

Untitled (A Medical Student's First Patient)

Category: Hands

written by Emily Gianetti | January 4, 2017

I was terrified the first day of lab. Terrified of the slice of a scalpel through human skin. And, most of all, terrified of how I would react to the shock of making that first cut.

I did make that first cut and many more afterward. I didn't pass out, and eventually my heart stopped pounding when I picked up the scalpel. As time went on, we learned an impossible amount about the way humans are made, the way the pieces fit together. That was your gift to us, and I want to thank you.

Though I must admit, it felt almost paradoxical to learn so much about you and so little at the very same time.

As someone who loves stories, it felt wrong to have no story about you and no way of ever getting one. Still, I couldn't make one up for you or give you a name. It felt wrong to assign you a life when you already had one, and I settled for wondering what led you to us, what you were like.

The day I wondered most was the day we studied the brain, when I got to hold your life in my hands. More than anything, I wanted to see what kind of life you had, who you had loved and what you had learned in eighty-eight years as the body that we were dissecting carried you through this world. If only those things were as tangible and as easy to see as the bones of the skull or the muscles in your face.

I think there is a hidden curriculum to a cadaver lab, a moment we realize there is much more to a person than the pieces that work together to allow us to be alive. It isn't until we meet a patient who cannot tell their story that we understand how complex we are as human beings, how much our stories really matter.

I'd like to think that each person could be a book if someone took the time to write about them, and I think this way about you, too. You were a patient I can never thank by name. An amazing gift to us, an unread and untitled story.

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