

Case Study: A 26 Year-Old Man with Chest Pain, Altered Mental Status

Yevin Roh

Medical school was supposed to be the

Great Distractor

Instead,

I find you in my textbooks,

“Elevated troponin is a specific marker for damage to myocardium”

I find you in my lectures,

“DSM V has no set time limit for normal grief”

I find you in my patients,

“How long before I’m back to normal?”

Before medical school,

I would have compared you to a force of nature

You, the sun and stars,

Me, the manchild who stayed Icarus

You, an eagle with weathered talons,

Me, a voluntary Prometheus

You, the moon, a harbinger of storms,

Me, an island with sand made of bone

Now,

Instead of Greek metaphors,

I’ve learned jargon with Greek roots to describe heartbreak:

“Patient presents with dyspnea and crushing, radiating pain from thorax to soul.

Symptoms started years ago, with pain spiking from a 5 to a 10 on the pain scale. Patient also reports distress originating from epigastric region. Abdominal xray shows signs of a graveyard of butterflies obstructing gastric outlet. Physical exam is salient for tachycardia, labored breathing and tremor.”

I came to medical school to learn how to heal,

To learn how to escape pain

Instead, I found new ways to describe trauma,

New ways to pathologize it

Your legacy grows inside my heart

Its chambers fill, become dilated,

as eccentric as you've accused me of being
I struggle to accommodate,
But a heart made only of hypertrophied, overworked muscle is bound to break--
bigger is not always better
I've tried to grow stronger, I've tried to change
But cardiac remodeling only delays the inevitable
Overloaded and overwhelmed:

Each beat counts down to the moment my tired heart fails to nourish the rest of me
For one cannot live on love alone

“Patient presents with inattention, inability to focus, headaches, excessive daytime
somnolence, blurry vision, and unintended weight loss. Symptoms began years ago, and
has steadily progressed. Physical exam is salient for involuntary lacrimation bilaterally”

I've stayed in medical school to learn how to heal,
To learn how to cure the sick
Instead, I found new ways to describe chronic pain,
Learned new diagnoses to add to the differential

Memories and love may fill me
but unreciprocated,
it will not feed me
It will simply grow like a tumor
Consuming what is good and well
Replacing replacing bits of me I thought were once mine
But are now nothing but insatiable hunger
For unrequited love eats, and eats, and eats
Growing larger,
but no more healthy
Growing more intense,
but no more sustainable
Growing monumentally,
but no more stable
Gluttonous...
but still starving
For love is hungry, and without reciprocation,
It becomes the very definition of cancer:
It feasts on me.