
POETRY | SPRING 2021

My First Mask Was a White Coat

By Lauren Fields

I get lost
between my screen
the notes on my paper
the people waiting in rooms,
and my team –
where I barely see
my own brown reflection.

On rounds, names become
numeric, identifiers
saying nothing
of life or story, dim beacons
of a vanishing objective,
and this feels like the last moment
I will notice the shift.

Somewhere in my mind
a code is still
a word you use to enter
treehouses, to commune
in a meaningful meaninglessness
with people you desperately want
to trust.

*Am I becoming
something unfamiliar?*
I want to ask. Instead

I exchange pleasantries
with the man in 421 as if
no one had ever died
in that room before,
as if no one ever would.

Lauren Fields is a graduating fourth-year medical student at Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, going into psychiatry. Poetry has been an important part of her journey to, and through, medical school. Her poems have been published in *Blackberry: a magazine*, *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*, *WATER Literary and Arts Magazine*, *Reflexions Literary and Fine Arts Journal of CUIMC*, and *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, and she tied for second prize in the 2020 International FPM-Hippocrates Health Professional Poetry Award.

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