

POETRY

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SPLINTER

“Do what you need to,” I said.

As though this was extracting
an arrowhead buried in flesh,
not a sliver of wood from a pinky.

She my officemate, colleague,
friend. But not –
it occurred to me as she started
to probe – a surgeon.
Probably hadn’t fingered
a forceps in years.

What I warn my patients
against every day –
not wise to compromise
with convenience.

I had no fear of pain.
A dozen tours in the OR,
years of drawing blood –
we learn to distance,
numb ourselves.

Numb ourselves, that is,
to the pain of another –
my pinky should have taken
itself to Urgent Care.

Maybe there was hurt,
but I never noticed.
All I recall is a flood
of sweetness, a drowsy
warmth, as when the world
is about to go dark.

Sometimes as we're falling
we hear a voice calling
in the distance.

“Oh, shit – going vagal,”
this one said.

It sounded like mine.

AUTHOR

Adrian M. Schnall

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrian Schnall, MD, practiced Internal Medicine and Endocrinology for 41 years. Since his retirement, he has been writing poetry and participating in multiple literary groups. His poetry has been published in *JAMA* and in multiple poetry journals and has been selected for public readings by Lit Cleveland, Lit Youngstown, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Writers Network at Hilton Head.

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Footnotes

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