

The Dark Bridal Canopy
First Place Prose 2002

She was beautiful in the illuminated glow of the floodlights, as she had been a few days before under her bridal canopy. A Druse woman in her early twenties, a member of a secret sect that had broken from Islam 500 years earlier, and after persecution, had sought refuge in the hilly sections of the Galilee.

Streaming blondish brown hair, high cheekbones, skillfully applied makeup around finely sculpted features, and the fine curvature that would turn any eye. A large diamond ring decorated her hand, bespeaking of a new status, likely the new wife of the son of leading family in her village.

Only now she was not breathing.

I sat crouched near her head, the ambubag slowly expanding and emptying in my hands, matching the rising and falling of her chest. Silent desert night moon overhead.

Along with an army doctor who had happened this way and my nurse, I huddled silently, as her new husband quietly whimpered some meters away. I had been called from my kibbutz a few kilometers down the road as I was putting the kids to sleep. I raced, if one can do that in a Subaru Justy, up the road upon hearing the news of a reported severe accident. It was pitch black, save for the lights of my car and the endless canopy of stars and moon on this warm fall night. She already lay on the road having been pulled from the wrecked car that had not made it quite around the curve, had probably caught on the soft shoulder and flipped.

They were returning from their honeymoon in Eilat, the Miami Beach of Israel, the place of luxurious abandon and celebration. Had they been talking about their future, their love, their new discovery of each other? Their first kisses and touches still fresh.

ABC - airway OK, breathing absent, pulse thready, but present, her blood pressure was barely palpable, her body warm. We began CPR, cut away her constricting clothing, and placed line after line, trying to resuscitate with IV fluids where her blood should have been flowing. The army doctor had been on his way to reserve duty in a nearby desert base, by chance an intensivist and anesthesiologist in civilian life, and had stopped to help. The regional civil administrator, who quarreled with me at every chance, save at such critical times, brought in the newly acquired mobile floodlights and illuminated our surreal scene.

Nothing changed for the better. The thready pulse disappeared. Think! ABCDE or Scoop and Run, Scoop and Run!! But to where? We were nearly an hour from the nearest hospital by ambulance, and calling a helicopter would take even longer.

The husband asked the ambulance driver, who was bandaging his small head wound, whether his wife was OK.

He had been united with her after all his male relatives had taken him joyfully through the village, accompanied by drums, singing and dancing, to the wedding canopy, while the women

and girls of the village had prepared her for this moment. "I am my beloved and my beloved is mine."

The army doctor and I conferred. I hoped he knew what to do now. We tried a few maneuvers and waited. No response. We stopped talking, continuing CPR against hope, against the wisdom of the books and our teachers.

The road was quiet save for the sound of the floodlights generator and the whoosh of the ambu. How beautiful the desert wind and view at night. All colors of the earth - browns and black, save for her pale skin and open eyes. Time spread out and slowed to a trickle..

The army doctor looked up and said, "all is done". We stopped, we covered her body with a blanket, not thinking to close her eyes. I went to the side of the road as she was placed on the stretcher and into the ambulance. I am unsure of whether I spoke to the husband or not, unsure of whether I cried or merely slid into my car and the enveloping darkness as I drove home. My wife and children were asleep when I returned. I shed my bloodied clothing at the door, ritually bathed long and hard - trying to clean off the pale of death, had a glass of wine, said a blessing on each of my children, and fell into a troubled sleep.

The husband likely returned to his village, his honeymoon turned into a funerary march. The Druse believe in reincarnation, so perhaps a child was born with her soul somewhere. Perhaps a different journey in the next life, one that would not end in the desert.

Author: Jeffrey Borkan, MD, PhD
Rhode Island University
Department of Family Medicine
Pawtucket, RI