

Doctor

by Gary Moshimer

I asked her how she came to be at our little party. We all knew she was an intern. What would she want with the likes of us, the orderlies and techs and strays? She just held up Ed's flyer and said, "Why not?" But she didn't look happy.

We fired up and someone said, "Let's get small," and I saw her wince, because she was big, two of me, even though I was a runt. I saw the hurt in her, the trapped fat girl, with her watery gray eyes and faded freckles.

No one said anything to her at first. We kept the keg flowing and the bong moving. Then this Wendy girl said, "What kind of doctor are you going to be?"

"Internal medicine," she said, looking away shyly. Her hair was down, nothing like at the hospital. It was light brown and shiny and flowed over the arm of the sofa.

"Wow," said Sheila, the X-ray girl. "I have nothing inside me to medicate."

After a while Ed started making out with the empty X-ray girl, and other couples paired off. I was left with the doctor. "I've seen you around," she said.

Eventually we made our way to my bedroom, the smallest room in the apartment but with the biggest bed, which wasn't really a bed, just a king-size mattress taking up the whole floor. I had stolen some fine silk sheets for it, though, and had cool black lights on the wall and posters.

She told me to take off my clothes, so she could do an exam. The skin of her face seemed to have loosened, hanging sadly. She was not as young as I thought. I did as she asked. In the black light my whiteness glowed, and the scars of my years were something else altogether— otherworldly: the half-moon gouges, cigarette burns, tracks and jagged Z's across my wrists, the topography of hell. All these she traced like Braille, searching for a diagnosis. Her hands

did not match the rest of her; they were thin with long, sensitive fingers.

She explored my popped belly-button. "Small umbilical hernia," she pronounced. She palpated my ribs and sternum. "Pectus excavatum." She brought my bony legs together and measured with her hand how my knees did not come together. "Genu varum." She felt the zipper scars over my knees.

"Accidentis motorcyclum," I said, and she smiled for the first time. She moved up to my face. She wiggled my nose. "Deviated septum." She placed fingers on my fluttering eyelids. "Despair." She opened my lids. "But no tears." She placed her small chapped lips on mine. She slid her tongue in and out, like a probe. "Dry mucosa."

"Cannabis."

She poked the tongue in my ear. "Slight fever." She nuzzled the pulses in my temples and neck. "Sinus tachycardia." With her palm on my chest, she said, "Hyperventilation."

That was when she noticed, must have felt the unusual tapping within me. She lowered her ear to my chest, jerked back up after she heard the clicking, my tin man heart.

"Artificial valve," I said. "Bacteria ate the other one."

She looked embarrassed and sad again. I knew the doctor game was over. "I'm so sorry," she said. "How could I have done this?" She started to cry. I folded her in, placed my tender wrists on her jiggling back.

"Seriously," she said into my chest, "you shouldn't be smoking pot with that."

"Well, if I'm going to die." But I didn't know for sure I was dying. I felt tired all the time, but I'd been worse. What she really needed to do was take my blood.

She took off her clothes, but then just fell asleep, curling me against her like some old familiar doll from her childhood.

In the morning, I awoke in bright sunlight to find her gone. I still felt her powdery smoothness over my skin. I went to the bathroom, ran my hands over my defects, tallied them. I noticed something new, a numbness in my fingertips.

When I saw her at the hospital, she said nothing to me. I didn't blame her. She was always with other doctors. After a while she moved on to someplace else, and I never really found out what she wanted.

