

POEM

History

I ask you all the questions
 You have asked before
 So many times,
 Of so many people.
 Never thought that one day,
 You would be on the other side.

I choose my words carefully,
 As a sign of respect.
 It seems strange now,
 To be reversing my lay vocabulary;
 To be giving in to the lingo
 So strongly etched in my doctor brain.
 To actually use words like
 "edema,"
 "hyponatremic,"
 "bradycardic."
 Words that would baffle the layman,
 But are perfectly understood
 By you.

You are quick to offer up details,
 Even though the story is muddled in your head.
 You must have tried to self-diagnose,
 But the doctor in you —
 Who, in fact, used to define you —
 Could not ignore
 The frailty which brought you here today.

I feel like a fool,
 Fumbling with my stethoscope,
 Telling you what "the plan" is ...
 Feeling so inadequate,
 Under your seasoned gaze.

I draw back the curtain,
 Wondering how it must have been
 When,
 All those years ago,
 You were the one taking the history,
 Examining the patient,
 Writing the admission orders.



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When I look at you,
 Talk to you,
 Compare stories of "today" and "back then,"
 I am allowed a glimpse of history ...
 But I realize,
 As I stare at your wrinkled face,
 Eyes clouded with cataracts and uncertainty,
 That I am not only looking into your past ...
 I am surely looking into my future.

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