Existence (or, Our Patient with Superpowers)

Andrew J. McLean¹

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Artist's Statement

Empathy refers to the capacity to understand another's experience (thoughts/feelings/attitude) from their perspective. As providers, we often forget what that experience is like. This poem about a clinic patient is a gentle reminder.

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"Good morning, Iris," I said.
She replied, "How do you know my name?"
Her unstated question actually was,
"WHY do you know my name?"
Not from a stance of vigilance,
But rather, a lack of belief
that there would be acknowledgement
of her value, of her being, of her
presence on this earth.
An early life of trauma and thereafter,
serious mental illness with frequent visits
over decades to our clinic.
Her gray clothing allowing her
to blend in to the waiting room furniture;
Eyes downcast, features non-clinically catatonic,
Undiscoverable.
Magically able to rematerialize
at the designated time to see
her case manager, her peers or
my psychiatrist colleague.
"Of course I know your name," I grinned.
She smiled back.

✉ Andrew J. McLean
andrew.mclean@med.und.edu

¹ UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Fargo, ND, USA