

# Symbols of Healing

Category: Healing

written by Lekha Reddy | September 2, 2021

I conduct a routine physical exam on you one day after you deliver your second child, moving from head to toe. Hunching down to examine your legs for any swelling, I catch a glimpse of your exposed left ankle. Inked in green on your skin are the jagged lines of an EKG signal, neighbored by an image of an eye. "What is this?" I inquire. You tell me about your first child, who was born with a heart defect and cataracts, and about the numerous trips made to the hospital soon after her birth. This tattoo serves as a reminder of the troubles you endured and the strength developed along the way.

"I can't keep going through this," you croak as a single tear spills onto the crisscrossed denim of your faded jeans. Your fingers caress a necklace resting on your collarbone. Three stones are suspended from the center of the chain: maroon, diamond and emerald green. "That is a beautiful necklace," I say. You explain that each stone is a birth stone from each of your three miscarriages: January, April and May. These months were supposed to be filled with new life, new milestones and joy. Instead, those joys were seized from you and replaced with unimaginable loss.

You ask: "Can we get the footprints?" "Of course," I nod. Two weeks ago, you were told that you had a rare condition of the placenta that made your pregnancy inviable. Now you lie in the hospital bed with a blank face, preparing for termination of the pregnancy. Once the procedure is over, I stand just outside your room, examining the death certificate. "In memory of blank," it reads, and two tiny feet are printed below the title. I enter the room to give it to you, but you are asleep. I place it on your side table, for you to take home.

This patient is typical of so many women I meet on the obstetric and gynecologic wards of our hospital. They go through tremendously difficult experiences with their pregnancies, and many choose to carry with them visible reminders of their journeys: birthstones, tattoos, footprints. My patients have taught me that difficulties need not be hidden. When held onto, these reminders become instruments of healing.

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