

Keeping Pace

Evangelia Assimacopoulos

In any other setting, we are ordinary and fragile beings. On the wards, however, we are expected to function with godlike resilience. We strive to meet this expectation, but from our effort stems turmoil –the clashing of mind and emotion. My mind, the timekeeper, rushes from patient to patient, down to the trauma bay, back to the wards. My soul takes pause. It does not understand the pressures of time, always pushing and never patient enough. My soul struggles to keep up at this feverish pace, unable to fully comprehend what it has witnessed.

It is early morning. I laugh, joke and greet the team. We down our coffee and run the list. *GSW. Assault. MVC. MCC. ATV. Burn. TBI.* I savor a last sip of coffee, set down my mug and ask a friend passing by how her weekend was. We walk into the patient's room. *GSW.* I ask him to squeeze my fingers and wiggle his toes. Follows commands, stable from yesterday, doing well. Next.

Wait. 'Well'? Is that really what we call this? This man attempted to end his life. The trajectory of his bullet was unfortunately –can I say that? –not fatal, but rather tore through his despondent face. Bones gone, unable to open his eyes, smell the air, or speak. His wife found him. His family is visiting here today. I look on with a strange curiosity as his wife and children process the self-inflicted disfigurement that is her husband and their father. And even in that time, I have paused too long and must hurry to catch up with the team, already in the next room.

Assault. She is an elderly, developmentally delayed woman who has been in the hospital longer than most. Her face lights up as I enter, but she does not say much. While I am assessing her, she reaches over and tears a page out of her coloring book. The colors cross the boundaries of the thin black lines and the tear has ripped through the picture. Nonetheless, she offers it to me and I humbly accept. A soft smile forms across my face and I allow it stay. She picks up a framed black and white photograph of a young couple riding a tandem bicycle. "That my mom and dad!" she exclaims.

My pager goes off, I have lingered too long. I quickly skim the picture and tell her "That's nice". As I rush out of the room, I turn to glance back at her and I pause. She stares intently at the photograph of her parents, brings the frame up to her lips and kisses them both. "I miss you guys." One more kiss. "I love you so much." The smile fades from my face as my mind pushes me toward the next patient. *MVC. 20 yr F driver. SAH/SDH, multiple fractures, intubated. Friend dead on scene.*