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Poems by doctors

A Lover's Quarrel

Vincent Hanlon

Describe it simply
as a lovers' quarrel
after which she slashed her wrist
and sought medical attention.

A superficial laceration
over the right wrist.
No active bleeding.
Clean the area with antiseptic
and pick away the dried clot.
Tidy tidy.

A scratch on the skin
parallels the main cut:
presumably an initial
tentative testing of the flesh.
Don't look here
for the confident opening incision
of a surgeon amputating a limb.
Instead, observe the hesitant and unsuccessful
pruning of the hand that caresses.

What is a doctor to do?
So late at night.
First of all, be gentle with the tissues.

Restore the natural anatomy
With a close approximation of the skin edges.
Use a small needle.
Minimize the small talk.

'You are very brave,'
she says when we're finished.
I don't argue.
It's too early in the morning
to start another lovers' quarrel.

Vincent Hanlon studied English literature and later medicine at University of Calgary. He is an emergency physician at Fort McMurray, Alberta. This poem is from *The Naked Physician: Poems about the Lives of Patients and Doctors*, edited by R. Charach (Quarry Press). Reprinted with kind permission of the author.

Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

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