

# A VALENTINE'S PRAYER

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*nonfiction*

“Tell me, why am I doing this at three in the afternoon, when I’m post-call? Why?”

We’re scrubbing in. I am the only other person here, but I have no idea if she’s talking to me.

“Because you’re a good person?” I offer, conservatively. I have pitting edema in my feet from standing all day.

“No,” she says, tersely. “It’s because I’m insane.”

[...]

The Chief leaves to check on a sick patient. I am promoted to camera-driver by default.

“Can you see where I’m working?” she asks.

“Uh-huh,” I reply, thinking she is about to teach me something.

“Well, you must have much better eyes than I do, because I can’t see anything—go in, go in, go IN to where I am!”

[...]

“Every time you keep getting blood on the lens. Try not to do that.”

There are adhesions everywhere, a jungle of glistening pink and red.

[...]

“Is that hernia sac or bowel? What do you think?”

I’m not sure. I’ve only spent about two weeks getting to know bowels and hernia sacs up close and personal.

“Umm...sac, I think.”

“This right here. Sac, right?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

“I’m really asking, so don’t just agree with me.”

“I’m not.”

[...]

The Chief comes back. I relinquish the camera, glad to no longer be held responsible for what is bowel and what is not.

Our patient’s leg keeps falling off the table. *We have the same nickname*, she told me just before she went under.

[...]

She tells the Chief: “Medical student did a good job of driving the camera earlier. Much better than the last batch of students. You’ll have to start recruiting her to general surgery. I’ll bet she’s already signed up for family practice or pediatrics, though.”

I remain statuesque. We go into the bowel and have to open.

I begin to lean on my namesake a little.

[...]

The scrub techs seem not to have anything she asks for. They go on a hundred treasure hunts and become more and more unhappy.

She explodes: “If you really want to piss off the doctors at Mayo, hand them the needle backward!”

[...]

The phone rings.

“Doctor, your patient on 7B has expired.”

“OK,” she says, matter-of-fact.

The Chief throws his elbows so high and wide that I have to stand nearly a foot from him. I can’t see anything. Once in a while, I retract from afar.

“We need to hurry up,” she says. “I have other patients to see who might be dying as well.”

[...]

“Did your family go with you for your critical care fellowship?” she asks the Chief.

“No, they stayed. We lived apart for a year.”

“You paid two rents?”

[...]

“Do you think that’s an anastomosis bleeding?” she asks. “I don’t want to have to present this at M&M next Thursday.”

[...]

Finally, we're closing. There is a general sense of dissatisfaction with what has just happened.

"Make her NPO, give her two doses of antibiotics, straight cath her, and pray for her," she orders.

"I pray," says the Chief, abruptly.

"You do?" She looks up briefly, surprised and curious at this admission.

"Amateurly, but yeah, I pray."

"Cut here. Amateurly?"

[...]

She leaves without a word. The Chief rushes out to a dinner meeting.

I scrub out and find a glittery red heart sticker on my scrub top. A nurse had given it to me earlier, for Valentine's Day.