

POETRY

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TIME

My index finger was reaching for
the up button on the elevator
when the voice sounded above,
Code Blue Tower 8. Code Blue Tower 8.
I broke for the stairs.

They were getting the paddles in place;
the First Year with the floppy hair, Ethan,
pumping the chest; the Night Float,
Emily, manning an Ambu-Bag;
Jamie, the Resident, running the code.

I dared a look at the face –
Ken, with whom I'd traded jokes
for twenty years – Ken, whom I'd told
yesterday his time was coming –
he'd be back home, maybe two days.

Clear! barked Jamie. Hands backed away,
motion suspended. A very long second.
The shape on the bed gave a shudder.
Then Jamie's voice: *Excellent, a rhythm.*

A rhythm – but no pulse.
Hands were pumping again,
counting, squeezing in air.
The spark was there on the screen –
life, dancing across it –
but none of the tiny muscles
in the heart were listening.

Epi. Atropine. Thirty minutes.
Ethan looked up at Jamie, she
shot a glance at me. Someone
had to say it – and first
right of refusal to the guy
with gray hair.

A power none of us wished for –
a power none of us have –
but the world pretends.

I felt my head move up and down.
Jamie's eyes found the clock –
7:44 AM, she said. *Time.*

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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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