

POETRY

Invisibility and death

You have to die a few times before you can really live.
— Charles Bukowski

My first death was in June 2007. She took her last breath, she turned grey and cold and I died with her. I was invisible before everyone.

Then, slowly — I returned.

My second death was in May 2010. I was doing my obstetrics rotation. “You’re worthless”, they said. “You’re below expectations”. “Flat affect — poor interactions with patients.” No lunch, just shoulder dystocia. Loving my patients but hating my attendings. Hating being there at all. Standing in ORs — not understanding anything. Not knowing. Being pimped and never having the answer. Shocked, angry stares.

I turned cold and grey. I now believed what they had been pushing on me since the beginning of medical school — I was invisible. I convinced myself and faded into the walls once more.

My third death — my invisibility act, was in December 2011. The man I had loved for four years had sucked everything out of me — I could no longer cater to him. Medical school had sucked it all out of me already.

Grey, cold — just like her hands.

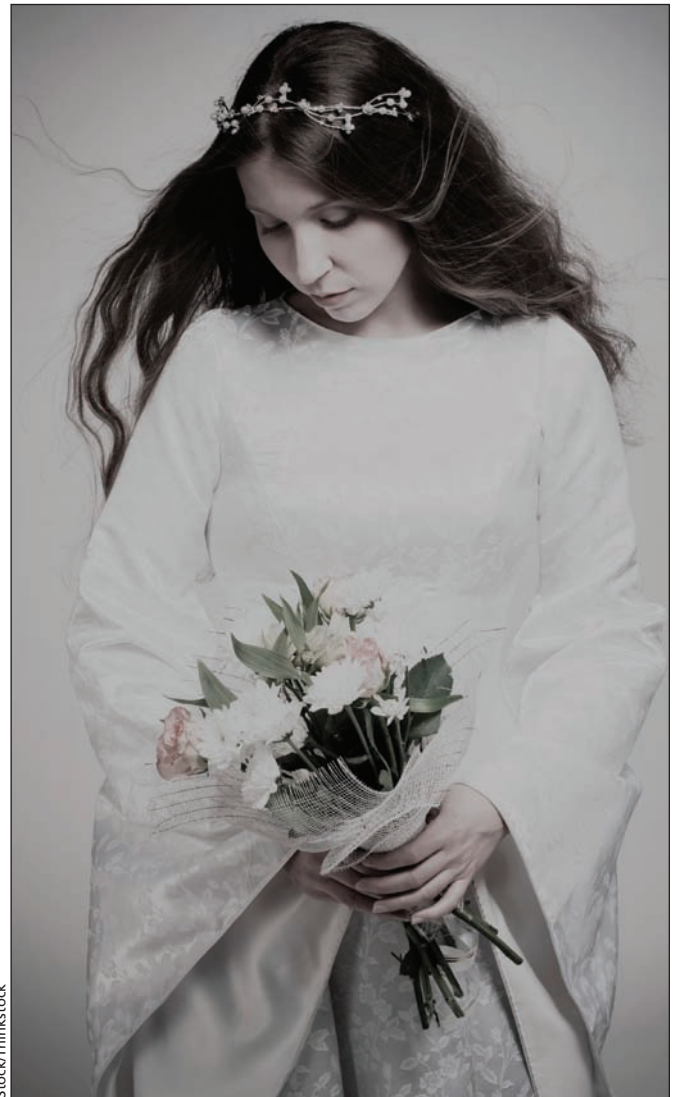
No one could ever want a corpse bride. Men want a red-cheeked woman with blood in her veins. I’ve been drained, filled with formaldehyde. I’m a cadaver now — I’m back in 1st-year medical school. I’m haunting the nightmares of 21-year-old girls participating in the rites of medicine for the first time. I’m waking in the night in the anatomy lab morgue. I’m looking for you.

Holly Delaney

MD candidate 2013
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ont

Editor’s note: This poem won honourable mention in the “Best Student Work” category of the Ars Medica and *CMAJ* Humanities Poetry and Prose Contest.

CMAJ 2014. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.130836



iStock/Thinkstock