

Winner, Writing Award 2020 for Poetry

Colleen Nesbitt

Class of 2023

Both Sides

My friend has gashed her leg. There's blood everywhere and no one will go near her. Somehow I'm ok. I'm tall and strong, I pick her up and take her to the nurse. This feels good. I am capable, I am a helper.

As they speak, I shrink at their stories of injustice and inequality. How can people be so callous? I am privileged, I cannot understand. But I am compassionate, I am a learner.

First patient of my own, my palms are clammy. I'm nervous, chest heavy with my responsibility. Just breath, just listen. Oh, I know this. I know what to do. I am accomplished, I am a healer.

I'm clutching my face, reeling from a patient's slap. She wanted a disability notice, but she doesn't qualify. It hurts more on the inside than out, compounding my fatigue. I am right, I am resilient.

A 27, no 37, year old female, abdominal pain. Clear labs, clear physical, has been here three times this week, asking for pain meds. Where's a nurse, I'm not dealing with this. I am busy, I am a...

wait.

wait.

Oh there's a lot of blood. Will I be able to go to soccer practice? I'm so glad she could help, I don't want to be laughed at by everyone.

I have struggled and fought and thrived. I share my story knowing someone out there is judging, but I am stronger than them. There is so much light in this classroom, and so much darkness outside of it.

This one looks new. I grew up in Russia and got all the way to Canada just to get MS. I'm dubious, sharing slowly. Oh, that's a good question. Oh, yes, I have had that. Maybe it'll be ok.

How can she know that I can't handle going into work anymore? They all stare and whisper. I don't have any more friends. She deserves it, she didn't listen.

I am. so. scared. There is so much pain, and I have no time to deal with this. I've been here so many times, my friends keep covering my shifts. Maybe this doctor can help, but she turns away...

wait.

wait.

She's coming back...