

# HUMANITAS

2014 Volume XVIII

A literary journal of the  
Medical University of South Carolina



**A Labyrinth of Learning:  
The Medical University of South Carolina  
and  
Humanitas**

As a comprehensive academic health science center the mission of MUSC is to preserve and optimize human life. Students and faculty are united in study, research and scholarship to increase understanding of every aspect of the human body in its extraordinary complexity. They enter a labyrinth of learning seeking knowledge and understanding that is utilized in environments of cultures and families, where the intangible elements impact all our knowledge and skills.

The challenge of preserving and optimizing human life requires deep learning and profound sensitivity. MUSC prepares us to be better scientists; Humanitas inspires us to be better citizens.

In these pages we see connections between images, imaginations, and words that exemplify the beauty as well as the complexity of life. We are inspired to intuit what we do not know, “listen eloquently” to what we cannot hear, and see with the “third eye” what we cannot see.

Humanitas inspires us to rise above the labyrinth and understand the whole even as we enter the labyrinth to know its infinite parts.

J. Herman Blake, PhD

Humanities Scholar in Residence

Medical University of South Carolina

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## Preface

The staff at Humanitas has always held to the principle that art is a celebration of the human condition. Throughout this publication's history, we've seen the impact that publishing creations of individuals in our community into the public domain has had. These pages provide the fuel for our rich and ongoing discussion about the relationships between our outer, inner, professional, and personal lives. It is magical how this process strengthens our bonds with one another and allows us to grow together, and, with this known value, we must not let ourselves fail to carve out time for such important reflection, exploration, and invention.

To all of you who took the initiative to submit to this year's journal, we extend our sincerest appreciation! We received an unprecedented number of works and selecting just a handful to publish out of so many truly excellent submissions is a humbling challenge at best. To those whose pieces are not included this year, please submit next year and all the years to come - it is your talent that makes this all possible!

We'd like to express our enormous appreciation to the all the faculty, staff, and students who contribute their time, energy, and funds to support the production of this publication and ensure that this forum flourishes. You help us all to keep in mind, as a university and profession, the mission we share - to better the lives of others.

We hope each of you enjoys this edition as much as we enjoyed producing it!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Clarke', written in a cursive style.

Keep finding the fun in all that you do,  
Alexander Clarke  
Editor-in-Chief

## MUSIC

In keeping with the aim to continually grow of our journal, we've expanded this year's volume by adding a new dimension! Join us in congratulating these fine artists by taking time to visit our website to listen to the wonderful musical works being made by individuals here at MUSC:

<http://academicdepartments.musc.edu/humanities/humanitas/music.htm>

**David Roer - "Quiet After Dusk"**

**John C Sieverdes - "To the Other Side and Back"**

**Joe Sistino - "Empty Avenue"**

**Vaibhav Mohanty - "Altitude"**

**Robert Relic - "Maggie and Sophia's Happy Day"**

**Robert Relic - "Cross My Heart"**

## 2014 HUMANITAS AWARDS FOR CREATIVE EXCELLENCE

### **Excellence In Written Word**

"To Whom It May Concern"

Cameron Jones  
College of Medicine

### **Excellence In Photography**

"Predator"

Rali Peneva  
College of Medicine

### **Excellence In Visual Art**

"Untitled" (Ink wash on watercolor paper)

Blakney Adkins  
College of Health Professions

### **Excellence In Music**

"Altitude"

Vaibhav Mohanty  
College of Graduate Studies

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**A Visit From St. Francis, MD, PhD,** Lee Blackmon

'Twas the night before Study Week, and all the through the libs

Its patrons were studying patho and phys.  
The white boards were covered, notes written quite clear,  
As students were waiting for their break to be here.

The gunners took Netter's with them to their beds,  
With visions of Bacro's ballet in their heads.  
Bernanke, his glasses, and Reaves in his coat,  
Devised a long practical to abolish all hope.

When down from the 3rd floor there arose such a clatter,  
I leapt up from my cubicle to see what's the matter.  
Away up the staircase, I pranced with such flair  
To see what in tarnation could possibly be there!

When, what to my wondering eyes did I witness?  
A large group of students improving their fitness!  
They were led by St. Francis, Swan-Ganz catheter in tow,  
Handing out knowledge all young doctors should know.

It's preload, preload, preload, did everyone hear?  
I said it three times, so it's fundamentally clear.  
The first thing to do is have the R to R read,  
If you make a mistake, BOOM! They're on the floor dead!

At the end of his lecture, he showed one more chart;  
"Now, learn all you can and know this by heart."  
The students all groaned as St. Francis took flight,  
Exclaiming, "Remember, don't e-mail me post-Sunday night!"

**When Minutes Become Minute,** Parker Barnwell

Playful shadow words  
Thrust at meaning

In this late evening  
Neverending  
Rendering nothing but  
Shadows of my knuckles  
Clunking out coy phrases

They themselves dreamily  
Meandering outward of me

(but even their brave potential  
cannot burn past the fact  
the most focused echo  
will last longer than my voice)

And if I can keep time as a secret  
For tonight from myself  
And take time with whisking thought  
Uncaught from bettered use  
I would compel myself that

A grain of sand as onyx unique  
And dusty dull as the next is not falling

It spreads itself before  
We course it through our fists

I hold in my palm my pen  
And press into the shadow on my paper  
Ink burrows deeper and does not wick away



Untitled, Blakney Adkins



## All We Do Not Know, Robert Sade

I stood about six feet from the radiant warming bed, behind the nurses and residents who were crowded around, each playing a role in the drama reenacted from time to time in this intensive care unit. They were resuscitating a neonate in cardiopulmonary arrest. An anesthesiology resident was at the head of the bed, manually stabilizing the endotracheal tube that she had just repositioned. A cardiothoracic resident was holding the baby around the chest, his fingers in back of the thorax, his thumbs resting gently in the middle of the sternum, rhythmically compressing it in an attempt to maintain circulation. An ICU nurse was delivering the umpteenth round of bicarb, epinephrine, and glucose, while another nurse stood behind her, in front of the emergency cart, readying the next round of resuscitation drugs. I had lost count of how many rounds had been administered. Glancing at the clock above the bed, I rapidly calculated that the lapsed time had been about 50 minutes from the moment of arrest.

I had operated on the baby earlier on the preceding morning, doing a palliative shunt for pulmonary atresia. The operation went well initially, but the pulmonary artery connection had clotted, requiring reoperation and eventually another shunt on the other side. She had been somewhat unstable for a few hours following the reoperation, but then leveled off and seemed to be doing nicely during the evening. Then, at 1:02 in the morning, her heart suddenly went into ventricular fibrillation. I received a telephone call at home shortly after the arrest, and fifteen minutes later, was in the ICU. As the resuscitation continued, I recalled every detail of the operation and the postoperative course, and explored every avenue of fact and speculation that could be extracted from the left and right brains of the physicians, nurses, and technicians in the room, as well as my own. We did everything we could, but, still, the flat line EKG pattern continued, interrupted by brief periods of ventricular fibrillation.

The intensity and frenetic activity in the room were waning as it became progressively clearer to each of us that this resuscitation was going nowhere. We probably should have quit after the first 30 minutes, 45 at most, but the trust that was clearly evident in this beautiful little girl's parents a few hours before urged me to keep going. Sixty-two minutes into the resuscitation, perhaps the most persistent, longest, and completely unsuccessful resuscitation I have ever attempted, I stepped back from the bed and announced in a voice made hoarse by a certain tightness in my throat, "OK, that's it. Please note the time; I'm pronouncing her at 2:04 A.M." and, turning to my family liaison nurse, asked, "Vickie, is the family in the lounge? I need to talk with them."

During my career in cardiac surgery, I had many moments of triumph and not a few of disaster. I suppose that many of the procedures I did could be called routine, but I never felt that way about any of them. I often learned something important and valuable during the most ordinary operations and, like Sky Masterson, could never be sure when

Lady Luck would slip out of the room, leaving me in the lurch.

Perhaps the greatest reward of surgery is the feeling of warmth and satisfaction that arise from expressions of gratitude from patients and families, particularly when they come in the form of unexpected reminders from the past. I particularly remember a letter I received from the mother of a former patient. Attached to the letter was a photograph of an attractive young woman in her early 20s with a broad smile that engaged every muscle of her face, especially the corners of her upturned mouth and narrowed, twinkling eyes, framed by brown shoulder-length hair. She was dressed in an academic gown. The note said, in part: "I thought you might like to see some of the long term results of your work. These pictures were taken at Lisa's graduation from college a few weeks ago. She double-majored in psychology and communication and is trying to decide on graduate school, so I think some of our fears about Lisa can be put to rest."

It is always nice, of course, to hear a voice from the past recalling a successful outcome, but this one was a special case. The bright, intelligent, and happily smiling eyes looking from the photograph straight into my eyes were those of the infant girl, now a college graduate, whom I had pronounced dead early one morning, 22 years before.

As I stepped back from the radiant warmer and turned to leave the ICU, my eyes were beginning to become moist as I took a last glance at the EKG monitor; it showed the same flat line as it had during most of the resuscitation. Then, the slow, sad process of cleaning up the bed and the surrounding space was interrupted by a solitary "beep." Our eyes turned toward the source of the sound, the EKG monitor that was still connected. A few seconds later, a second beep sounded as a ventricular spike appeared on the monitor screen, and then another, and then another. Within a short, time the EKG rate reached 90 a minute. We rapidly reconnected the ventilator, reversed the dismantling process, and resumed the cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

I do not know what caused Lisa's cardiac arrest and, much more significantly, do not know why her heartbeat returned after 62 minutes of unsuccessful resuscitation. The events in the ICU that night do not argue for extending resuscitation to an hour in most cases, or in any cases, for that matter, perhaps with a few rare exceptions. Well-established standards tell us when to stop.

This case serves as a reminder of the limitations of our knowledge, of our skills, and of our technologies, as sophisticated and powerful as they seem to be. It also reminds us of the marvelous resilience of the human body and spirit. Physicians are attracted to the healing professions by the nurturing, supportive sides of our nature, the intellectual challenges

*(Continued on page 4)*





## All We Do Not Know, Robert Sade (Continued)

of learning what is known and unknown, as well as many practical benefits. Surgeons are attracted to their profession for several additional reasons. Its palpable, visible results are often dramatic and provide us with the early gratification of positive results. Its intellectual challenges abound, providing peaks and valleys of success and failure (the former substantially outweighing the latter): success brings accolades of appreciation, while failure challenges our ability to learn from our errors, to grieve, and, despite disappointments, to continue operating.

Yet, the most profound rewards go beyond those that my discussion so far suggests. Surgeons have access to the deepest, if often hidden, hopes and fears of those who entrust themselves to our care, as well as access to the core of their physical existences when they are under anesthesia, totally helpless and vulnerable. In retrospect, I have been able more fully to appreciate the depth of trust and the weight of the responsibility that trust places on us every time we step up to an operating table. Our position as surgeons enables us to witness with almost unimaginable intimacy the complexity of the human organisms we help to repair, and rewards us with the possibility of making ourselves into physicians who are worthy of the immense trust that such intimacy demands. Yet, while we justifiably take great pride in what we know and what we do, we must at the same time acknowledge with an equal measure of humility the immensity of all we do not know and can only hope someday to understand.

(Adapted from Sade RM. All we do not know. New Horizons in Cardiothoracic Surgery. July 25, 2005. <http://www.ctsnet.org/sections/residents/newhorizons/article-7.html>.)

## Reflections on Huaycan, Leslie Mosteller

Sometimes the mountains look lunar, here. The dusty gray that covers everything sits – heavy against the clean, blue sky.

On a clear day the houses go all the way up. Please go all the way up, with me.

You'll see that the houses aren't really houses.  
But – the people are really people, like you and like me.

Maybe the women don't know how to read.  
Their hands don't recognize the curve of a lápiz, yet. Maybe the children don't go to school every day because some days the buses are full - because some days the buses don't come at all.

Maybe there's a father who doesn't work because he is injured. Or maybe there is no father, anymore ☹  
but a mother and her eight children, in one room, with three beds.  
¿Sabe?

Maybe the children are tired because they don't sleep well. They freeze at night.

I can't imagine sleeping there – up.  
In the houses that aren't really houses. It's winter now.

Please go all the way up, with me –  
to where everything living is thin, street dogs and children alike. Even the buses when they come, if they come, are thin too. Trafficking, injustice, death and everything horrible that can't be real. I promise it is. I have seen it.

Come with me. Come. This is real. I want to show you better than this. I want to tell you it is better than this. zthey only sit against the blue.

Beauty, here, is redefined.

It's in the dirty little fingers pawing for your hand and the hugs on your knees.

It's in the beauty of the smiles and the light of eyes both young and old.

It's in the swiftness of feet moving to meet your moto and follow you to class. It's in the volleyball games in the dirt below the cemetery.

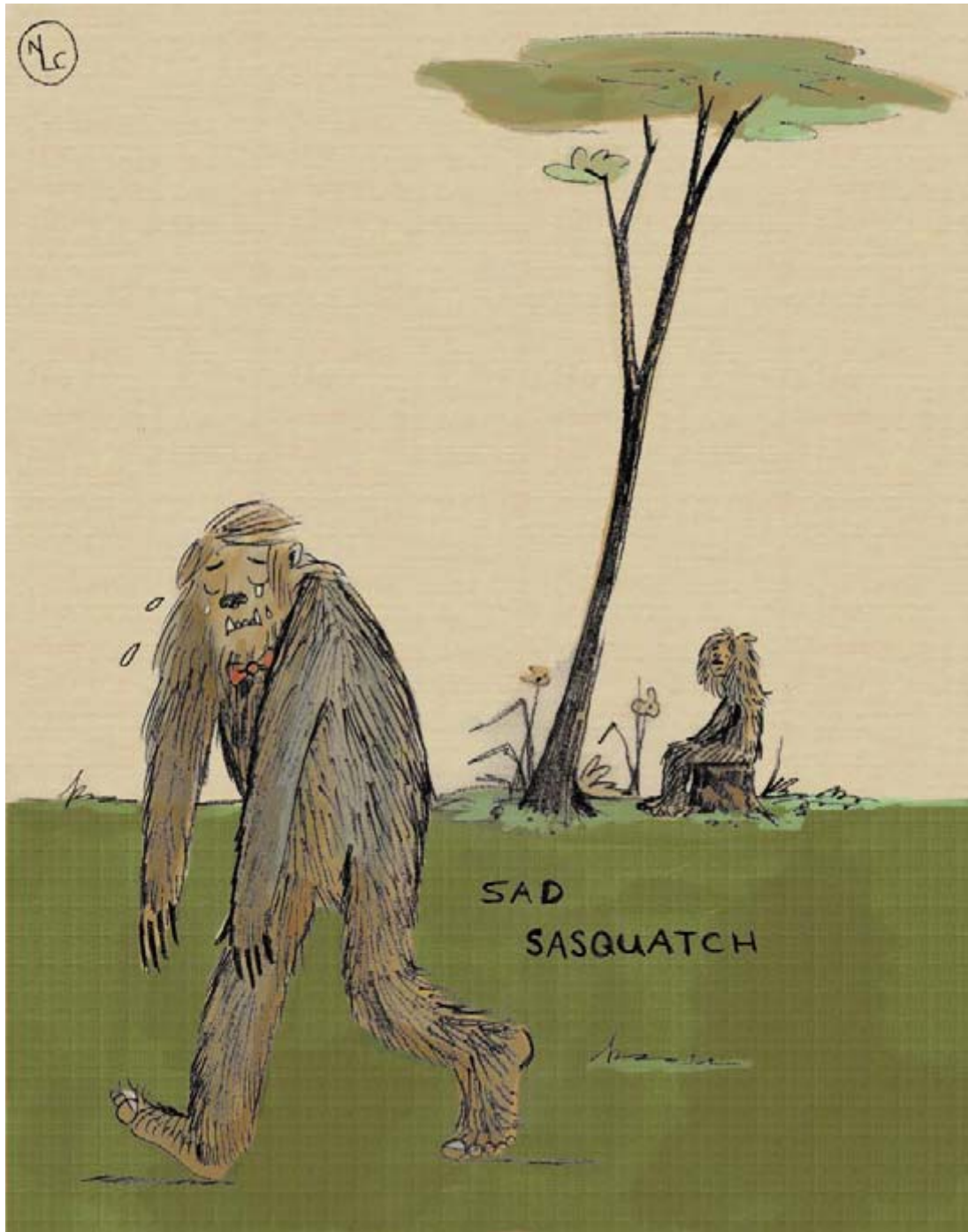
It's in the new friendships and the way families offer their houses to you and give you nothing

because nothing is everything.

It's in the tears of goodbyes. ¿Entiende?

It's in the hope.

Yes, I promise it is here too. And it's in the faith.  
And faith, we know, "is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" –  
Amidst everything we do see. Oh please come with me.



## Heart, Lung and Blood, Adam Smolka

Late afternoon, I was far from home, marking time in a Halcion Suites a mile from the Convention Center. A picture window over the whispering AC unit offered fine binocular views of fairy tale castles and sky-high rides. Snacking on baguette and Malbec, I scanned the next day's lung pathology sessions on my laptop, and then surfed the net for Argentine tango. I keyed the iDanze Studio into my phone and took off. A sudden torrential thunderstorm hurled sheets of rain across boulevards streaming with traffic. The GPS soon delivered me to a tidy little strip mall. The storm moved on, the dying sun transfigured gray clouds on the horizon, and flecks of azure sky came to transient life. The lights were off at the iDanze. As I pondered what next, a car pulled in beside me. In the glow of her dash, I saw a woman whose profile was that of Nefertiti. She cut the ignition, and stepped out as if invited to dance. Poised on silver stilettos, she peered into the studio, one hand shading her eyes while the other smoothed her pink satin dress. I considered, yet again, the perfection of the female form. I came closer, shading my eyes just like her. "What do you think?" I said.

She cast an appraising glance over me. In my mind's eye, I'm in my prime, a consummate professional, a man who has endured many loves, and whose shoes are always well polished. My fantasy life, fed by the ebb and flow of reality, is robust. But I couldn't tell if she saw me or my alter ego.

"You're like me," she said, "we Googled tango and here we are."

I told her my name and said I was in town for a heart, lung and blood conference. I

felt the familiar shiver of excitement and potential that heralds a tango embrace. "My name is Fairouz," she said. "Is this normal?"

I wondered if she meant the shiver or the dark locked studio. I gestured across the strip mall to the Bull and Eagle Grill.

"Let's have a glass of wine and find out."

Fairouz fetched a crimson pashmina stole from her car and we hurried across the parking lot as dense raindrops began dancing on the asphalt. Distant lightning strikes lit the sky amid renewed rumbles of thunder. In the grill, by the window, Fairouz kept an eye on the studio while I marveled at her composure in this unscripted encounter. I called the iDanze and a man with a marbled Argentine accent told me class was at seven, then dancing till midnight.

As the last colors drained from the sky, I proposed a stroll to kill time.

We came to a sliver of salt marsh the developers had missed. A wood stork flew in from the south, in profile no different from a pterodactyl in a child's encyclopedia, leisurely wing beats giving way to a precise glide onto a tidal creek bordered by cattails. She preened her feathers, and began foraging for bullfrogs and fiddler crabs. When we came back to the iDanze, raindrops had moistened Fairouz's satin dress, and my shoes were flecked with mud. The lights were on, and the silken notes of "El

Cielo en Tus Ojos" accompanied us onto the dance floor.

Mirrors on one side reflected Art Deco posters and bistro tables on the other. Further back was a bar with a sparkling backdrop of bottles, and beyond that a candlelit patio where an azure-blue amphora spilled water into a pond swimming with koi. Bewitching in satin and silver, Fairouz took my hand. The music wove a rhythmic spell as we danced past the mirrors, at one with our reflection. The pupils of her eyes were enormous, and two crimson droplets glistened on her café au lait throat. I thought nothing of this, because I'd slapped at mosquitoes down by the marsh. But what came to mind was the infamous shot of El Cachafas dancing with Carmencita Calderon, when she falls back in his embrace and bares her bosom to his teeth. My lips brushed her pearl earring, and then caressed the droplets on her throat. I thrilled to her salty taste and my imminent corruption.

The song was ending. We came to rest in a close embrace, caught in the music's web, the last notes still vibrant between us. Fairouz laid her head on my shoulder. She nibbled the soft flesh under my ear, while my hand on her back traced a caress that spoke of lives emboldened by tango. She bit me gently. I was startled, and then my knees gave way as she suckled at the pulsing perforation in my throat. I tried to pull away, but was overcome by lassitude. She slipped an arm around my waist and brought me to a wicker loveseat on the patio, out by the pond. I drifted easily, like the Technicolor koi, into euphoric dreams of heart, lung and blood.



Octopus in Purple, Jocelyn Kohn



An Alternative Self Portrait, David Williams







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## **Autumn**, Jameela Gourdarzi

It's a delicate process  
That snaps the tiny stem  
Turning it into a rusty hang glider.  
And a slow, powerful root structure  
That anchors its source into the earth.

Nature, always teaching us about the  
Secrets of love.

## **Silhouette**, Jens Jensen

In the night  
Beneath the light  
The man met  
His silhouette

Stiff as wood  
There he stood  
Beneath him laid  
The darkness made

## **Heart Attack**, Parker Barnwell

Suspended swirls in the river water  
Like the dark infarction within his mind  
His oily thoughts with words try to tell her,  
They do not mix; straining, he cannot find

A way to bridge synaptic gaps between  
His flushed feelings and what he wants to say.  
Inarticulate banter does not mean  
He has nothing more waiting to convey.

She is the thrombosis clotting his brain.  
Her image plaques, her voice arrests his thought.  
He wants to woo her, but his tongue is lame.  
He is confused and rigidly feels caught.

She strokes his hair and tells him to calm down.  
He smiles as his full heart ceases to pound.

## **Blue Baruch**, Adam Smolka

With two minutes to go, the auditorium was empty. A faint thrum of traffic and the pitter-patter of a rain-shower filtered into the silent room. I called up my slides, dimmed the lights for optimal viewing of fluorescent organisms, and made sure Tegrity was on. I checked my watch, and scanned the vacant rows of seats for signs of life. On the hour, my phone pinged as a text came in.

"ok your good to go dont forget to upload at the end mindy" "But there's no-one here, Mindy," I replied.

"don't worry their watching in the libray or at home go for it"

The course director had spoken. For a moment or two, I weighed the coercive logic of distance learning against a Socratic ideal of engagement. No contest. I gathered my notes, and glancing up one last time, about to leave, I saw a solitary figure, a redhead in shimmering blue tights, sliding into a back-row seat. She shook out her umbrella, smiled politely, and opened a laptop. I switched on the wireless mike clipped to my lapel.

"Good morning," I said, and aimed the ruby laser at the screen, carefully underlining my lecture topic. "This has come up in every National Board for the last five years. You'll ace that section with this lecture. I'll begin with three essential concepts." I slid my cursor to the Tegrity logo and killed it. I discussed the first concept, and was well into the second when my phone pinged again.

"tegrity down cant see anything" "Sorry, I'm busy right now," I replied.

Pointer in hand, I left the podium and sat down near the back. My student smiled quizzically, curious about what next. I cut off the mike, covered the third concept and went on with my lecture. Some minutes passed, the double doors behind us swung open, and a cold damp draft came in from the street. Mindy appeared in the aisle beside me, bristling.

She watched one or two slides go by, and said, "Let's switch on Tegrity."

"I prefer not to," I said. Mindy grappled silently with this notion, weighing the rights of one hundred and fifty paid-up students against my mandate as a professor. Before two seconds had passed, she strode down the aisle towards the podium and my laptop. My red-headed postulant took advantage of the interruption and leaned towards me.

"What do you mean?" she whispered. "Helicobacter pylori shuts down acid secretion and causes ulcers? I thought dogma said "No acid, no ulcer!"

On the big screen, Mindy brought Tegrity to life, and one hundred and odd remote students saw pearls iridescing briefly on their obsidian displays.

"Good question," I said, "let's get some coffee and dig deeper." I cast aside my wireless trappings, and we stepped out. The rain-shower had moved on, the sky was blue, and Socrates rested easy.





**Elephant,** Leslie Mosteller

"I don't know what goes through his head," she confesses to me. I turn and look at Ethel's husband, seated in front of the window. A cane rests beside his chair. Two hands cup the white, ceramic mug of espresso and milk. His gaze, fixed on something known only to him, ends in a distant time – a distant place.

"He started throwing things away today. I caught him in the attic with my dad's ornaments - my dad's Christmas ornaments. He was stuffing them into trash bags, mumbling something under his breath. He looked at me with this crazed look and asked why I was home."

"Really?" I manage to say, as I look again at Jennings.

"I think he's losing it. He sneaks around my closets, too, and doesn't let me take out the garbage anymore. I'm finally onto him."

"Hm." Jennings is now twirling his wedding ring on the table.

"Anyway girl what soup you got today? Potato bacon? You got potato bacon? I was hoping to take some potato bacon to my sister. You've had it twice and I keep missing it. You're always out of that soup when I come in – it's like you plan to run out or something."

"How's your sister anyway," I ask, noticing the shadows under her eyes. The dark becomes more pronounced the longer Ethel talks.

"Oh Lord my sister is sick and driving me crazy. Everyone's driving me crazy, girl, everyone. And now I'm onto Jennings."

I kind of chuckle and Ethel shoots me a look, the kind that soberes.

"Just wait until you get old and everyone around you gets old and starts acting crazy."

I explain that we don't have potato bacon soup because we're out of potatoes.

"We do have tomato soup, Ethel. Would you like to take tomato soup to your sister?"

"Oh no, no. She's mean. She's been so mean to me and I wanted to give her potato soup, so no. I'll just come by later. I come by often. You know this because you see me. I'll just come by later." I wonder how potato soup relates to meanness.

Ethel looks at Jennings and then at me. She steps away from the counter, taking her cloud

of perfume with her. She turns back and thanks me. "For what?"

"For listening to a crazy old quack."

I laugh again for lack of a better response. She makes her way to Jennings, and I think

about how thankful I am for my daily, quirky interactions with this couple. My heart breaks for the long journey ahead of them.

"Potato bacon. We'll have it tomorrow," I call out at Ethel's back. She raises a hand without turning back, as I hear her say something to Jennings about ornaments.

The next customer in line raises his eyebrow at me curiously. I smile.

**Winter Hymn,** Lauren Talley

Winter is coming in the wake  
Of defeated Fall whose soul did shake  
The sky turns bland from nostalgic waste  
Shuddering for Spring's spell to fall in haste  
In all of his majesty, or infected deeds  
He absorbs all life with the minutest of ease  
But the one he decides to leave unvisited  
Sprouts legs and truncates when in remiss

It hides and seeks like a lost child of killed mum  
Tasting the land so fertile with the lice of scum  
Barren branches that brood the blackening fruit  
Only to again nourish the glutton that is Winter brute  
His hands held the life that made His words seem sincere  
Yet he blasts the limbs and fallen man to eaves so foreign near  
It burns like briars, of the fire of Angered Winter  
And ices all spirit, like the empty halls that do hinder

He sings his song of regret with such succor  
It shakes Gaia to herald Spring in the eve of such limitless horror  
Again, Winter begins...

**These Lungs, My Cage,** Thomas Larrew

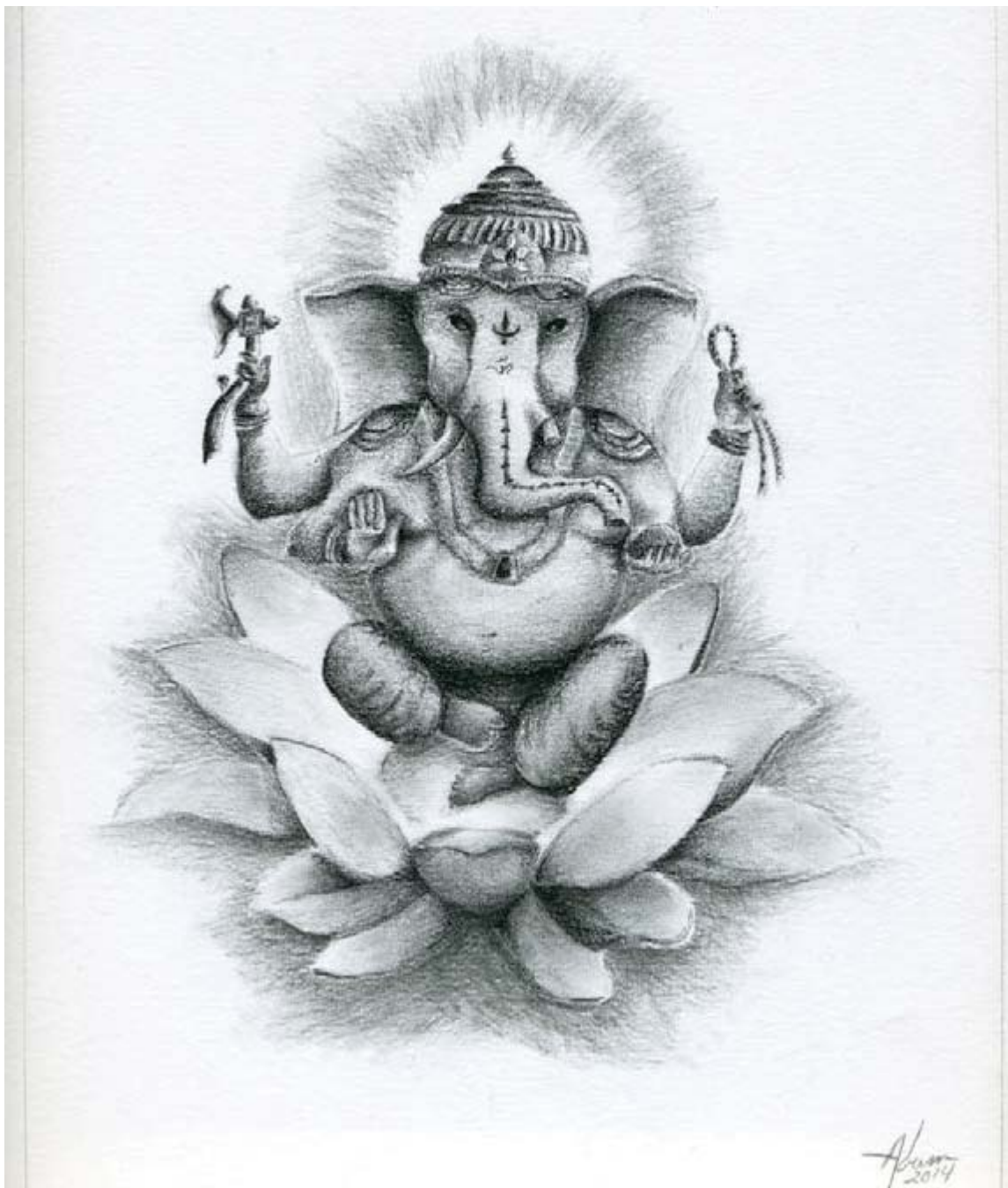
Why can't I breathe?  
Stuck in this odd angle,  
I can't let it out.  
I struggle to move and shout,  
But I'm left motionless thinking about  
The agony in which I wreathe.  
Hoping in seconds that within  
Concedes its ever salient strangle.

I can't escape it and I dare not provoke motion,  
Or motion that one could have guessed  
To live with such a thing on my chest  
Would leave me so pressed  
With a desire to be free,  
Craving to make a commotion but  
I can't: Breathe, make contact,  
Nor be a me  
Without this forceful estrangement.

Then, relief.  
Captive of this ribbed cage released.  
I breathe in, with the spirit as it were my first,  
And exhale with peace.











# For You, Jessica Sugianto

For You  
Jessica Sugianto

Voice

Piano

One more kiss be -

fore you fly from me, and one last smile to

hide the tears when you leave. I pray so hard that you'll be safe, not just this

2013

V.

Pno.

plane ride but for all the days a - head of us, I know this is

hard on us, but I will wait for you, keep you

in my heart. What's a thou-sand miles to us but air? Though the

2013

V.

Pno.

se-conds turn to years I'll al - ways be there. I'll wait for

To Coda

you. You call eve-ry day

just to say hel - lo. I miss you eve-ry day, send

To Coda

2013

V.

Pno.

kis-ses on the pho-ne, and when I close my eyes at night, can't feel your

arms a-round me hold-ing tight, I feel so far a-way but you

D.S. al Coda

call and say, I will

2013

V.

Pno.

Wait for me, you know my dear you'll al-ways be my

love so true, I'm here for you, and I'll

wait for you, keep you in my heart. What's a

2013

V.

Pno.

thou - sand miles to us but air? Though the

se-conds turn to years I'll al - ways be there. I'll wait for

you. Wait for me.

2013





## On the Interview Trail, Tabatha Davis

It was late October and the scent of Fall was in the air. The cool crisp breeze wafting the smell of gently sifted earth. I was reclining into the soft leather interior of a Ford SportsTrac Explorer with the butt-warmer turned on high. My fiancé had the country music turned up, while my barefoot toes kept time propped up on the dash. I touched the cool windshield tentatively with one toe and watched its fog-like doppelganger cling for a few seconds before disappearing as if it never was. Well, that is until the right ray of sunshine hit it and it looked like a little kid had played all over the glass. I was in fact, that same large big kid. Some things never change.

Colby sighed deeply as we hit the four and a half hour mark of our trip. We had been traveling since around 10 that morning, give or take our moments of procrastination and last minute packing. I was so excited, no exuberant is a better description for how I was feeling at the time, finally setting off on what is known in the 4th year of med school as "The Interview Trail." To start off the interview season, I had chosen two locations close to home—Asheville and Hendersonville, North Carolina. "See! This is what I'm talking about!" Colby exclaimed another half hour into our journey. "Mountains! Finally!"

Mountains represented home for Colby, growing up in mountainous Western Mass. The boy had grown up next to potato farmers with deer idly crossing the field. One of his Polish farmers even supplied Layes with the potatoes for their potato chips. Up until that time I never thought as "Up North" having farmers...especially farming potatoes. Wasn't that for Idaho? All I related to the North before meeting my somehow Northern/Southern-at-Heart country boy was industry. According to our Southern history classes the North was full of factories, railroads, the basketball hall of fame, and the people that won the Civil War.

"Mmmm..." I gave a non-committal head nod over in his direction. I wasn't overly thrilled at the idea of mountains. We were trying to stay close to both our families for residency, depending on what the program had to offer. I was picky, and for good reason.

Colby knew what mountains meant to me. They were somewhat terrifying. I was actually tired of hearing people praise Asheville and its artsy unique culture. The Asheville they saw was lively, a little liberal, and a bustling, vibrant tourist town where they could "get down to earth" and "feel one with nature," while also sipping lattes at a cute, hole-in-the-wall café.

The reason I was so terrified was that I had visited these mountains, these exact mountains since my birth. Granted I had done little exploring outside family visitation, but at this stage in my life that was good enough for me...good enough that I knew that I might want some other set of mountains if that was one of his requirements for somewhere to live for residency. Mountains to me meant poverty. It meant becoming stagnant something I had never been, nor ever desired to be. Mountains meant a trap. A trap in life. Somewhere you are born, grow old, and die in. A small box, whose walls like a trash compactor would press inward until you physically couldn't breathe. Oh God, was I really going back to Asheville.

I found myself suddenly four years old again in the stark white bathroom situated in the middle of Nanny's house after Grandpa

Charles had passed away. He died when I was two, I don't remember much. I recall my mother trying to brush out the damp mass of her daughter's toe-headed self, hair dangling to her waist. I remember feeling disgusting, unclean. We had only been there a day...but the cigarette smoke that coated, suffocated the entire house had been there much longer. It was on my skin, in every pore. I felt sticky, as if until I was able to flee, run far enough from the house it would never relinquish the hold it had on my body. I shivered suddenly and a cold towel wrapped around me.

"Babe...what do you think?"

"Huh?" I drifted back to the present.

"Of the area? We're getting closer, look at all the leaves changing color. Try staying awake for once, you don't want to miss this!"

His boyish grin again, he was excited too. I was excited more so about beginning the process of interviewing. This is what I had been waiting for. Two years of complete Hell, missing the world in a library and now...ahh, the wonderful smell of freedom. I'm sure all Colby could smell at the moment was mountains and leaves as another blast of mountain air came whipping in from the driver side window he had rolled down for the fourth time.

I started pointing out random cows and horses along the way to pass the time. If I wasn't sleeping in the car, I was daydreaming and daydreaming was not necessarily something I wanted to do at the moment, since I knew where my mind would go. I knew it would drift back to the one-story house with the cellar in Asheville so long ago, with the little creek in back and the solitary universal bulldozer blade slowly sinking into the earth in the backyard. I knew I would drift back into the memory that curled silently around the part of my hippocampus that held a space for Asheville and the tar-covered walls that surrounded it. Wait...Nanny didn't live there anymore, that's how they knew the walls were tar-covered, when they had moved all the picture frames, had to throw away the lamp shades, and then a lot of Grandpa Charles's things. Nanny had remarried a man named Norman Stamey.

Norman was more of a grandfather to me than anyone else had ever been. Grandpa Charles died when I was two. They said he wasn't the same after the war, but that he loved me very much. My other limited knowledge base on him includes that he earned a purple heart for being shot in the hand, he and Nanny slept in separate egg-carton foam mattresses or beds rather (I hate egg cartons of all varieties, foam and especially the cardboard kind, the cardboard is more of a texture thing to be truthful), and that he had narcolepsy. Mom said he could fall asleep just talking to you at the kitchen table. I think this is where I had gotten my knack for sleeping through lectures, medical or otherwise. Norman. Norman was gone now too—another husband Nanny had outlived. I never thought anything of the arrangement until I got older and saw the wedding ceremony pictures. Nanny had both of them setup one time side by side atop the tele. To the left was her and Charles with a lifepreserver, married on Valentine's Day, and then to the right to my disbelief was the same picture, only Norman had replaced Charles. "Mom, when did Nanny and Norman get married?" I shyly inquired. "February 14th, why?"

"No reason..." I mumbled, then bit my lip. Creepy, right? Norman, like so

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many people that had passed away during the course of my lifetime was now ashes, both figuratively and well...they cremated him. He died at the end of third year. Mom didn't want to stress me out, so she told me when it was pretty much out of the question for me to come to his "funeral," if you could even call it that. He was the first person I had ever known that requested cremation.

I was again jolted back to reality, but this time it was because the center console was shaking, vibrating furiously. "Damn, mountain roads," Colby mumbled under his breath. "Are you sure it's not the car?" I asked tentatively. "It's definitely not the car, I just had it looked at this morning to make sure it was road-ready. Remember?" He slammed his fist into the console and held it there momentarily, hoping the rattling would stop. "But it looks like the console's shaking," I replied. "Maybe a loose screw," he conceded.

The shaking was intermittent and seemed to occur at speeds below 60mph. To Colby that wasn't a problem at all. The truck purred along at 70, but the second someone darted out in front of us and our speed dropped back down, the shaking started again. "We'll be there an hour before the interview dinner," Colby stated, much like a plane pilot informing the occupants resting quietly in the cabin behind the cockpit. "Yeah, I know, I didn't want to rush," I responded and began to close my eyes again. I hadn't drifted long when there was a sound much like a gunshot that went off that was a little too close for comfort.

I awoke from my reverie in much of a haze. We were still in the left lane of traffic on I-26, chugging along at our previous over 60mph speed. It all happened so fast, it was surreal really. The whole thing wasn't in slow motion, I just wasn't quite sure what was going on. Still in my dreamer's haze, I watched as the truck bolted across the right lane of traffic. All my other senses seemed to go numb for a second, until I heard the words "Oooohhh, shhhhhiiiiittt..." escape from Colby's mouth. The earth rushed the front of the vehicle, as we were suddenly, somehow facing the opposite direction. Colby had called it. I was grabbing the oh-shit handle for dear life, bracing myself instinctively for the impact.

I remember hitting and then rolling, lots of rolling. Our previous mastery of the vehicle was lost. It was like some horrible roller coaster ride, especially the older, rickety ones you knew were never meant to go upside down. I'm not ready to die yet. This was the only grand thought that sprang to mind as this was happening. I waited for the cart-wheeling, lurching ride to be over. I couldn't really hear anything else around me over the clang of shattering glass. I don't even remember where my body was positioned. Had my right leg that was bent resting on the dash ever actually come off?

People always wonder if wrecks last forever in your mind while they are occurring. Mine didn't. It lasted long enough to form a thought. They ask you afterwards if you knew that you were going to wreck. My answer to that was that I saw the earth immediately before we started rolling and knew that that was what was going to occur. Initially, when the gunshot/explosion occurred I had no clue that it was our truck that was its target.

My eyes had been open throughout the first roll. After that I had closed them forcefully. Instinctually to protect them, to keep from getting too

dizzy, or the eyes shut because I couldn't believe this was happening to us? I'm not really sure. The rolling eventually stopped and I slowly, cautiously opened my eyes. Colby was already standing below me. Wait, what? It took me a moment to process this. How is he?

"Hold on babe, I'll get you out of there," he said.

It was at that very moment I started to process my current situation. I was dangling from my seatbelt. The truck was now facing another direction from the one we had been originally traveling. The truck was lying on its side with the driver side smashed into the earth. I started to cry. It was a pitiful, helpless, almost pouting cry. It was embarrassing. I don't know whether it was from relief of surviving or from the fact that I was dangling and didn't have any control over it at the moment. Doctors are used to having control. It feeds a lot of our actions. A double-edged sword. "It's okay babe," I heard him say... followed by another surly voice going, "Oh shit guys, there's a girl in there. There's a girl in there with him."

I peeked up and saw what I would consider to be a typical, North Carolinian, middle-aged male. He was slightly overweight, with a buzz cut that blended right into his salt and pepper beard-goatee combination. His NASCAR hat was pulled down well over his eyes, so that I couldn't make out their color and his face appeared more scrunched up and concerned than it actually was. We were both alive. I noticed that I had stopped pouting, crying—whatever the heck had dribbled out of my mouth post accident. I felt fine, more than fine. I was just chilly. We were in the mountains after all. I heard the surly North Carolinian say to another man outside the vehicle, "You think we'll need the jaws-of-life for this one?"

The man was talking clearly to Colby through the open window. I don't remember having ever rolled mine down. I heard sirens in the distance. After hearing the statement about the jaws-of-life I gingerly found the passenger-side unlock button. The North Carolinian man and a couple of others, who I assumed had stopped after seeing the accident seemed to take the hint and managed to hoist the passenger side door open. "Okay guys, I'll release her seatbelt if you can help lift her up and out of the car," I heard Colby directing. The North Carolinian man gave a grunt and a nod and I found Colby unfastening my seatbelt and then supporting me. Strong arms held me up and another two sets of strong arms lifted me up enough to where I could pull myself to a seated position on the passenger side frame, with legs dangling into the truck. Colby was still talking to the men, he handed me up my phone. Thank God for Otterbox.

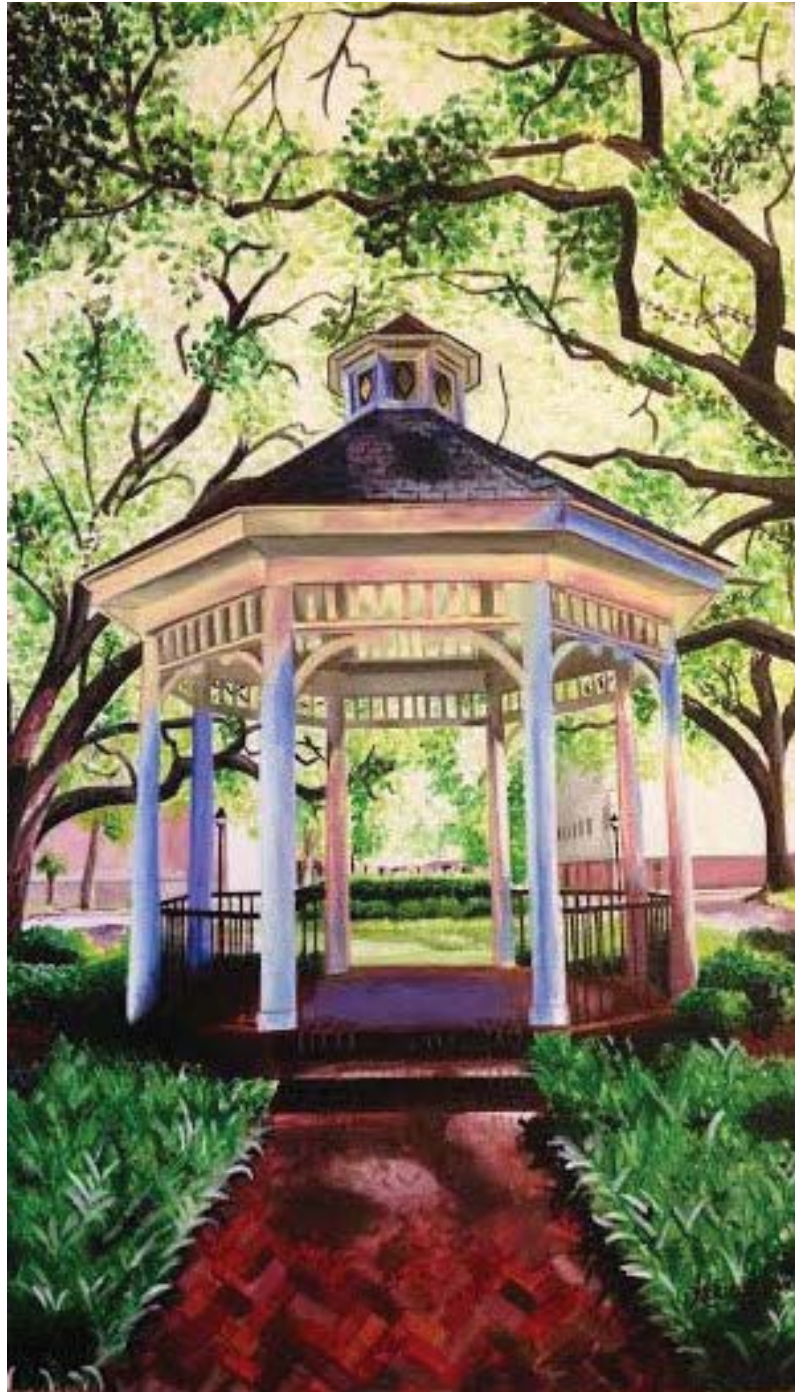
"Hey guys, can you take these bags?" I heard Colby call up as he began to toss out one duffle bag after another. I couldn't really see any of the suits that had been previously hanging up on an overhead bar in the back. "Is the Trooper here yet?" Colby called up. I took a moment and glanced around, we had landed in a bunch of thorny brush along the roadside. Trees were scattered here and there to the side of us and yes, yes, I did note the Trooper in his funny, wide-brimmed hat with a crossie that always seemed to remind me of the tassels on those old penny loafers.

"Yeah, he's here," I called back down. At this point, I don't know why, but I suddenly realized that I was going to be late for my

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Whitefield Square, Kelsey Fincher



## On the Interview Trail, Tabatha Davis (Continued)

interview. I'm not sure if it was utter shock or what exactly was going on in my head. "I need to let that lady know from Asheville that I won't make it to the dinner," I mumbled. I fidgeted with my phone and frantically tried to access my e-mails. My hands both had a slight tremor. Colby asked what I was doing and I found myself replying, "they told us if we weren't going to make it to that dinner that we have to let them know in advance and now we don't have a car, so we aren't going to make it." That seemed logical, right? I managed to find the e-mail for the Asheville Family Medicine Residency and the contact information of their Administrative Assistant. I was pleased to say the least that with modern-day phones I just had to click her number in the e-mail (yay! Touch screens!) because I doubt I could've dialed the number at that moment in time. "Hello, hello," I called. Straight to their answering machine, of course. It was after 4 o'clock on a Friday. I hung it up.

I heard the men talking to the state Trooper. "Yeah, we saw their tire blow. Blew clean off, more like exploded and then they went tumbling down in this ditch here."

"Is anyone injured in there?" the Trooper asked. By this time EMS was arriving at the scene. "I don't think so," I mumbled, knowing that Colby was still standing up below me, "funny thing was guys is that I was heading to a med school residency interview, I'm a fourth year." EMS: "Any neck or back pain?"

I had to think about that for a minute. Now that I had paused I realized that the right side of my neck was really sore and part of my upper arm.

Colby: "Nope, none down here."

Me: "I think my neck hurts down to my deltoid, no numbness, tingling, or radiation down the arm. My sensation is intact." What the heck? Do normal people talk like this in an accident. "No, no LOC," I found myself responding. "Pretty sure my back is fine."

Apparently, I have neck pain is the wrong thing to say in an accident because I heard the phrase pass from one EMS to another, "Hey, go get the backboard and the C-collar." I piped up at that, "Can umm...I change my answer? I think it's just some bruising from the seatbelt." The EMS laughed at that, "You think we can get her down?" he asked, addressing the men that had stopped after seeing the accident.

I nimbly assisted them in getting down from the truck that was now belly-up, so to speak. "I feel fine, really guys."

EMS: "Can you turn around and cross your arms over your chest?"

Pausing. "Hey, where is all that blood coming from?"

I looked down and noticed my left leg was covered in blood. One of the other men chipped in, "I think she got some glass in it, the windshield and the side windows shattered pretty good." Funny, I never noticed the glass that was evidently in my foot. Geez, adrenaline works pretty well. Although, I did notice the thorns sticking into my bare feet now. I crossed my arms obediently over my chest and turned around, my back now facing the backboard. I felt someone wrapping something around my neck, the bloody C-collar. "Ugh..." I moaned in disgust.

EMS: "Is that hurting you Miss?"

Me: "Nope, nope. Just heard waaay too many patients complain about these things."

I felt the straps being wrapped around me.

EMS: "You guys do need ambulance transport to the hospital right?" We don't have a truck! Of course we need transport...although, don't they charge an arm and a leg for ambulance transport. I felt myself responding, "Yes, I don't think our vehicle will be taking us anywhere tonight" and then thanking everyone for stopping and their assistance.

The EMS crew lifted me up in concert and hauled my backboarded and C-collared self back to the ambulance with Colby in toe. The ambulance doors shut behind us. I was glued to the backboard and shivering. A female EMS worker threw a blanket over me. Colby was giving information to a male EMS worker near me, while the state Trooper was collecting extra information for the accident report. I heard the male EMS worker pause, "Are you wearing girl shoes man?" Colby: "Yeah, I am. I couldn't find any other shoes. These are all her shoes, she brought three pairs, but I couldn't seem to find any for the right foot, just the left. So...now I have two different shoes for the same foot."

I found myself bursting into laughter, God it hurt and it made me feel like I was choking. I couldn't stop coughing now. The female EMS worker looked at me a bit confused, but then stated "Okay, I'm going to start an IV." I stopped laughing, "Do you have to?" Female EMS worker: "Yes, but I can use a 20 instead of an 18." Me: "Thank you, yay!"

Colby: "Wha?"

Me: "She just offered to give me a smaller needle, you know the gauge?"

Colby: "Just glad it isn't me getting stuck with needles. I hate needles."

Female EMS worker: "Now you might taste saline after I start the IV."

Me: "Why?"

Female EMS worker: "I don't know, it's just something that happens when we start IVs."

I felt her adept hands grab my arm and find one of my finger-sized veins (or so I was told by the phlebotomist teaching us to do sticks on one another at school) and thread the needle through the skin. A quick burn, a tourniquet releasing, and yes, there it was—saline. Female EMS worker: "Now you can tell your patients what to expect!" Man, she was chipper, but I noticed myself smiling back too.

We were soon arriving at the ED at Pardee Hospital in Hendersonville. The Trooper, having gathered his information, took his leave stating that he was glad we were both alright and that usually, at accidents that bad, they always had to carry a black body bag up to the car. A little TMI at the moment. I hadn't recalled much of what Colby's truck looked like after the accident. Colby and I were soon separated once we were in the ED. He went to what they call a "FastTrack" part, where minor accidents/injuries/complaints went. I was sent to Room 21. They assured us that we could see each other later.

The ED was a familiar place, not necessarily Pardee's ED, but I had worked plenty of trauma night call and spent a week on the Peds ED side at my home hospital in Charleston to know the drill. An assault or barrage of questions, step offs on my back to see if there was injury, a quick assessment, and multiple men pulling on my arms and legs. I knew what was coming. "Don't take the pants!" I exclaimed. I was still in the C-Collar, but I knew one thing they weren't getting my

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good pair of capris.

The attending looked at me curiously. "Your pants?" he asked. "Yes, my pants!" I was getting a little bit frantic, "don't cut them off with the scissors. I can definitely wiggle out. You can cut the shirt, I don't care...I got it volunteering, but the pants stay." The nurse grinned knowingly and bemused, assured the men that it was very hard to find the perfect pair of comfortable women's pants. I thanked her profusely, mainly for recognizing my current plight. "I don't think it's weird at all," the nurse told them and began helping me wriggle out of my capris.

After I got out of my pants the attending informed me that they would have to get some imaging, especially of my neck, the cervical region and probably the left foot with the glass shards all over it. He asked if I wanted a CT of my head, considering there was not any LOC. My response was well thought out at the time and for the situation, "Well Doc, right now considering...my brain is my best selling point. Let's scan it." The Doc laughed and agreed.

I found myself getting an early tour of Pardee Hospital, namely how some of its ceiling tiles were in dire need of repair. Imaging was quick and uneventful and before I knew it I was back in my "holding pen," Room 21 again; although this time when I entered the room the mid-curtain divider was pulled to. It seems I had company. My nurse came back to check on me before I got too curious about my new neighbors, "Colby sent me back again to check on you, he's still in the waiting room area, but he told me to ask or rather check on you and see whether or not you had your ring?" I knew which ring she was referring to. It was my engagement ring that he always guarded like a hawk. The boy did everything from cleaning it to taking it to its six month check-ups to make sure the prongs were still firm and holding the diamonds and sapphires properly. I twirled the three stones to face my palm to reassure myself as well, running my thumb along each of the different stones' surfaces, "Yes, I have it. All in one piece."

Colby wasn't paranoid about the ring per se. It was the largest single purchase he had made in his life. My engagement ring. Hand-selected diamonds and sapphires that were placed in a three-tiered platinum terrace setting. It scared me sometimes to even be wearing it around. He had done a wonderful job selecting it and had been scraping away for a few years to pay for it. My only requirement when he asked me about engagement rings I like was that it be thoughtful. Needless to say the ring met all of my requirements.

The CT scan of my head and the cervical X-rays of my neck came back negative according to the attending; although I would later find on one of the impressions that it was possible I had a slight concussion. The slight concussion might have explained the fact that I couldn't do simple math when they asked for my mother's birth year. I remember telling the Admin, "She's 52...that would make her birth year...hold on...I got it...1967, wait, that's not right...don't put that down." She didn't offer to help me with the math Odd, it was usually one of my strong suits.

With the new report in, the C-collar was removed. The blasted contraption had been biting into parts of my neck and scalp to the point that I had asked the nurse if I had a piece of glass sticking out of my head because it sure felt like it. "It's just the C-collar," she responded,

"it does that to everyone." Well that sucks.

The cuts and bruises were starting to catch up with me as I lay in the hospital bed. Without the C-collar I was able to notice a particular shiner above my right knee blossoming along with the multiple scratches and abrasions lateral to the knee itself. Bugger. The nurse noticed my discomfort, "Would you like some Tramadol?" she asked with a smile. "I try not to take that sort of stuff, but if you have some Ibuprofen, I'll take that."

The nurse came back with a needleless syringe in one hand, "I'll just put this in the IV" she said as she uncapped the syringe. It didn't look like Ibuprofen. She placed it in my IV. I didn't even feel it go in. "That should help with the pain. I think you're being discharged soon," she said cheerily as she popped out of the room.

I could now hear what seemed to be a couple talking behind the curtain. I heard a male voice saying, "Babe, you can't do this again. You have to think about me and the baby. You need help, like rehab." I heard a garbled female voice respond, "I know baby, I love you." The male voice was firmer, angrier now, "You said that last time and here we are again. Look, I love you, but you need to get yourself straight. Look, I want to be with you, but you have to be with yourself too you know, get clean. Next time this happens I'll have to take the kid until you get right. It's not fair to me and it's not fair to him I heard the female voice begin to sob quietly. That's tough love, she needs it. I felt kind of odd ease dropping inadvertently on their conversation. Their nurse came back, "Ma'am, I'm going to need to get a cathed urine sample from you and Sir, I'm afraid you'll have to leave the room." I saw the curtain ripple on the far side of Room 21 as the male partner exited. I heard the girl respond curtly, "Like Hell I'm giving you a cathed pee sample." She's obviously been through this before.

Nurse: "Ma'am, it's important for your care and if we do not know what drugs are in your system or possibly if you are pregnant at the moment we will not know how best to proceed. We want to provide the best care possible."

Female patient: "Screw you, I'm not getting cathed, I'll piss in the pan."

Nurse (patiently): "Ma'am the cathed urine is much cleaner and a bit more accurate."

Female patient: "If you want urine, bring me a bedpan. Otherwise, you aren't getting any."

I heard the nurse open a drawer and say, "Alright, Ma'am if you'll just lift up your hips a bit I will place the bedpan and then be back in a few minutes. Do you feel like you can go?" The female again responded tersely, "Yeah, I know how to pee." I felt bad for the nurse.

My attending came back in shortly and went through the discharge information with me. I had gotten away with a cervical sprain along the right side, several lacerations and glass pieces on the left foot that according to X-rays would work their way out later, and some mild bruising. He left me with, "You'll certainly be feeling that the rest of this week. Don't be shy about taken some Ibuprofen, Aleve, or something." With that he was gone. I found myself getting dressed rather quickly in order to follow the nurse where they were keeping Colby.





## Regrets, Paul Rousseau

My cell phone rang.

Mr. Jones, a forty-two year old self-avowed loner, had just died of lung cancer caused by a four pack per day smoking habit. Unfiltered cigarettes, the worst kind. But for a loner, his bed was surrounded by friends: an ex-wife, a companion from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), and three neighbors.

I entered his room, introduced myself, and gathered a chair.

The neighbors, saddened and sorrowed, told stories of nights when the moon, a pale wafer in the sky, bowed slowly to the morning sun. Those nights were long and never ending, filled with breathlessness, coughing, bloody sputum, and cries for help. However, for the ex-wife, there were no stories, for her nights were comfortable, quiet, and far from the agony of an ending life. And for the AA companion—he feels he did not do enough, that he should have done more, but what could he do? When the tentacles of cancer unfold their reach, there is nothing to be done, nothing that you can do.

I sat with them for a while, as tears fell and cries filled the room, spilling into the hall. Other families listened, afraid to approach, for fear if they did, death would follow to their rooms. There were questions. If the diagnosis had been made sooner, could he have lived? Why didn't the chemotherapy work? Should he have gone to another medical center for a second opinion? Why didn't his doctors try harder to make him quit smoking? Questions of guilt, and questions of absence, all from the ex-wife. I answered the best that I could, but water under the bridge mutes any and all answers.

I listened to their heartache, witnessed their anguish, and excused myself, but returned an hour later. The friends were gone, as was the ex-wife, but the body remained, along with a memento mori: a bag of morphine still hanging from an intravenous pole, the catheter dangling like a hangman's noose. Mr. Jones was long gone, but his body remained, as did the nurse preparing his corpse for its next journey.

Mr. Jones laid pale, his heart at rest, his worries leaving with his breath. He looked peaceful if waxy, his days finished—at forty-two years of age. His comfort was no longer tenuous, but complete—if death is a comfort. No one really knows for sure. I reached over and touched his hand, its coldness stark and telling. Being with a dead body moves one's soul, and reminds us of our fleeting transience and the fragility of today.

As I left the room, the nurses and doctors laughed, and they complained—of traffic, of lunch, of weather, of families, and of the unfairness of life. Trivial when compared to the struggles occurring in every room

on the oncology ward. However, we all do it, we're human, it's just the way it is. But as noted by Donald Hall in his book about the death of his wife, *The Best Day, the Worst Day*, death minimizes hangnails. And it's not until a loved one dies that you really know the depth of loss, when there are no more tomorrows, no more words, and no more chances. It's then that everything changes. Grief and death do that, they take away everything common, everything known, and replace it with nothing. It's a free fall into sorrow, with no safety net. And because grief happens so suddenly, we hope it will leave suddenly—but it doesn't, it's a guest for life. It never leaves, visible at times, hidden at others, but always there, percolating beneath, ready to pounce, a vertiginous swirling that sidelines the ordinary—forever.

Mr. Jones' ex-wife rested in the waiting area as I left for home. I stopped and she looked up. "I failed him," she says. "I wasn't there when he needed me." That's the trouble with death, all the loose ends.

"You were there when he needed you, when he died, his time of greatest need. He knows that, God knows that—and that's all that matters. And I want you to know that."

As I said the words, I felt fraudulent and conflicted, for she wasn't there when he suffered horribly, when his body was betraying him, and when he needed her, and of that she was guilty. We sat there for a minute, silent and without words. Then she thanked me and left, shame trailing close behind.

As I walked to the elevator, I thought of how we all die in our own way, at least as much as we can, and as survivors, we all grieve in our own way. And while loss hurts, it's the regret and guilt that can overwhelm, but it's a part of grieving, it's a part of being human, it's a part of loving, and it's a part of death, and there's nothing we can do. It troubles us all. For a long time, and for many of us, for the rest of our lives.



D Brady



La Sagrada Familia in Barceona, Spain, Brett Tomashitis





## **Tender Garden**, John Campbell

Fronds bend in darkness.  
Sensation; once foreign and primitive  
Now heightened, refined.  
A barrage of golden beams;  
Tendrils of dual role,  
Both of obstacle and compass  
To one seeking the favorite place.

Tethered roots, vital soil.  
His display of unparalleled strength and desire,  
Yet vulnerability; helpless to her elements.  
This paradox not of consequence,  
But rather the thought of any other existence.  
His intention is her,  
Full numbers attained only through her.

Together seeds sown,  
And each harvest more fruitful than the last.

## **You Don't Understand Me; That's Not What I Meant At All**, Lauren Talley

"You don't Understand me; That's not what I meant at all"  
These were the most intelligent phrases to have ever been spewed from man.  
He curled his blistered lips into rounded utterances to produce these sounds  
to make this meaning. The words stood for nothing; only the phrases made  
me sink. I was beginning to be made unknown again and the sounds were  
finally making me feel. These thirteen syllables were spoken two nights ago;  
two nights ago when a bar had settled into dulling chaos and the lights melted  
everything tangible into a molten watercolor. How Impressionistic. We were  
young. We were dead. We were living for what the other never had. And the  
sounds of that damned clock in the upper corner of the eaves where the beams  
were aged just right with wood rot and laced with silken doilies had begun to  
tick away my existence. There he sat on the metal bar stool, eyes sunken and  
those hands splayed across his knees. He looked at me. He stared me into  
nothing until he spoke. And when he finished, he left no one there. The glasses  
clinked, the sounds of patrons swelled, and there was nothing left to respond.  
So great were these phrases formulated that my heart died and my soul cried in  
ecstasy. This was the twinned fate I was given.

---

## **Wimmen Problems**, Leah Fryml

"Please come to order, take a seat every one.  
The Boss has a crisis—he's coming undone.  
Tossing and turning, he won't sleep a bit  
Till we reach a consensus and deliver it.  
I'm Dr. Gray. You know me already,  
To keep us in order, I'll chair this committee."

All I need say of the problem at hand  
Two words-- "A lady" --and you understand.  
I helped the Boss write a Pro and Con list  
But he ripped it to shreds the first time they kissed.  
So I'm calling you all to weigh in on the matter  
Before the Boss goes as mad as a hatter.

"First, a Miss Bellum called from tech HQ  
That we've got their support, whatever we do.  
Sarah Tonin's running late, my voicemail said.  
(Prob'ly had trouble crawling out of the bed.)"  
"Late again?" Broke in Raphe, the office manager.  
That does it. Just call her and tell her don't bother!"

"Lucas Ceruleus, you look anxious indeed.  
If you'd like to speak next, by all means proceed."  
"Too risky, I tell you. He'll never survive  
His only option is to run for his life!  
I.....I feel a bit sick—is it warm in here?  
Excuse me please, I must get some air!"

"Ok, next, Barney Stem, the council would like  
*To hear your opinion—step up to the mic.*"  
"It's a right easy answer, can't ya'll see?  
Don't over-think it, if y' ask me.  
It's about time that puppy got screwed.  
Now dammit, I'm hungry. Got any food?"

"*Sr. Campus, we're grateful for your expertise  
If you're willing, now share your thoughts with us, please.*"  
"Call me, 'Ippo,' dear members, and thanks!  
I bring you word from the Memory Banks.  
"The memory banks?!" the room chorused, "Do tell!  
And if there's time, Dr. Freud's thoughts as well!"

'Ippo mused, "Though it seems the boss likes another,  
The one he wants is really his mother.  
She doted at first but turned out to be  
Rather distant emotionally.  
'Fore long, if he troubles to carry this out  
He'll murder his father, I have little doubt!"

"*Thanks all, your points have all been quite grand,  
But, I fear they've not solved the problem at hand.  
The results are in, Boss. I'm sorry to say  
That no consensus was reached today.  
The committee proposes that you, instead  
Consult with the Heart instead of the Head.*"





## To Whom it May Concern, Cameron Jones

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you, my local representative, in order to protest my exclusion from the list of citizens chosen for the so-called subterranean chambers. I realize that you are likely receiving many similar letters from people eager to escape certain death from the impending asteroid (Or is it meteor? Or meteoroid?) Honestly you would think I would have this down by now. I realize that there are a number of private firms currently at work on their own chambers, but many are prohibitively expensive, and last I heard, the so-called People's Initiative chamber—which will allow in any occupant willing to help dig, had only reached a depth of 32 feet and had run into a number of issues with water mains. I also understand that the citizens currently slated for the aforementioned govt.-sponsored chambers were chosen based upon specific criteria in order to remake and replicate our current society in the aftermath of the strike. However, I think we can all agree that the situation post-strike is going to be less than optimal, and I think there's a strong possibility of anger and disappointment on the part of the citizens underground, once they realize what life is going to be like. This disappointment could even lead to open rebellion and chaos. Thus, what I'm suggesting is selecting people who already hate their life, so as to minimize frustration and strife underground. For example, I happen to know that a guy named Brendan in my neighborhood received a spot, and he has a great life: happy marriage, two wonderful kids, well-liked and successful. I believe life in the subterranean chamber is going to be a bit of a come-down for Brendan and his ilk. I on the other hand live a lonely, miserable existence in an apartment that in many important aspects already resembles a cave. I am unlikely to experience any real disappointment following the strike, and, though I have up to this point shown very little talent or ability in any of my previous endeavors, the underground world will be a new place, perfect for those who had already buried all of their hopes and dreams.

Best wishes,  
Ted

Hey guys,

I am writing to you about something that, frankly, has me a little ticked off. I'm referring to the underground rooms and all the people that get to go down there. Needless to say, yours truly wasn't included, but, hey, I've never been the type to let obstacles, or, as I openly admit and as my extensive criminal record will attest, laws get in my way. However, I thought I'd send an official letter first, just to give you an idea of the kind of ingenuity you'll be losing out on by not including me. Just for example, here's a recent idea I had. I know there's been a lot of debate about what to do re: animals, with ideas ranging from, do we go full Noah's Ark w/ this thing or maybe only save the animals that, like, serve us our food. Listen, when that big rock hits—even in your precious little

underground chamber—it's gonna be pretty epic. I'm talking like one of those fair rides where they don't really have the space to do like a roller coaster or even one of those pirate ship things, so they just kind of rumble you around. And dusty, with broken stuff everywhere. Ok, so here's what we do: you need something that's going to make stuff for us, like a cow, but not a cow, because (let's face it) cows are the worst. Strike 1—they eat grass...which I happen to know only grows out of the top of the ground and not the bottom. Strike 2—they take up a lot of space. I don't know how much time you spend around cows, but however big they are in your mind, they're like twice that in real life. Strike 3—they get scared easily, especially during earthquakes (you can Wikipedia that). Ok, so we need an animal that's going to be useful. Let's see, what makes milk, like a cow except in a totally badass way? Hmm? I don't know, how about freaking goats. Guess what they eat? Like everything! There isn't a ton that stuck with me from elementary school, but one thing my teachers were pretty clear about was that goats are basically like trash compactors. They just recycle our leftovers into milk. I don't know about you, but that kind of sounds like an animal I want in my cave. Secondly, they're not fat, not even kinda fat. They're all bony and they're always just perching on stuff. Thirdly, they're not scared. Who's the most famous goat? Three words: Billy Goat Gruff. What's on his résumé? Last name Gruff, crossed a bridge, pwned a troll. Boom! Ok, wow, I ran really long on the goat thing there, but let's just say I've got plenty of other ideas along those lines. Try, for example, performing a similar thought experiment with ostriches and chickens.

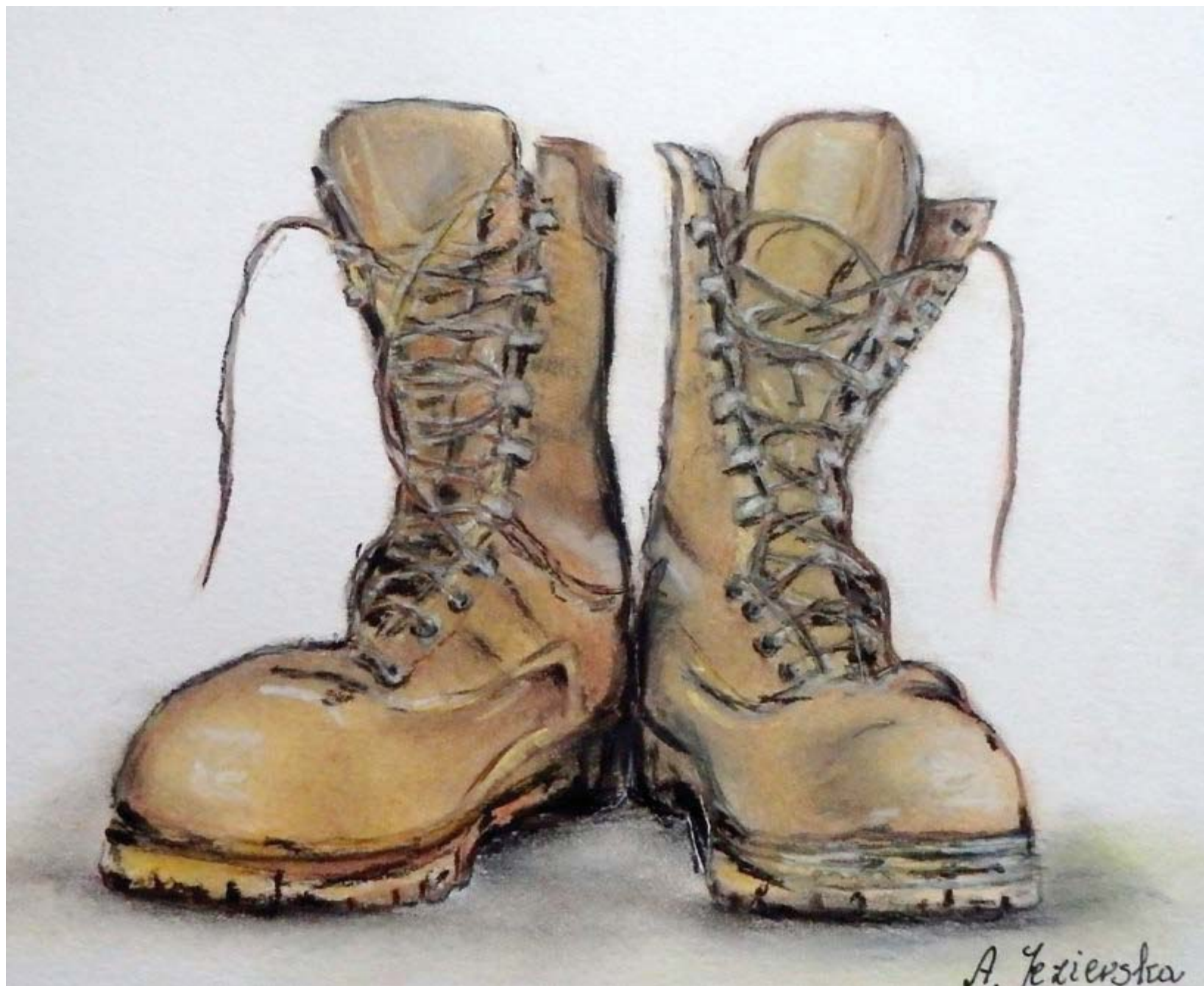
Sincerely,  
Dave

Dear government,

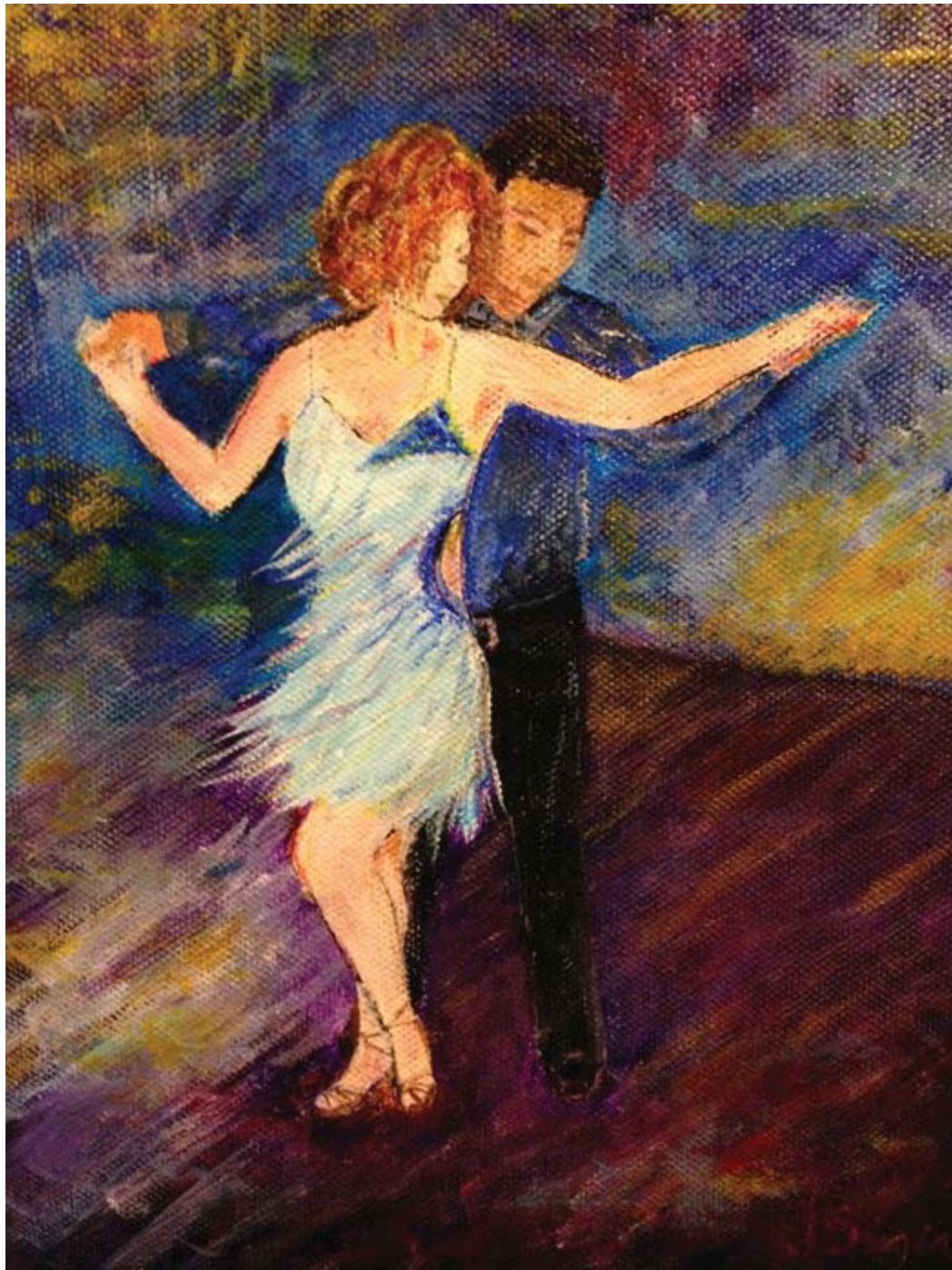
I am writing to you with an exclusive offer, in light of the imminent apocalypse. Let me begin by asking a simple question. Do you wear contacts? What about any of your government friends or your government family? If so, you might be uncomfortable at the prospects for your vision once you're living in the subterranean chamber, presumably with a limited supply of contact solution. We in the modern world have grown accustomed to our poor vision being a small hindrance thanks to modern advances in eye-care, but let me remind you that ancient history has not been kind to the nearsighted (who were often killed, fossils have revealed, by thrown rocks) or the farsighted (who often died, according to fossils, from blunt rock trauma). The bad news: there will likely be a lot of rocks underground. The good news: I have been preparing for just this eventuality, and I'm pleased to inform you that I am in possession of the world's foremost collection of authentic human tears. Seeing as how I myself actually have pristine vision, I'm willing to barter my entire collection for a place in one of the chambers. I invite you to check out my website, [www.tearsforyears.com](http://www.tearsforyears.com). Lastly, I trust that at this time you'll see no need to ask any ridiculous—

*(Continued on page 36)*











## To Whom it May Concern, Continued

and frankly, irrelevant—questions such as, but not limited to, how a single, middle-aged individual managed to harvest, er gather, several hundred gallons of human tears.

Awaiting your reply,  
Lester

Dear those in charge,

I am writing to offer you a chance to correct your recent oversight. I'm referring to your failure to include me in your list of subterranean chamber invitees. However, I'm willing to overlook this slight as a result of ignorance rather than malevolence, provided the necessary steps are taken to correct it. See, over the last several years I have come to realize that I have a unique power, one which I believe to be the result of a sudden acceleration in human evolution. You might be familiar with the recent films, the comic books, or perhaps the 90s cartoon entitled "X-Men?" Right, so that's basically what we're looking at, except it's really just me, so it would probably be X-Man. I'm sure you're curious as to what my enhanced capability involves. Well, let me preface by saying that it's rather difficult to describe abstractly, but essentially, I am able—through what I've deduced are invisible light-waves radiating from the area around my thyroid—to significantly alter a person's mental balance and overall synergy. The most common symptom in others is a severe sense of disgust and anxiety, tinged with a strong dose of despair. My effect on others begins immediately, though it is certainly enhanced through extended exposure. You might wish to corroborate my claim, so I invite you to contact my ex-wife, Stacy Jennings, last known to be residing in Minneapolis, MN. My two estranged children, Mark and Vanessa, will no doubt also describe my transformative power, but I confess I don't know their whereabouts (avoiding me seems to be a big part of what they do these days). I'm sure you can track them down. Though I can understand how you might feel my abilities would be ill-suited for a locked chamber housing people in close quarters, I believe that, theoretically, these waves could be emitted in various frequencies, perhaps with a change in my diet and/or surroundings, to produce a range of emotional outcomes. Additionally, I doubt I need to remind you that if I'm not included among the surviving humans, my ability will be lost, and who knows how long it could take for this fortuitous genetic mutation to occur again. However, with the restricted gene pool after the meteor strike, the prevalence of this ability in the human population could be markedly increased in a short time. Perhaps, the government might even wish to set up some type of, uh, partnering program that would allow me to more efficiently propagate this invaluable gift?

Talk to you soon,  
Jeff

Hey guys,

I'm writing to you about the whole subterranean chamber thing. Saw that the list came out the other day, and I wasn't on it. Not gonna lie, that one hurt a bit. In any case, I'm not really into history, because I live in the present; but one thing I do know about history is that we wouldn't have it if someone hadn't recorded it. Therefore, I'm volunteering my services to act as the official chronicler of man's journey underground. As an established filmmaker I bring the requisite level of professionalism needed to accomplish this important task. I won't bore you with a full list of my films, but you might be familiar with my recent documentary "(Not) Groundhog Day" in which I explore the ins and outs of Punxsutawney Phil's life the other 364 days of the year. It's raw, intimate stuff, that's left me well prepared to film the underground rebuilding of society after 95% of mankind perish in a fiery explosion. I also have a lot of experience filming in the dark, which seems pretty handy. If you're interested in taking me on, please contact my agent. We share an email address, so you can just hit reply.

Hit me up,  
Jake



**Palm VI**, Lisa Graves



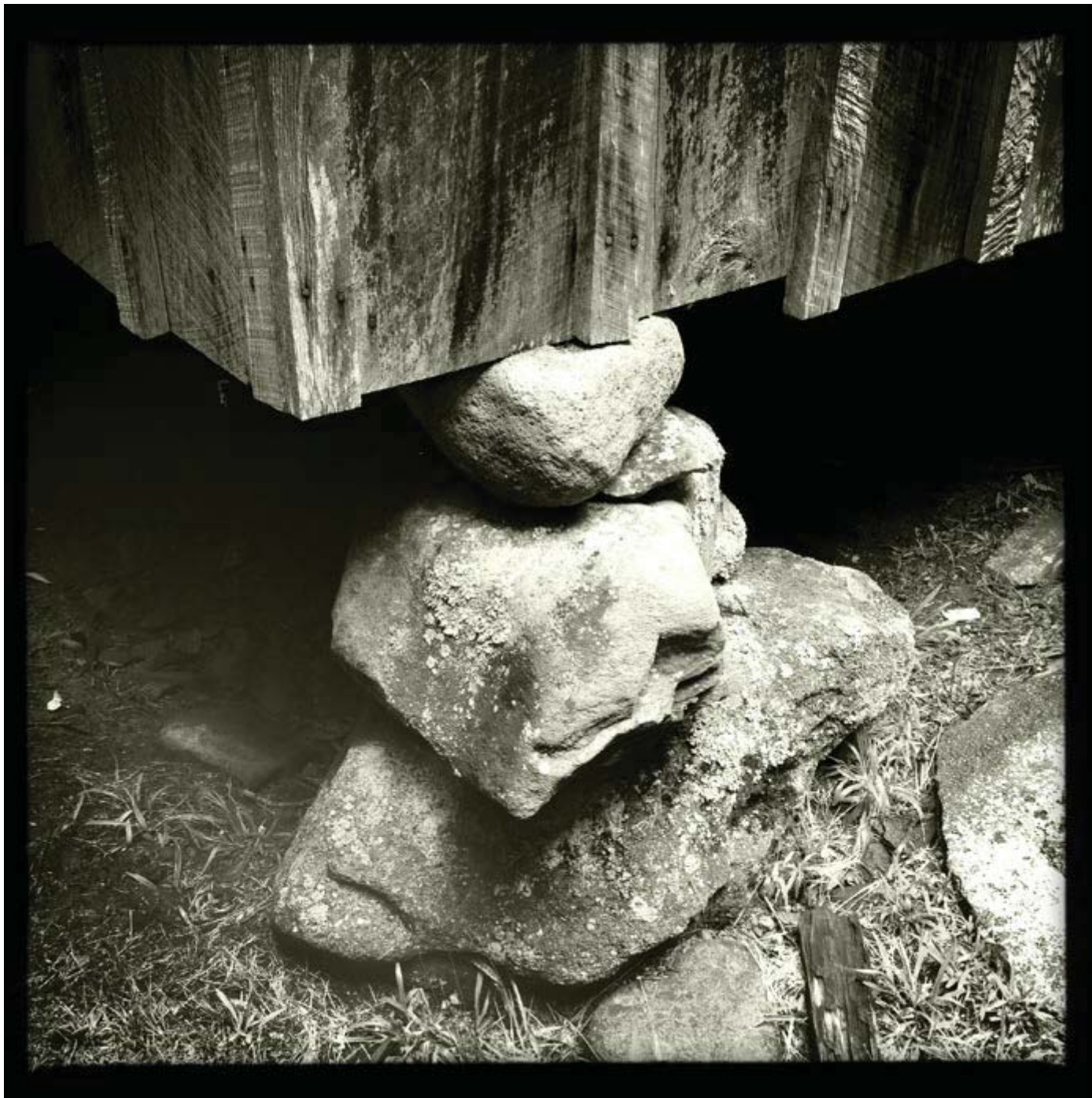
## **Over my Wall I Heard You Call**, Parker Barnwell

Over my wall I heard you call,  
"Overhear what I have to say, if it only in passing.  
OVERRATED is security, is contentment all alone.  
Overlap my life with your life for at least a little while."  
"Overstating, don't you think," I called back calmly,  
Overtaken, secretly, with the muffled stir of some awakening.  
"Overtones dramatic, don't you think," I called over, secretly swallowing  
Overwrought emotion overwhelming.  
"Oversleep on me then!" you overthrew my overanxious pride.  
Overnight love is set over dusty dead embers anyway.  
Overlay on overlay we built until like  
Overcast sky pierced, we felt that nuanced pang  
Overhang our lives.  
Overdoing any language overkill, I beseeched  
"Overlook me, look over into my eyes.  
Oversee the destruction of my walls."  
Overjoyed, we loved overtly, and in the night.  
Overall, we grew into each other and overgrew ourselves,  
Overshadowed you and me, in this 'we' which  
Overruled our lives.  
Overly paranoid perhaps, did I go overboard?  
Overrun I was with worry, did how you feel become an oversight?  
Overreaching for an overarching reason, my pain is overdue and I  
shouldn't return.  
Over and over and over again still I set logic in motion illogically  
Grasping to the necessity that there was something  
For it to be over.

## **The Terraces of Delight**, Tariq Rashid

The sun, perfect as she was rising from the East,  
Bringing her gems of rubies and diamonds sparkling from the desert  
On that cold winter's morning atop the mountain,  
What mystery, what wonder, what awe I felt as my whole being came to be,  
Viewing down on that magnificent sight so perfectly hidden from me that  
night,  
And so I breathe as if I had never breathed before,  
I smile as if I never knew joy till this moment,  
I gallop, for this moment is a gift, the gift of many lives ago,  
And I walk down the terraces towards the sea of delight,  
Filled with light and love more luminous than that starry sky  
Not so long ago,  
And I remember the story of that Man who yielded his earthly form so I  
could have this moment of true bliss,  
My soul...here for this dawn, feeling the warmth of the rays of light on my  
face,  
The joys of hope, of intensity, of a love that fills me up like none other  
before it and none other since—  
From the sight of the sun rising from the East,  
Shining down her rays of splendor all across these hallowed, holy trails,  
From here to eternity, the paths go beyond the vast horizons atop,  
And I hear that cry penned so long ago:  
"Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings!"  
As I walk down the terraces of delight with the wind piercing my face  
with mirth that fills my soul.









**Frozen Potomac River, Jameela Gourdazi**



Today's assignment: learn empathy. I joked with my classmates when we saw it on the schedule before we knew anything about the pathophysiology of tumor formation and the genetic and embryologic origins of metabolic disorders and heart defects, before we learned pharmacology and the relativity of vital signs from person to person, especially in pediatric patients. Boards are quickly approaching, so we have been studying extra hard lately in the library, situated between the hospital—home to our future patients—and the basic science building, home to our cadavers.

On the one hand, how can we achieve such a feat in one day? Learning to empathize with integrity takes years of practice and of being exposed to the full gamut of emotions in medicine. On the other, we all fall pray time and again to MSS—Medical Student Syndrome—the belief that “I already have mastered that skill even if the others haven't.” Maybe it's a defense mechanism, a way of dealing with the fact that there are few things we can actually master in the maze of medicine the first time we try. Maybe it comes from the fact that we've participated in all of the adequately unique and altruistic endeavors necessary to be accepted to medical school. I spent time in a clinic in Africa and shared germs and stories with the women in my host family as we ate out of a communal bowl. I did CPR for the first time ever on a man who was already dead during my EMT training class in college. I studied medical anthropology. If anyone knows how to see the patient as human, it's me!

Whatever the reason, I go into this assignment with what I see as healthy confidence. I'll show how great I am at empathizing and then go home to a glass of wine and my favorite TV show before hitting the books. Any experienced nurse or doctor sporting a long white coat could easily diagnose my case of MSS.

Alas, I feel a slight bit of trepidation as I step into the hospital with my preceptor. Is it trepidation or nausea? Back pain or the worst headache of my life? Am I fainting? Am I starving? Am I dying?

I pull myself together. I know what I'm doing. I am the master of tolerance and compassion. I'm a natural empathizer. It's why I wanted to go into medicine in the first place.

I follow my preceptor through the maze of ER rooms, trying to ignore the overwhelming wave of stress that threatens to overcome me. What is wrong with me? I go into one room after the other, listening to what patients have to say but mostly ignoring them for my own self-preservation. I try to think about the science behind their disease states. If I see them as less human and more machine, it will be easier to be objective. It will be less painful. Despite my best efforts to stop it, the doctors all seem more imposing than I have ever found them to be. I have forgotten everything I know about medicine. I am at their mercy. I hear words and phrases I don't fully understand. “If her pulse ox and respiratory rate don't pick up, we're going to have to code her...OD on antidepressants...suicidal ideations... dehydration... stubbed toe...give him a bolus...pancreatitis...what's her blood alcohol level?... give her a steroid injection.. how many times has she been in asking for painkillers?” I am on my knees heaving. I have an elephant on my chest; I feel hopeless

and drunk; I have a sharp pain in my left upper quadrant, and my toe is purple. I am addicted; I don't want to malingering, but I must to survive. I don't have insurance. That's why I had to bring my sick kid to the ER instead of going to the pediatrician tomorrow.

My preceptor pulls me up and stuffs me into a wheelchair, taking me, febrile and hurting, into the elevator. Next is oncology—the same thing all over again, except this time, I am starving yet nauseous. I am ashamed at my baldness and the state of my skin. I can't taste anything anymore. I am constipated from the pain meds. I am angry with my body for turning against me. I am losing hope despite the fact that I have always been an optimist. It goes on and on—cardiology, neurospine, pediatrics (this is the most hopeful I have felt all day), nephrology, gastroenterology, etc., etc., etc.

Finally, we enter a quiet room in the hospice unit, where an elderly woman lays surrounded by her family. She is glowing in the late afternoon light despite the fact that she is obviously dying. I choke back my sobs; this peaceful scene is no place for tears. But I can't follow her to where she is going—not yet. I consider what I have experienced today—the sick feeling of self-aggrandizement I got even as I was shaking so much with a patient that I could never have helped her, the feeling that if I didn't completely experience what the patient felt, then I would never be a healer, only a slave to biomedicine. Is my problem really based in that I empathize too much?

The woman pierces my soul with her gaze. “Baby, just let go,” she says, as she closes her eyes for the last time.

I am freer than I have ever been, cured of MSS and thus tuned into the universal heart of humanity rather than the momentary inflictions of individuals. I feel vitality and joy return to my body as I cast off my self-inflicted pain. I don't need to be my patients in order to treat them. I need to be their healthy, self-full doctor. I need to acknowledge that I am human and thus impotent without a team of nurses and other providers. I need to let go of trying to identify fully with my patients and instead come to them on what common ground we have, negotiating an understanding and a plan. It all makes sense now—those words I ignored in “Fundamentals of Patient Care,” because I thought I knew it all already. How could I have made the same mistake as so many other medical students who have come before me? My eyelids are heavy, and my preceptor smiles knowingly as she tucks a blanket around me. Darkness falls. I wake up the next morning in an empty room. The dead woman and her family are gone, and a nurse is sticking her head in to see if this room is available for a new patient. I smile at her, my mask of self-confidence removed and replaced with quiet calm. I receive a genuine smile in return. That assignment was harder than expected, but it could have been worse. All I had to do was die.



**Low Sun, High Tide,** Grace Dion



## Enlightened by Microbes, John Hughes

Scrupulous avoidance of the past tense and strict adherence to worry-free  
(if any) speculation about the future

That's my byword.

Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is promised to no one.  
Now, *this* moment, is all we really have and now is all we really are.

Ba-da-bing

Or so I told myself  
And others  
And it worked, for a long time.

Brought low, however, by the news that this bag  
is ninety percent microbes -  
harboring their own DNA-driven ideas about identity-  
And merely ten percent me,  
I feel stranded.

Son of a gun  
That mouthy tent maker Paul was right.

Let's see, let's see, let's see.....

Let's see

\*\*\*\*\*

The freeze-frame self-portrait identity of now is not.

Can't be

It's a fungible commodity.

Marketable proportions ever blending,  
Changing measure among past, present and future

W  
Shifted and molded by fellow ten percenters,  
Trading what was for what is or will be.  
Retaining colorful remnants of then for now  
Putting some in inventory  
Designing others for a dreamed of day.

The brittle of now is, after all these years,  
not the front row seat sought in the theatre of the divine, but that which  
causes us to miss the show altogether.

Even the microbes get this,

adjusting as they do  
in their ongoing hum of homeostasis,  
knowing that they, too, can't grasp the great nameless eternal I Am,  
their 'now' as self-limiting as mine, minus the conceit of soul and thought.

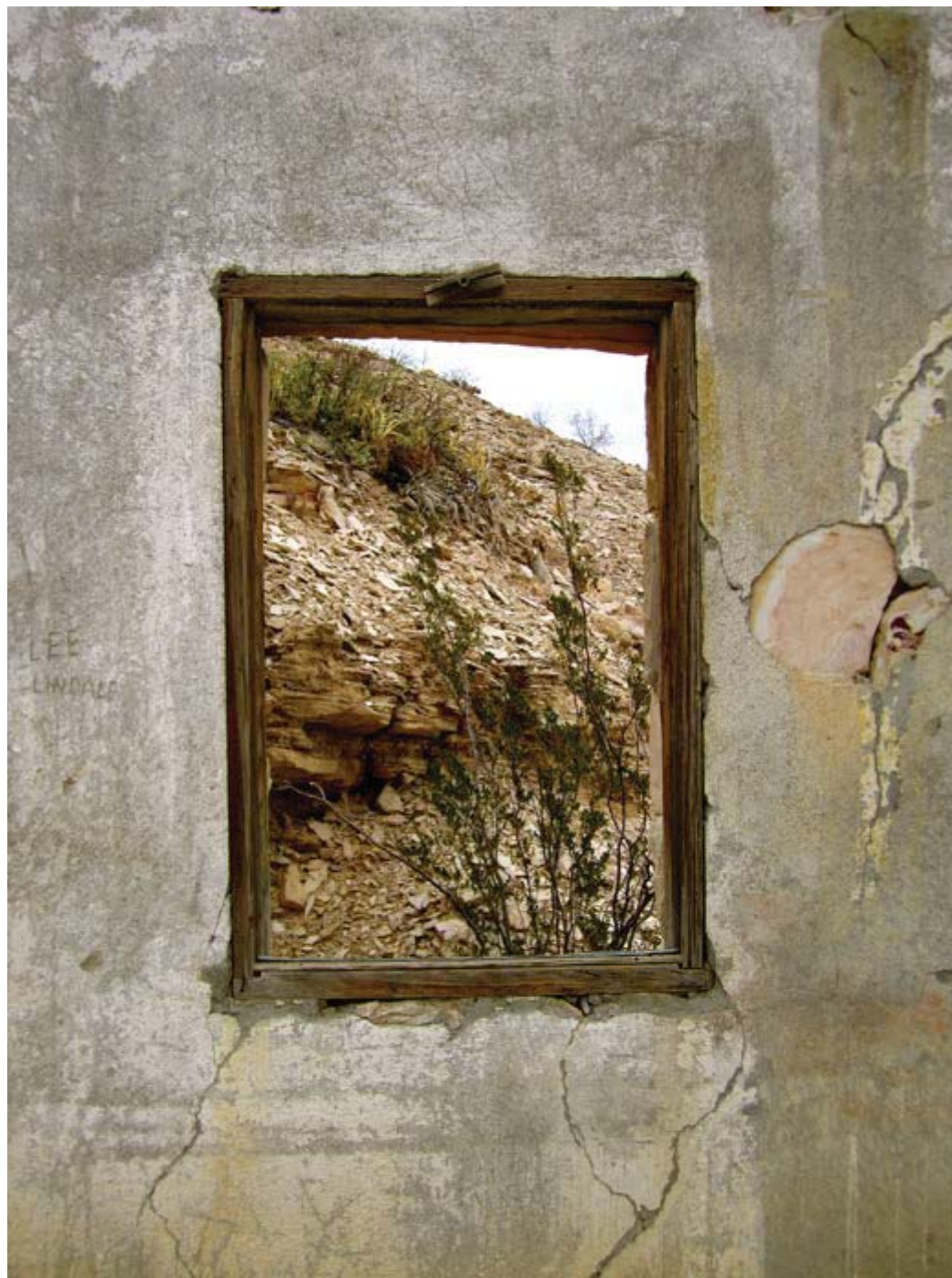
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Settle down a bit.

Call yourself Love for now.

Because it's the family name of all who  
claim their identity in the nameless one,  
but can only pose the question of what eternity is.

We are they who wait on the shore,  
Happy to have learned that the timeless identity  
that one day will be ours  
is something far beyond 'now'







# El Fin

Bethany Moebis

Flute *p*

Violin *mp* *f*

Piano *p*

bac: i V<sup>3</sup> i<sup>3</sup> ii<sup>6</sup> i

Fl.

Vln.

Pno.

V<sup>7</sup>  
III

D: V<sup>7</sup> I V I V<sup>6</sup> IV<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup>

Fl. *ff*

Vln. *f* *mp*

Pno. *f* *mp*

I I IV V<sup>7</sup> I I vii<sup>6</sup> I

Fl. *p*

Vln. *mp*

Pno. *p*

V<sup>6</sup> I ii

bac: iv V<sup>6</sup> i<sup>3</sup> i V<sup>6</sup>

Fl. *f*

Vln. *f* *ff*

Pno. *ff*

i<sup>4</sup> ii<sup>6</sup> i V<sup>4</sup> V<sup>8</sup> i<sup>3</sup> i



 **MUSC**  
MEDICAL UNIVERSITY  
*of* SOUTH CAROLINA