

Poetry

Hands

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Abstract

Description

"Hands" is inspired by my first encounter with a donor in the cadaver lab during my first year of medical school. This poem highlights the intimate relationship between the medical student and their "first patient" and captures the factors that helped me realize the grandeur of the dissecting experience. Through an awareness of the donor's hands, I became viscerally aware that the cadaver is a real human being who donated their corporeality to help students learn. The bilateral vulnerability of this experience is a critical milestone in the development of health care providers. Given the recent transition from in-person to virtual training, the memorialization of these humanizing moments is critical.

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As I first reverse-scissored through the viscera
An inexplicable mixture of realizations triggered a
Deep gnawing, falling sensation, unmistakable
I glance peripherally, and see the dignity

Of my neighbor's cadaver whose nails were painted
Candid, animated, a bright pink pastel, decorated
I awaken to the humanity of hers
And the vanity of my own, an amateur

As we initiated muscular bisection
I caught a glimpse of my own reflection
My own mortality jumped to the foreground
One hundred eighty-degree turnaround

I gained an unmistakable appreciation
For the fragility of life and her grateful donation
Of her being to improve my own
An organic cycle of skills honed

I will never forget my first dissection
The cadaver was not the only one inspected
For I realized we are more than bagged matter
Death to birth, question the answers

Acknowledgement

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares he has no conflicts of interest.

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