

## The Jogger

Her nail polish was the same color as mine. The same silver ipod was clipped to her Nike running shorts. Aside from the banded design tattooed on her ankle and the star at her right hip, I felt as though I was looking at myself lying there on the table, dry-fit top and sports bra being cut away, central lines and IV's being placed. What was she thinking of as she laced up her running shoes that afternoon? Certainly not that her run would lead her here. Was she thinking of the evening, of the meal she would share with her fiancé, or reviewing in her mind her day at work; or was she, as I usually am at 5 o'clock, simply anxious to feel the wind at her face, free herself from the sedentary and the stagnant, and clear her mind, if only for five miles.

The hopeless crying of the monitors refocused my thoughts. My stethoscope bounced against my own chest as I wailed on hers. "Hard and fast, Stiglmeier, hard and fast". This wasn't a practice round, a half-bodied plastic dummy on the floor of a lecture hall. I counted in my head the compressions: one, two, three, four... There were no video instructions, no one counting for you. For a hauntingly long second, I looked up from her chest: tubes, blood, syringes, hands, needles, monitors, bodies, and instructions all melded into one, and all I noticed was how cold her sternum felt against my palm. "Switch!" I was yanked backwards from the table, and paddles were thrust into my hand as the resident took over the compressions. "Ready, Stiglmeier?" I gave my senior a wide-eyed grave nod, and then, only from sheer necessity, I opened my mouth to speak. The sound that came out was clear, forceful, and steady, nothing compared to what I felt within. "I'm clear, you're clear, we're all clear!" All movement stopped. It was unusually quiet in there, and the shock, though only applied to one body, was tangible in everyone else.

The cycle continued for 50 minutes: bagging, compressions, IV epi, shocking, faint signs of a rhythm, then a flat-line. Everyone in that room, it seemed, held on to the hope that *this* push of epi would work, *this* chest compression. I even believed, somehow, that through applying the appropriate pressure and shock to her chest, that I could also push life back into her, that some part of my own living and breathing and working body could be transferred to her. "Stiglmeier, one last time..." "I'm clear, you're clear, we're all clear!", though, in reality, I wasn't exactly clear on *anything* that was happening, except that this woman was hovering between life and death, and we were trying to get her body to choose the former.

But we couldn't run for her anymore. We couldn't run any more drugs into her veins, any more shock into her heart, any more air into her lungs. Sweaty, tired, we peeled back gloves and masks, as if we had just run a marathon ourselves. We set down vials and syringes, upset and sorry we had lost the race with her and for her. The room slowly emptied, and what moments ago had been a pulsating extent of hands and minds working as one entity towards one goal, now became a silent cold tunnel of fluorescent light. I was left holding the paddles, just as they had instructed me to do. But no one instructed me on how to deal with death when it slams into you, when it enters the ED on a stretcher wearing the same color nail polish.

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