

Invisible



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The boy was impaled. Speeding by just outside the hospital, he drove into a metal post. Paramedics radio me: he has a pulse. Three minutes out. Impossible! I call the trauma code, don gown, gloves, eye protection. Find drugs, airways, surgery trays. Order blood. I snap on humming theater lights that will let me see into this boy. Nervous laughter and talk of old cases buzzes around the trauma room like electricity. I wait in complete silence. Emergency doors suck open, the curtain rises. We crack his chest. Hurry! Pericardium open, I squeeze his heart with my fingers. Pulse there? Surgeons remove a bleeding lung, tie off his leaking pulmonary artery. The whole hilum oozes. The pole swept aside 2 vertebrae.

We stop. Silently stare at one another. Stooped shoulders carry the weight of this failure. The boy is splayed open and struck through by steel. Red footprints litter the bloody floor that smells heavily of iron. Hastily opened

wrappers and tubes lie around like garbage. I remove my gown, my gloves, my glasses. I step away from the carnage and close the curtains behind me. Go and find his family. His girlfriend says they had been arguing.

I see the next patients but I'm not really there. Guttured. Later I lie awake at home and apologize to a friend for calling him late. *There was nothing I could do; it was impossible. But he had a pulse. His family took it OK. They looked straight through me; I was invisible. It was awful. I did everything I could. There was nothing I could do.*

Next day there was long red-ribboned box on my desk. A card read: *I want you to imagine these are from that boy's family. Thank you.*

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