

## And the Bottle

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You showed up a disturbing alphabet soup: E-T-O-H and SI in the ED. But we met hours after, so I didn't smell the ethanol level, didn't hear your SI screamed off the walls of the bright-lit midnight emergency room. I was to take your history from you and inspect you, to use that information to provide the best that modern medicine has to offer. You complained of your dry eyes, your dysphagic throat, your inability to avoid pints of vodka on a daily basis. You joked about your failing heart, your cruel sister, your useless drunken life that you had wanted to end often enough that last night just happened to be convenient. You taught me CIWA with your monochromatic tattooed hands shaking and one-to-one monitoring with the pleasant yet disinterested volunteer. You explained how important the hospital toothpaste is to life lived out of a car that you break into because it's a cheap car and finding the keys in a drunken stupor is harder. And you laugh again, so I clutch my crinkled mess of folded paper that I've written less than 30 complete words on. You give me wheezing breath sounds, a breakbeat heartbeat as your myocardium quivers from years of alcohol drenching its fragile internal walls, and miraculously, a benign abdominal exam. You've given me so much, so I'm ready to present.

You've been here before, under different names in different lives, but this hospital has processed your sad iterations with careful detoxification and dismissal. A poor historian, they call you — as if YOU are the one slighting us. Why can't you improve on telling us how your car, your tiny respite from the world, your homeless home, got towed because you parked it illegally to drown yourself in the nearest lake? Try harder, to understand that moistening your dry eyes isn't included in what we offer the placement cases, those passing through. Your tender esophagus, a bidirectional meattube for your favorite poison, doesn't concern us now. You're still shaking and we're unfazed. As we should be on this side of the johnny, from this view of the lake.

I write for your bottle of eye drops, artificial crocodile tears for you. I hold up your chart sheepishly. My attending shrugs, signs off with a mess of ink, and turns the dial on the chart to notify the floor we've done something for you. In limbo between a text entry program and your medical record, there's a catalogue I wrote of your past 24 hours and why anyone here should care.

Anything to get him out of here, they'd say around the charting area. Your shakes are gone, you showered off the adhesive from your brokenheart monitor, psychiatry said you're not sad enough to be a lawsuit later, and now we want you out. You asked for long term rehab, we gave you a cab. And somehow you're still thankful - because you don't want to walk to the impound lot a town over to get back home. Where you headed? they want to know. To the lake, you say. Didn't he try to drown himself in a lake? I ask.

But psych said he's clear to go.

Oh.

I stand with your one-to-one as the cab arrives, hoping to provide you some additional solace. Despite the extensive practice in waiting to be useful that all third-years get, in that moment I couldn't stand just standing on the threshold to your room, third-wheeling the conversation. You remain pleasant throughout my lingering. I interject that your cab should be here soon and wish you the best, my simple gesture for your heart-wrenching complexity.

We don't want you to die - here in the hospital from a seizure. But take this bottle to the lake and hopefully your eyes won't be dry much longer.