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The Cleaning Lady

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She was a cleaning lady
An illegal immigrant
Who spoke little English
Understood little English

I suppose that is why
She kept shouting
“No entiendo!”

With six burly men
From hospital security
Stopping her
As she tried to run away.

I spoke little Spanish
Understood little Spanish
“No entiendo!”

She grimaces at me
Aggression was all over
As Haldol touched her
And she was kept in her
Warm bed cage.
In a couple of hours
I would likely get a page
For seizure-like activity
That could look more like
Tardive dyskinesias
And then, I will not be sure
If it was the Haldol
Or the dyskinesias
Or the seizures
She’s had before.

She is a celebrated case
A new disease
Recently described
Positive for
Anti-NMDA
The interns are excited
She fits the textbook
She threw a mug
At her little boy
Spits at her husband
Profanity
But to me,
All she ever said was,
“No entiendo!”

She is so different
From her old photographs
The eyes have lost their
Owner
Somewhere
A place I wonder
If medicine could ever fathom
But I hope never
To see for myself.

Steroid was no miracle cure
Quetiapine quiets only
A few hours
How can she
Stay, let alone, go home?
She would not even know
She is not at home
I told her husband
The good news
She doesn’t have cancer—
At least as far as
Our tests can tell—
What that really means
For him, for her,
I do not know
How can I explain?

She stirs ...
“No entiendo!”
She was a mother
A wife,
A cleaning lady,
A rock
I had to clean out
No facility will take
An illegal immigrant
With NMDA encephalitis
Who does not know English
I am not
A cleaning lady
We strap her down
We want her out
We are treating
Her ...
She was in for a treat—
Treat to make better?
Her or me? This facility?
No entiendo?
“No entiendo!”

Listen to Dr. Ramos read this poem, available exclusively on *Neurology*® for the iPad®.

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Neurology 2012;78:e82
DOI 10.1212/WNL.0b013e31824d58e9

This information is current as of March 26, 2012

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