

12-2021

my first covid patient was of the omicron variety  
he was awake, alert, and oriented, walking and talking and listening to his favorite soap opera at  
maximum volume for his hearing impaired ears  
he asked each question and made each statement at least three times, at shouting volume  
for his dementia  
and my hearing impaired ears, coated in three layers of personal protective equipment and a helmet with  
its own air circulating system, appreciated this

when i signed up to help with a covid surge i imagined patients gasping for air  
i imagined disruptive chaos,  
human suffering overwhelming the safety and control that hospital machinery and treatment algorithms  
imply

i hoped i would be challenged to find empathy for patients who had not listened  
who had stubbornly refused vaccination  
who sat on the precipice between this world and the next  
who would look me in the eye and force me to know that i cannot sustain this level of (rightful) anger and  
maintain my belief in the inherent goodness of human beings  
i hoped i would do something that really mattered

i hoped i would be forced to reckon with the mess we are in. the mess i am in.  
but this patient, three doses under his belt, only needed help shaving.

the miracle of vaccination meant that i, a useless second year medical student,  
did a thing that i could do,  
a thing that really mattered.  
i held his military tags, doled out the supplies  
and listened as he sang  
and shaving cream spilled everywhere  
and we looked at each other in the mirror  
and laughed.

and i thanked the universe  
and science  
for gifting me this moment with a covid patient  
who had done their homework  
and only needed help shaving.