

Pomegranate Hearts

By Michelle Izmaylov

That nervous rabbit-kick of heartbeats my stethoscope transmits isn't because she can't keep her T-words straight. Tumor. Transplant. Tacrolimus. It's because her husband is searching for something precious. It's because her husband is still searching, store to store, as Friday evening and the possibility of a liver transplant tonight ticks nearer.

It's because a mother in the labor and delivery ward holds a still-slippery newborn in her arms. Because she'll clean her baby, kiss her baby, offer breast and bottle and feel her child fall asleep against her heart. Because someday she'll set that child down on his own jelly-wobble legs. Because his whole palm will grip her guiding fingers as he stumbles into his first steps. Because one day he'll let go and she won't hold him that way anymore. Because one afternoon she'll spoon pureed carrots against his pouted lips and from that day on he won't eat baby food again. Because she'll read his favorite bedtime story and every evening after will find him reading on his own. Because she'll help him wiggle into a shirt before school and from then on will always find him dressed and waiting by the door. Because one morning she'll walk him to the bus and the next morning he'll ask to walk alone.

It's because the girl on the second floor of our hospital sat on a bridge with her best friend last night with water under their swinging feet and their eyes on an overpass of stars. Because they walked home with dark and darker fingers mixed together. Because they shared a tiny cupcake and petted a soft kitten found on a stranger's porch. Because the road is beautiful when wet-wet with rain but last night their footsteps only scraped starlight off cement. Because the girl on the second floor of our hospital kissed her best friend as they parted on the porch. Because a girl kissed her best friend and went upstairs to open rivers in her wrists.

It's because a sister doesn't hug her little brother on her way to high school on a morning when she's running late for breakfast with her friends. Because he wants to show her a poem he wrote before he walks to school but she ignores the paper held between his fingers. Because she is sipping on saccharine-sweet coffee when a dull voice on television tells her *there's been another hit-and-run*. Because for the first responder on the scene, the memory that stays tattooed inside his skull is the sound of an unanswered phone ringing on a broken body. Because she's holding her brother's ghost-pale hand as IVs feed him by the vein on a pediatric ward when a doctor comes to say *I'm sorry*. Because twenty years later she will sip coffee and still taste hospital. Because she will take her daughter to visit him and a little girl will ask her mother why they're giving such pretty flowers to a gray stone. Because she will still wonder about the unread poem her little brother wrote.

That staccato-sound of knocking is a husband returning with one carmine fruit, split open. The patient's fingers pick red-gem seeds from pale pulp. In ten minutes her doctors will announce a

liver has arrived for her, but for now she tastes one of life's little endings: her last time eating her favorite food before a drug reaction marks it *contraindicated*.

She hugs us all with gratitude for forewarning of what is often recognized only in retrospective.

This is what stays with me.

Michelle Izmaylov writes because there are untold stories and unanswered questions, because the dictionary words diligently learned in school are not always enough to speak the feelings of a sucker punch to the solar plexus or sunrise inside a cage of ribs, because there are spaces between our fingers and spaces between people and yet we wonder why loneliness exists, because words can leave sharper incisions than steel, because there are writers and painters and musicians who still make us laugh and cry seven hundred years in their future. She is a third-year medical student at the Vanderbilt School of Medicine who received a Bachelor of Science in biology and chemistry from Emory University.

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