

GREENERY

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Four screens hang in the aggressively lit room. A single eye – large, red, dull – is fixed in the middle of each. It bobs left then right then left, matching the radio pop music about some girl loving some boy who loves some other girl. The eyelid is peeled back like an apple slice left to suffer under the sultry sun.

“Do you think it’ll really happen?”

I am in the corner, watching the feet of the woman wiggle under the blue sterile sheet. As a medical student, I must shadow this basic operation, a cataract removal, which stands as the runny lifeblood of any ophthalmologist.

Prior to the operation, I was idle outside the operating bay. “This is clockwork,” the resident who I was assigned to said while eating an Oreo. “Easy stuff. I don’t even look at the charts of the patients. Heck, even someone like you could do it after a while.” I smile, thank him for what I hope is a compliment. “But what is important is to be fast. Faster than fast. Machine-like, even.”

I nod. “See this?” He points to a fat, bold, black 25 claiming two-thirds of a white board. “And see this?” Underneath, the words written *to go slow is to not go at all*. “Do not get in the way of this factory.” He laughs, I laugh, and I notice only after the rumble has died down that beside us in a bed I thought empty is the next patient, eyeing a ceiling with miscellaneous brown stains, skin the colour of a light blue, faded metal. She does not watch us as we wheel her in. Her nails are a bright, unrelenting pink.

“Do you think they’ll allow it?” The resident asks again.

The attending ophthalmologist peers up from his microscope. Sweat slips on his bearded face. The music seems to pause, switching to the next sugar-high song. Even the patient's single eye captured on the multiple screens gazes up, as if to politely show that she too is listening to the response "No." He takes a breath, "Of course I don't think it'll fucking happen. We won't be replaced by robots."

Everything pounds back to normal. The music croons on electronically. The nurses hand the tools without mention of name. The surgeons continue the work with the lyrics of how you'll be the only one for me, for me, for me ringing hollow.

"Can you please look straight?" The ophthalmologist demands of the patient.

The eye complies, still as the dead. "But anyways, Dr. L fit in 30 patients in a day. Would you believe that?"

Much of the sight is obscured by the milky muteness of the cataract. Under the ceaseless light of the OR, the lens looks like a sea before a storm – heavy black is caught in the center, a slight green is hinted at near the edges of the overwhelming grey, hard cloud.

"Horse shit. No one has topped my record yet."

A small knife enters just above the limbus, the junction of the sclera and cornea. A little spring of blood swims in the socket. It flows freely, birds trying to escape the surrounding hole.

"I think Dr. L really did. I saw his billing."

The song chatters about how the someone-lover has the most blue, brown, yellow, lovely eyes they have ever seen. Meanwhile, a small oscillator vibrates into the gap left by the knife, breaking up the mass of grey ocular cement. The remains of the cataract are whirled in a circle, graceful in its own currents.

"What was he paid? A million? Two?"

Once hard, the cataract has become a soft fish of movement, a ghost-like specter of life at its most beautiful, flowing. On the screen, I cannot help but think that it looks like a memory must, moving and marvelous.

The patient glares up again, causing the four screens to see only white. "I won't say it again," the ophthalmologist raises his voice, "Look at the ceiling please."

The eye fixes itself back on the unseen above. Whatever is left of the cataract is removed in swift, deliberate movements. Echoes of some sunshine matching some colour of hair can be heard on the OR's radio.

“More like three.”

The full eye is in view. There where the grey sank itself belly up is the giving green of the iris, the kind of deep, whole green that is impossible to describe, one that you could spend a life with, where you would bathe in it, study it, fall in love with it, be with it each moment of each day until you are old, weak, green yourself from the ages that have beaten passed, and you would still not understand its depth. Against the abrasive whiteness of the room, against its bleeding brightness of a flame too strong, her green iris was the only colour that would ever be in this world.

“Greedy fuck. Leave some for the rest of us.”

The view is soon hidden by a black, artificial lens. It is slipped in, spreading like those puddles in some city that never seem evaporate. It fits perfectly.

“Even God couldn’t do better, eh?”

An oily substance is secreted into the cornea to keep the lens in place. It sinks to the blackness around. As the final drop is placed, the eye rolls up.

“For Christ sake, stop moving your eye.”

But the eye does not fall back down. It continues its elevation to the brain, to where the radio is perched in the OR, to the echoes of the chorus being sung. *I love you.*

The nurse bounces to the heart rate and saturation monitor at the end of the bed. She yells.

I love you.

The surgeon lifts his head from the microscope for the second time. The resident follows. He says almost as if it were a rhetorical question to leave in the air, “The patient isn’t breathing.”

I love you.

The resident begins to perform CPR on the patient. I stand up, unsure of what to do, not yet trained for this situation. A code is called. A team comes in a few forever minutes. It is cramped, hot in the room with the numerous bodies hurrying. In between each shock, the total whiteness of the four screens shake. The radio

has been drowned out by breaths, the noisy air. I am moved out the room by a nurse, who I notice has green eyes too. ■

Note: The following is a collective narrative story of numerous events with no single patient, no single physician, and no single institution. What it shows is what I hope to learn in medicine: that it can always be made better, that this means realizing we aren't always, and that there is a way to see life as life, where each interaction, however brief, however untidy, is vital. It is all there is.