

Carol Wiley Cassella, M.D., Editor

The ASA 4 Patient at the VA Hospital

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Dread is the pile of stones I carry in my chest
each diseased organ, each hardened vessel
a stone in the sepulcher
his heart sags large and tired
tar flecks his lungs
his gangrenous toe a granite shim
wedged into the growing pyramid
numbers thump like a mason's hammer
91, 2.1, 29, 30
the cairn demands more stones
hepatitis, stroke
early dementia seeps
like concrete poured into crevices
dread: the pile of stones I carry in my chest

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his aging wife, a tiny bird, flutters about him
she primps his pillow, knows to not ask questions
my patient cracks a joke
he's made me smile
I push him on his gurney
and for a brief shining moment
before we enter the operating room
we disappear at the turn
into the glare of the morning sun