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Unscripted

Christine L. Xu, B.A.

Stanford University School of Medicine, Stanford, CA

Poetry

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Author for correspondence: Christine L. Xu, Stanford University School of Medicine, 227 Ayrshire Farm Lane, Apt. 302, Stanford, CA 94305, USA. E-mail: cxu7@stanford.edu

My first patient
lay motionless
eyes closed
in a stark
bright
white
room, voice
a thin whisper, barely audible
over beeping monitors.
I fiddle
with my ID,
"MEDICAL STUDENT"
it screams
in all caps, but
the silence
in the room
is deafening.
I look down
at my hands, trembling,
at my notes — they sounded professional
yesterday,
but hollow,
disingenuous
today.
I decide not
to follow my script,
I open
my mouth
to speak.
I learn
of seven
self-inflicted
abdominal wounds,
small intestine
sliced apart
with a kitchen knife,
stitched back
together
with surgical sutures.
I don't know
what
to say,
"I am so
sorry to hear that"
does not
fit here.
Instead, I ask
about his past,
he tells me
of loneliness, depression,
mood swings, a returned
wedding ring,
substance abuse, unemployment,
family strife.
This all

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might
explain
the kitchen
knife.
I ask,
"What makes
you happy?"
He opens
his eyes,
they are piercingly
blue like
a glacier,
scintillating and bright, with
layers
of depth
buried far beneath
the surface.

He tells me
he used
to play guitar,
we talk
about
chords and
rhythm and
tempo and
texture, music fills
our minds and
colors
our imaginations, and
we momentarily
forget
his tragic past,
his uncertain future,
and everything in between.

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