

Modern Medicine

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The room looks different this time. Old frumpy furniture with threadbare cushions has been replaced with sleek modern benches that are resistant to wearing down. Likewise, the staff seems to have been upgraded to young doctors and nurses with plastic skin. The room is still framed by three walls and a sliding glass door peeking from behind a curtain the doctor left pulled back slightly from earlier during his mandatory pop-in. The curtain is new and a different color from the one that was here when I first arrived. This medical curtain is so fresh it hangs with folded creases still visible from its days pressed and packaged tightly in a warehouse facility, waiting to be ordered. The tubes and equipment they inserted and hooked up to me smell sterile and of saline.

A needle from my IV is pinching with a cold sensation where it is taped to the flesh of my arm and tethers me to the room through a bruised vein. The needle's plastic wrapping still lingers on the speckled countertop, torn open but not yet discarded. A beeping monitor is watching my vitals. It rhythmically fills the room with an auditory reminder of my decline. The room not only looks new, but it also feels new, much like the crisp atmosphere of a model home. Despite the efforts of baking sheets, the prospective homeowners see through the deceptively warm gooey cookies that are trying to feed them the lie of a home. Convincing as chocolate chips might be, the buyers always know better. They see the space around them—it is lifeless, an artificial prop of the real thing.

The screen facing me clicks black after a long period of inactivity. Its shiny and metallic construction is fitting with the hospital's emphasis on innovation. Examining my reflection in the blackness of the screen, I can see one thing out of place in this room. He told me my kidneys are failing with the stench of coffee wafting off his breath. His story is that of 5:00 A.M. yoga and nonfat cappuccinos. My body, however, tells the story of illness and death. My ailment is the last archaic feature of this state-of-the-art room, nonresponsive to groundbreaking treatments in plastic packaging. When I finally give way, I will be a fossil that my doctor will raise his hands over, joined with his fellow Johns Hopkins graduates. They will celebrate one more step into the modern age as my body is wheeled away. The room will be prepared for a body more receptive and willing. They will praise the miracles of modern medicine.