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Right Brain: You Are Gone

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Abstract

This poem describes the author's experience performing her first brain death examination as a neurology resident. The author hopes this work may prompt readers to reflect on similar experiences. Physicians frequently deal with heavy diagnoses and grave situations. Introspection may inspire empathy and kindness to improve how one provides care for patients and interacts with families.

You are gone

My light meets your eyes
and I stare. *Please, please.*
Your pupils— wide and dark.
What was the last thing
you saw? His little hairs
as blond as yours?
The threads unraveling
from her wrist splint?
Two, three. Gone.

Eyelids held open, I sway
your head left to right,
left to right.
Your eyes are unfazed.
Did they trace him
crawling
before the morning
you woke up cold?
Three, four, six. Gone.

My string of cotton,
wilted and apologetic,
strokes your corneas.
Not the slightest flicker.
When did you last feel
her kiss on your forehead?
Did you get to smile one
more time as you dreamt?
Five, seven. Gone.

Water charges into your ears.
Cold, wet.
There's no give in your eyes.
What was the last sound
you heard?
His crying in the quiet night?
Not her painful weeping,
I hope.
Eight. Gone.

My tongue depressor
brushes your pharynx.
Please gag. You don't.
The vacuum through
your tube is violent.
Just a little cough. Nothing.
Did she have time to memorize
the sound of your voice?
Nine, ten. Gone.

My hammer leaves
your nails pale.
I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.
In your stillness,
I wade through the viscous

space towards her.
I don't need an interpreter
to understand
she is lost.

Ready or not,
you are gone.
Where did you go?
Where will your wife
and little boy find you?

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