Brain Candy
10th Edition
2023

Gold Humanism Honor Society
Wayne State University School of Medicine
Thank you for picking up this year’s 10th edition of Brain Candy. We are very proud to present the year’s edition. We have incorporated paintings, written pieces, poetry, and photography from all the medical classes at Wayne State University School of Medicine.

The first edition of Brain Candy was published online and in print in 2009, produced by a generous grant by the Gold Humanism Honor Society (GHHS). The edition featured poetry, nonfiction, short fiction, and different types of artwork. With generous funding support from alumnus Dr. Tom Janisse, Class of 1975, the journal continues to be in print since 2009.

We hope you enjoy this edition! If you are interested in the production of this journal or would like to contribute to further editions, please do not hesitate to get in touch: dan.jian@med.wayne.edu.

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Boo Boo The Fool
Alyssa Rogers c/o 2026
Opposing Forces

Tick-tock

The hand freezes
Distorted figures pass by
Tick-tock

Climb up the ladder
Nimbly, quickly, without losing your footing
Tick-tock

New faces, new places, chronically online
Emptiness permeates the atmosphere
Tick-tock

Fluorescent lights, white sheet, scalpel in hand
Spongey absorption of the material
Tick-tock

Ball drop, blowing out candles
Camera pointed at the future is out of focus
Tick-tock

Hobbies for one
Karmic retribution for false truths
Tick-tock

Am I too late?
Tick-tock

Will things change for the better?
Tick-tock

The hand unfreezes

Aila Rahman c/o 2025 MD/PhD
Hidden Peak - Snowbird, Utah
Susan Wager c/o 2024
odkac: an ode (for ayeeyo)

I like to think that this small scene of ours
Enter scene

Will continue to play indeterminately, so that
Enter diced garlic, sliced onion rings

I may sit on days like this to re-watch
The ruckus that manifests into ground

My Ayeeyo and I spring about in our sun-lit
Cinnamon, that produces cardamom in

Kitchen home
All of its glory – if that doesn’t transport you

I like to imagine myself taking command
Enter our pot of slowly melting butter

Of the small watch on her hand, the
To which we will add all our assorted spices

Grays that creep into her hair strands
Butter that will simmer & sit

By day, by night, I like to wonder at how
and submerge the Odkac, which is there

My grandmother played out this script
On the side, our pot of fried meat

In her own time
Cubes goldened to a perfect crisp

Hajirah Farah c/o 2026 MD/PhD

Odkac (cubed meat) along with simmering butter (& onions, garlic, cardamom, and cinnamon).
Serenity
Josiah Stryd c/o 2026
P.U.S.H (Pray Until Something Happens)

“Do you know how to pray? My mom prays for me so I don’t know how.” He whispers as I go to listen to his lungs. He looks so small in the hospital bed but he’s a chemo pro. Round 5 they tell me. I pause when he asks. Of course I pray but is this professional? I pray all the time silently praying my patients get better, that my presentation gives the information that my attendings need to treat them properly, that I leave the room without crying.

“You’ll teach me to pray?” His mother is still sleeping. She hasn’t left the hospital since he entered. She’s been here every time. Pregnant twice each time waiting until he goes into remission this time will be his third. She’s confident he’ll make it out this time. The team - not so much. His tumor burden is the highest my attending has seen. He has a few weeks to a few months. I tell him that he is a superhero. I think he believes me.

“Don’t tell my mom. She’s never scared of anything. I’m scared today. She says God makes her brave.” His mom sits through the hospice meeting unphased she nods she listens. She’s a gargoyle. She strokes his sleeping head. She asks when he will get his next chemo dose. He holds steady to the minecraft stickers I brought him today.

“I’m ready to learn to be brave.” He’s not old enough to reach the steering wheel, let alone drive a car but he’s the oldest sibling. He promises to take care of his younger siblings. To pray for them and ask God to give them his super powers.

I’ll teach you to pray. I grab his hand in the dark room and he winces. “I’m ready"

Our Father Who art in Heaven
Hallowed be Thy Name
Thy Will be Done Thy Kingdom Come
On Earth As it Is in Heaven
Give us this Day our Daily Bread and Forgive us our Debts
As We Forgive Our Debtors
And Lead Us not Into Temptation But
Deliver Us from Evil
For Thine is the Kingdom and The Power
And the Glory
Forever and Ever
Amen

And then he drifts off to sleep…

Jasmine Coles c/o 2024
I would like to talk about death
I would like to talk about death
to explain the pathophysiology of the final days of a patient
how their necrosis cannot be compensated for
the coagulation, the deoxygenation, the end
what would you choose
a, b, or c
and which would it be
if they had a DNR
and yet the wife stands in front of you
begging you to save her husband
UWorld has yet to teach me how to cope with trauma
asynchronous lecturers miss the tears in my eyes
while I listen to them speak of disease
they are not a pathology, they are a person
I think
as I move quickly on because there's much to be learned
and less to be felt

I would like to talk about death
to understand what’s required to guide a patient toward peace
toward rest
I lack the language to adequately explain these things
because I lack the education
despite the hours of lectures
and prestigious professors
not one has taught me about the power of holding someone’s hand
or how it’s okay to cry with your patient
and about your patient
or to think about what you would do if a patient’s death struck a certain cord
was it your grandfather you were thinking of
while you called out those numbers
12:15 or 11:22 or 1:34
was it his laugh and smile and devastating absence you noticed
that made you run out, sobbing
even though it wasn’t his final moments you bore witness to
I would like to talk about death
but my medical education has not taught me the softness I desire
only the hardness we must approach prolonging life with
we will fight! we will win!
they all say it’s only a matter of time
until a better chemotherapy comes out
but I look at my friend and think about how she is not a loser
she is just a person
and she did not quit, as your language implies
she just decided there's a time and place to prolong suffering
and this is not it
it pains me that the language of my training fails
to extend her grace or sorrow
but instead prescribes her something else for the hurt

I would like to talk about death
and tell you I can sleep easily at night
knowing I’ve done more than the bare minimum
but the next bedside I approach
that family doesn’t get to walk away
they don’t get to sleep at night
my humanity may fail them
my resolve cannot
if only to see to it that we are taught
to approach the bedside of those dying
with courage
with grace
with one another
standing arm in arm
wildly unprepared and fully human

Anonymous

in passing, in past
Hajirah Farah c/o 2026 MD/PhD
8372 - An Ode to Remember Srebrenica

Yeah let it reign over me,

rain drops from my eyes fall on the caskets below me, no gardens grow from me.

Blood written over my belly, hunger has struck me...I wonder does it make me lucky?

Does it make me strong? Does it iron out qualms?

To forgive and let bygones be bygones?

It's not hate.

It's a reminder that all I feel is because I was lucky. I could have been number 8373. Instead I walk this Earth and feel for all that couldn't before me.

Alem Cizmic c/o 2025

Dubrovnik
Urvashi Gupta c/o 2023
Egner’s Untitled
Josiah Stryd c/o 2026
The sun rose

The sun rose in the west, and thus set in the east
While the earth spun like a clock
As a smile emerged on my face
Heavy was to light, as light to dark
And I, I was bright
Looking up to the floor
Down to the bright blue sky
Freed by falling, and trapped by standing
So, watch me fall to the clouds

The sun set in the west, to again rise in the east
An old clock ticked
The heaviness, nothing more than my eyes
Light nothing more than rays from the skies above
The ground, nothing more than somewhere to walk
But I, I was still bright
I’ll be freed from soaring, instead of falling
So, watch me fly to the clouds

h.w.


**The Refugee**

Trapped in this sterile prison  
Long after the sun has left the sky  
My body convulsing in ways I've never known  
Waiting for your arrival to come by

*Pain*

Mama, oh Mama, I need her now  
In my fantasies she was with me  
Witnessing the miracle of life  
Her absence tonight stings terribly

*Pain*

I look to my right and I see  
The man that I should love  
Our bond fractured by the toll  
Of our journey we don't speak of

*Pain*

Our wedding, planned in haste  
In the backdrop of war and bloodshed  
And the lights and sounds around us  
We imagined were fireworks instead

*Pain*

And suddenly we were running  
Just as quickly as we were wed  
Through deserts and mountains and oceans  
Thousands of miles we fled

*Pain*

And you were also present  
Cradled for months within my womb  
Enduring the arduous trek  
I fear I've given you an early tomb

*Pain*

Is it worth bringing you into this world?  
You don't deserve the cruelty  
The suffering, the torture I've seen  
May your innocence keep you free

*Pain*

Oh sweet child of mine  
The irony is not lost, I wonder  
You will be born in the very land  
That tore mine asunder

*Pain*

The doctors and nurses around me  
Envelop me with their foreign cries  
Their message gets across though  
With the intensity in their eyes

*Pain*

I try to push and push and push  
But my body has betrayed me  
Ravaged by the toll of my escape  
But for you I must gather my energy

*Pain*

*Pain*

*PAIN*

And then

A startling, loud cry  
Like music to my ears  
Amazing how one tiny human  
Can dissolve all my fears

Zoha Qureshi c/o 2024
A Reflective Commentary on Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.  
His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound’s the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,  
But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

~ Robert Frost

Robert Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* does a great job in emphasizing the rush to keep promises and the almost pathologic need to be productive. I find that it especially relates to the journey we experience in medical school. In the above excerpt, from lines fifteen and sixteen, we can see that Frost duplicates the phrase “and miles to go before I sleep.” Though Robert Frost paints the image of a snowy, quiet landscape, readers may notice that there is an internal struggle to go the distance, which contrasts to the remote, frozen locale described in the work above. How can medical students relate to the above poem?

As medical students we often fall prey to learning for the sake of “getting through this next block,” instead of learning for the sake of the potential lives we will impact in our future careers. Why is this so? The reasons are multifactorial. It is difficult to quantify the impact we will have on quality of life of patients when you’re only a year, two years, even four years into a lifelong medical career. Because of this we tend not to embrace the journey, but to embrace passing tests and not the information we learned along the way. It is my hope that noticing the stark contrast between our racing internal monologue and the quaint environment around us will emphasize that perhaps it is okay to take a brief reprieve, despite the pressure to succeed, and enjoy the woods around us. In lines five, as well as nine through ten, the little horse quizzically shakes the bells of his harness as if to ask the question, “why are we stopping here?” The horse may be viewed as a parallel for the people outside the racing thoughts of neuroticism that medicine brings. This parallel can remind medical students that there are others outside our minds congested with projects, studying and busy work- that there is a life outside of medicine.

Zechariah Jean c/o 2024
Stopping by Woods in Autumn
Zechariah Jean c/o 2024
It's A Trap!

Two flocks spiraled upwards in the serene blue sky
One flock flew lower, not daring to try.

You could say the latter flock was underachieving
Or claim they chose a less dazzling path.
But as they say, "looks are deceiving,"
Perhaps the low-altitude Aves simply did the math.

High in the firmament the Sun blinded many of the brood.
Disorganized, their flight pattern did not operate under one hood.
Finally, as the first squadron met their esteemed destination
Their heads turned in indignation.

The second legion sat upon the foliage,
Boisterous with mirth and satisfaction,
They squawked, "-cage! Cage!"

The highfliers were aghast,
Whilst in their fervor they hadn't realized
The entrapment that was cast.

Zechariah Jean c/o 2024
Blue Heron of Shark Valley, Florida
Sophia Gandarillas c/o 2026

Brother Nature Produce
Alyssa Rogers c/o 2026
**Black Noise**

“God help me.”
Twisting and jerking, a sharp “bang” rang in my ears, waking me from my sleep. “Ow.” I touched my forehead, feeling the bruise that was beginning to swell above my left eye. In my confusion I found that I was lying on a seat with dark stains on its plastic cushioning. “Why am I on a bus?” I realized that this seat was the same as the ones the old public buses used to use. Although they had been in disuse for years. Hesitantly, I glanced down the aisle. Most of the bus was cast in shadow, the only light streaming in from the dirty windows on either side. “Hello?” I called. Silence. Feeling hot and shaky I stood up. I grabbed the seats in front of me, managing to walk down the platform and onto the main level. Noticing the back door exit I tried to push it open. When it wouldn’t budge I slammed my whole weight into it but the door remained firmly shut. Feeling panicked, I called out again, this time louder. When no one answered me, I hurriedly walked down the aisle. “I must have fallen asleep on the bus going home last night.” Thinking about it, I remembered a story like this on the news. Some elementary kid was left alone on the bus for 4 hours before someone found him.

My thought made me relax as I reached the driver’s seat. It was abandoned too. Not giving it a second thought I slammed my body against the closed front door. On my second heave the metal door squeaked open, causing me to fall out onto a snow bank. “Ugh.” I picked myself up, struggling to climb over the large bank and onto the sidewalk. Catching my breath I smiled to myself. See, your being silly Vicky. Allowing the fluttering in my heart to cease I began to look around, realizing I was standing on the sidewalk of some suburban neighbourhood. I didn’t recognize the area but figured it must have been one of the southern neighbourhoods, probably near Billings Bridge. Why is it parked here, then? My thought disturbed me so I decided not to think about it. Instead I looked widely around the street. The neighbourhood seemed to be an old one, with many large oak trees that towered over the bungalows and single homes. Weirdly enough, the only vehicle in sight was the bus. All the driveways were empty without any tire marks and the window curtains were all drawn. Feeling the hairs on the back of my neck rise, I started to approach the house closest to me. “Maybe they’re just at work?” I reasoned, pulling my coat closer around me. Ringing the bell I looked back at the bus which sat merrily on the side of the road. Waiting a few more minutes, I rang the bell again before deciding to knock. “Not home.” I mumbled, moving to the next house. No one answered. I stepped back from the door looking up and down the street. Was this whole street abandoned?

I knocked on every single door, getting no response. I could only believe that everyone was out or that no one wanted to speak with me. Exhaling deeply I made my way onto the second street. I dashed to the closest house and pounded on the door screaming for someone to answer. Despite all the noise there was nothing but silence. I didn’t bother to check every home but continued to jog onto the next street. At some point I would come across a main road or corner store of some sort. I looked around scanning the distance for any signs of life but found only houses. Making my way onto another street I felt my stomach twist painfully in hunger. I started to think manic thoughts like taking a large stone and pelting it at a window. The stone would shatter my reflection of braids and freckles and I would stand watching the array of shards before breaking an entry. No. I can’t do that. What if there are people inside? If there are people inside, why won’t they help me? The thought chilled me. Maybe this is a bad neighbourhood, maybe they’ve had traumatic experiences with strangers before? It was after this thought that I noticed something in the corner of my eye. Yellow clouds were blowing vertically from some structure to the far right. “That’s smoke.” That means people! I ran in that direction. Turning onto another road I found myself heading towards an evergreen forest. Leading into the forest was a small path that took a sharp turn to the left, a turn which caused the forest to break into a large clearing. As I approached the clearing I saw that the path led to a road speckled with grey lifeless houses and a-

“A hospital?” I stared at the looming tower with a faded blue H on its side. Mentally, I started counting all the hospitals in Ottawa, wondering if this was the General, the hospital in the south. I crept past
the homes, noticing the origin of the smoke was from a large chimney behind the hospital. So there
are people here? This question stemmed from an observation I was trying hard to ignore; there
wasn’t any noise coming from the hospital at all, only a silence, thick and menacing. My heart
pounded as I considered turning back. Maybe I should head back to the bus? If there wasn’t anyone
in a home I could break into one. Even as I thought this, my feet dragged me forward. Making my
way up the lane I passed parked ambulances and cars. One of the cars, an old Corolla, had its
headlights on. “What’s going on here?” I whispered inching slowly to the main entrance. Entering, I
rang the bell at the nurse’s station. Peaking over the counter I saw that both the computer and some
of the machines were on. I tried looking to see if I could spot a phone but it was too dark to tell. I
then looked around the sitting area for a phone. As I looked, I noticed by the side of the nursing
station was a sign that read “Phone”. I staggered to the sign. Picking up the receiver I fingered in
9-1-1. It was about half a second when I realized that there wasn’t a dial tone. “What the hell!” I flung
the receiver at the wall, only now noticing the cord was cut.

I sat on a chair, wheezing as I focused on settling my heart. I closed my eyes. This was a bad idea, I
should have just broken into someone’s home. When the pains in my chest eased I opened my
eyes. It took a mere second for my sight to focus, but when it did, my pupils dilated in horror. I
slammed my body backwards, falling over a few chairs. I sprang up, running down the hallway. In my
haste I accidently tripped, slamming my head on a heart monitor. My vision blurred as I went down
on one knee. With all the energy I could muster, I ran to the exit on the side of the room. Dashing
towards the forest I ran down the sidewalk, my head pounding as I tried not to think about what I had
seen. I found the path and without slowing down, I clumsily stepped onto a patch of ice and fell over
a snowbank. I winced as I got back up, my left leg twisted and throbbing. It was at this moment when
I heard the hum of a car. Alert, I scanned the distance for headlights. From the right, the same
direction of the hospital, came two yellow beams. It was a truck for No Frills foods. It slowed down
until it was in front of me. The door opened and I got a clear view of an overweight woman wearing a
bright yellow track suit staring down at me. Her eyes were wide as she gave me a bewildered
expression. “What in the hell are you doing all the way out here?” “I got lost. I think.” “You think?”
She looked me up and down. “What happened to your leg, you’re walking funny?” “I tripped and
twisted it.” I told her, leaning against her truck.

“Is your car parked somewhere?” I shook my head. “I didn’t come by car but bus” “The bus took you
all the way out here? Girl you’re half way to Vars, never heard of a bus being out this way, not so far
from the city.” I didn’t say anything, feeling sick and confused when she told me where I was. Vars
was a small town in the country, many miles from the east side of Ottawa. “Here, I’ll help you inside.
I’m going to Ottawa and can drop you off somewhere.” “Really!” I gasped with relief. She got down
and pushed me into the passenger’s seat and then got back into the driver’s. I wanted to cry in relief
as I closed my eyes. As the truck began to move a question popped into my head. “If this is Vars,
where is everyone, even the hospital is empty?” “What are you talking about? I said you’re half
‘ways’ to Vars not in Vars. Right here is the middle of nowhere, just forest for miles and miles. That’s
why I was so shocked to see you just strolling about. Never heard of anyone living out here?” I got
cold. “What about the hospital you just passed?” “Hospital, all I’ve seen in the last 10 miles is a
bunch of signs saying how close I am to the city. Most people don’t even take this road, ever since
the Amber Bridge broke and killed that girl. What was her name again?” I felt a chill pass through
me as I thought about what had scared me at the hospital. It had been a mirror hanging on the wall,
a mirror that showed an empty room, despite me looking right at it.

“Dang I totally forgot and it was recently on the news, you know, for the anniversary.” “Was her name
Victoria Jones?” “Yeah, wow that’s it.” The driver said smiling at me. She began to say something but
I stopped listening. My name was Victoria Jones.

Genevieve Joseph-Mofford c/o 2025
Wild Lights
Tiffany Khaw c/o 2023

Caribbean Reef Shark
Claire Novelly c/o 2023
Back to its Origin
Abrielle Fretz c/o 2026
The Beauty of Venezia
Madison Meyer c/o 2026
**New Year’s Resolution**

Monotony and stagnation are the mind’s greatest enemies. In March of 2020, they became core tenants of our lives. We couldn’t travel, spend time with others, physically go to work or school. Everything came to a standstill. At first, I welcomed a reprise from my hectic life. Soon, however, I found myself feeling restless, itching for something to stimulate my brain, for a new experience, to meet new people. Thankfully, this came in the form of a medical school acceptance. Flash forward a couple of months and I was meeting new people, stimulating my brain, having new experiences—until I wasn’t. The cut of scalp no longer excited me. Long hours were spent reading lecture notes, doing Anki, memorizing information. Every week felt the same.

The multiverse theory fascinates me greatly. In an extreme oversimplification, it poses the possibility of many parallel universes. Sometimes my mind wanders to consider the possibilities. Could I be a photographer for National Geographic? Did I choose law school over medical school? Am I the owner of a flower shop in Greece? All these scenarios lead to me to the same questions. Would my life be more exciting if I chose a different path? Am I living life to the fullest? Normally, I shake the what ifs from my head. Focus on the present and make it the best I possibly can. Look forward to the future and all the things I have yet to experience. I’m sure clinical rotations will be exciting with clinical cases, ample learning opportunities, and a new specialty every couple of weeks. I have yet to see a neurosurgery, a baby being born, a cardiac catheterization. Even outside of medicine, there are countless things I want to experience. Learning to swim, visiting Europe, taking cooking classes and so much more.

Despite all this, there’s this nagging feeling in the back of my mind. How do I keep monotony from taking over? Especially when many years of practice are under my belt. How do I take advantage of all life has to offer? Is living life to the fullest even feasible or was it entirely concocted in a Hollywood studio?

If monotony and stagnation are the mind’s greatest enemies, then I think contentment is the mind’s greatest weapon. Happiness, like many other emotions, is fleeting. You can spend your whole life in futile pursuit of happiness. Feeling content allows you to weather the ups and downs, to remain steady against the tumultuous waves. Now, content does not equal passivity. Make changes to better your life, whether that be by changing your job, pursuing hobbies, expanding your social circle. Try new things and travel extensively. But at the end of the day, fun and excitement are just parts of life. The rest is heavy with responsibility. For 2023, I want to strive for contentment and the peace that comes with it.

*Aila Rahman c/o 2025*
Fish Study
Kate Gavagan c/o 2026
Gratitude and Serenity
Priyanka Kale c/o 2024
The First Time.

Blinded by lights so bright, the sight in front of me was hazy
But my body was overly aware of my environment
My hands were shaking and my heart was racing
Curiosity sparked in mind for what was coming behind the doors of an operating room
It was almost like I erased the procedures I observed from the outskirts or all seasons of
Grey’s Anatomy I watched and re-watched

Frankly, I stumbled my way into a gown and gloves with a dance-like guiding from my
resident and scrub tech
The dripping on my back and pressure in my chest kept me still.
The last thing I wanted was to disrupt my state of sterility
The itch on the back and the urge to brush my hair under scrub cap screamed at me
It was the things that never bothered all on my mind

Until I turned around and made contact with my patient
Stunned and speechless it was not just not surreal
It was a privilege and now a commonplace flashbulb memory

Priyanka Kale c/o 2024

mental & physical health affirmation
priyanka kale c/o 2024
Ortho Halloween
Zaina Khoury c/o 2024
Dress for Success
Zaina Khoury c/o 2024
Anesthetized

The air is thick with a buzz of nervous excitement. We adjust our surgical masks and snap our gloves on. We are told this is our first patient; today, we are performing our first surgery.

With fumbling hands, we grab hemostats to slide fresh blades onto our #3 scalpels. Just like in the movies, in the TV shows, in our dreams. We set our tools down onto the cool metal table, arranged in a neat row, like we know what they are used for.

This is it. This is years of hard work and struggle and sacrifice, culminating into one meaningful moment: the first cut.

And then we unzip the body bag.

A tall man of about 70 years. His face is covered, and yet he seems no less human without any identifying features. He is cold and stiff, his skin an odd color, strangely juxtaposed against the glow of our own. We are told he died of cardiac complications.

Privately, I wonder if he knew he would look like this.

Over the following months, we dissect the muscles of his shoulders, his arms, his hands. I wonder if his arms had ever rocked a crying infant to sleep in the dead of night, or wrapped another in a comforting hug, or if his shoulders had ever carried the weight of the world. As we cut away the skin of his hand, I wonder if his fingers, long and slender, played the piano in this life—or if they will in the next.

We cut into his legs and I wonder how far they carried him, and if he had ever walked in another’s shoes. I wonder if his knees had ever buckled from the raw pain of grief, or if he had ever been so happy that he jumped for joy.

Using a bone saw, we crack open his chest, ribs splintering with a decisive crack. As we remove the thoracic cage, I wonder if his chest had ever swelled with so much pride that it felt like it would burst. When we remove his heart, I wonder if it had ever raced with excitement, or been broken so terribly that it ached inside, or if it had once skipped a beat at the sound of someone else’s name. The lungs come last, cradled reverently in our hands, and I wonder if he had ever seen a sight so beautiful that it took his breath away.

We cut away fat and we clean arteries and we rummage through the deepest parts of our cadaver while idly commiserating over the day’s annoyances. The shock we felt that very first day so many months ago has long since faded into monotony; it’s a normal Tuesday. Are we almost done with the dissection yet? Gloves are snapped off. Tools are sanitized. I go to replace our cadaver’s soft white shroud and pause.

I wonder who he was. Was he a father, brother, husband? Did he have goals and dreams? Did he ever achieve them? Did he have any regrets, any words left unsaid, any moments to turn back the clock to? Was he happy enough in this lifetime, or did he have more yet to do? Was his death unexpected, or was it a merciful relief?

If he could do it all over again, would he?

If he could change it all, would he?

I place the shroud over his face and zip the body bag up. It’s a normal Tuesday.

Annelise Gordon c/o 2026
The Medical Student
Zaina Khoury c/o 2024
Yellow Fin Tuna
Kate Gavagan c/o 2026
Open Water
Claire Novel c/o 2023

A Different Perspective
Claire Novel c/o 2023


**Excess**

I was prepared to give,
Forfeit to you the expanse of everything.
And I levied the trade,
Knowing full well it was an unequal barter.
For in turn,
I was to receive you.
A place further than the universe,
Is where my love for you ends.

*Shivansh Desai c/o 2024*

As a third year on my obstetrics and gynecology rotation I found myself repeatedly being privy to the beginning of someone’s life. This made me think of the end of life, confused by life as this finite trial of sorts, and then nearly spiral into an internal existential dispute. Love however felt immortal and it permeated through the experiences I saw daily. Love was transferred and made eternal through each bitter loss and each celebration of a new life. This excessive currency of love travels longer and farther than we can ourselves. It leaves traces of ourselves in the human story. It is our ancestral gift to give.

*Shivansh Desai c/o 2024*

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**Moonrise or Sunset? ~ New beginnings or Endings?**

Aishwarya Panneerselvam c/o 2023
Vitality
Vidhya Nadarajan c/o 2024
Fairytales

Once upon a time
In a true fairytales mime
A king and queen embarked to a new land
To increase the luck of their already dealt hand

The couple sired a child
Whose temperament was less than mild
She overachieved and reached for the stars
Supported by those both near and far

She decided to pursue the profession of healing
Which requires considerable compassionate feeling
The journey which once proved exciting
Slowly began to feel less inviting

Roadblocks, challenges, feeling alone
She wonders if this is what it means to be grown
Towers of content to sift through
The path ahead seemed daunting and too new

She began to collect little reminders
To store in her mental binder

A hug from a patient’s loved one
Exploring a historical city in snippets of fun
Volunteering to help out the community
Learning about the human body was a privileged opportunity

Exposure to disparities and practicing sutures
Coping with mishaps using good ‘ol humor
Building connections with others
In hopes of following in the footsteps of her mother

Light shines through amidst the clouds
Encouraging her to keep going and be proud

The best is yet to come
Invisible String
Kathleen Young c/o 2025
**Like This**

Two crochet chains—one skillfully woven by a wrinkled hand, the other clumsily crafted by tiny fingers. You smile and gently guide my needle through the chain. “Like this,” you say.

Pizza dough, warm and freshly risen. I punch it down with my small fists, sending clouds of flour billowing into the air. You smile and start rolling the dough out onto the counter with a rolling pin. “Like this,” you say.

A container of bubble soap, with bright pink and blue and green bubble wands strewn haphazardly in the grass. I blow hard, but no bubble forms. You smile and raise your bubble wand to your lips. “Like this,” you say.

A pan of your signature caramel cake, the icing piped on with painstaking care and pride. I am older now, and your fingers are too stiff, your eyesight too poor to decorate cakes anymore. You smile as you watch me pipe ‘Happy Birthday’ onto the cake. I’ve been practicing. “Like this, grandma,” I write on the small whiteboard you carry with you, for your hearing is gone now, too.

A life-changing surgery, one that carries as much risk as it does reward. How is an 87-year old going to survive cochlear implantation surgery? After, when you hear our voices again for the first time in years, you smile through your tears and tell us triumphantly, “Like this.”

Years pass like this. And then.

Long pauses. You grasp for words. Your gait begins to shuffle. You are looking at me with a glazed expression I cannot recognize—until I realize that it is me who you cannot recognize.

Not like this.

Your mind starts to unravel. You spew atrocities that are like poison spilling from your lips. You call my mother by my uncle’s name. There are flowers growing from the living room floor. There is a little girl hiding under the sofa.

Not like this.

You are brought to the hospital. You wait eight hours in the emergency room. You are sedated into oblivion, and then you are given every cocktail of medications imaginable, and then you are sent home. The prognosis is poor.

Not like this.

Over and over, you tell me you want to go home. “You are home,” I plead with you, begging you to understand. You sob. You don’t understand. There is a feral fear in your eyes, fear of the war being waged inside, as though there is some part of you deep down that is wrestling to regain
control. You grasp it, tug at its edges. It washes over you. Lucidity. You erupt into tears, and I wrap my arms around you. “I’m so scared,” you sob into my shoulder, “I never thought it would end like this.”

Not like this, I pray to any god who will listen to me. It is an expertly cruel irony.

Memories play in my head on a reel—flashes of proud smiles, your unbridled laughter bouncing off the kitchen walls, the smells of old world cooking reminding me that I am home. Running down the street barefoot to catch the ice cream truck on a hot summer afternoon. Your hands showing mine how to cut out sugar cookies at Christmas. The famous Banana Bread Incident. Your gentle, easy pushes on the swing set lifting me to the sky, with your love lifting my soul.

You are gone now, but I smile. I will remember you like this.

Annelise Gordon c/o 2026

"Iris by Van Gogh"
Sophia Gandarillas c/o 2026