

# UC Riverside

## UCR Honors Capstones 2017-2018

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Beyond the White Coat

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APPROVED

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## **Abstract**

## Acknowledgments

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## Prologue

This collection introduces desperate doctors who are neither the same person nor connected through relations in the hopes of creating generalized characters whom readers can view themselves within.

It is a cross-genre, hybrid piece that engulfs the emotional toll and hardships doctors' face throughout their career.

Part 1 consists of a compilation of prose pieces whilst Part 2 consists of poems, each attempting to convey the underlying emotion of the character. The titles are meant to add clues in terms of content and what to take away.

Statistics:

Doctors work an average of 60 hours a week.

At least one doctor commits suicide in the U.S. every day due to issues such as alcoholism, substance abuse, depression, and other mental illnesses.

Women physicians make up a larger percentage in family medicine and obstetrics/gynecology practice, while men make up a larger percentage in surgery and emergency medicine.



**PART 1**

## **Double Life**

Looking into the thirteen year old boy's wax filled ears, she declared they were in good shape. Just as she asked him to open his mouth and project the universal "aahh" noise, she remembered she had forgotten to pack her son's soccer jersey. She was supposed to pick him up after school to go to his game and he had asked her to bring his jersey. She knew she was forgetting something that morning. Watching her patient bend down to touch his toes as she looked at his spine, she was at least happy she was able to cook dinner for her other two boys as she wouldn't be back till late. She wished she could have made something a little more elaborate than the plain rice and chicken she felt she constantly made, but she just never found the time anymore. The young boy squeezed her two fingers as she checked for lack of strength. She always felt so guilty that she wasn't doing enough. She often missed her youngest son's games due to her schedule, her middle son complained of her never being home, while the oldest simply didn't open up to her as he used to do in the past. She couldn't spend as much time with her sick mother as she wanted, knowing her own brother rarely checked in on her. Shining the light in the boy's eye, she focused on his pupils. She still hadn't paid the bills that were due in two days. Taxes were coming up too. The overflowing pile of dirty clothes still hadn't made their way to the washing machine as she hadn't had time to buy soap. Her son needed his white collared shirt washed for an interview. She disregarded her own tea stained scrubs as she pulled on her white coat earlier that day, glad it covered it. She watched her patient prance out of her office with a red lollipop in his hand.

## Lucky

He was weaving along the dimly lit road/freeway, large black tires rolling over the choppy white lines. He jerked himself awake for what felt like the tenth time since he left the hospital that night, each time praying for a safe return home. Shaking his body and slapping his cheek in an attempt to keep his eyes open, he focused his attention on the red Toyota Camre in front of him. A few seconds later the license plate he was trying to memorize became a swan lazily swimming across a lake. Having lifted its head from beneath the water, the swan looked into his eyes as he sat in a wooden boat fit for only one man. Still maintaining eye contact, he reached his hand over the side of the boat towards the head of the swan. Just as his index finger was about to reach its pure white feathers, a sharp wail made him turn. His hands suddenly pulled the steering wheel to the right as he realized he was in between lanes. Looking into his rear view mirror, panic rose as he was blinded by the red and blue flash of the police car. Putting on his blinker and pulling over to the side as the cop mimicked him, he turned his car off and placed his forehead on the wheel. He just wanted to sleep. Rolling down his window, he watched in his mirror as the officer came towards him while the crisp 2 am air went into his lungs.

“License please, sir,” the uniformed police demanded.

Pulling his wallet out of the back pocket of his three day old scrubs, he handed over the little card. The cop moved his flashlight onto the license and seemed satisfied. Noticing his exhausted face and white coat, the police asked,

“How long have you been driving?”

The words reaching his ear slower than normal, he replied with, “Since I was 18”.

“No, how long have you been driving tonight?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. About half hour. I just finished my shift at the hospital I haven’t really slept in over 36 hours. I’m just headed home right now”

Eyeing him again, “How far do you have?”

“The exit after the next.”

“Well, I don’t smell any alcohol on you so why don’t you just get straight home?”

Grateful yet still feeling like a dream, he thanked the officer as he turned the keys in the ignition and once again prayed that he could stay awake.

## **Promises**

It had been a long, exhausting day filled with a hospital shift and teaching. His lecture on drowning and CPR to the university students had gone rather well he had thought. The young medical students seemed to have been engaged with his topic, many having enthusiastically raised their hands whenever he put forth a question. The hospital however, was even busier than yesterday. There were a few more difficult cases that weighed him down; a woman with extreme kidney failure and a large likelihood of death. All he wanted to do that evening was snip the connection between his feet and the floor, and sleep the chaos of the day away before waking up and doing it all over again. Yet he had promised his two children he would watch a movie with them. He hadn't seen them since seven o'clock that morning and they appeared so excited when he agreed to a film earlier that day. And so with drooping eyes, he locked the car as he made his way through the garage door, finding a very impatient and eager boy and girl.

“Have you kids chosen a movie?” he asked, trying hard not to think of his bed.

## **Insomnia**

He lay in bed, unable to fall asleep even though he had been awake for twenty four hours. His wife's rhythmic breathing told him she was far away, stopping him from waking her up. His mind filled with worries and leftover stress from the previous night, some rational and some not. Again he resisted the urge to wake his wife. He turned his body for the hundredth time trying to get comfortable, secretly hoping his wife would stir. He was so exhausted but he knew his insomnia would last most of the night. Rolling off the creaking bed, he looked at his wife with a sigh as she still lay fast asleep. Downstairs he found some dishes in the sink. Might as well wash them.

## Chaos

He sprinted back down to the delivery room as the gynecologist paged that it would be happening any minute now. *Of all nights I just had to be scheduled for tonight* he thought to himself as he repeatedly pressed the elevator button. Finally making it to the room for what seemed like the twentieth time that Friday night, he rushed through the doors without knocking. Looking over at his wife's sweaty and panting face, he himself tried to regain breath as he made his way towards her to hold her hand. *What is she trying to break my fingers* he thought, wincing. It was 49 minutes of pushing and stopping and pushing and stopping, filled with grunts and beeping pagers. It wasn't until he exhaled when he heard the beautiful sound of his baby's first cry that he realized he had been holding his breath for the past minute and a half. He felt light headed and queasy, trying to get some oxygen into his system. He couldn't even remember the last time he ate. Looking over at his wife's sweaty and exhausted yet smiling face, he gave her a kiss on the forehead before moving down to her lips. *You are my world.* He could feel his arms shaking as the nurse walked over to hand him his now clean and wrapped new baby son. The elatedness and overwhelming happiness he felt in that moment was something he did not think possible. He wished he could simply remain in this moment forever, but his pager beeped once again. Gently kissing his son on his little forehead, he passed him along to his wife before apologizing and telling her he was being called back upstairs. The edges of her lips slowly rose as she smiled to tell him it was okay and that she understood. In that moment he felt sorry for everyone else in the world because they did not have a wife who was as amazing as the one he had. Forcibly tearing himself away from his family, he made his way back to the elevator, adrenaline still high.

## Home

She stood in the chilly call room, watching her cafeteria bought dinner of mashed potatoes and chicken with broccoli spin inside the steel microwave. Rubbing her hands together and gently bouncing on the balls of her feet, she impatiently reached over to open its door at 00:17. Opening the utensils packet, she grabbed a hold of the fork and napkin before settling herself in her favorite cushioned seat facing the television. She let out an exhale of relief as she had been on her feet for the past five hours without being able to take the slightest break. Looking over at the time, she saw it was only 7:19. There was time. Taking a large bite of her steaming potatoes and allowing the flavors and heat to warm her body, she turned on the television to channel 9. *Jeopardy* always had a way of making her feel less lonely, reminding her of nights with her dad and siblings. They had always competed against one another to see who was able to answer the most questions correctly, the winner being rewarded with a dollar. It wasn't the money that they were after but the pride of being the smartest member of the family. At least for that night. She started on her chicken whilst smiling as she had gotten the last question of the second round correct. The next bit was her favorite part. Quickly shoving the last bit of broccoli into her mouth and tossing the plastic plate into the bin, she half ran back to her seat just in time for Alex to ask the question. She wracked her brain in search of the answer before settling on one. As he had started questioning the contestants on their guesses, she felt her beeper vibrate. Slowly closing her eyes, she sadly raised herself off her comfortable seat as she made her way out the door. She would have to find out later if she was right or not.

## **Duty**

He sat in his office chair, hand to ear as he spoke on the phone. Not another trip. He had just been on a week humanitarian trip to Guyana a couple of months ago, and now they were asking him to join another one. He noticed as he was aging that it was becoming more mentally difficult to be away from his family. All he wanted to do during his time off was be at home with his children and wife. The thought of being gone again seemed too soon for him. He knew five days really wasn't much, but in his mind all five days were filled with exhaustion and a desire return home. He sighed at the thought.



## Sensory Overload

He came home that afternoon, tense and on edge from the day's work. All he wanted to do was shut his constantly vibrating beeper off and not think. He drove home slightly above the speed limit that night. Safely arriving ticket free, he exhaled deeply as he steered his aching body out the car. He was so looking forward to eating his dinner and falling asleep in front of the television. But just as he made his way through the front door, he heard screaming from the top of the stairs.

"No, it's mine!! I saw it first!"

"No, you didn't I did!"

He slowly closed his eyes as all he wanted was some peace and quiet after a long and exhausting day. He made his way to the kitchen as the screaming continued.

"Why are they screaming?" he asked his wife as she went to give him a kiss.

"Oh I don't know something about a pencil. Kevin! Daisy! Stop shouting your father is home!" she herself shouted as he jerked his head from all the noise.

He heard the loud stomping telling him his children were coming down the stairs. Here we go.

"Mom, Dad, I saw this lead pencil first but Kevin won't give it to me!" Daisy cried.

The shouting, the tears, the loud noise of the television; he was getting sensory overload. Trying his best to keep calm, he told his kids to give him the pencil and that he would decide who got it tomorrow.

"But why!" "That's not fair!" "I saw it first!" "No, you didn't! I did!"

"That's enough!" he screamed, "Both of you upstairs to your rooms now!"

He couldn't handle this tonight. Not now. Breathing slightly heavily, he sat down in front of his plate of dinner. Picking up his fork and dipping it into the noodles his wife had made, he lifted it to his lips to find it cold enough to have been in the fridge. Slamming the fork down, he put his face in his hands. Was a warm meal too much to ask.

The story of the eight o'clock news proceeded to reach his ears like a thousand buzzing bees, making him jump out of his seat and frustratingly hit the power button. He sat back down in his seat with hands folded under his chin, staring down at the table. He could see his wife in the corner of his eye, staring at him. Even she irritated him at the moment. Taking another deep breath and clearing his throat, he said,

"It's been a rough day."

## **Unforgiving Shame**

He rolled over to discover the time: two am. The guilt had awoken him. Earlier that day he had shouted at his eldest son for something as silly as wanting to go to the gym. He knew he might have overreacted, but all he wanted to do was eat breakfast together as a family. Why didn't his son just ask him before or had some decency in choosing to stay with his father whom he had barely seen all week? But he knew no matter how hard he tried to justify his actions, he would feel guilty in the end. He always felt he was to blame. His son had finals this upcoming week. What if he doesn't do well because of what he had done? What if the gym was his only stress reliever and now he wouldn't be able to focus? It would be all his fault. He slowly took the covers off of him and made his way to his eldest son's room.

## **Accidents**

She rushed her daughter to the left side of the pool. She had swimming lessons and they were already eight minutes late. The two saw the instructor with the other students in the middle of the shallow pool. She watched her daughter take off her butterfly flip-flops as she herself went and sat down on a chair provided for the parents. She mouthed for her daughter to get into the water as she merely stood on the edge, looking upon the other children. Just as she was about to walk over to her, her daughter did a spinning sort of action that ended with her chin meeting the side of the pool. Blood seeped into the water as she ran over to her and lifted her head. The cut wasn't too big but it was deep enough to need stitches. She excused herself from the instructor and took her in-shock and what she assumed embarrassed daughter back to where she had just been an hour ago. The ER was quite crowded that Tuesday evening, but she had paged a fellow pediatrician on their way there to squeeze them in. And so carrying her daughter, she made her way past the line and through the doors to greet her friend. Ten minutes later she walked out still carrying her daughter, except her daughter now wore a cotton ball and tape that kept the glue in place.

## **Endless**

He had been on the go all day. Rounding took place before his back to back meetings whilst frequently checking on the two year old with a heart infection. It was 5 o'clock and he hadn't eaten lunch yet.

## Twenty-Four Hours

He dreamt that he and his wife were on a stranded beach with no one around other than his two little girls. He watched them as they played along the white marbled looking sand, one splashing the other with clearer water than the air around them as the two of them giggled and laughed. He didn't seem anxious as he took in his surroundings, noticing they were in fact on a small island with nothing else in the horizon. In fact, he felt rather zen and calm. Gazing down at his beautiful wife as she laid beside him on a foldable wooden chair, he smiled before she opened her mouth. He could see her mouth moving, yet she couldn't understand what she was saying. He leaned closer towards her to try and read her mouth.

“Evan!”

Jerking awake he yelled, “What, what?!”

“Honey its Dr. Adamu on the phone,” his wife said.

Turning his head to face the clock he blinked several times before he was able to read the numbers that read 12 a.m. He slowly closed his eyes as his brows moved closer together. This has been happening every night for the past week.

“Just give me”, he said angrily at his wife as he snatched the phone from her hands.

He saw her own brows move up in surprise and annoyance before she rose off the bed and walked out of the room without another word. He felt badly soon as she left but he couldn't help himself. He had not gotten more than four hours of sleep for the last few day and Dr. Adamu from his humanitarian trip to Kenya a year ago wouldn't grasp the concept of the time change no matter how many times he reminded him. Taking a deep breath, he pressed the green button.

“Adamu! How are you?” he said enthusiastically in an effort to sound awake.

## **Reflex**

She lay on the couch with her head on her favorite grey pillow that she'd finally managed to pound into comfort. She looked to her left as her husband had already fallen asleep beside her, her legs on top of his knees. The last thing she remembered before her own eyes closed was Lucy trying to work a sewing machine as Ethel curiously watched.

The next thing she knew, she had jerked awake, instinctively jumping up alert and ready for action. Looking around slightly disoriented, she gazed down at her son who she realized had woken her.

“Mommy are you okay? I barely touched you” he said in his squeaky ten year old voice.

Sitting back down breathing slightly heavy, she said, “Sorry, sweetie. Mommy is just used to having to wake up quickly at work”.

## Always on Service

He pushed the silver button with his thumb on the side of his arm chair, leaning back ever so slightly. He didn't want to be one of those jerks who disregarded the person sitting behind them and gave them only five inches of space, but he did want to adjust his seat a bit so as to be comfortable on his twelve hour flight to London. He lazily flicked through the list of movies British Airways offered on his television screen. He didn't remember falling asleep. But as the pilot's announcement came through the speakers, he felt himself jerk slightly forward as his eyes shot open. He blinked rapidly and fidgeted in his seat in an effort to wake up. It had already turned dark and his screen had automatically began playing the next movie on the list, *Madagascar 2*. He had just started looking around to determine if he had slept through dinner before his ears caught the word "doctor". Now focusing his attention on the pilot's voice, he heard the caught the words "...a doctor on board please press your call button and a flight attendant will come to your seat" over the roar of the plane.

His stomach slightly dropped as he once again fidgeted in his seat. Was it too much to ask to go through one quiet flight, undisturbed? Sighing, he tiredly pressed the call button on his arm chair before watching it light up. Within five seconds a younger and flustered looking flight attendant arrived at his elbow, asking if he was a doctor. Immediately after nodding and reaching into his pocket to show his medical license, she asked him to follow her. She led him down to the end of the plane, enviously watching the other hundred passengers sitting lazily in their seats either speaking with the person beside them, watching a movie with wide eyes and a blanket held up to their chin, or sleeping with relaxed faces. He wondered what they were dreaming about. Once they reached the back of the plane, he saw two other male flight attendants looking worriedly at an older woman who sat in the flight attendant's landing and take-off seat. The younger flight attendant who had escorted him explained that this woman had in fact been found unconscious next to the bathroom floor about ten minutes ago, and had only woken up about six minutes ago. Bending down, he gently took hold of her hand and placed his thumb on the left side of her wrist, counting her pulse as he stared at his watch.

After a general body analysis, he informed her and the crew that she had simply suffered from low blood sugar, suggesting she eat something with a high level of fructose. The taller male flight attendant quickly stepped around the corner and came back with a banana, asking him if it would do. He nodded before asking if the woman needed anything else, and assuring her that with water and sleep she would feel better. She continuously thanked him as she wrapped both her hands in his and shook it. He smiled politely before walking up back up the plane and falling back into his seat. Closing his eyes, he ignored the seat belt sign.

## **Judgmental**

He placed his palm on the back of his neck, rubbing the spot that had been painfully aching for the past three months. His overwhelming workload for the past few weeks had forced him to disregard his wife's advice of going to physical therapy. Over the course of time however, the throbbing had reached an almost unbearable level. But it wasn't until he had a minute to breath last week that he made he finally decided to make the phone call. After about ten minutes, he had finally scheduled an appointment with Dr. Johnson whom his colleague had recommended.

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He placed his palm on the back of his neck, rubbing the spot that had been painfully aching for the past three months. Expecting to feel immense relief by the end of his first therapy session, the only thought running through his mind was that Dr. Johnson was not a very good doctor.



## **Debt**

With every loan he withdrew, the deeper he forced himself into the earth. Money. Money. Money. It was always on his mind. If it wasn't in the front it was in the back, if not somewhere in the middle. Budget. Budget. Budget. That was always on his mind too. With grocery shopping. With clothes. With nights out. With electricity. With phone bills. With gas. With cups of coffee. An endless list.

## **Conflicting Roles**

She lazily picked up the dirty plate as she set it into the pool of warm water, her red and wrinkled fingers gently scrubbing it with the two day old sponge. Humming to herself, she watched birds flutter around the feeder she had installed onto the branch of her favorite jacaranda tree a few months ago. It was a peaceful morning. She had just been released from call the previous night and had finally been able to catch up on some sleep. She didn't have to go in today until around noon for a meeting. It was nine a.m.

She stood there for another six minutes as she finally reached for the last dirty set of utensils. Just as she was putting the spoon and fork to dry on the rack, she heard a strange noise from the connecting living room. Dropping everything and rushing over, she saw her baby in his crib with bread in hand, and a face that couldn't breathe. He was choking. A level of adrenaline that was never felt before surged through her very veins. Reaching for her pocket, she quickly dialed 911 and threw it onto the table with it on speaker as she lifted her suffocating child onto her lap. She flipped him over so that his nose faced her shoes, and bent her knees slightly forward creating a diving position. As the operator on the phone asked her what the emergency was, she quickly explained the situation and that she was a licensed doctor yet needed the paramedics to arrive just in case. At the same time, her left hand was holding her baby's head in place, while her right was smacking him rather hard in between the shoulder blades, hoping to create enough force to dislodge the piece of bread stuck in his windpipe. Just as the operator was asking for the address, she heard her baby give a giant cough as a little ball of wet mush fell onto the floor. Leaning him forward she stared at his incredibly red face that was slowly turning to its normal pale skin. He was still furiously coughing but the fact that he was coughing told her he could breathe. She held her baby close to her heart as she gently rubbed his back and wiped his face from the tears as her own face began filling with them. It wasn't as if she had deal with worse things, yet it was the first time she had save her own flesh and blood.

## Unplanned

It was a normal Tuesday evening. The children had come home from school and finished their homework while his wife cooked dinner. Salmon with rice and chicken. They all chatted away and laughed at one another as they sat together for dinner. He asked how each of their day went while at the same time taking bites of the delicious food. In the middle of his eldest son explaining what he believed to be an intense soccer game during recess, he suddenly heard his daughter aggressively coughing. He asked her if she was okay as his wife smacked her on the back but she simply kept coughing. His joy slowly began to sink as he tiredly hoped he wouldn't have to drive back out to the hospital. As he reached her she stopped coughing and now had begun banging against her own chest. Through her panting he saw that she was breathing so he was immediately put at ease. But when he asked her what was the matter, she said she felt as if there was something in her throat before once again forcefully coughing. He asked her to open her mouth wide so that he could see, but all he saw was black. Grabbing the flashlight that was stashed in a kitchen drawer in case of a power outage, he once again looked down her mouth. There appeared to be a fish bone that had lodged itself sideways in her throat, prohibiting any further movement. He knew he was going to have to do something. All he wanted was a peaceful dinner where nothing went wrong. Taking her hand he led her to the living room where he laid her on the floor. He informed her that he was going to have to cut the bone in half for it to go down her throat. When she asked how he was going to cut it, he gently explained the small scissors he hid behind his back. Her eyes widened with shock yet he knew she got her bravery from his side of the family. Hoping it will only take one try so that he can go back to his peaceful dinner, he held her mouth open.

## Disappointment

It had been a long day filled with meetings and placing two patients on ECMO. He pushed the acceleration pedal slightly past the speed limit as he eagerly drove home. All he wanted was to change out of his now slightly wrinkled collared shirt and thinned out tie as it had been tugged on several times throughout the day. With the thought of putting his feet up and a hot plate of food in his hand, he couldn't help but press his right foot a little more.

Pulling up into the driveway earlier than normal, he tiredly yet quickly grabbed his leather briefcase from the passenger as he practically jumped out of the car. Removing his shoes before walking into the house, he opened the door with the smell of cooking in mind. He was instead blasted with a wave of yells and screams. The temper that had been waiting to break through the surface from physical and mental exhaustion finally erupted. He made his way to the kitchen and slammed his bag on the counter as the screams continued.

“What’s going on?”, he shouted before sudden silence.

He heard several pairs of little whispers coming from upstairs. Tapping his fingers and foot in an attempt to release some anger, he waited as the sound of tapping feet made its way down the stairs. He had just wanted a calm and relaxed dinner with his family after a long day at work where he was forced to be on high alert from the moment he entered the building that morning. He watched as five faces that reached no higher than his waist marched in with bowed heads and guilty faces, with his wife following behind. His third child he noticed, held a piece of clump of paper tower to his head as he tried to not show it.

“Adam, what happened?”, he asked in a strict tone.

Looking to his right and left at his other siblings before locking eyes with the floor, he explained in a scared tone how he had accidentally fallen while they were playing and hit his head against the wooden post of the couch. Temper once again slowly rising as he did not want to have to deal with anymore injuries, he reached for his son's shoulder before dragging him forward and removing his left hand to reveal the cut. It wasn't deep enough where he needed to go to the hospital, but he would have to put some form of stitching on it. Releasing a sound that resembled a mixture of a grunt and a sigh, he took his son up to his room where he kept a bag of medical equipment, one including adhesive strips.

## **Mary Poppins**

He lifted his overnight, blue duffel bag into the car. This was the bag he took with him during his call nights. If this world were to ever experience an apocalypse, his bag would be the one thing he ran back into the house for. After years of accumulation, it suddenly possessed everything needed for a chance of survival: socks, a sweater, extra change of scrubs, toothpaste, floss, toothbrush, scissors, Swiss army knife, first aid kit, a belt, matches, a bottle, pressed down granola bars, chap stick, Neosporin, itching ointment, stethoscope, shampoo, lotion.....

## **The Limit**

He stood outside of the NICU ward, having a casual conversation with the head of neurosurgery. He was listening to her describe the dinner party she had over the weekend while he politely nodded and commented when appropriate. She suddenly asked if he was going to attend the funeral. Confused as to she meant, he explained he wasn't entirely sure what she was referring to. It wasn't until a few moments after that he understood what she had been speaking of. A student of the medical university connected to their hospital had taken her own life. She had made it to school and was already midway through her second year of residency. Some couldn't fathom how she would have gone through so much heartache and effort just to end her life when she was so close to reaching her goal. Yet as the head of neurosurgery continued to explain, he understood all too well the pressures and suffering that came with this route. He felt a twinge of pain in his heart and pressure in his eye as he quietly listened.

## Everywhere

The driver held the steering wheel tight along the winding road. She was in a different country, a different continent. Several Kenyans were seen walking along the street, many carrying tall items on the base of their heads. Her fellow team members were asleep in the back seat of the van, exhausted after the long day's work. They were there on a humanitarian trip, asked to provide aid and knowledge to The Nairobi Hospital. The early mornings of rounding and the late evenings of lectures were enough to make anyone fall asleep during a moment of stillness. While she herself was quite worn out, it was their last day in Kenya and she wanted to take in as much as she could before their flight the following afternoon. And so she stared outside the half open window, gazing at the passersby's.

As she shifted positions to instead stare outside the windshield, she felt the driver press rather hard on the brakes as the seatbelt pressed into her shoulder and putting her on alert. Looking over to him, she asked what the matter was. Not having spoken English very well, he merely pointed his finger towards the far right a few cars away. She followed his hand and noticed a several bodies grouped together in a circle and looking down towards the center. To their back left she saw a car that appeared to have crumpled in half, with its nose having smashed directly into the trunk of a tree. The folded front and shattered windshield told her the driver must have been thrown through the glass at full force. As her driver was now stopped in the middle of the road due to the traffic and chaos, she simply opened the door and stepped out, informing the driver she was going to see if they needed help.

As she neared the scene, her white coat paved the way to the center as the bodies stepped aside. Immediately she forced herself to suppress a gasp. What had appeared to be have once been a young man was now a mutilated body. Lying face up with arms and legs sprawled at odd angles, she noticed several fingers were no longer there. His blue shirt and khaki pants were shredded and drenched in dark red that had seeped from the equally grated skin beneath. Looking at his face that resembled wood having been hacked off with a bloodied chisel, she leaned her ear towards his mouth to see if he was breathing, ready to perform CPR until the paramedics arrived.

## **Resistance**

Bacteria, viruses, germs, and on the list goes. They had all become dormant inside of her, put to sleep by her immune system. Rarely ever getting sick was a perk of the job. She smiled to herself at the thought.



## Lessons

He sat on the wooden kitchen chair, sipping his morning coffee while his fourteen year old daughter ate her Fruit Loops. He had been sharing stories of his residency, amusing her as she swirled her spoon across the vibrantly colored cereal.

“I had been up for forty eight hours, completely exhausted...”

He trailed off as she listened with open ears, his muscles recalling the memory as if it were only the other day. It had yet to leave the hospital all week except for an hour to get a new change of scrubs. He did not know his eyes could reach such a level of tiredness, yet the coffee he drank ordered them open. It was four in the morning and he had not eaten all day. His heavy feet shuffled along the carpeted floor as he made his way around the cafeteria. Purchasing a hot bundle, he sunk his teeth into a burger that early morning, staring against the window and looking upon a fuller and unfamiliar version of himself that he was not so used to.

“The first rule of residency or even medical school is –”

“Eat when you can, and sleep when you can,” his daughter said with a wide grin on her face.

She always remembered his stories.

## **PART 2**

## **The First**

He lingered behind,  
Unable to detach,  
Bustle around him,  
Clatter and clang,  
Removing their masks,  
Shedding their gloves,  
They slowly scattered,  
Two remained,  
Lights blinding,  
Hand on shoulder,  
Pat on the back,  
He was last,  
Staring upon the result,  
Eyes wide in comprehension,  
Knowing this to be his life,  
He forced his feet away,  
Away,  
Away,  
Away,  
From the body.

## **Her Own**

She suddenly felt paralyzed.

*He stares with clouded eyes*

Not knowing what to do.

*Tubes attached to his body*

Her physician's confidence fading.

*Lights shining above him*

Mother instincts and worries invading.

*Blood adding color to his pale skin*

To take action or not.

*Leg already resembling failure*

## **Funeral**

He stood there, staring  
    as the three lay beside  
one another in sleep,  
    the earth claiming  
them as its own before  
    any could walk,  
he knew that he  
    had tried his  
best, mostly in  
    the hands of the  
supreme, but his  
    inherent guilt slithered  
up like a snake,  
    inhabiting in the  
throat, compelling his  
    airway to block  
and eyes to leak, the families  
    express their  
gratitude for the attempts,  
    as he partially  
accepts on their behalf,  
    knowing this won't  
be the last as the  
    snake begins to  
move toward  
    his mouth.

## **Deservance**

He moved down the hall,  
Cup of half drunken coffee in hand,  
Exhausted from the nights shift,  
Dreaming of his secure bed,  
Waking up to his own textured ceiling,  
He turned at the call of his name,  
Recognizing his patients mother,  
Unable to formulate words,  
She thanked him for his efforts,  
Leaving him feeling warm yet empty,  
Cup of half drunken coffee in hand,  
He moved down the hall.

## **Flights**

He sat there on the cushioned  
Seat, bracing himself  
For the long journey,  
Looking over at the  
Empty seat beside him,  
He wished for  
Some company,  
Thinking of his wife  
And children,  
He closed his  
Eyes.

## **Separation**

She looked upon her  
young one, thankful it  
was not her, knowing  
the guilt if she erred  
would take her, she  
watched his fingers  
and toes, lips ever so  
slightly parted,  
trying to keep her  
faith as the men in  
blue took him.



## **Temptation**

It sat there

mocking him,

Calling him

like his master,

Glistening in the

darkness,

He promised

he wouldn't,

Will of the previous

night waning,

He tried to

justify it,

One sip would

not do much,

The long day

fresh in mind,

He glanced around

for her,

Knowing it would

mean war,

He grasped the

bottle.

**Weight**

Chief.

Complaint.

Wife.

Anniversary.

Son.

Baseball game.

Mother.

Sick.

Brother.

Money.

Father.

Alone.

Me.

Chaos.

## **Valentine's Day**

With knowledge of tomorrow's exhaustion, he decided upon tonight.

Four meetings and two on ECMO, he made a detour.

Three for each of his girls, he chose pink for two.

The third despised the color, red calling his name.

Perfect. Please. Wrap.

Eyes tired, lips smiling.

Juggling in hand, he made his way.

A day before Saint Valentine, their faces priceless as if he had planned.

**Aching**

Head

Eyes

Neck

Shoulder blades

Back

Soles

## **Reflection**

He watched the family rated movie,  
aware it was not real,  
yet still permitting it to seep through.  
The child having left this earth,  
with father shielding his body,  
screeches and tears leaving him.  
His own eyes filling with salt,  
death never escaping,  
reliving a similar scene.  
He tried but failed,  
bowing his head,  
wishing it to be over.

## **Interruption**

He dreamt of the  
snow, its whiteness and purity  
engulfing him, seeping  
into the creases  
between his toes,  
allowing himself to  
fall under its spell,  
believing anything  
to be  
possible,  
a step was all  
it took,  
a voice calling  
him forward,  
before all was broken,  
through a beep  
and a buzz, he  
opened his eyes.

### **Thursday Schedule**

9:00 a.m.: Hospital

4:00 p.m.: Visit to Dad

8:00 p.m.: Hospital

11:00 p.m.: Home

12: 30 a.m.: Hospital

4:00 a.m.: Home

## **Distraction**

Hot breath clouded his  
    eyes,  
Hands in someone  
    else,  
internal odors seeping through his  
    mask,  
Unstable beeping filling his  
    ears,  
Unsure if it was the sound of his  
    heart,  
Red specks vibrant against the  
    blue,  
White lights clouding the  
    ceiling,  
Praying he gets her  
    through,  
Black string swimming through  
    liquid,  
Endorphins releasing into the  
    air,  
Thinking of what to have for  
    lunch.



## **Guilt**

Three this week,  
He hoped and prayed,  
Yet each in vain,  
Seeking reassurance,  
From the Lord to man,  
Could he have done more?

## **Anxiety**

Jerking awake, darkness

Filling her

Eyes, moon

Reading midnight,

She laid

Stiff and paralyzed,

Uncertain of the

Shock, releasing

Her lids, yet mind

Imprisoned, she knew

Her efforts were

Futile.

**Breaking**

Tears <i>fill</i> his eyes	as they never did.
Compassion <i>engulfs</i> his heart	as it never did.
Guilt <i>wraps</i> his brain	as it never did.
Forgiveness <i>leaves</i> his lips	as it never did.
Empathy <i>tugs</i> at his stomach	as it never did.
Love <i>possesses</i> his soul	as it never did.

## **Late Hours**

He stared below  
At the mountains of papers  
And notes and charts,  
Yearning for a fire  
To destroy it all  
With no prevail,  
The sun reminding him  
Of his lack of  
Presence with his  
Family.

**Unwind**

Surrounding herself

with the simple

the calm

the gentle

the innocent

the whole

the pure

the light

She held her baby.

## **Substance**

She thought of  
other ways, to deal with  
the pain,  
the stress, but  
it was too  
simple, wishing she  
was strong,  
the air thick with  
thirty minutes of  
cloud, she cried,  
reminding herself of  
her appointment  
with the half empty  
bottle in her  
fridge.

## **Stress**

On the edge  
of her bed,  
she sat, hands blanketing  
her knees, teeth  
making sharp contact  
with her bottom lip,  
water drowning her  
eyes as beads crept down  
her cherry skin,  
immense weight  
crushing her soul,  
seeing no escape.

## **Therapy**

He didn't think he needed it,  
He was doing alright on his own,  
Everyone else was different,  
He could handle it himself,  
His mind was only his,  
No one else had the right,  
Screams were normal,  
Tears were normal,  
Heartache was normal,  
Guilt was normal,  
Stress was normal,  
All was normal,  
They were his,  
No one can stop life,  
There was no reason,  
There was no point,  
He didn't think he needed it.



**Distance**

Hospital 1

*23 miles*

Hospital 2

*60 miles*

Hospital 3

Day 1, Day 3, Day 6

*Stretching her like an elastic band.*

## **Offsprings**

He saw how they  
Feared him, irritation  
Spreading through his veins  
Like a switch every  
Night, unknowing of  
Where to send it, what felt  
Like endless hours  
Leading him to insanity,  
He tried to control  
It, thinking of all his  
Blessings, yet constantly  
Losing strength.

## **Travels**

She promised she would wake her  
to say goodbye, for it wouldn't  
be six nights she didn't  
kiss her goodnight. But as she  
stared upon her resting  
face, she couldn't bring herself  
to release any more  
tears. Gently leaning  
she ever so pressed her lips  
against her young skin, whispering  
a goodbye as she  
slipped into the dark.

## **Questioning**

Is this worth it?

...the stress

...the anger

...the sadness

...the heartache

...the worry

...the exhaustion

Is this worth it?

...the relief

...the joy

...the reunions

...the euphoria

...the triumph

...the thrill

## **Always on Call**

A scrape on the elbow

A gurgling cough

Fainting in the supermarket

A papercut

A car accident

Choking at a dinner party

A baseball to the eye

A congested nose

A sinus headache

A pus filled blister

A fractured ankle

And on

And on

And on

And on...

## **Compare**

She watched him lie  
In bed, withering and whining  
Worst than those  
In the ICU,  
Forgetting when she wed  
A coward, the temperature  
Of his body not  
Even having reached  
Five degrees near  
Critical, with all  
Limbs and inner organs  
Intact, breathing  
Heavily like  
A helpless fish  
In need of water,  
She watched him lie  
In bed in disgust  
And disapproval.

**Endurance**

*2 on ECMO,*

*3 on the ventilator,*

*1 dead,*

*2 dead,*

*3 dead,*

he didn't think he could  
do this anymore...

## **Tipping Scale**

The numbers weighed him  
down, pulling him away  
from the sun, the ones he  
couldn't save, forgetting all that  
he had, swamping his  
mind, clogging the drain of  
rationality, he sunk.



**Balance**

Death,

    Upon death,

        Upon death,

            Upon death,

                Upon death,

                    Upon death,

                        Upon death,

                            Upon death,

                                Upon death,

                                    Upon death,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

  Upon life,

Life.

**THE END**