

Of Epiphytes and Epilepsy

Lealani Mae Acosta, MD, MPH 



Vanderbilt University Medical Center, Nashville, TN, USA.

I had a succulent hanging from my office cabinet:
nestled in a mound of fake snow, illuminated by fairy lights,
dangling in a glass teardrop-shaped terrarium, swing-
ing by jute twine.

He
has Trisomy 21 and Alzheimer's disease, his gift his friend-
ly smile.

Once he had a goatee, betraying ginger roots
previously concealed by a thinning pate and favorite
baseball caps.

He eventually shaved it off,
much to the relief of his sister, who always accom-
panied him.

She
flipped a switch at the bottom, an electric cloud of
twinkle lights
floating above the snowy white flakes and pointed green
arches.

I
saw him in the emergency department, myoclonic jerks
raising his arms, almost a celebratory gesture, every few
minutes.

His sister, bedside as his entire body shuddered and danced.

I
was a doubting Thomas, reluctant to acquiesce to
vague secondhand reports from outside hospitals
until I touched for myself his convulsing hands and feet.

She
held his hand. EEG confirmed.
The anti-epileptic we'd been blaming and weaning slowly
for months,

that seeming agitator, irritator, eclipsing his sweet-natured
disposition,
now hero.

I
had been tasked to bring something beautiful to a work
meeting,

so I cupped the glass terrarium in the middle console of my car,
When a backpack fell the teardrop shattered –
rupture in the employee garage.

It
longer dangles from the jute twine;
the succulent sits squat and proud on my desk.
The jagged edges outline where once was clear dome.
Fairy lights still twinkle on or off with the touch of a switch.

I
bemoan being all thumbs; contemplate healer's hands.
He
remains seizure free.

J Gen Intern Med 36(7):2149

DOI: 10.1007/s11606-021-06826-1

© Society of General Internal Medicine 2021

Corresponding Author: Lealani Mae Acosta, MD, MPH, Vanderbilt
University Medical Center, Nashville, TN, USA
(e-mail: lealani.mae.acosta@vumc.org).

Publisher's Note: Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to
jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Received August 14, 2020

Accepted April 11, 2021

Published online May 5, 2021