

FROM THE INSIDE

Autonomy

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Intensive care clinicians have the privilege and responsibility to share human experiences at critical times. Often, those connections come with the need for complex decision-making under uncertainty, the results of which may irreversibly change the lives of all people involved: patient, relatives, and clinicians. These encounters may be seen as a grace or as a burden, depending on the clinician's approach, and an appreciation of the dignity and mystery present in each encounter may help resignify and avoid becoming overwhelmed. This poem explores the interplay between making clinical decisions and respecting the enigma of identity and autonomy, through the recognition of the sacredness of the self and our own vulnerability. Acknowledgement of the limitations of our understanding of the situation, both the disease and the individual, is reinforced by the solemn, liturgical atmosphere described in the poem, in an attempt to imply the divinity present in the pursuit for humanity beyond the medical apparatus.

I try your eyes and I see you,
Though I can't hear your voice,
I don't remember your age,
I don't know your name.

Of course, I've read the information in the notes,
But those are just words on a piece of paper, not your name.
Not the name you are called upon in your dreaded nights,
The name you call yourself seventy times seven times,
When there is no other way out.

The name whispered behind the curtains and between
the sheets,
Written in the small gift card left alone over the table.

Soon, I see it in you.
Is it fear is it hope is there any difference?
Looking at your vague gaze,
Searching for clues of dreams and wishes and possible
futures,
I find no hint of the paths that led to
This (un)predictable (un)avoidable (un)forgivable
present.

Yet, here we are.
Self-ruled cities grown apart,
Desperate to build bridges.

You, that has never been here before.
You, lying on this bed. This cold white bed that has
seen other bodies.
You, your life attached to wires and tubes shackled to
you.

You, now surrounded by more familiar faces,
Breaths and sighs and then, stillness.
And I, who have been here multiple times,
Am still surrounded by the mystery.
Trying my best to connect
Or reach out a stranger's soul.
But rarely certainty is what it seems.
So, I hope for absolution,
Holding your hands in my hands,
Even if from across the room.

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