and she says because I wear too much cologne. She is wearing a navy blouse and her glasses overwhelm her nose as they fall down its bridge.

As we wait we sit next to a man whose chest I watch as it heaves and wheezes up and down with each breath. He has come from Hays and sells shoes, he says. He fumbles with a pearl gray inhaler. He says he can't breathe and so I tell him not to talk. I watch the clock on the wall as it ticks past fifteen minutes and my eyes allow Abigail to know that I'm growing impatient. The girl behind the desk finally sings my name and we are led back by a woman who swishes her path back to the exam room.

Inside, the walls are painted a sick desert mauve and there is a picture of Hippocrates above a chair diagonal to the sink. His blue eyes twinkle beneath a fishing hat as he is holding a trout. The table is made of leather and high off the

floor, slanted upwards as it moves towards its head. There are two lights in the room. One is dangling from the ceiling in the center. My eyes burn when I glance at its glow. The other is a dimly lit green light on a narrow table held by wobbly legs in the corner as the counter ends. The chair is perpendicular to this and Abigail sits down. I slide up onto the exam table and let my legs dangle.

We wait without conversation.

In a rush the door swings open towards us and through steps a man draped in a rough cotton robe which twirls around his body. His sandals are open-toed and lace onto and up his calves. He is wearing white cotton socks under his sandals. His face is old and long, covered with a ruddy olive complexion. His fluffy beard runs down in white drifts to rest on his chest. His hair is cropped with curls that run down his back. He smiles wide as he steps, allowing us a glance at haphazard teeth that go in every direction. Brown-framed old man glasses swallow his face.

He grabs me with both arms, his fingers are buried into my shoulders, and he says Neiderhoffer [my name] you're tired.

I say you're right, I'm tired. I say I'm bleeding-from my nose.

You have too much blood, he says. You're not exercising enough. He pushes his glasses up his nose as he looks at me. His right hand presses into my gut and feels, searching. He asks how is my head.

My head is fine.

Do you have pain in your sides, he asks.

No.

Cough?

No.

Bellyache?

No.

He stands me up from the table and looks at me. He spins me. He makes me bend over. Touch your hands to your toes, he says.

Yes, he says, too much blood. It is being expressed from your nose because there is too much in there, running through you.

I'm tired, I say.

The blood weighs you down, he says.

My knees hurt.

The blood, he says. It boils within you; your knees swell from this.

I ask for an answer. He says he will drain some blood from me. I will feel worse for a short while and then better. We will let nature run her course.

He rests his arm on my shoulder and smiles. Don't worry, he says, you will feel better. He glides towards Abigail and kisses her cheek. He leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

We are alone again.

You're crazy, I say to her. You're crazy for making me do this.

She looks at me with her lips pursing into a slight smile. I know, she says, but he cured my uncle.

I stand up from the table. My knees buckle slightly as I take a deep breath. I tell her I can't do this. I grab my coat, and my hand meets the door.

Wait, she says.

I turn back to her.

He cured my uncle.

Then your uncle was never sick, I say. I open the door and walk out, leaving both myself and her to die.

A Pair

Jeremy Stidham, *University of South Alabama College of Medicine*

"Let me tell you a story about a pair of pants," Jack said looking right at me.

Pants! What? And what was with those sunglasses? He had been wearing them since he walked in the door. It was just a friendly game. I still don't see why I had to invite him anyway. Just because she said to.

At least Jack gave us four players: Lewis on my left, Rick to my right and, of course, Jack across the table from me. We had been having poker night ever since I got my green felt table top for my last birthday.

"Laura bought me this pair of pants," Jack continued. "I guess it was about a month ago."

"Whose deal is it?" I interrupted, hoping to put an end to this pants business. Rick put his beer down and started shuffling the deck. He cut a sharp glance my way and then back to the cards.

I could hear what Rick was thinking, "Come on, man. His wife just died." I looked to my left at Lewis for support, but he never caught my eye.

"What were you saying, sir?" Rick said without looking up from the cards he was cleverly shuffling together.

What a brown-noser. Sure, Jack is the boss, but sir? We don't even call him sir at the office.

"You don't need to call me sir, Rick. It's not like we're at the office. Anyway, so Laura bought me this pair of pants... really nice pants... slacks really." The sliding door rolled open.

"Can I get you guys anything?" I know she didn't mean it. I'm sure she didn't just come in there to see if we needed anything. She just wanted to come in and check up on me; just make sure I was making Jack feel welcome, and not losing too much money, and not making a mess of the dining room and not doing anything at all really, at least not without her permission. Well, I was... or I wasn't... at least I was doing everything right this time.

"Thanks hunny, I'll have another beer," I said. That'll teach her.

She smiled warmly to me, took a beer out of the fridge, and walked over to the table. She reached across to hand it to me and when she did she put a gentle hand on Jack's shoulder and said, "I'm so sorry about your wife."

He looked up at her, lowered those ridiculous sunglasses, put his hand on hers and simply said, "Thanks. She was wonderful, huh?" She nodded to agree, walked back into the living room and rolled the sliding door closed.

Uncomfortable silence was everywhere.

"Ante up," Rick said as he started dealing cards around the table. We all pitched in a white chip. He slid two cards to each player. "Texas Hold 'em," he said proudly. Every time Rick deals we have to play Texas Hold 'em. It's his latest thing. The pros are even playing it on television now.

Jack looked a little confused. "Everyone gets two cards of their own," Rick explained, "and the last five are dealt face up in the middle for everyone to use. You pick five of those seven cards to make your hand. Best hand takes the pot."

I grabbed my two off of the table and quickly looked. The Queen and Ace of hearts looked back. Not a bad hand. You can't complain when you get two face cards. I could end up with a high pair, maybe a straight or even a royal flush.

Everyone else looked at their cards. Lewis, on my left, looked pleasantly surprised. Rick, on my right, was composed as usual; I never can read him.

"So anyway, those pants Laura got me," Jack picked up his story again, "They were a little too long, and I had just gotten her that sewing machine she had been wanting, so," he paused while he studied his cards. I was hoping he had forgotten about those pants by now.

I started the betting with two blue chips. Lewis quickly matched it.

"You're up," I said to Jack across from me. I could see my reflection in those sunglasses. He thought for a minute, cocked his head sideways and finally tossed in a couple of chips.

"Too much for me," Rick said and he slid his two cards to the side. "The first three cards that go face up in the middle are called the flop," he explained. He grabbed three cards off the top and spread them on the table. They were the queen of clubs, ten of spades, and seven of hearts.

Lewis looked even happier, almost giddy. I couldn't tell what Jack was thinking behind his sunglasses.

Rick moaned out loud. "Oh man, I shouldn't have folded." He sighed and looked at me, "You gonna bet?"

Jack leaned forward and put his elbows on the table, "So Laura decided she was going to fix those pants. She had me put them on and she pinned them up to the right length: a full break at the bottom; that's how I like 'em."

I tried to tune him out while I considered my next wager. I looked over the three cards that were in the middle. The queen sure helped. That gave me a pair of queens and with only three people left in the game, well, that's not a bad hand. The ten helped out; it got me a little closer to a straight. I wonder what...

The sliding door rolled open again. Yep, it was her.

"Sorry guys, I don't mean to keep barging in here. Just try to ignore me," she said.

Ignore her? Sure thing. No problem. I was in the middle of making my bet with Mr. Happy Face and Sunglasses staring me down, and now little miss try to ignore me decided it was time to do the dishes. "Let's up the stakes a little," I said loud enough for her to hear over those pots banging together. I hastily threw in two green chips, the highest chips we had. I gave everyone a little nod to let them know it was no mistake.

"We got the pants hemmed up and she started sewing on them," Jack said. "She had those things for about a week before I ever saw them again."

Lewis carefully dropped two green chips into the pot. Jack stopped his story again to think about his bet. He raised his sunglasses and looked at the pot pretending to have just noticed the size of it. "Wow," he said and tossed in his two chips.

"Well a week later she finally gave me back my pants, but when she did she was crying. She wasn't crying hard; she just had a few tears in her eyes. So I asked her what happened."

The banging stopped in the kitchen. "Who was crying?" she said.

I decided I didn't want to hear the whole pants saga again, so I decided to give her the condensed version. "Laura bought him some pants that didn't fit so she fixed them. Is that about right, Jack?"

She walked over to the table and stood next to him. "Why was she crying, though?" she asked sympathetically.

"Well, you see, she was kind of new at sewing. When she measured the right leg, she measured it with a cuff, but on the left leg she forgot about the cuff. So when she cut the extra fabric she cut too much off of the left leg and when she finished... well, that side was just too short," he concluded.

My wife poked out her bottom lip a little. "Ohh, poor thing. She tried her best."

"That's what I told her and I told her I appreciated her hard work and that next time she would know."

I had had enough, "Rick, let's see the next card."

A king of hearts hit the table. That helped. Now I was one card away from a straight. All I needed was a jack; any jack would do, and there was a lot of money in that pot. I still had my pair, but with a straight I couldn't lose. I grabbed my beer and took a long drink trying to disguise my excitement. Rick looked at me and smiled. He knew I had something good.

I started the round of betting with four green chips this time. Lewis matched it and Jack, who hadn't been paying much attention, picked up his two cards as if he had forgotten what they were. He bit his lower lip and cocked his head while he thought about what he would do.

He set his two cards on the table again. "You fold?" I asked.

"Nope," he said. "I'm all in." He slid all of his chips into the center.

Rick stood up out of his chair and whistled. Lewis just pushed his cards to the side and said, "I'm out."

Rick looked at me, "Are you going to match him?"

He was bluffing. He had to be. He didn't even know how to play the game. Who goes all in without even seeing the last card? All I need is a jack and I win. Even if I don't get it I've got my pair of queens. Surely he's got something better than a pair of queens if he's going all in. I can't just give him the pot, though. I can't let him scare me off. I've got too much in it to fold now. All I need is one card. I matched his bet.

Nobody said a word. This wasn't just a card game anymore. My wife walked off toward the living room. Rick sat back down and looked at the card on top of the deck. We all did. Rick slid it off but didn't turn it over. He just slid it out to the center and smiled. The boss took off his sunglasses and set them where his chips used to be.

"Do it already," I said.

"What do you want it to be?" Rick asked.

I guess it didn't matter anymore, so I laid my cards down on the table. I pointed to the cards as I called them out, "Ten, queen, king, ace," I said. "Just turn over a jack. What are you looking for?" I asked across the table.

Jack looked at Rick, "Just turn it over."

"Yes, sir," he said and did so. It was a four. I knew I had lost. Nobody goes all in unless they can beat a pair.

"I guess that leaves me with a pair of queens," I said. "Show 'em, Sunglasses." Rick glanced back at the cards and then gave me a funny look.

Jack laid down only one of his two cards, a king. That gave him a pair of kings. He reached out to the middle, scooped up all of those chips and said, "It's getting late. We've got to be at work in the morning."

He went all in on a pair and won. He had everything; he took all my chips... with a pair.

"You know," Jack said to me, "you should've won that hand."

Nice. Real classy. I should've won. Take a man's money in his own home at a game he didn't even want you at and then rub it in. "What are you talking about? You beat me. I don't choose the cards you know."

Rick looked at me and said, "You had a flush, man."

I looked back at all of the cards on the table. They were right. That last card was the four of hearts. I just didn't notice. That would have given me an entire hand of hearts.

The boss tucked his sunglasses in his shirt pocket and started cashing in his chips. Unbelievable. He was just going to leave.

"You going to quit while you're ahead?" I asked him trying to sound jovial.

"I've got to get to bed. I'll see you all in the morning."

He rolled the sliding door back and walked out through the living room. He said goodnight to my wife who was sitting on the couch waiting for us to finish the game.

"Look at that," Rick said pointing into the living room. "The left leg of those pants must be four inches above his shoe."

The Lonely Medical Student

Victoria Wong, *University of Hawaii at Mānoa John A. Burns School of Medicine*

Me and my shadow...

A flickering light bulb the color of bile shines down from the low ceiling at an angle in the bowels of the late night. My shadow hazes from the disseminated light, or perhaps it's just my declining vision after hours of studying the gastrointestinal system. My stomach rumbles in a plea for attention; I ignore the hunger and instead, worry about learning the physiological mechanism behind my hyperactive bowel sounds.

Not a soul to tell our troubles to.

Ideally, I should have learned this material last week. But with my propensity for procrastination and a sophomoreic dream of writing the next Great American Novel, I'm slightly in arrears. By now, the rest of my class has mastered bowel sounds and moved on to colonoscopies - with which, for those of you over 50, you should be well acquainted. Make an appointment today! I apologize for the shameless plug (no pun intended), but hey, it could save your life.

And when it's twelve o'clock, we climb the stair,

I used to sleep at midnight. As a child, I read by the light coming in through the slatted sliding door of my room until well after my 10:00pm bedtime. I guess all those years I was in training to prepare for 3:00am cramming sessions like these, with a long book on anatomy and a short attention span. Time has passed yet little has changed. My eyes are a bit more myopic, my lighting a bit more direct, and my bedtime quite a bit later, but the text flows on in a laxative-induced fashion, and there's always more to learn.

We never knock, for nobody's there.

My anatomy book is one of those with the real photos of cadavers, an unformaldehyded flat version of the ones we cut up in dissection lab. By day, I interact with my peers, with doctors, with patients; but after hours, the prospective medical student's interviewee ideals about interacting with people go flying out the window. I stare at my dead people book. I key in a code that gives me 24-hour access to the dissection lab and get downright familiar with those cadav

ers. I study my patient cases, but they **d**on't talk back until after my seventh cup of coffee.

Just me and my shadow,

Medicine is a rewarding field in all its applied glory. It's just that, in the still of the night, when my productivity wanes and the book pile looms high and not a creature is stirring but for the *Helicobacter pylori*... the life of a medical student gets to be a lonely existence sometimes.

All alone and feeling blue.

Lyrics to *Me and My Shadow* written by Billy Rose, legendary Broadway producer and lyricist.

Colleen was so . . .

Amy Leland, *Indiana University School of Medicine*

Anyone who's lost a loved one knows it's not the death itself that is hard. Sure it's the time when there's the most commotion—calling the mortuary, scheduling the funeral and burial, notifying friends and family. But at this point you are in shock and purposely diverting your attention to pointless details of the plans. Even as you watch the casket being slowly lowered into the grave, you weep softly only because death is sad and you're supposed to. You'll thank the guests for coming, embrace them, and promise that you won't hesitate to call if you need anything, knowing full well that you have absolutely no intention of touching a phone for weeks. The last car will disappear over the hill, its small black FUNERAL flag flapping in the breeze. For those guests, the afternoon is just one Saturday obligation that can now be checked off their list of things to do. Life is back to normal for them. But not for you.

It is at this moment, as you stand completely alone in the ominous silence of the cemetery, that you will lose your composure. Your bottom lip will quiver so uncontrollably that you have to bite it down 'til it bleeds just to keep it still. Your knees will buckle and you will crumble into a shapeless heap of sheer rage. You may ferociously rip grass from the earth, grasp nearby rocks and hurl them at Death, that evil being that stole your daughter. Or you may simply scream at the top of your lungs to get the hurt out.

These are all common reactions to the realization of the finality of death, the realization that you will be forever without the person who rests in a buried box beside you. And this realization . . . this is the hardest part. You'll have the memories, of course. But you'll never have the opportunity to make new ones. You'll never be able to use your daughter's name with present and future tense verbs. From this point forward, it's only "Colleen was so . . .," "Colleen would have loved . . .," or "Colleen and I used to . . ."

Holidays will no longer be joyous. A time meant to be spent with family becomes, for you, a time of mourning as you are again reminded that your family is short one member—one less place to be set at the table, one less person to put on your gift list. While others gather around a cozy warm fire with hot chocolate to laugh and play games for the night, you spend your evening hovering over a tombstone, frozen to the bone, weeping icy teardrops, all alone without even so much as your shadow to keep you company.

You wonder if it will always be this hard. You remember how your pet fish died when you were a child, how you cried for days and thought your life was over. Then Mom brought home a new puppy and you forgot all about the fish. What was its name again?

Yes, it will always be this hard. In fact, you want it to be this hard because you will not allow the memory of your daughter to fade away like that of

an insignificant childhood pet. You're afraid to let go of the pain inside because you don't want to forget. Don't want to make room for anyone or anything that may replace a memory, the only thing you have left.

Your biggest fear, once death, is now life. How could you have been so blind before? Death is easy. Life is difficult, an everyday struggle that demands all the energy you can muster just to drag yourself out of bed in the morning. Yes, death will seem like the only way out, a welcome alternative to life without your child. At least then the two of you could be together. You could again embrace her and comfort her and shield her from all that is evil. Be her mom again.

But maybe you don't know what's best this time. Could you not serve her better by proving that you are strong enough to press on? To tell others her story and to help others like her conquer the illness? When people who learn of her short life and tragic end drop their heads, lower their eyes, and say, "What a waste," you'll be there to defend her and assure them that she touched more lives in her 25 years than most do in a lifetime.

Did she ever really choose death? Then what makes you think she'd want death for you? She'd choose life. And so you will, too. Because you love her. You'll eek your way along the rocky, winding, uphill path to happiness because she'd want that for you. And she'll remain forever inside your heart, encouraging your every step of the way.

Aalia

Sushrut Jangi, *University of Massachusetts Medical School*

I still remember the first time I saw her. It was in my English class. She sat directly across from me. Because of this, I could not study her. We kept our eyes to ourselves. When the time came for her to read her work aloud, her gaze was locked to her paper. She knew that I was watching her read. She had soft, dark eyes, cow-like, curious, moist, blinking only at the end of paragraphs. Her nose was small and just so, her hair the color of raisins, her lips cautious and careful in shaping the words that she spoke. Her voice was quiet but brave. We all heard her reading.

I don't remember much what her work was about, except when she mentioned the phrase "wriggling supernovas," and this has stuck with me over the course of the year that I haven't seen her. There's no particular reason it has been fixed into my head - but when I think back to it now, I can remember the cadence of her voice as she said the "wriggling," melodic, and her half-smile when she uttered the last part of "supernovas," the final 's' almost inaudibly sweet. In my more sentimental moments, there have been times that I have looked into an inky sky and looked for them, hoping for a wriggle as some cosmic signal for me to place importance on my remembering her.

Yesterday morning, I received a message from her, hardly cosmic, but no less surprising: she has composed an email in which she has invited me to Boston to join her for a coffee/beverage/condiment. I think back to the last time I had seen her - it had been my junior year in college and her senior year, and she had been on the edge of graduation. Indeed, her behavior had, in particular, assumed the quality of transience, in that she walked around campus without her feet fully touching the ground, and in awkward lighting, I often believed that her shape was no longer distinct, as if it was making up its mind whether or not to simply flicker away. My conversations with her were haphazard and we would only exchange words in passing. The last I saw of her was when I had been studying in the library. I was buried in a physics book and was studying gravitation when I had seen the reflection of her face in the glass of the table. I had frantically began to dart my pencil across my legal pad, in an attempt to appear on the verge of proving a theorem with a terribly important significance, and for a moment, I had looked back into the glass and caught her eye, moments before she vanished down the stairs and out of the library.

Now I am on the train into Boston and I feel bold, encouraged by the momentum of beginning my final year at college, and strengthened by the August evening weather, humid and sweet, with the air brimming heavy with moisture and

possibility. I wonder if the way I imagine her in my head is the same way that she will be when I see her - her large, blinking eyes that I remember most, her petite figure that moves with a fragile grace, her high cheekbones, her Persian skin that makes mine look almost dark. She is conventionally beautiful, a characteristic that sharply contrasts with her other traits: her ability to arrange words in sentences in patterns that are so refreshing that I have wondered if anyone had said them in that order before, her almost spiritual devotion to Bono, her love for books that nobody else has thought of reading. When I think of her reading, I remember moments from the first time I had gone out with her, moments that I have kept secret from my closest friends in an effort to prevent them from knowing about my ability to skink into social awkwardness to which I had believed myself to be immune. We had gone into The Coop in Harvard Square, and in a sudden whim of what I had believed to be pure romantic genius, I had suggested that we purchase each other copies of our favorite books, and that we should scrawl messages to each other on the front page of each. I had bought her a copy of *Dandelion Wine*, and underneath the lights of *Au Bon Pain*, I had read her a passage from it out loud, something about balloons on fire rising on the Fourth of July, and rope swings perhaps, in some desperate attempt to enchant her, and when I heard the silence at the end of my reading, and her feigned expression of rapture, I had felt my heart grow weary, as if it knew that I was abusing it.

When the train stops at our meeting point, Charles MGH, all the thoughts of our date more than a year ago, vanish. Instead, I am overcome with a calm feeling, a feeling that I am sure generals have experienced when they have approached the enemy on the battlefield, some perfect mixture of blind confidence and a desire to yield to a force that they can no longer control. The station is relatively empty. I cross onto the Charles River Bridge and look out over Boston. It is gorgeous, the skyline flickering through the oaks that rise up over the water, pulsing with a silver electricity. I turn from the view and begin walking and suddenly she is there, and we admire the view together, without looking at each other, without investigating how inaccurate our recollection of the other person might be, perhaps because we are afraid to, and perhaps because Boston is a beautiful excuse to look out upon, instead. We walk then, from the bridge down to the street, and we begin to talk, and I am almost suspicious of her, of our interaction, in how easy everything has suddenly become.

We are indecisive as to what to eat for dinner. We do laps, walking from one end of the street to the other, pausing before each restaurant, second-guessing each other's expressions after glancing at the menus taped to the windows. We are both painfully hesitant, afraid to make a sudden choice, because we do not want to eat food that the other does not enjoy, and more importantly, because I

find it pleasant walking these laps with her along this street lined with white lamps, in these comfortable moments in which decisions have yet to be made.

Somehow, we drift into the North End. We are pulled into a restaurant called Giocomo's, lavish, the windows hugged by heavy red drapery, a gentle murmur rising up from the tables. We are seated next to a middle-aged couple, the wife rummaging through her purse, the husband staring down at his menu, to whom evenings spent drifting into restaurants has become commonplace.

I look up at her and she points to her menu and asks me, naively, what the MP next to the baked salmon means. Although I know what the letters stand for, this strikes me as an opportunity for humor and I try to come up with a variety of solutions: Meat produce, mainly protein, maybe poisonous, and when she laughs, I laugh, and our laughter draws the attention of the couple sitting next to us. The woman smiles at me and then touches her husband's arm tentatively, and they whisper to each other, both of them smiling at us discreetly, and their behavior makes me suddenly self-conscious. I fight it, that struggling memory from a year ago attempting to rise up out of me, and in this effort, I purse my lips together and she laughs and this breaks the spell. We talk more, leisurely, without being overtly talkative. She tells me her brother and her sister's names, an avenue that I had not thought to explore before, and their pronunciation comes to me easily. Arabic is not so distant from the language we speak in my house. She too, says my sister's name perfectly, and I think how much closer to her I feel when she already knows to put the accent on the first syllable of Manasi, and not on the second. Suddenly I exclaim that MP stands for market price, and when the waiter confirms this, enthusiastically nodding his head and smiling, I feel that he has confirmed this evening and everything contained within it.

When the bill comes, she lunges forward to whisk it away, and I reach into my wallet, but she gestures no, and my attempt to counter her is so half-hearted that I let my hand fall from my pocket and hang loosely at the side of my chair. I sit back and grin about how different tonight is, how a year ago, it had been as though we had memorized the roles of what couples should do on a date, as if we had looked up 'romance' in a dictionary and were dutifully carrying out its definition. Tonight, in Boston, with her, has been refreshing, because we have not held hands walking through the city, because I have not brought her flowers or worn cologne, because it is easy, the wind is right, and because we are simply drifting with each other.

She walks me back to the commuter rail stop. We are relatively silent, but it is a comfortable quiet. It is not unforgiving, like the first time on the silent shuttle bus back to school, when I had felt a powerful urge to break it by saying something significant to her, instead deciding to comment rather stupidly on the

effect of September 11th on Halloween, on how "people were putting out flags rather than ghosts," after which she had told me then, rather incisively, to stop talking. Tonight, I have the opportunity to replace it with the easy quiet that lives between friends, and so we do, walking along Hanover Street, she realizing that I never walk in straight lines but always slightly to the right, and I noticing that she takes rather long strides for her height.

We reach the platform just as the train is departing. A conductor hangs from the door and watches our exchange. I look at her, and she is a different person to me now, a girl who lives and works in Boston, who drinks coffee and who I can walk beside without my heart beating sideways. I am braver now, I think to myself, and whether or not I am suffering from delusion, I do not question my new sense of self-identity. Then, the conductor, still hanging from his post, as if he is some embodiment of the forces that test my mettle, suddenly yells out hoarsely to me, "Kiss her already!"

I pause here. I could kiss her but this would run counter to our unconventional night, but not kissing her would feel inconclusive and almost predictable. I watch the conductor, as if he might provide me with a clue. But in my hesitation, she makes a decision: she extends her hand and shakes mine with more strength than was needed. Her eyes are confident and her expression stern, almost as if I have completed a successful interview, and quickly she turns and walks off the platform. I leer at the conductor who laughs and goes inside his train. I climb aboard too, find a seat and stare out of the window. He must see this all the time, I think, a train conductor, taking people apart and bringing them back together again, watching from the safe distance of his cabin door. For a moment, I envy him and his distance and his power to watch the drama of beginnings and endings, and then, quite suddenly, I do not, because those things worth seeing are those small, brave, tremulous things that happen in between.

A Force Above Me

Anna Borisovskaya, *University of Washington School of Medicine*

"I want a child."

The ocean wind flings the words in my ears, along with the noise of breaking waves and crying seagulls. I pretend not to have heard them, but she continues, purposefully oblivious of my reaction or lack thereof.

"Your child, Tony," she specifies. There is that fearless look in her blue eyes, as though at this very moment, she is conquering a new mountain, a new language, or a new opponent. I'm the obstacle in her path and by God, she is going to overcome me.

Her name, Inga, is tight, strong, and vaguely exotic, just like the woman herself. I want to say it out loud, savoring each sound, In-ga, but I'm not sure she means for me to speak yet.

"To give birth some time next year would be good for me," she concludes. Her black hair, shoulder-length and layered, flies around the perfect oval of her face. Ten years back, it was cropped army-short. "I can work from home and take care of the baby."

I shouldn't have wondered, then, why she'd decided to drop by for a visit. These are long-standing, meticulous plans. I wouldn't be surprised if there is a nursery being built at her condo as we speak. "I'm flattered," I finally say. "Inga."

She nods, as though that is a given. "It would be no burden on you," she clarifies, matter-of-fact. "My finances are sufficient."

So are mine, but who can think of money now? Inga can, but she is one in a million. She's always been. "Why me?" I ask. "You have a husband. Wouldn't he be upset?"

"Patrick is aware of my plans." Inga looks straight at me, without blinking. Truth and nothing but is her unwavering policy. "I can't conceive with him; there is no possibility of us starting a family without help."

"I'm sorry," I say. It sounds lame, but I make no effort to correct it. I am, indeed, sorry for Patrick. He is crazy about Inga; I bet he is chewing his nails to the core, knowing where she is and why.

"I have tickets back to New York a week from now," Inga informs me.

She looks expectant, like an actress on the stage waiting for her dialogue partner to catch up with her, so I do. "You want me to impregnate you?" I ask. I admit that I'm aiming for crudeness. I want to see if she can get ruffled.

Leave it to Inga to remain in control. "Yes. But," she passes a challenging glance in my direction, "I understand if you'd rather not. There are ways other than sex."

I sit down on the nearest boulder - a tree, polished smooth by the ocean and discarded during the storm. She remains standing in front of me, hands on hips, bare feet braced apart. She's a formidable figure, and I've lost to her before: when she excluded me from her mount climbing trips because of the poorly healed back injury I acquired practicing martial arts, when she left to study at the NYU and I stayed behind in Seattle, sure that I'd never see her again, and when she forgot to invite me to her wedding. I appreciated her caution, though after a few days of sickening jealousy, I wanted to come, to wish her and the man she chose over me not everlasting bliss and happiness, but -

It would have been a nice wish, of course.

Suddenly, I have a terrifying, mind-numbing need to be buried inside her. I need to push her down in the cold, wet sand, and growl an animal-like sound. I need, I need... oh, to be able to destroy her. I carefully cross my legs. If Inga is aware of my erection, she pretends not to notice it.

To ignore the very thing she came for. How like Inga.

"There is an excellent fertility clinic here. I made inquiries," she says. "They could see us as early as tomorrow morning."

"Before we discuss how much sperm you need me to squirt in a bottle," I interrupt, "why do you want a child?"

Inga's face softens. "It's time, Tony," she says simply. "After a certain age in life, it's hard not to feel maternal."

I try to envision her with a child in her arms. It's easier than I imagined it would be, the picture stands out so sharp and clear against the gray landscape. Of course, the baby is a girl, and she looks just like her mother, blue eyes in contrast to dark hair, demanding little fingers pulling on the blanket wrapped around her. She is a strong child. When she grows up, she will learn martial arts and become a fan of mount climbing.

"You're smiling," Inga tells me. She sounds a little curious as to the reason but restrains herself from prying. "I forgot how beautiful you are when you smile."

It's a nice moment; I savor it for however long it lasts. Nice moments don't come by me very often - nor am I blaming anyone for it. One can't receive what one is not seeking. "Why me?"

"You're a gifted man," she sits down on the sand, assuming the pose of Lotus with spectacular ease. My back will never permit me such flexibility. "You have good looks, and you're still athletic despite your injury. Genetically, I couldn't do better."

"Except for Patrick," I add masochistically.

"Probably not," Inga shakes her head. "His health leaves much to be desired."

"What's wrong?"

"It's not important," she says. "But he'd make a good father. He wants children."

So do I. Just an unconscious wish before today, it boils so close to the surface now that I fear its intensity. To shape a new person, a little human being, to find myself within him or her, is suddenly my one and all-consuming obsession. To find Inga in the same child? My heart nearly stops beating at the beauty of the thought.

"I have so much to give, Tony," Inga tells me while I'm staring at the ocean. Her voice is filled with longing. For once, I'm hearing the real voice of her soul, the sound that evaded me for so long. "To this unborn child. To the other people I love. While there's still time," she finishes in a whisper. "I can't imagine those years ahead... and no one beside me."

I lean over to kiss her. It is less a kiss than a commencement of devouring. The need to consume her, sublimated for so long, bursts from me, a being in its own right. I unbutton her blouse and start working on the zipper of her jeans. I can't possibly stop, not even if I tried, not even if -

Inga's light eyes glance at her watch. It is a deep-blue glowing circle with hours, milliseconds, and dates. Dates. My mind hooks on the word, somehow sensing its importance despite my current insanity. "Are you ovulating?" I ask with a strain. The effort of speaking costs me physical pain.

She nods carefully, while her hips grind against me, further complicating the mental process.

"Patrick is dying, isn't he?" I guess wildly.

Inga nods again.

"And after he is gone... you will raise the child by yourself." The understanding finally sinks into me, and I add masochistically, "You will never have an impulse to call me, won't even think of moving back or inviting me to New York."

She remains silent. She won't lie - not even when it means abandoning her wish. I push myself away from her, with enough force to reawaken the aching joints in my back. I writhe in the sand until I see a firm hand lingering nearby, offering support. I want to accept it. Oh, how I want to accept it! Her blouse is still undone, a promise of bliss the likes of which I hadn't known in ten years. Inga, I want to say again. Tight and strong. Inga, never bending to my will.

I pull myself upright, using the boulder as an anchor. For a few agonizing seconds, I'm not sure whether I will remain standing or crumple down again,

but my back mercifully remembers the correct way of functioning. And I'm grateful that I don't need Inga anymore.

In some infinitesimal way, I already don't need her.

"You will not help me," she concludes. There is a distant smile on her lips, as though in a matter of minutes, she'd processed my refusal, accepted it, and issued forgiveness.

I keep my voice just as distant. "No."

Inga doesn't ask me why: we both know the reason. "I will change my tickets to New York for tomorrow morning."

I finally have a chance to make that wish I never made. I remember the phrasing down to the last letter - I had rehearsed it in front of the mirror several times. Inga was probably right not to invite me to her wedding. "I hope your life is filled with love. With Patrick, or without him."

I start walking back in the direction of my car, not waiting for her response. In a cruel ruse, her lovely face, blue eyes searching the ocean, looms ever closer to me in inverse proportion to the distance between us.

The Day Jimmy Denton Kissed Me

Joanna Pearson, *Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine*

The day my mom made me stop going to Mr. Spencer's, I was fourteen years and five months old. My shoulder blades stuck out like a stegosaurus, and I had eyebrows like two woolly caterpillars trying to mate. When my friend Sandrine had predicted futures at a spend-the-night party one time, she'd foretold her career as a Playboy-model/doctor and my happy future as a science textbook editor. In real life, my only claim to fame was my status as third runner-up for freshman class president. There'd only been three candidates, but Mom insisted that I hold my shoulders back and keep my chin up anyway.

Any time I hinted dissatisfaction with my lot in life, Mom simply became further convinced that both my posture and public schools were deteriorating. The solution was simple: do more math outside of class. Not invited to the big cook-out? Don't worry, do some math. No one to go to the homecoming dance with? Enrichment math. So, chin cocked, and an advanced math book in hand, I was zooming to a future life of photosynthesis diagrams and mitochondria.

And that was how I had started going to Mr. Spencer's.

Mr. Spencer was a 70-something year old retired math teacher. He'd plastered Mickey Mouse signs all over his basement walls to make the place look friendly and named it "The Mickey Math Tutoring Den." It may have been dorky, but Mr. Spencer's place had appeal. It was bright and cheerful-and there was the candy. Boxes and bowls of it-bright, giant size Blow Pops, shiny Hershey miniature chocolates, blue and yellow sourballs, tangy chewy Airheads, Tootsie rolls. When you went for a math session with Mr. Spencer, it was yours. By the time we would see my mom pull up in the van on the little video monitor of the driveway, my jaw was sore from chewing and the top layer of my tongue was burnt off from all the sour candy.

But I liked Mr. Spencer too-not just his candy. His squinty blue eyes would water with pleasure when I got an SAT practice problem right, and I would laugh. We had such fun. I was witty and smart in front of him each Thursday from 3:30-4:30. Mr. Spencer would cross and recross his veiny old legs with little wisps of gray hair growing on them, and I would smile and write formulas on the dry-erase board like a precocious pageant contestant. Mr. Spencer never forgot. When he asked about Student Council, he knew the person filling every position, knew that Mark Jackson's selection for the homecoming dance DJ had been a disaster. He knew the long-standing couples, kept up with the break-ups. I stopped noticing his nose hairs and his pink moles because he paid such good attention.

When all the gossip pleased Mr. Spencer, his eyes would go even filmier, and he would shake his shriveled old legs with a certain nervous energy. Sometimes I felt Mr. Spencer got too distracted, as if life was one big coming-of-age movie that played over and over again but Mr. Spencer kept coming in way too late, so the best he could do was focus on the closing credits. After awhile, I would casually turn the conversation back to math. As my pen squeaked across the board, I'd see his old legs quieting down to a calmer bounce, and I felt a strange pity for him, like he might want a few more friends too.

Mr. Spencer was happy though, I'm sure. He'd never been married, but he lived with his sister. She seemed nice in an apron-wearing-and-pie-baking sort of way. I imagined that when you are old, it must be happy to live in a little house in a little town, just you and your old sister, and at night you could watch Lawrence Welk and eat cake and ice cream. Mr. Spencer lived for young people, too. He truly cared when his former students or tutees got into good colleges. He taught Sunday School. He'd won teaching awards. He really put in the extra effort, as my Mom said. Some of the guys that he'd really bonded with had gone on a fishing trip with him. There were pictures on the wall of the fish they'd caught and of all his other tutees, smiling like stunned bears with a big Mickey Mouse head over their shoulders. It was looking at his wall of pictures one day that I noticed the picture of Jimmy Denton.

Now I knew that Jimmy Denton was having problems in math. Sandrine kept me updated on this information.

"Uhhh," she would sigh, "If Jimmy doesn't start doing better in math, they're going to kick him off the soccer team." Boys like that, she explained, with muscley legs and all that curly leg hair, really shouldn't be bothered with math problem sets. They were destined for the soccer field and to be lovers of girls like her.

Jimmy was older, though, and I'd never seen him speak to anyone, certainly never to Sandrine. He was the type who arrived at the Big Bash three hours late without saying a word to anyone and slipped into a corner to start drinking all the beer. Sandrine swears, though, that one time when she went to a party with a lot of Senior guys and kissed one of them, Jimmy looked really jealous, and they even talked a little bit.

So I came to realize when Mom dropped me off early one Thursday that, not only did he go to Mr. Spencer, but Jimmy Denton also had the tutoring spot just before me. There I was waiting outside, picking grass with my toes and inspecting the ankle hairs my pink Daisy Gillette razor had missed, when I heard laughter from inside Mr. Spencer's screen door. Jimmy Denton! Before that moment, hearing Jimmy's deep voice intermingled with Mr. Spencer's kind, creaky

one, I'd assumed Jimmy could only communicate in grunts. Now he and Mr. Spencer were talking rapidly to one another and laughing.

I saw Jimmy Denton walk to the screen door and Mr. Spencer slap him good naturedly on the back. Jimmy smiled, slapped Mr. Spencer a high-five, and began walking through the grass around to his car. I was frozen on the ground, watching his torn-up running shoes as they approached. The running shoes stopped, and from where I was sprawled in the grass, I squinted up into the October sun. Jimmy Denton smiled at me: A big, sticky-faced, chewed-up Blow-Pop and Tootsie Roll smile.

I never told Sandrine, but I began to look forward to Thursdays. As I waited, I would listen to Jimmy and Mr. Spencer, all their laughter and bantering over the occasional math problem. I couldn't help but weave plots as I waited-how one day Jimmy would run out, grab my hand, and we would be off in his beat-up station wagon past the mountains past old gas stations and road weeds. We'd drive through all the sunny highways across the United States-and just so Mr. Spencer wouldn't be lonely, we'd take him too. We'd all be laughing with the windows down, Mr. Spencer sweetly in the back, easing conversation along and holding a big container of candy in his lap, Jimmy and me holding hands in the front. Me and Jimmy would trade Blow-Pops, and Mr. Spencer would make us both feel charming.

I may have been dreaming this on the last day I went to Mr. Spencer's, dreaming of how the wind would blow back my long hair and how I'd have on my mom's old Jackie O. sunglasses, how Jimmy and Mr. Spencer and I would sing really loud to the radio, even when the reception crackled...

And I heard something crash inside. It sounded like Mr. Spencer's dry erase board toppling over. Instead of laughter, I heard Mr. Spencer talking quickly like a frightened man pleading to keep his wallet. Something else fell, and Mr. Spencer was talking louder and faster. I couldn't hear what he was saying, so I walked closer. That's when Jimmy Denton started yelling.

"What the hell are you thinking, you twisted old man? What the hell!" There was no mistaking his voice through the screen door. A cloud passed cinematically over the sun, and Mr. Spencer began to vanish from the Route 66 station wagon in my mind.

Now I could hear Mr. Spencer too. The two of them had moved outside and were standing in the doorway.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, I think you've misinterpreted. I didn't mean that, you have to understand. I would never think that you--"

"Shut up, you miserable old bastard! Shut up!" Jimmy was clutching his ears as if he'd rather stick forks in them than hear Mr. Spencer's words. Mr.

Spencer looked like he was about to have a heart attack, and Jimmy, sweet Jimmy, the tough soccer star, looked like he was about to cry.

God knows what made me creep towards them. Maybe I would explain my station wagon fantasy. Maybe Jimmy and Mr. Spencer would suddenly laugh and say "Oh, we see!" Maybe each crying on one of my shoulders, they would make up, and then we'd be off..

When I came close, Jimmy's voice was a low hiss, "You are a miserable, perverted old man, and I want you to tell me that's what you are," Jimmy paused and Mr. Spencer shook with a low sob, "I want you to say, 'I am a miserable, miserable old fuck.'"

Jimmy grabbed Mr. Spencer by his feeble shoulder, and I gasped. I would never have dreamed of touching Mr. Spencer, just as I wouldn't dream of touching Mom's china. I'd never thought Jimmy's voice could sound so wickedly vindictive, and the f-word; it hurt my stomach.

"Jimmy," I said, but my voice came out like a whisper. Mr. Spencer saw me for the first time, and the most horrible sort of relief passed fleetingly over his eyes. I cleared my throat, "Jimmy, I don't think you should..."

"You don't think I should what?" Jimmy snarled, turning and seeing me for the first time.

Jimmy, he teaches Sunday School, I wanted to say, he eats ice cream and watches Lawrence Welk with a Mickey Mouse doll on his lap. He, of all people, was harmless as eggshell. My heart was beating so fast that I forgot to mark that this was the first time we'd ever spoken. I looked to Mr. Spencer for succor, but his eyes, big and blurry behind his thick glasses stared blankly, and his face was an unnatural purple. His orange mouth opened helplessly like an old carp.

Jimmy released Mr. Spencer with a shove.

"You disgusting old man," he whispered it slowly and backed away from the doorframe and closer to where I stood.

Then, just as I was about to exhale in relief, Jimmy turned to me and dug his hot fingers into the bones of my shoulders. His eyes were burning, and he was leaning so closely towards me that little flecks of his sweat fell coldly onto my face. He yanked me towards him, those fingers burrowing like hot lead worms through my skin. My eyes watered in pain, but I was too surprised to say anything, could only breathe shallowly the air that smelled like Jimmy's breath and cherry Airheads.

And then Jimmy was kissing me, or his mouth was on mine and our teeth were clacking. I felt the stubble on his chin rubbing my own chin raw, rubbing the sore little pimples around my mouth and uncapping them. (Real stubble, I thought, I should tell Sandrine) and then his tongue came with the force of a

hand in a rough gardening glove. I was miserable, and just as suddenly, Jimmy flung me away as if in disgust.

Mr. Spencer let out a moan, a deep, deep moan like he'd taken a soccer ball hard in the groin and stumbled weakly inside.

I sank to the grass right there by the door. I figured it would be best to just look at the ground even though I knew Jimmy was standing there. I thought maybe if I'd been friendlier, maybe if I'd been Sandrine, I would have told him to sit and explain to me what was wrong. I didn't, though. I just studied the ground. I could hear the sounds of Mr. Spencer feebly putting back up the dry erase board. Jimmy sat down.

"You're name's Janice, right?"

I kept my eyes on the ground and nodded.

"Look up," he said, so I looked at him.

"Yeah, Janice." He paused, pulling a bit of peeling rubber tread off his shoe.

"You're not very pretty." He said it just like that, like a fact or a chemical equation. My feelings weren't even hurt. "No...but I think you're alright." He stood up, looking tired and ready to leave.

"Janice," he said, looking away and concentrating on each word, "Mr. Spencer is a sad man.

"I know," I told him.

"Good. I was hoping you'd understand."

"I do," I said, and he turned to leave.

I wanted to yell, "Thanks for kissing me!" but I didn't. Instead, I watched him leave. He put his hand up to wave, but didn't turn around.

When my mom finally came to pick me up, I was sitting on the floor in Mr. Spencer's basement eating candy. Mr. Spencer had gone upstairs and never come back down, so I'd just gone inside and started picking up the candy that had spilled to the floor. Then I'd just started eating it. Eating it and eating it until, forty-five minutes later, it turned 4:30.

"Janice, what in the world is going on here? Where is Mr. Spencer? What's going--" My mom sputtered in confusion as I wiped the sticky off my mouth. Instinct kicked in, and she jerked my shoulders back and yanked me off the Mickey Mouse carpet in Mr. Spencer's basement.

My stomach hurt that night. I sat in my room clutching my gut thinking about the Jimmy Denton kiss as Tootsie Rolls rumbled through my intestines like sputtering racecars. I half-expected my hair to suddenly grow long and wavy and my breasts to erupt like big red tomatoes after such a kiss from a boy with real stubble and curly leg hair.

Mom was on the phone a lot that night, and I could hear her talking up to fever pitch. Sandrine called me and asked, did I know? Had I heard? How Mr. Spencer was helping Jimmy Denton to cheat on his math? How Jimmy Denton had quit the soccer team? How Mr. Spencer was a strange man who had tendencies her mother wouldn't talk about but had always suspected? No, I hadn't heard.

Instead, I'd found my accelerated book and started to work on the trigonometry section. It seemed to be coming along pretty well.

A Tribute to a Father

Kori Sauser, *Keck School of Medicine of the University of Southern California*

He looks tired. He looks gray. He looks lifeless.

Tears silently stream down my face and I see him strong, alive, vivacious. Standing on the third base line motioning me on -to run through from 2nd to 3rd to home plate. He rushes to meet me, to celebrate with me as I cross the plate and score the winning run for the Wildcats. We high five, we cheer, and we hug. That's my Daddy. That's the dear soul I want to remember.

People stream in and out of the hospital room and it teems with activity. Yet somehow, without his warmth, without his personality to fill the room, it feels empty and cold. I hear the bustle of the hospital around me, and I know that hundreds of people in this building are working and breathing and living their lives. And yet I sit here, in this austere building, and I am in another world. A world of only Dad, me, and nothing else.

I watch him. His emaciated chest slowly rises and falls, but does he hear me? Does he know that I am here beside him?

"Dad?" I ask tentatively, my voice barely audible. I try again: "Dad? I was thinking just now. About Lake Geneva. About our boat rides, and the Beach Boys, and water skiing... Dad? Those were great times Daddy. I wore my hair in pig-tails, 'cause that's the way you like it. I mean that's the way you liked it. Oh Daddy..." I gasp for air, where is it? Why can't I breathe? Help me Lord. I can't do this. I can't let go of him. I can't God. I can't.

We're in a car together and Abba is playing on the radio. I'm breathing again; we're singing: "Chickadee both you and I knooooow..." I look up at him full of adoration, and he looks away from the road, catches my eye, and winks... I smile and lose myself in a sea of memories.

We're walking off the tennis court and his arm is around me. "6-4, 4-6, 7-5," I tease, "I like the ring of that score!"

"You know, next time I don't think I'll let you off so easily," he says with a smile.

"Very funny, Daddy-o!" I reply, elbowing him in the ribs.

I'm sitting on the golf cart watching as he lines up his shot. "Pumpkin bring me my 7 iron, would you?" he asks. I scurry over with his club and watch as he concentrates on the ball, sticking his tongue out the side of his mouth like he always does when he's focusing hard.

He's fiddling with a utility knife and two plastic plates and I am constructing the axels and body of my machine. "What would you do without your dear old dad?" he asks, looking up with a grin on his face.

"Well I'd be failing physics, for one!" I reply.

O Lord God. Heavenly Father. What will I do without him? He seems so far away but here he is right in front of me. Help me Lord. Help me

to let go; to say good-bye; to remember him the way that he was. I want to remember him not as this unconscious man in front of me, but as the ebullient spirit that he was. As the father who didn't let me pass him in the hallway without giving him a hug. As the man who cheered me on in sports and in life. As the man who lived his life for me, for my sisters, for my mom.

He was a wonderful spirit, a man of You, Lord. He lived his life to the fullest and glorified You in all he did. Now, as he is ready to pass 2nd base, 3rd base, and run home, I am the one standing at 3rd, motioning him on and cheering as he crosses home plate, crosses into the arms of our Lord and Savior.

Living Canvas

Nathan Schlicher, *University of Washington School of Medicine*

Saturday, 1:30 am. Damn.

I had just left my patient's room and was sitting down to do my admit note. 1:30 am on a Saturday, what the hell was I doing sitting in a hospital? I figured if I worked hard I could get to sleep in an hour and get a few hours rest before the new day. When you are on call that is all you can hope for, a quick rest in between two long days. I had planned out my night, nothing could stop me now. Then it happened.

"Code 199, Code 199, Central Hospital, Ground Floor. Code 199, Ground Floor." The speaker overhead blared. It was a snap response, I grabbed my white coat off the wall, threw my stethoscope around my neck, and was on my way before I even knew where to go. I was running, four flights down and another 100 feet to go...

I burst into the cath lab, a high tech abode where thin wires through blood vessels are used to stent open the heart, stop bleeding aneurysms in the brain, and save lives. There she was, lying on the bed, stiff as a board, people moving around, it was all a blur. I wanted to get in there though, here it was, my chance to do my part, to save a life. It was the opportunity we all had waited for as medical students, the chance to make a difference. I stripped off my white coat, put on gloves, and waited for my opening.

Then the nurse yelled out, "Stool! I need a stool to stand on." She was reaching to do CPR on the cath table and was struggling. I snapped into action, grabbed the stool and threw it on the floor. "Here," I said authoritatively as I slid it under her feet next to the patient. I was in the code now, standing at the patient's waist. Finally, I was part of the team.

The patient, whom I had never met prior to that moment, was in Ventricular Tachycardia, a serious heart arrhythmia that leaves the body and brain without oxygen. If nothing is done for them, they will die shortly. Thankfully in these stressful moments there is a standard algorithm used that has been tried and tested. But, even the best algorithms cannot save every patient.

I stood at the patient's waist, watching the nurse pound on her chest rhythmically, up and down, up and down. It was surreal. I still had not seen the patient's face, knowing only that she was a woman by the small breasts between which the nurse was performing CPR. She was another part of the algorithm, the canvas upon which we would work our art.

"Ready to shock." The nurse yelled out. "Hold CPR. Everyone clear. Shock." The room went quiet when everyone moved away from the patient. It was as if the Red Sea was parting in the room, the patient lay on the gurney, surrounded by a distant ring of people. Without even a sound, an electric shock was delivered. She jerked a little, falling still again. We all hope this would be the time

it worked. Thirty pairs of eyes now stared at a little monitor in the corner of the room. No rhythm. Damn. Without even missing a beat the nurse went back to CPR and the sea fell in again on the patient.

"Amio drip ready." Another nurse called out. I reached out and grabbed the line, here was my chance, a little piece of tubing not even as wide as a pencil could be the difference I thought. I saw the femoral catheter, but it was sterile and I most definitely was not. I hesitantly reached out and looked at the cardiologist. He nodded, "go ahead." I had learned long ago how to twist the tubing in, but this was new, it had two ports. I placed it in one and twisted the selector. The problem was, I did not know which way to turn the selector to allow the drip to work. Hubris caught hold of me for a second, here I was finally in a code and I wanted to show that I could be a help, not a liability.

Thankfully, somewhere deep inside my Hippocratic Oath came to me in that moment, "first do no harm." In reality it was probably a large part of me that knew I could never forgive myself if my ego had allowed a patient to die. Hippocrates may have been there, but guilt is an equally powerful motivator. I turned back to the nurse from whom I had taken the line and told her I did not know which way to turn the selector. She came to the bedside and checked it, I had luckily chosen the right direction. The nurse went back to preparing the medications and I stepped back to the bedside. I was still part of the team.

This ballet of "shock and drug," as I have come to know it since, danced on. We shocked, no rhythm, we gave drugs, no rhythm. After eight rounds of shock and drugs, a sinus rhythm appeared, but it was slow, 40 beats a minute. We stopped everything and held our collective breath, did we have her back? Was she one of the lucky few that would survive a code? Too often people think that we can save everyone, that all codes mean a miracle. Maybe she would be one of the miracles. She slowly started to beat faster, fifty, sixty, seventy. She was back, at least for now.

The room started to empty slowly, it was over. Our transient job was done, she was back. Now the cardiologists could work their magic to save her heart and life. As people stepped back from the table, I finally caught the first glimpse of her face. She was intubated (where a tube is placed down your throat to breath for you) with her head turned to the side. Gray hair wrapped her wrinkled face. But the gray was not that of an eighty year old, but a woman not even out of her sixties. She was still a child of life with decades left to live. In retrospect, the cardiologist working to save her life looked older than she did. How was this fair that this thin healthy woman would die before him?

I walked over to the chair on which I had placed my belongings, picked up my white coat, and wrapped the stethoscope around my neck again. It seemed like it had been only a few moments since I had taken them off. My resident would later inform me that it had been 15 minutes worth of work. We had flogged her body with CPR, breaking ribs, bruising internal organs, and shocking

her for a long time. Even with the best of CPR and intention, she had been down long enough that we all knew she would likely never wake up. Her body may very well survive for a time, but her mind and soul were likely lost forever. We had accomplished nothing, only prolonging the inevitable.

Our team left the room and in the distance I heard the technologist call out again, "She is having another run." The cardiologist pulled the catheter back and she recovered. I would later hear that they tried for another hour to stent open her blocked artery. Unfortunately she remained unstable and they had to stop trying. I never heard what happened next, but I did not need to ask. With the main artery to her heart blocked, she would likely not live out the week.

This was the first code that I was truly involved in and the first time I never knew the patient's name. In past codes I had helped get charts, reviewed records, or done CPR, but always knew the patient's name. This time it was just a body on a table, a cadaver fighting to come back to life. I realized as I walked back to our room to start again my admit note that she would never know that I had been there. She would never see my face although I had seen her laying naked on a table, seen her in one of her most intimate and exposed times.

Personally, I would never be able to tell her about how she had affected my life. She was the first patient I had helped care for who I knew would not survive the week. It would be her image on the table that will forever be in my mind as the first true code in which I helped, albeit minimal. Too often as medical students we are excited about the next procedure we get to do or the new experience waiting around the corner. She reminded me that with each new procedure, there was a patient that would be the experiment. There would be a grandmother and mother who would teach us how to save lives even when her own was lost.

Every patient teaches me something about medicine, but also about myself. It is their gift to each of us, the gift of knowledge and experience. I may never learn her name or her ultimate fate, but through the years her story will remain with me.

The Preacher with the Golden Eyes

Joanna Pearson, *Johns Hopkins School of Medicine*

Lola threatened to stop coming when she saw the dogs. There were plenty of other houses, after all. She could make her living without this one. But the mother had pleaded with her, cajoled, kneaded her thin fingers, bumpy with rings, in a frantic display of domestic worry. What would she do without her?—what would they do without her? She'd been coming there so long, she was practically one of them. No one else would remember to wipe down the forgotten cabinet knobs and the top of the refrigerator like Lola did. Plus, the mother had promised, the new puppies were harmless. Still, Lola didn't trust them, didn't trust the way they stared at her with their yellow eyes.

The oldest daughter, Gretchen, would see to it, then, the mother promised, that the pups were put outside whenever Lola came, then. That would work, wouldn't it? And besides, they really were such sweet-tempered dogs, those chocolate labs. Lola really wouldn't abandon them, would she?, not now that she'd been coming weekly since their oldest, Gretchen, was three: Lola, her same yellow brown car with a vanity plate that read "Jesus," the same gray sweat pants, the same Huskey family reunion t-shirts. For as long as they'd known her, Lola had always had wet black curls touched with gray and smelling of coconuts. She'd always had a pair of men's glasses and a moustache that she left untouched, perhaps, Gretchen had suggested meanly one time, because God would think it was vanity on her part to remove it.

Lola had relented, nodding defeatedly at the mother's rapid-fire pleas. She would stay, even with her terror of all dogs. Picking up the dishrag in her chapped, dark hands, she simply turned and started scrubbing right where she'd left off. Her hands were her livelihood; they always had been. Even as a girl helping in her mama's restaurant, she'd always been one who could get by with her own two hands easily enough. Even now, with the restaurant long closed, she still got by. She baked cakes on order for the other members of the Ebenezer Baptist Church sometimes. Her sour cream poundcakes were famous at the Wednesday night suppers, but she hadn't been able to eat a piece herself in years. Mainly, though, she cleaned the white people's houses.

It was steady work, although her back was stiffening with age. She liked how big the houses were, how the women were friendly and conspiratorial, how the children had grown so accustomed to her presence that they ran past like she was a ghost. Rubbing furniture polish on dining room tables, she overheard the spats between mother and teenage daughter, the screaming fits of blond-haired children home from soccer practice, the irate husbands frazzled by white-collar workdays, but even this was not embarrassing. The well-dressed mothers always protested and feigned embarrassment over the imaginary disarray the family had created since Lola's last visit, but the houses were never really dirty. Housekeeping

was more a ceremonious flurry of hands and spray bottles, a steady, unnoticed footshuffling.

She no longer lived in a house herself but in a small apartment near the county library. She had abandoned her mother's house years ago, but it was still there. The yard was littered with shopping bags from the K-Mart and pizza boxes from Little Ceasar's. It was too close to the highway, and she suspected it was a crackhouse now. The high school football star had been shot just two doors down. The neighborhood was nothing but a lot of young girls smacking grape bubble gum with babies slung on their hips, Lola thought. Somewhere along the way the men all disappeared.

On Fridays, the front door would open with a rustling of plastic bags as she entered. She'd plod through the entranceway and into their kitchen, placing her lunch on the counter.

"How are you doing, Lola?"

"Everyday's a good day, praise the Lord."

Lola liked Gretchen if only because she asked such questions with a certain level of consistency- unless she was in a hurry to get somewhere, running through the hallway, her blonde ponytail flipping madly behind her, shouting at her mother the time she needed to be picked up. Usually, though, she said hello, and she was the one who always put the dogs safely in the back. This reliance on Gretchen made Lola loyal.

"There are two things black people don't like, at least this black person, and that's dogs and cold weather," she said this Friday, half-chuckling to Gretchen and shaking her heavy face. "And specially those dogs, but any animal comin' near give me bad blood pressure."

Gretchen laughed, perhaps, Lola considered, in embarrassment at her, an unsteady old woman who came to clean their house, some throwback from a different age, a benign, bumbling mammy-figure. She seemed to make Gretchen awkward. Gretchen was a girl who had secretly kissed a boy who was black at the state summer program for students gifted in science and mathematics, but Lola, of course, didn't know this. Marcus, the boy, had been one of the few black students there, but his father, whom Gretchen had met the last day, was a manicured physician who drove a Benz. So in the end, it was uncertain in her adolescent mind whether he counted or not.

"They're sweet, Lola, I promise you. They're scared of their own shadows."

"Maybe so, but the only dogs I've ever seen with eyes that color were wolves."

It would have been no use to explain that the dogs were perfectly normal, playful Labradors, sprayed and cleaned and checked. Kennel certified labs with rich, milk-chocolatey coats and yellow-gold eyes, not a drop of wolf, mutt, or mixed blood flowing through their lithe bodies. Similarly, it would have been

no use to explain to Lola that they were in a safe neighborhood. Each day, Lola first set about locking the doors. She would not clean a house with the doors unlocked even though they told her she didn't need to do that, not in this neighborhood. It was fine, they assured her. Lola would nod as if agreeing with them, but the moment they went away, she opted for caution.

Lola heard Gretchen in the kitchen as she fiddled with the deadbolt in the laundry room. She heard the girl fixing herself toast, spreading peanut butter on the warm, crisped bread. By the time Lola returned to the kitchen, broom and dustpan in hand, she saw nothing but Gretchen's crumbs on the white countertop. The sticky knife, smeared with brown, was lying on the counter. Pushing the broom slowly across the floor, Lola began singing softly one of the songs her mama had taught her, filling the now-empty main floor of the house with her lonesome, deep voice and the old-time hope of Jesus.

Lola's mother hadn't held with snakes and babbling in foreign tongues and all that sort of nonsense, but there'd been a preacher in town, and he'd had golden eyes. Golden eyes, she'd told Lola many times afterwards, there's nothin' like a pair of golden eyes to make you believe what a somebody's sayin'. His eyes had blazed like a fire, her mother said. This preacher could walk into a room and fix everyone in it with those eyes. People wouldn't so much as scratch an elbow or clear their throats when this preacher's voice broke over the crowd. The old people said he had a way with animals too, so that the birds fell silent when he preached the good news, and family dogs wouldn't even bark when he came calling. He just had a way of lookin' through to your soul, her mama said, like he was hungry to save it. The whole time he was in town, Lola's mother swore, babies didn't cry, men didn't swear, cats didn't leap up onto cuttingboards, and stray dogs didn't howl at night.

When Lola's mother talked about this preacher, who'd stayed in town only a few nights, her own tired brown eyes got misty in a way they never did when she talked about Lola's father. After the preacher had left, Lola's mama had poured all her love on Jesus instead. As a child, Lola had expected him to walk in some night for dinner-not the preacher, but Jesus.

Lola's mother ran a restaurant behind what was now the K-Mart. It was called Yummyums even though the restaurant was just part of their house. Lola filled up the translucent plastic cups with sweet tea and wiped the waxy plastic tablecloth in the kitchen. Only a few people could sit to eat at a time, so those waiting would lean against the screen door, contemplating slow cigarettes or posing stork-like with one bent knee against the sides of their house. They'd shout out to her, "Lola, girl, what's the veggies today?" And she'd tell them if it was cream corn or molasses green beans or turnip greens or kale. If they had to wait a very long time outside, she'd bring them a biscuit or a square of sweet yellow cornbread on a plate, and they'd pat her with their big hands that smelt of red clay and cocoa butter. The customers, working men from the neighborhood, were

submissive and respectful at the restaurant because they knew better. They all said silent blessings before they lifted a fork. Her mama would nod approvingly at this, all the while leaning over the stove with biscuit grease on her hands and sweat darkening her neckline and underarms. She hummed a lot or said Psalms, and she told Lola, "The good shepherd got food for your soul, but if you wanna put food on the table, you gotta set to workin'."

After Lola's fifth birthday, her mother first told her the preacher's warning. The preacher had the gift of second sight. And even though she didn't hold with those things, when the preacher started singing, Lola's mama couldn't help but listen. It was after church meeting, well past midnight, and the two of them, the preacher and Lola's mama, were sitting at the table with the waxy tablecloth in the kitchen. Their cups of black coffee sat untouched, and the preacher had his head tilted back so that Lola's mama thought he'd fall backwards out of his chair. The sounds coming from his throat sounded like the song of another world, something she'd never heard, and although she couldn't pick out a melody, she found herself humming along. Lola, just a baby at the time, was asleep in her mother's bedroom all the while this preacher was doing his singing. He was singing and singing, and then he stopped.

His eyes were looking so far back in his head that Lola's mother couldn't see the gold in them. His hands were absolutely still and pressed palm to palm, like a statue. He let out one slow, mournful howl, a holy noise, and then he whispered, "Nobody better mess with that baby daughter of yours."

Lola's mother rearranged herself anxiously in her seat, listening.

"Nobody better mess with that girl, and she better be careful of herself. Because God's blessed her, he done chose her as one of his own, and something bad'll come to them that interferes with the good Lord's chosen."

Then the preacher had started singing again, this time real softly, just in the back of his throat. It was almost like a growl, her mama said. Lola had heard it so many times that she could almost envision him singing, his collar sweat-stained from the day and unfastened. She could remember the sound of his voice, she thought, although this was impossible, or imagine remembering. And she could see in her head the moment when, almost trance-like, he'd taken her mother's hand and the two of them had sat there rocking and humming until the first gray of morning came in through the kitchen windows.

Her mama told her this story whenever Lola came home frightened with a skinned knee, the story swelling in her eyes of how someone had pushed her and then she'd slapped him. And always her mother would just shake her head, reminding her to reign in her hurt—did she want the Lord's judgement coming down on all the neighborhood children? Being specially blessed by the Lord came with responsibility. It meant sometimes you had to bite your tongue and take the pains this world gave you.

But the gifts of the spirit are unreliable. At the age of nine, Lola had

learned to doubt, ever so slightly, what the preacher had told her mother. It was springtime, and she was walking home from the creek. The air was the perfect mixture of sunshine and coolness from the trees against her legs, which were warm and tired from the running and the digging. As she approached her house, she saw there was a man standing outside. She had never seen him before, this white man in polished shoes with thinning brown hair. His forehead glistened in the new sunlight, and he wore a light brown suit. No white people she'd ever seen came to the restaurant. His hands shook slightly as he drank from a silvery flask, but he looked at Lola and nodded as if he knew her.

"So you must be the little girl, huh?"

Lola looked up at him and nodded. He leaned down to speak to her, and his breath smelt like licorice. His eyes, Lola noticed, had irises the color of yellow amber.

"Well, honey, I had a dream and we were together. We were playin' together, you, me, and your mama. I took you for ice cream cones, and you were holdin' my hand. What do you think a' that?"

She felt incapable of speaking, wary of something in this man's eyes, the recklessness of his speaking, even a sense she should know him.

"She's not here now, your mama. That's a hard woman. A hard woman that won't talk to me no more."

He seemed to swerve at this point, looking nervously for something over his shoulder. For a moment, Lola thought he had lost his ability to focus, his eyes wandering but not seeing.

"I got somethin' to show you though, since she's not around." As he said this, he seemed to reach for something. For a moment, Lola thought he was clumsily seeking some sweet he had stashed in his pocket-maybe the licorice-but then, when she saw, she was silent. It was strange how the two of them just stood there, Lola frozen with curiosity, the man's face drained of expression like that of a sleepwalker.

It was then that Lola's mother had found the two of them. She caught her breath, a sharp gasp, and Lola saw the muscles in her face twitch with anger.

"You weren't nothin' but a wolf in sheep's clothin' all along," her mama whispered. "Nothin' but a low-down, snarlin' wolf."

Her mama's hands were trembling as she swung her arm at him, heaving the full weight of her body against into his chin. He let out a grunt of pain and then stood there, teeth bared at her.

Her mother and the man stared at one another. Lola felt her heart thrumming its way up into her throat. She wondered if the man would swing back, his stained teeth shining there in the sunlight.

But instead he had turned and walked swiftly but jerkily away. Even in her numbness, Lola recalled the strange realization that her mother had been home the whole time, that the man who had been loitering outside had simply lied

to her.

The rest of the afternoon and evening her mother did not hum, and her lips were pressed together so hard that her chin wrinkled up into a prune. But before bed, her mother had pulled her to her lap.

"That man who was hangin' round our place today, you forget about him. I didn't hurt him, not one whisker on his face, but even if I did, it wouldn't 'a been anything but God's will. It's best to forget that one ever turned up here."

Lola didn't answer, instead nestling her head into her mama's soft breast.

"There isn't a good thing any man has to offer, unless it's Jesus."

Lola remained silent for a moment, absorbing the good bacon and biscuit smell that always lingered in her mother's clothes.

"Was Jesus like the preacher with the golden eyes?" She wanted to ask was he like the man from that afternoon, but she did not.

"No," her mother said, "There wasn't a bad part on Jesus's body."

Lola swallowed. "What about my daddy?"

"You never had no daddy. Not on this earth."

That night when Lola tried to bed, all she could do was press her cheek to the cool side of the pillow and shiver, listening as the neighborhood strays bayed and bayed to the new moon.

Perhaps had the phone not rung just then, Gretchen probably would have remembered to tell Lola that she'd put the dogs in the garage rather than taking them to the backyard. Or maybe, had it not been just the person that she'd hoped on the line, she would have thought of it. Or maybe in the back of Gretchen's mind, she realized she had forgotten to tell Lola all along, and all her laughter into the receiver and seeming absorption in the conversation belied this simple fact. Maybe not.

However it happened, though, she did not tell Lola about the dogs. The happy, skittish labs remained in the garage, but Lola didn't know. She heaved herself up to gather the trash bags and take them out through the side door as always and didn't think a thing about it. She walked heavily, bags in both arms, barely managing to open the back door. Lifting the trashcan lids, she smelt the ripeness of rotting food, a daily accumulation of spoiled leftovers. It was a thick smell and distracting, almost so much so that she didn't notice a faint yapping at her heels.

Turning, Lola saw the animal. It was brown with gold-flecked eyes. The tail wagged, and it cocked its head at her, human-like. Lola clutched behind her, feeling for the hard rubber of the trashcan. Then she saw the other one. Like children's toys gone haywire, they scampered towards her, yapping and shaking their ears. She could hear their throaty yapping until the sound of her own heart in her ears drowned it out.

Her head pulsing, she clung to the trashcan behind her for support. She felt like she'd been looking too long towards the sun. The dogs seemed provoked by her ankles, and they jumped around, skipping and nibbling her shoelaces, and

somehow this movement added to Lola's dizziness. It added to the pressure she felt building in her head, behind her eyes, in her chest, through her tight arteries.

It occurred to her that this might be what it is like to be taken in a sort of fit or speaking in tongues. Maybe she would pass out. But they were jumping at her legs, pawing her calves. They would run dizzying circles around her if she were to try and escape.

And then she saw blood.

It started as one drop that plopped onto the floor by her feet. Then she saw a second, like a great red blossom on her white athletic shoe. She grew frantic, shaking her head, praying in quick, extemporaneous bursts, but the blood splatters continued appearing everywhere. She felt a wetness near her belly, looked, and saw a stain. Her sweat pants became flecked with it. She called upon the Lord, remembering her gift. God, God, she whispered, but the sickening certainty grew that the dogs were biting her legs, and they were drawing blood. They were bloodthirsty. If ever there was a time to call upon Him, she would call upon Him now. She thought about the preacher and his words, and she raised her wild eyes to the Lord.

She began to flail, kicking, feeling the soft impact of the puppies at her feet, shaking her arms, throwing her head back, and watching as the blood seemed to spatter everywhere. And with all the power she could summon, she bellowed out to her heavenly Father to come and rescue her from them, to come and smite them down.

Gretchen must have heard the bellowing from the garage some seconds after her mother. The dogs. Lola.

The mother must have heard as well, because she too came running. It was terrible, the noise rising in waves from the garage, and Lola knew that it was coming from her own mouth. She could not stop.

Gretchen and her mother, both of them came tearing through the laundry room and towards the wide open door, the mother falling weakly against the doorframe. The mother's hands were pressed over her eyes, and she was gasping. Lola watched blankly as Gretchen struggled uncertainly with the scene, staring at it like a child with a troublesome jigsaw puzzle, struggling to fit the bits of scene into a full picture: herself, an old black woman, clutching her knees, bellowing by a trashcan. Moaning and mumbling about the river Jordan and God the Father and his burning golden eyes. Blood, her nose was bleeding from the soaring blood pressure. She had somehow managed to fling the bright scarlet everywhere in her frenzy, all over her clothes, blobs and puddles all over

the garage floor. And then, Lola watched as Gretchen's eyes lighted upon the dogs. Their limp bodies, unmoving and peaceful on the floor.

Seasons of the Heart

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It may have been the hottest October day on record in Louisiana, but little Joe didn't care. He was spending time on his grandparents' farm, and for Joe it didn't get much better than that. He seemed to find fascination in every aspect of the farm. And with fascination came questions.

"Why'd it turn brown, Paw Paw?" Joe asked as he tossed one of the first leaves of autumn into the air. The boy of four years old acted as if it were his first autumn.

The old man's face was nearly as puzzled as the boy's, realizing he had never really pondered the question himself, until recently. "Tha's jus' tha way God does it, son. They turn brown an' fall off so new'ens can come on in tha spring."

The brief explanation only made Joe more puzzled as he poked his finger through the expired sycamore leaf. "What's gunna happen to this one?"

"Well, Joe, tha wind'll carry it away. Tha's if ya don't talk it ta pieces first." The old man chuckled. "Ya remember what kinda leaf that is?"

"Yep!" Joe didn't take his eyes off the leaf as he sent it spiraling through the air once more.

"Well, what kind is it? I jus' told ya this mornin', remember?"

"Um...a big dead one."

The old man chuckled again. Joe's dad, Bobby, just glanced at the boy and shook his head, relieved that a day visiting his old folks on the farm meant someone else would be the target of the boy's unending supply of questions for awhile.

"Let 'em alone, Bobby." The old man had sensed his son's frustration at the boy from the time they arrived at the farm early that morning, and decided to set him straight before the boy's curiosity was quenched once again. "He ain't got no more questions than tha rest of us, by God! Maybe he's jus' tha only one ain't 'fraid ta ask 'em out loud."

"God? I ask God lots a stuff," Joe exclaimed, grinding what was left of the brittle leaf between his bare toes. "Well, I used to talk to him a bunch."

"Used to? Why'd ya quit?" The old man posed the question with his brow raised, only imagining what his grandson's reply might be.

"God jus' don't talk back much."

The men's faces beamed even brighter shades of red as they tried not to laugh too hard. They had been working since dawn, except for an hour break at lunch. A good laugh lifted their spirits, but they sure felt it in their sore bodies after chopping and pulling at stubborn underbrush all day.

"Well, boy, I been talkin' ta tha man upstairs fer seventy-some-odd years m'self. I ain't sure if I'll ever get a straight answer either, but I ain't 'bout ta give up a tryin'!"

"Why don't you shut up when I don't answer, son?" Bobby sputtered sarcastically, briefly taking his eyes off a small sapling which he had nearly beat to death. "Now Joe, I told you this mornin', you can't be out here bare-foot. There's too much stuff out here to cut your feet on. Now get up there to the house and tell your mama to find your boots."

Joe had already started to cross the pasture before his father could finish delivering the scolding. He usually didn't have to wear any shoes on the farm, as long as the weather was warm, but today was different. Today the men were clearing the underbrush around the huge magnolia tree.

The tree was centered in the most beautiful spot on the farm. It could be seen in all its glory from the back door of the farmhouse, which was directly across the pasture. The great magnolia stood out, especially this time of year, with its golden-brown and green leaves still intact against the background of sycamores. The sycamore trees were still holding most of their fading brown leaves, but would soon give them up to cold weather, leaving the magnolia to boldly stand alone against a background of naked limbs. In the dead of winter, one could stand at the back door of the farmhouse and look out across the pasture, past the magnolia, and through the thicket to see the river glistening in the distance.

"I caint even remember when life was that simple." The old man had a peculiar, nostalgic look on his face as he pondered his recent conversation with his grandson.

Bobby pretended not to notice his father's newfound ability to express his own thoughts and feelings, and simply responded with a grunt. He was, after all, a bit frustrated with the old man. He finally had a weekend off and had planned to spend it in a relaxing visit to the farm. There usually wasn't much work to be done out there anymore. The old man hadn't raised any crops in years. As Bobby continued swinging the hack-knife at an unyielding nest of vines, his sweat-soaked shirt pulling at his reddened skin, all he could think about was how busy the office was going to be on Monday. Why couldn't he have spent his day on the farm doing what he wanted, sitting alone on the river bank enjoying a few beers while the old man entertained Joe? Why was he not spending the warm October evening in front of the TV, watching football and eating one of his wife's famous chocolate pies while she and his mother talked of life and their men problems? And why was it always so damn hot and muggy in Louisiana, even in late October?

"Why are we wastin' our time out here, old man?"

"Wha'd ya mean, wastin' er time?" Since he had quit farming, the old man acted as if all time were the same. He seemed not to enjoy one minute any more or less than the rest, but he had recently gained an ability to sample and savor each one of them. "I done told ya, son, I jus' wanna get ever'thang cleaned up 'round this ol' tree. It's gotten ta be a mess back 'ere."

Bobby didn't mind working. At least, he didn't mind it if he was working for something he wanted. Farm work, on the other hand, has always been a waste of time for him. The old couple had bought the farm when they were nineteen years old with intentions of having a large family to share the workload. They had no idea that they wouldn't be able to have children. At least they couldn't until they were surprised by Bobby twenty-five years later. By that time, they had grown so accustomed to managing the land on their own, with whatever hired help they could afford, that Bobby never had to work like other kids. Sure, he had his responsibilities, but most of his time was spent getting into trouble. When Bobby came along, his dad got the nickname "old man" from the guys down at the feed store, and it stuck. Bobby first referred to his father as "old man" when he was in elementary school. At first it was cute, but then it became a habit.

"Ya know, most ever'thang on this farm's a mess. I jus' caint keep up with it like I used to, not with yer mama bein' sick n'all." The old man paused from whacking at a palmetto and arched his back in a stretching motion as he let out a sigh. "Sure is good when y'all make it down 'ere ta give us a hand." The conversation was cut short as Joe ran up behind them, nearly tripping over his black rubber boots, "Mommy made cupcakes!"

Bobby's frustration grew even more, knowing that there was certainly some unspoken reason that they were out there baking in the heat. He knew the old man well, and knew that communication has never been one of his greatest abilities. He often thought that the old man enjoyed making a guessing game out of whatever was going through his mind.

"Why'd you ever take the old cypress swing down?" Bobby said in a growling tone as he swatted a mosquito on the back of his neck. "All these damn bushes never would've taken over if that swing was still bein' used back here."

"Son, I took that swang down 'cause nobody used it no more. What'd ya want me t' do, watch it rot? Yer mama done got too sick t' get out across tha pasture, that's why I hung it up in tha shed. If you and Julie still used it like y'all did when y'all was courtin', I woulda left it alone. But nobody used it. Hell, the weeds was done so high 'round it I could barely get it outa there. That's been a few years back, son, ya jus' never noticed 'cause I never asked ya ta help me clean up back 'ere. Hell if ya don't notice nothin' 'round 'ere."

Bobby didn't even think about answering. He couldn't remember the last time his father reprimanded him, and it cut straight to his soul. He had never stopped to realize that his mother has been sick for years now. He recalled how much time she had spent beneath that magnolia when she was younger. Sitting in that swing was her favorite way to do everything, from shelling peas to knitting. Anyone who knew his mother knew that the spot beneath that tree was heaven to her. He wondered why he hadn't noticed that she was no longer able visit her favorite spot by herself. Why hadn't he brought her back there in the truck, to sit in her swing, when he visited the farm? How much effort could that have taken?

Bobby wondered if the old man would let him hang the swing on that old limb again, since they would soon have that spot cleaned up just like it was before.

Joe used the silent moment in the heated conversation to announce, "Ya need to go get a cupcake!" He was still smearing the chocolate icing into his face in an apparent attempt to wipe himself clean. "Maw Maw said they were the best ever."

"That woman knows she ain't 'posed ta have sugar!" The old man knew he wasn't supposed to have it either, but it was ok as long as she didn't see him eat it.

"Uh, I give her some all the time, Paw Paw." Joe thought about how he could always make his Maw Maw smile with a peck on the cheek, as he corrected his grandfather on the issue.

Nearly every time they visited the farm, Julie brought a sugar-free baking mix along. She just never let anyone know that her treats lacked sugar. No one would care, anyway, except for the old folks. They clearly enjoyed the treats more knowing they were forbidden.

"It didn't occur to you to bring us a cupcake?" Bobby asked, thinking he already knew the answer.

"Oh, mommy said to, but I already came back out here without 'em."

The old man's belly shook as he laughed at the response on Bobby's face. Joe always brought the old man back to his own childhood. Bobby just shook his head. The old man, beginning to show exhaustion from the day of hard work, sat down on the ground to get a minute of rest. He used his hand to rake aside a small tuft of dirt as if he were searching for something. "Found that silver dollar yet, Joe?"

"It's a dollar, old man, ONE dollar! You sent me chasin' that thing under this tree when I was a kid. You think he's gunna find it if I couldn't find it years ago?!"

"Son, ya got a crazed squirrel up yer britches er somethin'? Hell if I know what it is, but ya been actin' all day like somethin's done got ya by the nuts! By God!"

"Hee-heee!" Joe squealed, throwing his head back in laughter. "Paw Paw talks to God 'bout nuts! heee!"

The old man smiled, amazed at how fast his grandson's innocence could calm his temper. He knew better than to look at Bobby who was certainly giving him one of those familiar "look what you've done now old man" looks.

"Joe, that silver dollar was frum my first pay, frum tha first crops yer Maw Maw and me raised on this very land when we got married in 1950. I's so proud when I got back from tha co-op that I ran back 'ere and grabbed yer Maw Maw up off tha swang an' gave 'er a big ol' hug 'n kiss. Wouldn't ya know that in all that commotion I lost one a them silver dollars! We only got twenty-five dollars from that whole load a crops, an' that had ta go a long way in them days.

Thangs was quite differ't then."

Joe, who had just finished chopping an earthworm to pieces with a stick, paused to look at his grandfather. "I already know that story, Paw Paw. I'll find it for ya!" He smacked the worm guts twice more and froze, "What's a silvery dollar?"

The old man just grinned. While using his axe handle to raise his feeble body up from the ground, he grunted, "Did yer mama say if she's gunna bring us somethin' ta drink?"

"Maybe when she's finished tendin' to Maw Maw." Joe knew his Maw Maw was sick, but to him it was nothing that a little sugar on the cheek or one of his colorful drawings couldn't take care of. He always made her smile. Lately, Joe was the only person who could make her smile. At times he seemed to be the only person she recognized.

"That wife a yers sure is good ta her. An' I really needed tha break t'day." The old man stepped toward Bobby.

He didn't even reply as he wondered what had happened to his weekend break. Bobby could clearly tell by the change in the old man's tone and the way he took a few steps toward him that he was saying without words, "I forgive you, now here's your chance to redeem yourself from your foul mood. Let's walk up to the house together and get something to drink." But Bobby ignored him.

Knowing that the walk across the pasture for the old man, who was too stubborn to ride in the truck, would mean retiring early for the evening and the two of them would have to finish the work in the morning, Bobby offered, "I'm goin' get somethin' to drink. Want me to bring you anything?"

"How 'bout one a them cupcakes? An' anythang cold. "

"Yeah, me too dad."

"An' better bring some skeeter spray fer this boy," the old man said as he bent over and picked up a small clod of dirt, tossing it atop Joe's head, "Sounds holler!"

Bobby rolled his eyes as he left the two of them behind. Questions began rolling through his head as he stepped out onto the pasture, questions that he pondered often. How could the old man be so playful and lighthearted with Joe when he was never that way with his own son? It amazed him how much the old man had changed since Joe came along. But even to Joe the old man has never said it. As Bobby walked along, dodging the cow patties, he wondered if the old man had ever said it to his own wife, except perhaps on their wedding day. Perhaps he has said it to her recently, since her mind is only here in brief moments. Perhaps Joe had loosened him up enough, perhaps his wife was sick enough, perhaps his old hard heart had softened enough.

He neared the house as the zap, zzzap of the bug light became louder. There was still enough daylight left in the evening to work a little while longer, but Julie had already turned on the bug light. She always spent their visits to the farm

making sure everything was in order. She really had made things easier on his dad these past few months. The old folks loved Julie from the moment they met her. Now that he thought about it, Bobby could not remember the last time he told her how much he appreciates her, how much he loves her.

Once he reached the clothes-line in the back yard, he noticed another sound between the pops of the bug light. Searching for the source, he looked back over his shoulder to see the old man seated once again on the ground with his cap in his hand. Peering between the islands of weeds in the field he had just crossed, Bobby could see that Joe was making circles around the old man, dodging the swats of the old man's cap on his back side. But they were too far away for Bobby to overhear their little game. The sound must be coming from the house. Now he could hear it a bit more clearly as he picked up his pace, rushing toward the sobs. As he threw the screen door open and it slammed shut, his wife let out a wail from the old folks' bedroom that told the whole story. He felt a sudden cringe in his chest. He knew he had to fight it off. He had to be strong. He had to be able to tell the old man and Joe. They would have to have the strength to dig a grave in the morning... "My God, the magnolia! That's why... But how did he...?" The revelation slapped him across the face.

Bobby entered the bedroom to find Julie kneeling on the floor, hunched over the bed. Part of his mother's robe was soaked with Julie's tears.

She heard him enter the room, but could not yet look up at him. "I'm sorry, Bobby. I'm so sorry."

He didn't say a word as he knelt next to his wife and placed his hand on his mother's forehead which was already pale and turning cold, sending his hand away immediately.

"I wanted to come and get you but I just couldn't," she sobbed.

He knew what he should do, right there in that very moment. The thought flashed through his mind. He could see himself turning toward his wife, wrapping both of his hands around the back of her head and turning her eyes toward his, "It's ok, baby. I know she was just like a mother to you. I know how much you loved each other." But the moment was gone as he pushed the thought aside. He just knelt there silently until he reached over and patted his wife on the back of her hand, "We'll make it, Julie. We'll be strong and we'll make it. But right now we just have to take care of things here."

"We have to tell your dad and Joe," She had barely uttered the words when the smack of the screen door split the air.

"Just stay here."

They could already hear the p-thump, p-thump of Joe's little rubber boots on the hard kitchen floor. Bobby thought he would allow Julie time to brace herself before she had to look her son in the eye. Besides, he could handle this better by himself, man to man. He met Joe head-on as the boy was just about to enter the hallway. Grabbing his son and lifting him up, Bobby began to speak...

"Look what Paw Paw gave me." Joe was holding out a bright, shining, new silver coin. "He said keep it."

Bobby toted the boy into the living room and knelt down in front of him, trying to ignore the coin in his face so that he could break the news to his son. "We need to talk about something."

Joe's eyes shifted from the coin to stare through his father, "Me and Paw Paw's been talkin'."

Not knowing how to get the boy to shut up, and not quite knowing yet what he was going to say himself, Bobby gave in, "Talkin' about what?"

The boy's eyes seared into his father's eyes, as if the four year old had something to explain to his father that could never be communicated in words. "He was talkin' 'bout how much he loves me. He loves me and you and mommy."

The lump in Bobby's throat that wasn't there before now would not allow him to speak. He stared back into the boy's eyes, forcing himself to swallow. As if he were speaking to someone who knew much more than a child, Bobby uttered the question, "What else did he say?"

"He said he loves Maw Maw too much to let her go." The child looked down at his own arms, quivering under the hold of his father's suddenly weak, trembling grip.

"Dad," Bobby whispered, pulling himself up off of his knees and forcing his legs to carry him into the kitchen. He could feel his rib cage crushing the life out of him as he ignored every muscle in his body aching, crying for him to breathe. As he neared the doorway, the first cool breeze of autumn streaming through the back screen door stole the breath he had just tried so hard to catch. He could see the wind swirling the brown sycamore leaves over the piles of brush where they had been working. "He's not there" are the words that crossed Bobby's mind as he stood with his pale lips slightly open, not realizing he had said the words audibly.

"I know. He carried Maw Maw down to the river."

Bobby spun around to stare into his son's face, "Wh...What?"

"A big man was waitin' for them." Joe pointed toward the river. Though he had never seen a stranger before on the secluded farm, he had not a hint of concern on his face. "She just kept on laughin' the whole way."

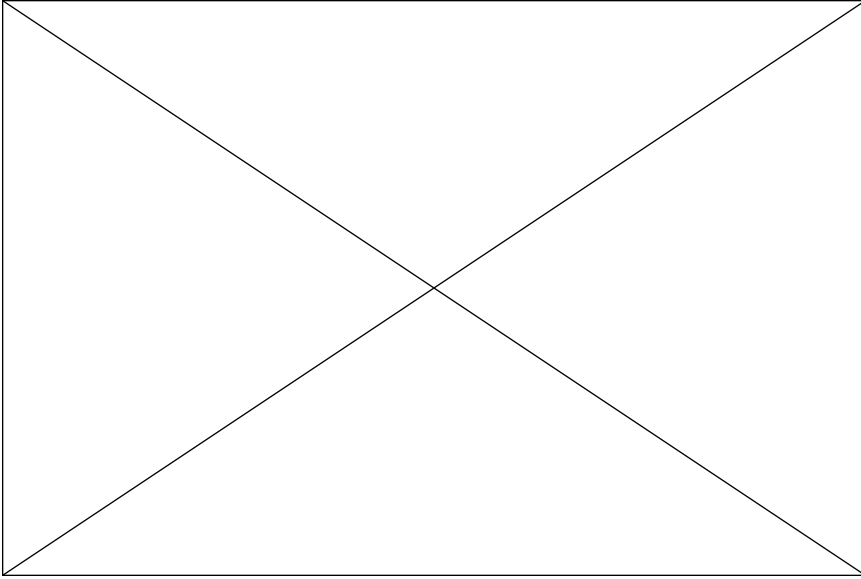
Bobby turned his back to his son. Through his blurred vision he could see the remaining small rays of sun glittering as they passed through the magnolia, its leaves dancing in that new autumn breeze. He stood frozen, his skin tingling under the cool autumn air.

Julie managed to force a small, comforting smile as her son walked into his grandparents' room. She was kneeling beside the bed as Joe walked around her to see his Maw Maw's face. Julie lowered her head in an attempt to choke back her emotions. The metallic glare between Joe's clenched fingers caught Julie's eye as he placed his hand on her arm to support himself, reaching forward on his toes

to bring his lips to his grandmother's cheek atop the tall bed. As charmingly as the boy delivered his sugar to his grandmother, he opened his fist to show his mother the gift he had received. Blinking to clear the tears from her eyes, she peered down at the sparkling silver dollar which displayed boldly the year it was minted, 1950.

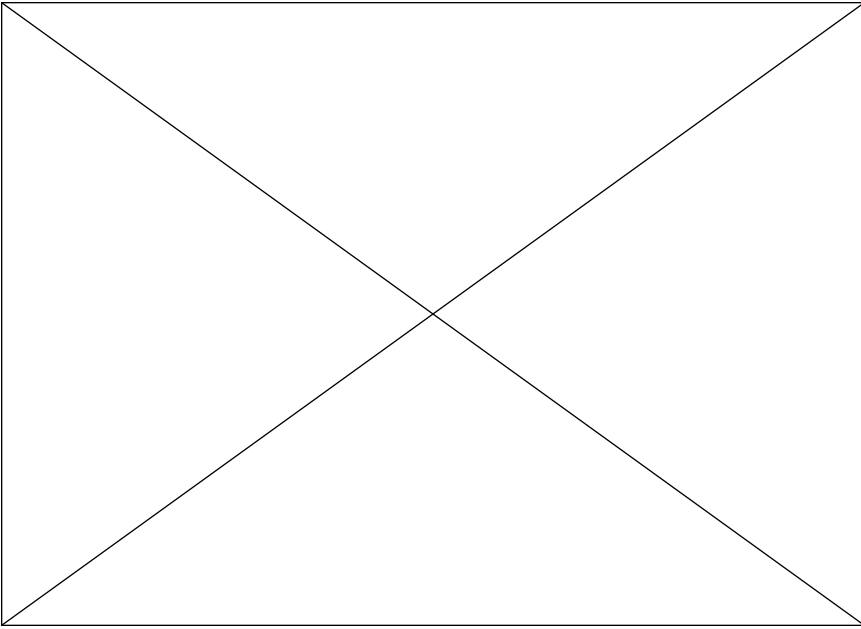
Art and Photography

First Place

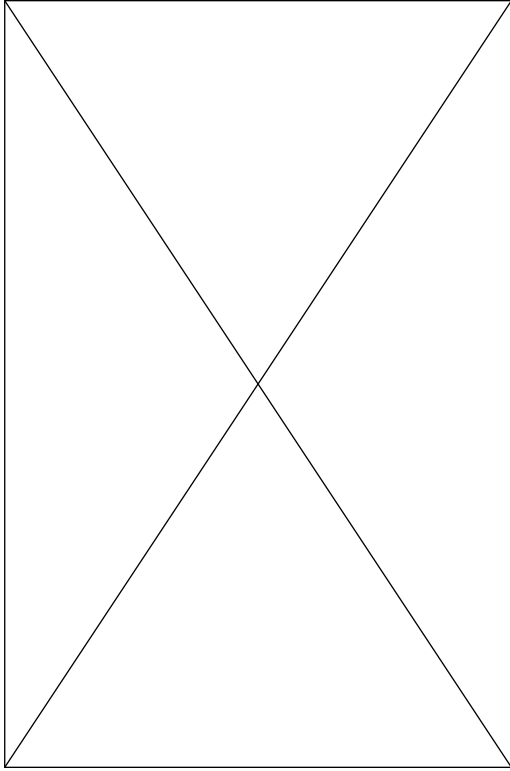


Buddha's Empty Hand, Heidi Haun, *University of South Florida College of Medicine*

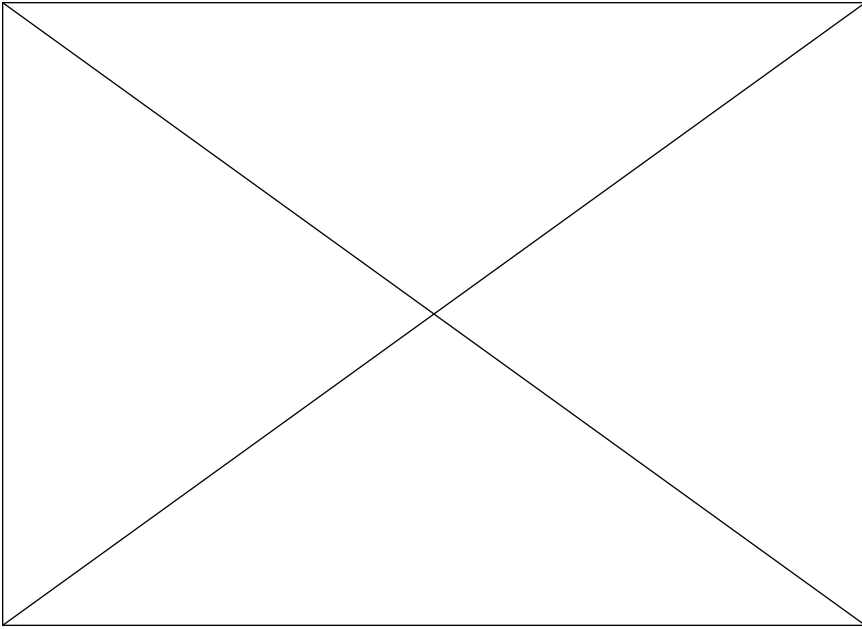
Second Place



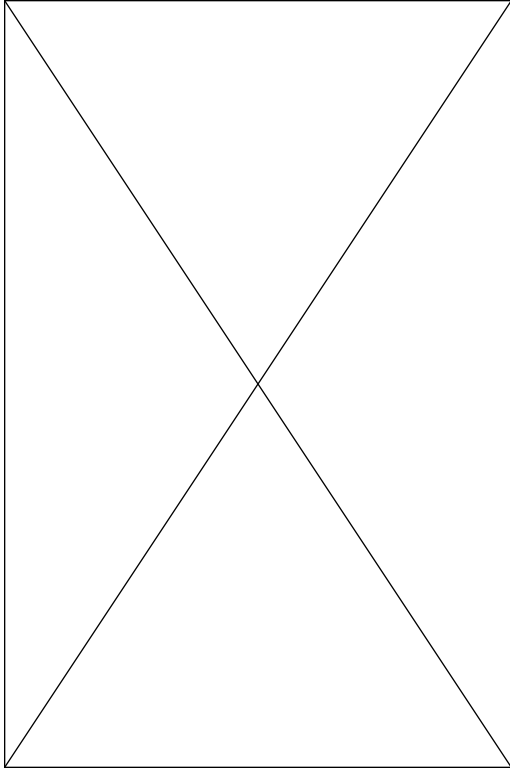
Red Cloak, Michael Mallin, *University of South Carolina School of Medicine*



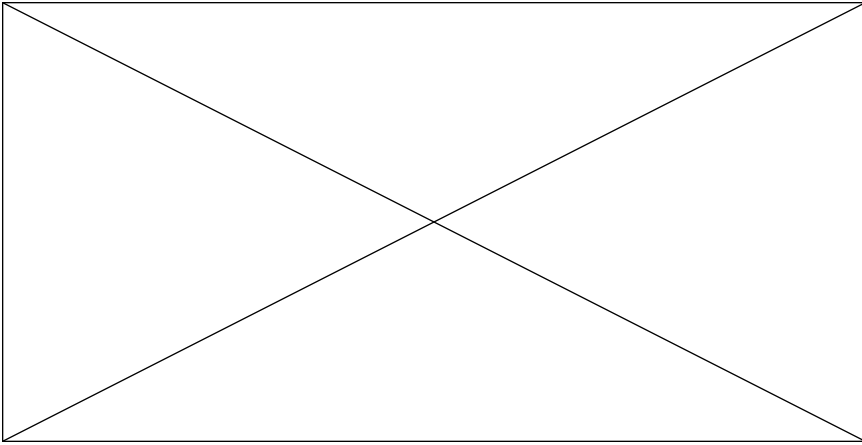
Hope for Tomorrow, Jodi Skiles, *Indiana University School of Medicine*



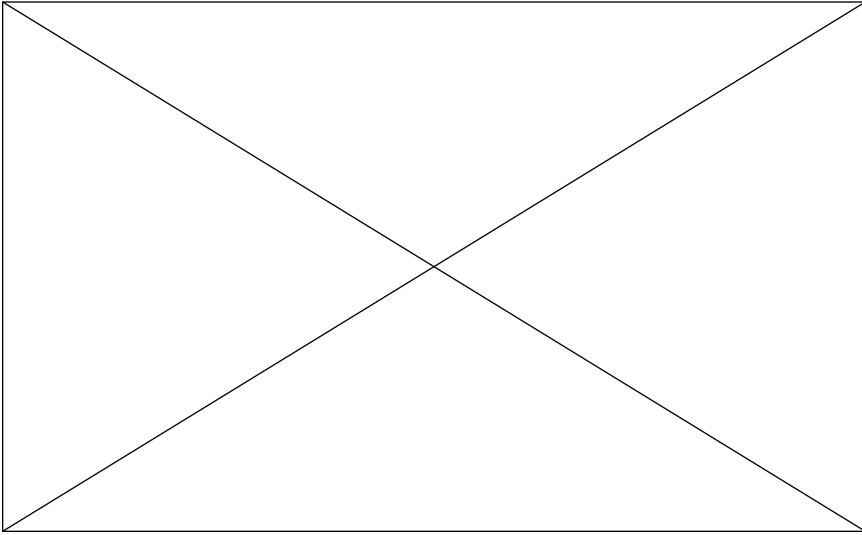
broken, Justin Finch, *University of Minnesota Medical School--Minneapolis*



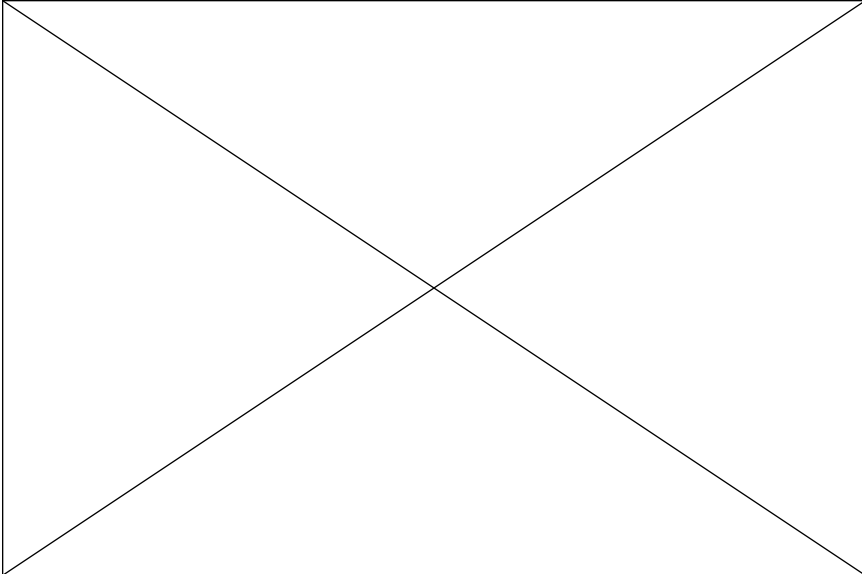
Workload, Jodi Skiles, *Indiana University School of Medicine*



toothbrushes, Justin Finch, *University of Minnesota Medical School--Minneapolis*



renewal, Justin Finch, *University of Minnesota Medical School--Minneapolis*



The Path Less Traveled, Michael Zacchilli, *University of Massachusetts
Medical School*

Personal Statements

First Place

Enlightenment

Jenny Bernstein, *University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine*

Our lecture hall was built auditorium style, an arrangement that not only ensured an adequate view of the blackboard for all students, but one that also bestowed a movie-star quality upon every professor that came before us. At our first anatomy lecture, the spotlight was askew, shining upon not our anatomy professor, but a long metal cart draped with a sheet. The smell of formaldehyde wafted up the rows, evoking nervous smiles and exchanged glances among the first year medical students.

Sylvia stands at the podium, her words echoing through the lecture hall.

*The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see
Them unwrap me hand and foot ---
The big strip tease.
Gentleman, ladies
These are my hands
My knees.
I may be skin and bone,
Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.*

Her face becomes contorted with rage. Sweat and tears glisten on her rouged cheeks. She singles me out with her piercing gaze.

Our first task was to remove the skin from the cadavers' backs. A camcorder recorded the instructor's dissection at the front of the room and projected it upon a large overhead screen so her precise techniques could be observed. 175 pairs of eyes stared, unblinking, as the white sheet was lifted from the cart, exposing the body of a black man, face down.

No, Sylvia is not lecturing from the podium (perhaps she would be if medical school covered 20th century suicidal, self-aggrandizing female poets). Sylvia sits immediately behind me, whispering in my ear.

*There is a charge
For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart ---
It really goes.
And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of blood
Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
So, so, Herr Doktor.
So, Herr Enemy.
I am your opus.
I am your valuable.
She kicks my chair and pulls my hair. "Herr Doktor," she taunts and breaks into fits of
maniacal laughter. I turn around and hiss at her to be quiet. I'm trying to learn.*

The instructor narrated her movements, first making a crisp longitudinal incision along side the spinal cord and then a horizontal incision below the scapulae. She tugged at one of the four corners where the lines intersected and pulled the skin away from the body. To facilitate its removal, she suggested that we make a small hole in the skin, a "button hole," into which we could insert our finger for a firmer grasp. With this grip, she tugged at the skin and sliced away the fascia beneath it, slowly detaching the skin from the body.

Lamp shades. The single piece of information I have retained from ten years of Hebrew school is that the Nazis made lamp shades out of Jews' skin. They were unbelievably economical. Hair taken for wigs. Gold fillings for jewelry. And skin for lamp shades. The skin was stripped from the victims' bodies, sometimes alive, but usually dead, and stretched taut across a wire frame. Black thread held the pieces together around a glowing light bulb, which bathed the room in a soft yellow light. Sometimes a lamp would illuminate a tattoo and cast dark shadows of mysterious figures upon the walls.

After the demonstration, our class was herded to the lab where we met our partners and our cadaver. The list at the front of the room offered that table 21 carried a 76-year-old woman who had died of lung disease. We were instructed to cover her face with gauze before we began. No explanation was offered for this procedure.

Dissection commenced.

Nightmares assault my sleep. I dream that my skin has been cut into ragged squares and sewn together with black thread. With every step I take the thread unravels and the skin slides off my body, exposing my muscles, nerves and organs to an audience of pointing, laughing white coated children playing doctor.

In three months we had dissected her limbs, thorax, abdomen and abdomen. We named every muscle in her forearm, traced the course of her pace-maker, examined the main exocrine duct of her pancreas and isolated the inferior rectal arteries that supplied her anal canal.

We moved onto the perineum. We split her pelvis in half. The electric saw whined loudly as metal sliced through bone. She had no ovaries or cervix and her uterus was badly misshapen.

At the Holocaust museum, I moved steadily and silently from one exhibit to the next until I came to the photograph of the dwarf, positioned against a white wall with black lines delineating height. His body had been cut sagittally to expose his curved vertebral column and grossly shortened limb bones. Below the picture a small placard explained that Nazi doctors performed numerous experiments of this sort on dwarves to understand their anatomy. I stared at that photograph for a long time while those around me moved onto other areas of the museum.

I raised my head from our dissection and looked around me: table after table of students in blue scrubs crowded between the spread legs of dead bodies, wielding scalpels and mutilating genitalia.

I returned my gaze to my table as my lab partners pointed out the bulbospongiosum and corpus cavernosum muscles.

She pulls the sheet from her face and rises from the metal table, wincing as her feet touch the cold floor. She sidles up behind me and whispers in my ear.

No, she lunges at me, scalpel in hand, and violently shakes me. She screams out through her tears, "Herr Doktor!"

But I'm not Herr Doktor.

I'm not Herr Doktor because she didn't walk into that chamber expecting water to pour from the spouts. No, she stripped off her clothes and strutted barefoot into the room. She calmly looked up at the ceiling and waited to be bathed in poison gas.

Herr God, please let that excuse me.

Second Place

Full Moon

Jaime Hope, *Michigan State University College of Human Medicine*

Imagine my surprise to look up from my dining room table to see a 'full moon!' This particular display came from "Charlie's" backside, in protest to being defeated again at a game of cards. Charlie and the other foster kids who lived with my family came from some very tough circumstances and ended up in this foster program because no one else would take them in. The situation necessitated strict rules; they were not allowed to swear in the house, watch TV, or even have shoes (to deter escape), so they found other creative outlets for their frustration. The mooning incident became the first of many I would encounter growing up. Only once did an act of rebellion result in a call to the police...

Growing up in a home that fed and housed three to seven teenaged boys, each and every weekend, clearly shaped my perspective on what I could do to help others. Somewhere during these heartbreaking, trying, worthwhile, and sometimes funny experiences, I realized that I was developing and cementing traits that make me the person I am today and the emergency care I will become tomorrow. These qualities include: coping well in unique situations, developing multiple types of effective communication styles, negotiating and navigating between wants and rules, and working for people who often do not have advocates.

Coping skills. This is an important trait that I bring to your program. I have gained these skills from the unique and diverse opportunities that have placed me outside my comfort zone and into some of the best learning experiences I had never imagined! These experiences include studying in both England and Costa Rica, giving public health lectures throughout the community, being a published poet, volunteering at an alcohol and drug rehabilitation center for troubled teenagers, and even jumping out of an airplane. What I have gained from these and other experiences is that I know I can stay cool under pressure, I am adaptive in unexpected and unfamiliar situations, and I am strong even when I am afraid. I feel that these traits are some of the tools I will need as a physician in order to negotiate the demanding and ever-changing world of patient care, and these skills are particularly applicable in an emergency care setting.

Effective communication skills. This is another quality that I offer as an employee and a physician. I strive to express myself honestly and compassionately in an appropriate way for each situation. My varied life experiences have taught me to communicate dynamically and adaptively. I recognize which situations call for a no-nonsense approach and which situations need more delicate handling. It has been very rewarding to hear feedback from my patients as well as preceptors that they naturally feel at ease with me and that they feel they were heard and understood. Continuing to achieve this is my goal for ideal communication.

Negotiating between wants and rules. What is wanted and what is pos

sible can sometimes be at odds with one another in life and in medicine. I enjoy working with people on both sides of a situation. Although this can be a tricky place to be, I have nurtured my talent for diplomacy. The negotiating and navigational skills I will bring to your program will prove useful in interactions with colleagues and patients alike.

Advocating. I speak for those who are without the resources to speak up for themselves. Growing up in a family of limited means, I have firsthand knowledge of what it means to be without. I was raised in an environment that valued hard work and helping others, even when we were lacking. Because of this, the drive to serve has been instilled deep within me. Having worked as a health advocate, volunteering to tutor, and being a mentor for other future physicians, serving others does not seem like work to me at all. These things are not just a line on my curriculum vitae; they are an intrinsic part of who I am. As a physician, I will be in a powerful role to affect change in the lives of my patients. This is an aspect of medicine that I most look forward to.

My qualities that I have described are not things that can be learned from a book, nor taught in a classroom. Only my unique life experiences could have created and cemented this combination of attributes that I have to offer. I am seeking a program that values these qualities in their physicians and employees. Such a program will help me to become a very knowledgeable and skilled physician. My contribution to the learning environment will be my willingness to work hard to serve my profession with my strong work ethic and great passion for primary care. After completing the core rotations required of a third year medical student, I have solidified what I know are the attributes I have to offer for my future career. I have thoroughly considered my choices and have reached a well-thought-out conclusion regarding my career path. My commitment to my education along with the traits I have described above naturally leads me toward a career in emergency medicine. I am very much looking forward to the challenges and unique experiences that lie ahead, and even catching the next 'full moon'...

Personal Statement

David Winchester, *University of South Florida College of Medicine*

"What do you want to be doing at 3 A.M.?"

This was the question posed to me by my Ob/Gyn attending one late night while we were awaiting final preparations on our next operative patient. My knee-jerk response was "sleeping". She conceded that she felt the same way, but then noted that some day, probably while sleeping, my pager will go off, and someone will want me to get out of bed to do something. What did I want that to be?

She further probed, "Would you rather be going to the operating room to start a procedure or to the emergency department to admit a patient in florid heart failure?" My tentative response was that I would prefer the latter.

Working through my acting internship in Internal Medicine, it became obvious that my answer had been correct. My days started before the sun rose and frequently ended after it set. There were horses: CHF, pneumonia, and renal failure. Then there were zebras: superior mesenteric vein thrombosis, adrenal insufficiency, and hypertriglyceridemic pancreatitis. Without looking at the clock, these days of admitting, rounding, treating, and discharging passed effortlessly. At the end of the day, I always left the hospital with a sense of accomplishment. At the end of the month, I left the hospital with a sense of purpose:

At 3 A.M., I want to be an internist.

For several years now, my belief has been that I possess the desire and the skills needed to be a fine physician. My commitment to a life as a physician can be illustrated, not only by many of the items on my resume, but also by many you will not find there.

My commitment to medicine as a profession is illustrated by my extensive involvement with the American Medical Association. My contribution has meant a lot of weekends on cramped airplanes and reading hundreds of emails, but it provides a great sense of accomplishment. Taking part makes me feel like I am doing something to better the health of America.

My pledge to life-long learning is shown by my desire to read the many journals to which I subscribe. My dedication to community service is demonstrated by my involvement in charitable activities. My enthusiasm for teaching is evident from the time I spend with medical students beginning their clinical experiences. My passion to set a positive example can be illustrated by losing 75 pounds and jogging daily.

As medical school draws to a close, I will leave behind the hours of holding retractors, sitting before a woman delivering her child, and discussing the

detailed diagnosis of schizophreniform disorder. Finished, but not forgotten, I have learned a great deal from each of my clerkships. They have provided me with a strong knowledge and experience base upon which I will build a successful career in Internal Medicine.

Alternate Spring Break

Don Custodio, *Michigan State University College of Human Medicine*

I didn't exist. As they walked by me, they would stare at my worn-down shirt and rags only to look away when I made eye contact with them. Some would glance over for a second only to turn away as I passed by them, with a garbage bag slung over my shoulder. My shins were burning, the bag was getting heavier with each step, and my feet were numb from the cold. But I knew I had to keep going. As the sun fell, I walked through the back alleys in search of a place to stay. I peered through dumpsters and into dark corners. Then I just jumped into a dumpster. The stink was suffocating as I grabbed onto my cardboard bed for the night.

The experience of being "homeless" during a week-long spring break trip to D.C. as a member of Project Volunteer/Students of Service taught me a lot about myself and the world around me. I have attempted to take these lessons with me as I finished my undergraduate years, as I moved into medical school, and now as I apply to the specialty of Emergency Medicine. These lessons are: experience things first-hand, nurture curiosity, display persistence, show compassion for others, and be part of something where I can utilize everyone's talents.

Experience things first hand. It means learning by doing. I was homeless to learn what life can be like when you have almost nothing. I walked across a creaking human bridge, the only path to reach an indigenous tribe, because I wanted to understand beyond the books. I've always found that doing provides me with a better appreciation and comprehension of things. I'm drawn to Emergency Medicine because it allows me to experience things directly. I am eager about being the first in assessing the patient's needs, providing treatment, and recommending the next step. I love the hands-on work coupled with the intellectual reasoning that presents as a daily challenge to the emergency physician.

Nurture curiosity. It means thinking about possibilities. It means taking chances. I take back roads I've never been on when there's a long traffic back-up. I've walked down a cliff to inspect a hawk's nest even when my friends hesitated. I was taught there are no stupid questions. I always try to ask probing questions. During my clinical years, I found myself energized during the initial work up of the patient. I rehearsed in my mind questions to ask after hearing the chief complaint on my walk down to the ED. I find my brain most active and alive during these moments. The opportunity to combine a careful workup with efficiency, accuracy, and compassion excites me about Emergency Medicine. I love the fact that Emergency Medicine encourages curiosity, and allows one to think broadly

yet decisively about the problem it encounters. I am eager to hone these skills as an emergency physician.

Display persistence. This means never giving up. I have the will to keep going. I challenge myself. I have demonstrated mental toughness through academics and college tennis. I never quit. I always believed that when I worked hard, good things could happen. The ED can be hectic at times and I am ready to push through in providing the appropriate disposition for the patient. I want to make sense out of the chaos. The required foundation of knowledge that shapes the field is challenging yet vitalizing. I am ready to learn more about all the essentials that make up a competent emergency physician. The opportunity to provide care to unpredictable medical complaints motivates me not to pause at getting things done. I have found that determination is important to my character and I want to use this trait as an emergency physician.

Show compassion. It means treating everyone with dignity and respect. Every person who comes in the door has his or her own story. People of diverse background will be meeting me mostly for the first time, and I must be non-judgmental in order to provide the care and comfort in their time of need. I have found that my work in a medical mission, free clinic for the underserved, and with Project Volunteer/Students of Service has honed this skill to a competent level. I understand how it feels to be the "underdog." I love that Emergency Medicine breaks social barriers. Any person can walk in and receive treatment. In Emergency Medicine, I will continue to be in the forefront of medicine to make active, compassionate decisions for people from all walks of life.

Be part of something where I can utilize everyone's talents. It means recognizing the strength of the team. It means that a cohesive group of people can achieve many things. As a co-site leader for community projects, I marveled at how much twenty people could accomplish in a day of painting over areas of graffiti in Detroit. Through my involvement in college and medical school student council, I learned that relating to people in a professional manner accomplishes objectives as a team. I saw how much voice sixty people could have on the steps of the state capitol. During my clinical years, I found that I learned on my feet best when issues are discussed by my team. In Emergency Medicine, team of caregivers converges to handle situations under duress. Different specialties are coordinated to serve the patient best. Emergency Medicine requires team players that can work together with sensitivity and efficiency. I want to be one as an emergency physician.

I always envisioned a medical career to be essential, challenging, and honorable. I believe the field of Emergency Medicine represents medicine at its

very best, most essential, and can truly impact any person's life. I want to be a part of a residency program with a supportive environment where I don't feel "homeless." I want to learn more lessons and I feel that emergency medicine will do just that. I am eager to begin.

The Monkey Bit Me

Gretchen Gockerman, *Michigan State University College of Human Medicine*

"The monkey bit me!" I stated with conviction and confidence. My mother's jaw dropped and her face conveyed confusion as she asked, "What are you talking about?" Matter of factly, I repeated, "The monkey bit me." My mother scanned my body looking for signs of injury, for some suggestion that I had encountered a monkey. Should she rush me to the hospital? Where had I come into contact with a monkey? Had we lived in the jungle or even near a zoo, it would have made more sense. But we lived in a city that was void of any zoo, circus, or jungle.

My first ever spoken sentence, in retrospect, speaks to several life lessons I have learned over the course of my life! These life lessons include: what someone says may not be exactly what he or she means, how you convey information may be as important as what you say, when not to intervene is as important as when to intervene, and how you keep your cool in all situations is an invaluable tool. I believe that these lessons will serve me well as a physician, especially in a specialty like emergency medicine.

Life Lesson # 1: What someone says may not be exactly what he or she means. This life lesson applies to all parts of my life from work to friends and family. One specific example comes from an experience with a close friend of mine. My friend called to tell me that his grandfather had passed away. When I asked if I should come for the visitation or funeral, he said it was not necessary. As I listened more deeply, I heard the pain in his voice and the need for comfort and companionship. I went to the visitation despite his instructions not to attend. Years later, he told me that he really did need me there to grieve. If I had listened to just his words, I would have failed my friend. I have learned to listen with both head and heart to find the meaning that may be deeper beneath the surface. In Emergency Medicine, we have to listen to both the words and the meaning behind the words to hear everything our patients are saying. I believe that I will bring this gift to your program.

Life Lesson # 2: How you convey information may be as important as what you say. This lesson became most important to me in a pediatrics elective rotation in Malawi, Central Africa. I stood with a young mother who had given birth to her child at home only hours earlier. I listened to the weak cry of the newborn as I examined the dusky intestines that bulged out from the infant's abdominal wall. The English-speaking pediatric surgeon told the mother there was nothing he could do, and he turned to walk away. The mother did not understand that her child was not going to survive through the night. I carefully cov

ered the intestinal contents and wrapped the infant in a blanket. I found a chair for the mother and handed her the dying infant. After finding the father, I gently placed a hand on each parent and in broken Chichewa, I told them I was sorry and that they should spend their last few hours together, holding their infant. It did not take many words to tell them their child was not going to survive. It took a gentle touch, kind words, and a compassionate heart. I believe this compassionate attention is a vital part of medicine, including emergency medicine, where many initial diagnoses are made. I am looking for a program that will value compassionate interactions and will teach effective communication with patients.

Life Lesson # 3: When not to intervene is as important as when to intervene. This lesson became clear to me during my medical ICU rotation. A 90 year old man in respiratory failure was diagnosed with a tracheal tumor which was impinging upon his esophagus and inhibiting his airflow. After many discussions among the staff, his family, and the patient, he indicated his desire to be done here on earth. He squeezed my hand and pointed his finger to the skies. While there were further invasive tests and treatments we could have pursued, we respected his decision to die without further treatment. Medicine is a very action oriented discipline, and sometimes it is difficult to choose no action over action. This choice is especially important in emergency medicine where initial decision making often takes place. I believe I have the ability to step back and evaluate a situation in order to best decide whether or not intervention is needed.

Life Lesson # 4: How you keep your cool in all situations is an invaluable tool. During my emergency medicine rotation, I found this an important lesson to live by. During a lumbar puncture, an infant's breathing became labored and her oxygen saturation began to drop. The resident doing the LP began to panic and yell at the person holding the infant. The resident's distress was apparent to the patient's parents, and they too began to panic. I reassured the parents that we were monitoring their child closely and that she would be okay. Remaining calm allows procedures to move along smoothly, coworkers to work effectively together, and parents or loved ones to feel more comfortable and confident. In emergency medicine, where a light day can turn chaotic in seconds, remaining calm is essential to effectively treat patients. I have the ability to remain calm while chaos surrounds me. This ability, I believe, encourages others to stay calm as well.

I believe each of these life lessons will serve me well in a career in emergency medicine. I will bring to your program an ability to hear patients beyond their words; an ability to show patients a gentle touch, kind words, and a compassionate heart; an ability to know there are situations where no treatment is the best decision for the patient; and an ability to remain calm during the most hectic sce

narios. I look forward to building on to and adding to these life lessons as I embark on a career in emergency medicine, where I will enjoy the wide range of diagnoses seen, have the opportunity to perform procedures, and see a variety of chronic and acute health issues.

"The monkey bit me!" What did happen all those years ago when I spoke my first sentence? I will tell you this: my mother did not take me to the emergency room, and my family has never let me forget the words I spoke that day.

Personal Statement

Christopher Brown, *The Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University*

Walking the 300 mile medieval route across northern Spain to the tomb of St. James proves an apt metaphor for my past, present and future in pediatric neurology. Although I only spent three weeks hiking the Camino, I am eager to begin the training for a long career as an academic pediatric neurologist.

The Journey Begins: My medical school classmate and I had no advanced warning that the first stage of the Camino would involve a grueling 19 km climb and descent of the Pyrenees. Expecting a leisurely warm-up hike, instead we faced one of the toughest physical tests of our journey. With similar unexpectedness, one Spring morning my junior year of high school a grand mal seizure shook my body and my world. Fears of a brain tumor, another seizure, and the potential loss of all my hopes and dreams haunted me. A negative workup (which did not include an EEG) allayed my worries temporarily and allowed me to successfully resume my life. After college, an EEG helped to explain the myoclonus and absence episodes that occasionally persisted. I learned that my particular form of epilepsy was easily treatable and with the help of Depakote, juvenile myoclonic epilepsy has not limited me in any way. In a surprising fashion, my personal introduction to child neurology planted the seed that would grow to become a passionate interest in the field. Back on the Camino, Michael and I too had a newfound and personal respect for our unforeseen challenger, the Pyrenees. Inauspiciously, both journeys commenced.

A Chance Meeting: We soon found that walking all day in the searing sun could pass speedily or painfully slow, often depending on the company of our fellow pilgrims. Meeting Mary, a Canadian psychiatrist, her husband Frank, an English professor, and Sean, a foul-mouthed Anglican priest, completely altered our Camino experience. In much the same way, my time at the UNC Headache Clinic with Drs. Finkel, Kahn, and Mann introduced me to the wide world of neurology, this time the other end of the reflex hammer. Extended interaction with the often challenging patients, constant exposure to this dynamic group of neurologists, and immersion in the world of neurology made for an enlightening six months. More importantly, neurology changed from a personal encounter to a clinical science full of rewarding patient interactions. Back on the Camino, our special quintet hiked together for an unforgettable week of riotous adventure and discovery, not unlike some days in the headache clinic.

The Nun from Pamplona: Sometimes it takes help from above to find the way. After an exhausting day's effort, a few of us found ourselves with feet full of blisters and without a place to stay in Pamplona. Out of desperation, I randomly asked a nun who was crossing the street if she knew of any lodging. She proceeded to take us to her family's home, where our wounds were bandaged, our stomachs were filled, and beds were prepared. Wearing a white coat instead of a

nun's habit, Dr. Susan Boutilier opened the world of child neurology in a way that made certain it was my medical home. The patient interactions were rich; the pathology was stimulating and diverse; the opportunities to provide caring treatment were abundant. Every day after clinic, I returned home full of stories to tell, excited about my patients. Child neurology perfectly merged my lifelong interest in children and my desire to develop an area of expertise in a stimulating and rapidly growing field. It was a joyous crossing of paths. Spending an additional month in pediatric neurology at Wake Forest further confirmed that taking care of children with neurological disease is a wonderful exercise of both heart and mind.

The Journey Continues: Michael and I never arrived at Santiago that summer. Injuries and commitments back home took us off the trail with thirteen stages left. Similarly, a long road of training lies ahead before I am a child neurologist. Although I cannot see exactly where that road leads, I can imagine. My love of teaching places me practicing in an academic environment. My early interests include epilepsy, headache, and post-traumatic brain injury. I enjoy a diverse patient population and can relate well with groups as varied as inner city children, Hispanic farmworkers, and affluent teenagers. I aspire, above all, to be a superb clinician who provides excellent care with distinctive compassion. This April, I will return to Spain to finish the journey to Santiago de Compostela. My journey in child neurology, however, has only just begun.

All the King's Men

Chris Wilkomm, *University of South Florida College of Medicine*

I find myself uncomfortable, my back against the wall, surrounded by the assassins of my familiar adversary. With half of my rank having already been slain, each man has grown in importance. My opponent meticulously calculates his next advancement, closing in on me with a slow, determined approach. Seeing him in this formation reminds me of a similar situation where dark figures riding on horseback punished my disregard of their unique attacking ability. I am forced to attack aggressively, knowing that to only act defensively at this point may prolong my fight, but would ultimately result in my demise. I send out a tandem of my soldiers to initiate the assault. I first advance my most invaluable comrade, leaving her unprotected and my own position vulnerable to attack. I then order one of my horsemen to expose himself to sacrifice, not knowing if my combatant has seen through my deliberate intentions. Breathlessly I await his response. As he removes his hand from his henchmen's tall, dark figure, finalizing his impulsive, impudent execution, I announce in a victorious tone..."Queen D8, check mate!"

The parallels between chess and surgery are numerous. They both require the ability to prepare for a seemingly infinite number of potential situations, several steps before they occur. This must be done by anticipating, and then recognizing, not only the common situation, but the unique attack as well, being prepared to counter the danger swiftly and adeptly. In chess, as in surgery, you must be prepared to sacrifice in order to achieve the desired goal. On a personal level, a surgeon must constantly sacrifice his time and freedom, living a life that is far from one of convenience. And on another level, a surgeon is continually confronted with the decision of whether a patient needs to sacrifice vital tissue or an organ in order to conquer an otherwise fatal attack from metastatic disease. The only way to gain the foresight and understanding necessary for this delicate balance of swift response and careful deliberation is through extensive experience which in turn gives you invaluable knowledge. And finally, in chess, each character has its own unique contribution, vital in shaping the outcome of the battle. When these teammates are used in concert together, their effectiveness increases exponentially, allowing for more complex approaches that would prove impossible on one's own. I have learned during my limited clinical experience that all these things are true. The more I learn, the more I realize there is to learn; the more I anticipate a reaction, the more I realize I need to expect the unexpected; and the more I improve my own abilities, the more I realize I need teammates to assist me.

For a surgeon, (and certainly for a medical student studying to become a surgeon), knowledge is forever an ongoing process. During my surgical clerkship, I prepared for my first Whipple procedure. I continually reviewed the

anatomy and the procedure until I felt confident that I could walk someone through the entire operation. The physician I assisted is an amazing surgeon, and is known to be intolerant of any form of incompetency. Although I had thoroughly prepared, I felt nervous, wanting to live up to the surgeon's expectations. As the abdomen was opened, I watched the glistening bowel gently peristaltic. I reviewed the pristine anatomy, naming to myself the blood supply and important landmarks of each organ. After hours of retracting muscle, fat and skin, I ached because of my contorted position. I prayed for a question, an opportunity to showcase my knowledge, a chance to make my studying worthwhile. Moments later, the attending surgeon turned to me and asked for the name of the cut vessel to which he was pointing. I froze, staring at the hollow stump coming off of the right hepatic artery, feeling it was too proximal to be the cystic artery. I replied, "I don't know, sir." Staring at this human body, instead of merely a textbook, reminded me that the importance of experience and knowledge is not merely for a "grade", but for a life. I realized how much there was to learn, how much there would always be to learn.

As in chess, surgery always involves a team of individuals with varying levels of skills and expertise whose cooperation is essential for a successful procedure. During an acting internship, I took the resident's position of first assist on a laparoscopic Nissen fundoplication. Although I mainly retracted tissue, I realized my role was essential, freeing up the surgeon's hand, making this menial task crucial to the case. I also realized that I yearn for additional experience in the role of the surgeon. The mere feel of the surgeon's instruments in my hands was exhilarating, and only served to further my conviction that surgery is my only focus.

I have not yet begun my medical career as a surgeon, but I am eager to learn from those who have the invaluable knowledge and experience that I need and aspire to attain. I intend to pursue this knowledge with determination and dedication, being fully aware that it will require tremendous personal sacrifice and dedication to achieve even the basics that are necessary, but also knowing that achieving anything less will be giving up my "King".

THE LEGIBLE SCRIPT

A LITERARY JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE STUDENTS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

THE LEGIBLE SCRIPT is a literary journal of short stories, essays, poetry, photography, and artwork published by the students of the University of South Florida College of Medicine. It is partially supported by the Dean's Academic Fund.

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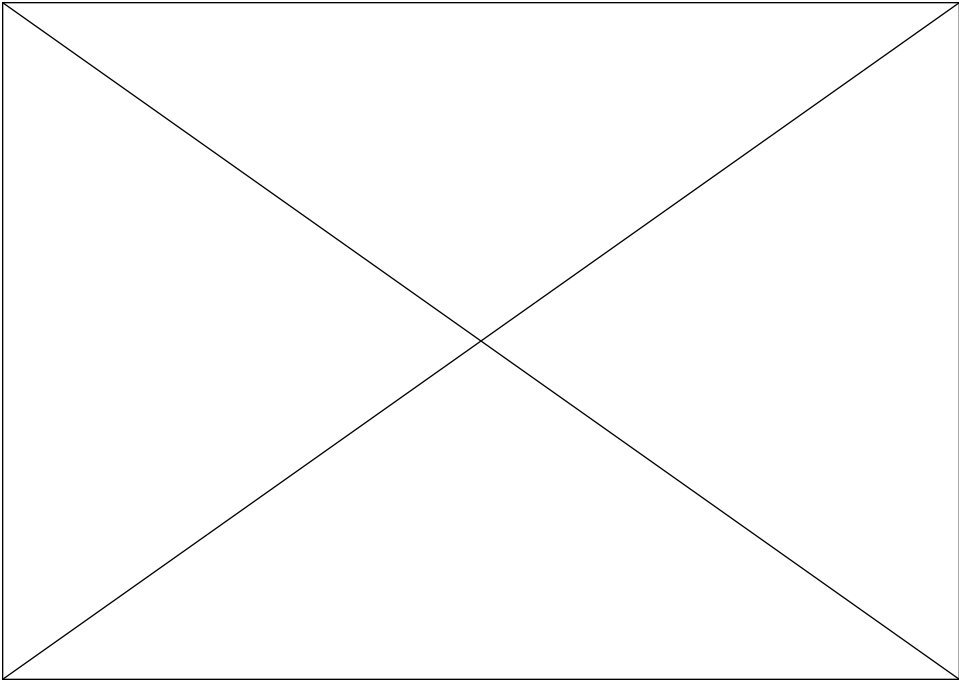
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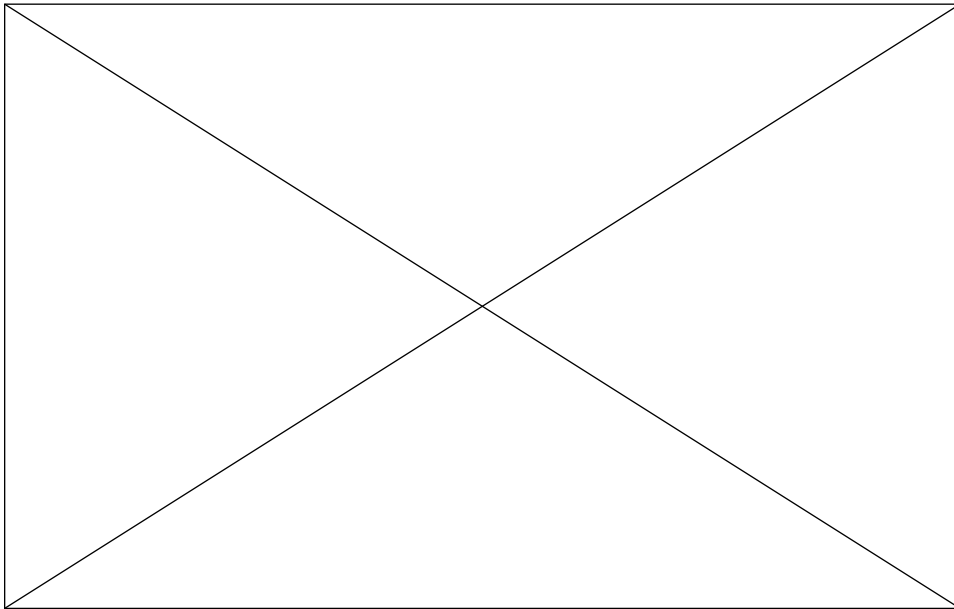
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