

New to this Doctoring  
First Place Poetry 2002

I don't know what to do  
with these nuggets of humanity  
my patients keep giving me  
amidst their chief complaints

"I was hoping to ride my bike  
down to the lake and watch the air show  
this weekend," he says,  
while waiting for a definitive diagnosis  
of pancreatic cancer,  
too sick to eat, pee or shit.  
"It's my birthday tomorrow, Doc",  
Oh, happy birthday.  
You're going to the OR tomorrow, aren't you?  
"Yeah. Do you think they could fix my ileostomoy site while I'm under?"  
You'll have to ask the surgeons, I say, knowing the answer is no.  
He's tired of the bag.  
Not because it disgusts him,  
but because he's been wanting to go for a swim,  
to roller skate, to fearlessly play basketball  
for these 25 years.

"As soon as I can afford it, I'm  
going to treat myself to a breast lift"  
I laughed to myself, and thought  
I'd do the same for my own sagging breasts  
telling her she was beautiful  
and complete in her forty year old body.

The words stay with me longer than expected.  
I toy with them late at night  
while waiting for sleep.  
I don't know what to do with these  
stories and lives I feel have  
undeservedly fallen in my lap.  
At times, I give in return my own humanity,  
selfishly and awkwardly.  
Other days, I hand the words back,  
Barely seen or heard,  
wanting only problems I can name and cure

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