

Dialysis

by Michael Seidel

Two years into my dialysis treatments, the woman who tends me began draining my blood into a small, kidney-shaped pan, walking it carefully down several flights of stairs to the hospital's cafeteria, and placing it in the microwave. She'd turn the knob for 4 minutes and 30 seconds, the same time it takes to cook four potatoes. The light would go on, and she'd watch it begin to boil through the perforated screen.

She'd return, pour the blood back into the dialysis machine, set it to do what it does, and feed it back into me. The first time, the sting was discomforting.

"Why are you doing this to me," I asked her.

"We know each other so well. I care for you so much," she replied.

Each time I went back after that, twice a week in those days, she'd repeat this. Sometimes she'd spill a bit on her walk down and have to call an orderly to come with a mop and bleach.

My veins got tunneled in callus, and eventually the feeling of the blood going back in was a kind of euphoria. Not hot; warming, good. Like a drug that hitches itself to your mind and gives you clarity by taking away all thought.

On the days I wasn't there, my insides felt like paper-mâché.

So I've begun filling in. I line all the tools up, extract the blue until it goes red and fills the World's Best Sister coffee cup I use to collect it. The lights of my house flicker at night from the power it takes to get it to the temperature I like—you can see it from the streets.

I stand outside sometimes while I wait, just watching that stutter of light, seeing it as others do.

