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## Blood Flows

I hung the script on my fridge on June 26th, and it's been hanging there ever since. Each time I pass the fridge, reach in to get the creamer for my morning coffee, or take out my insulin so I can change my infusion set, it stares back at me. The script hangs there with a few check marks on the page, asking for my vitals, my hemoglobin A1c, how my thyroid glands are working. I glare back at it; I know that at some point, I'll take that stupid script down to Quest to give a urine sample and multiple vials of blood. But until then, I keep up this staring contest with that thin piece of paper and try to deny that my health isn't in perfect condition. I thought I'd gotten past that point. Apparently not.

It's not uncommon for people to be hesitant of going to the Doctors and learning about their health. Often times, a doctor will tell you to "do better"; if you eat less fats, drink less coffee, walk and run more, your health will improve and so will your outlook on life. That "better" is never really quantifiable as a plan for lifestyle changes. Rather, it's an encouragement to do more with your life than what you'd previously done. But when chronic illness makes going to the Doctor a chore that happens far too often, instead of a yearly check-up just to see if you're doing all right, the dynamic between how you view your health and how you view diagnosis changes.

My first major diagnosis was type-one diabetes mellitus when I was nine years old. With diabetes, there's a lot of hesitancy to learn more about my particular condition. I always believed that if I'd struggled with it for long enough, then there's nothing more that I can learn outside of new technological advances. If I've dealt with diabetes for more than a decade, then there shouldn't be anything else I'd need to know.

But that's not how illness and medicine works. Medicine relies on constant testing and retesting, looking to see if either (a) the diagnosis and treatment are correct and working, or (b) there's something that needs to be changed. For people with diabetes, it's almost always option b; something will always be changing. The biannual blood workups that I so dread tell my Doctors how much I have or haven't fucked up since I last saw them. I tend to lean towards the former. Upon my return from my year studying abroad, I knew that at least one out of my gaggle of Doctors was going to ask me for some blood tests, and I planned on putting that off for as long as possible.

I didn't get to it until Tuesday, the sixteenth of September at 9am. It was the kind of morning that felt like fall: a little too windy but sunny enough for it not to matter. I woke up dreading that I would have to get my tests done before class, revision, and travel planning could occur. I kept saying that I had too much to do before I left for Canada that Wednesday, and why was I forcing myself to do this now? I staggered down the stairs into the kitchen to see if any of my tests included a fasting urine sample, only to find that the script was no longer on the fridge. I muttered a quick "fuck" under my breath before resorting to full on panic mode, tearing the house apart for that tiny slip of paper that I'd been so adamant to avoid. In my move from family home to university apartment, I'd forgotten that the plumbing in the bathroom had leaked into our kitchen, causing irreparable damage and forcing my parents to renovate the kitchen in its entirety. They'd taken everything off the fridge, and because I'd spent all but one night at home since the leak happened, I didn't realize my script would no longer be there.

I tore through storage boxes that contained our former kitchen, wine glasses, cutlery, old mail that never got shredded. I panicked because if I didn't find it, I wouldn't be able to continue on with my day. Everything important to me at that moment rested in a plastic takeout bag with some coupons to *Bed Bath and Beyond*

and postcards from Belgium. When I finally came across the script, I folded it up neatly and kept it on my person until I walked into the Quest Diagnostics on City Line Ave.

Whoever decided that lime green and white would be a good color combination for people awaiting blood and urine tests that would determine how we would live our lives was, in a word, deluded. Everything about Quest was either lime green or a faint cream color. The chairs were green, the walls were green, even the vase that held the fake silk flowers was that garish lime green. The room was empty save for myself and the elderly companion of the only other patient getting tested; the radio playing the Steve Harvey morning show filled the empty space and echoed throughout. It smelled sweet, but in a way that felt like someone had sprayed perfume over a deep bleaching of the whole place. All it made me feel was nerves.

I started to pick at my scalp, a nervous habit I developed in my sophomore year of college that had only worsened as the stresses of life got the best of me. The skin flaked underneath my nails when it parted from my scalp, as if the nerves that I felt could be picked away at until nothing left of me existed. What would be left in the chair was the Edinburgh University Feminist Society sweatshirt I wore today and a pile of flaked off skin, no nerves left to feel.

When the other patient left, after a fight with his companion about tucking in his shirt, I steeled myself as I walked up to the counter to get my blood drawn. The phlebotomist directed me to room one, and as I sat down in the chair, I noticed she wasn't even asking for a urine sample because they always do the urine tests first. In a soft voice, she asked if I had a preference to which arm she was going to stab with a needle to hopefully find a vein. As always, I said my left, and she tightly tied a royal blue rubber band around my arm upper arm. She tapped around my elbow joint, finding a suitable place to put the needle in, and warned me for a sharp

pinch. In years past, I'd always looked away from the needle as it was put in my vein, but this time, I kept eye contact with the needle. It slid in smoothly, allowing my wine colored blood to flow quickly into the four small test tubes. I watched the blood bubble up as it hit the side of the test tube, thinking that the course of treatment for the weird, ongoing future of my health would reveal itself in that tacky fluid.

The four test tubes were filled in less than a minute, and as I signed the waiver saying that the phlebotomist put the labels on the tubes in front of me, I realized the worst physical part of it was over. I soon left the office, being told a bill would be sent to me because their system was down, and continued on with my life for the day. I know that soon my doctors will call me and tell me the results, at least one of which is not going to be good, I can guarantee. But that's how medicine works right now. I dread the procedure until I have it done, then I dread the results. Perhaps my kidneys are failing, perhaps my lipids are too high, and I may even have a vitamin D deficiency.

For those of us with chronic illnesses, the 'chronic' may be the most important part of that phrase. The tests that we're scared of, the illness's effects, the medical treatment that is on a constant loop, none of that ever ends. In six months time, I'll have to get that blood test done again, maybe this time paired with a urine test. The time between when these tests occur flows quickly, like the blood from my arm into the test tube. It flows regardless of nerves, life plans, and the people your diagnosis affects. If, like time, these tests continue on, and the uncertainty of the results scares me, then I may never get over it. Nevertheless, there are other things to be scared of in the meantime, like the results from this test or even another diagnosis. But only time holds those answers, and right now, I seem to have more of it than I could ever want.