



Fruitions of Anatomy Lab

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I gaze on fallen faces veiled in white
Unbound by a blade, a novice at best
Now, to this haunting image I digress:
My father raging 'gainst the end of life
I Parsifal, benighted and contrite
To Amfortas, speared, bleeding without rest
Unto this favor I must venture lest
I wake and revoke this mantle of strife
Yet, to everything there is a season
Where our hearts acquiesce what Fate portends
And find the Will to carry on again
Gorging Life's brimming fruit, ripe with reason
Ere we die, no one alone shall descend
Without Love from those in whom souls commend.

Background

I wrote this poem on October 16th, 2018, as a first-year medical student during Gross Anatomy, a rite of passage for any future physician. However, my first week with the cadaver might as well have been a living nightmare.

In 2016, I lost my father to pancreatic cancer and endured watching him suffer endlessly as I stood by in vain. Following his death, I had a recurring

dream in which I matriculated into medical school, only to enter the anatomy lab and find my father as my cadaver.

Despite its recurrence, I dismissed this as a mere dream and nothing else. One can imagine, then, the horror on my first day of medical school when I discovered my cadaver had not only died of the same cancer as my father

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had, but even resembled him in likeness.

This poem is my response to the feelings I had throughout gross anatomy and the impact they had on my life and medical edifice.

Form

I chose the form of a Petrarchan Sonnet in honor of the number of Italian instructors I had for anatomy, chief among them Dr. Cristiana Rastellini. I also chose this sonnet because it was suited nicely to my purpose of introducing a problem and the transformation. Traditionally, the octave serves to introduce the problem whereas the following sextet is the resolution and is known as the volta, or shift.

Imagery

My feelings of helplessness during my father's death resonated with Parsifal, one of my favorite music dramas by Richard Wagner. Parsifal, in his youth and naiveite, finds himself in the presence of Grail Knights who defend the Holy Grail. Amfortas, who is head of their holy order, suffers from a perpetual bleeding wound after being seduced and stabbed by a sorceress. Upon witnessing Amfortas' agony in the performance of his religious duties, Parsifal is moved by compassion and wishes to help Amfortas but cannot because of his own ignorance regarding the mysticism of the order. This was the imagery I hoped to convey within my poem as I felt as helpless as Parsifal to care for my father and his festering cancerous wound.
