

Beyond the Chart

By: Christine Strelchuk

In the waiting room where time bends slow,
Where stories sit no charts can show,
I held a file, a name, a chart
But met a heart that was broken apart.

Her hands were still, her eyes were not,
They traced the things her mind had caught
Fragments drifting, sharp and wide,
A storm she could no longer hide.

The fluorescent lights hummed overhead,
Like something half alive, half dead,
And every clock ticked out of sync
With all the things I tried to think.

They taught me first to take a pulse,
To map the pain, to be precise,
To name the nerves, the drugs, the dose
But not the weight of being close.

Not how to sit when words run dry,
Or meet a tear in the crying eye,
Or how to stay when nothing's said
But still feel everything instead.

Not how to sit with quiet grief,
Or offer presence, not relief,
Or how a silence in a room
Can hold far more than words assume.

She spoke in pauses, deep breaths and ache,
Each word a risk her voice would take,
And in between, a silence grew
That asked me what I thought I knew.

I thought of texts and tidy lines,
Of neurotransmitters and clinical signs
Of pathways drawn in black and white,
Of right and wrong, of dark and light.

But here there was no clean divide,
No place for certainty to hide,

Just human grief in fragile skin,
And me, unsure of where to begin.

“I used to write,” she said at last,
“My thoughts were gardens—growing fast,
Now weeds have taken every space,
I don’t recognize the place.”

Her voice was soft but carried weight,
The kind that lingers long and late,
And suddenly the charts fell thin—
What use were scales to measure the pain within?

What metric holds a vanished voice,
Or tracks the loss of losing choice?
What language captures losing sight
Of who you were before that night?

I wondered how a mind can fade
In ways that cannot be displayed,
How someone slowly grows apart
From memories they used to guard.

She wasn’t just her symptoms’ name,
Not just a code, a list, a frame—
She was a story, mid-erase,
A living text I couldn’t replace.

I asked her what she missed the most,
She whispered softly, “Being close—
To who I was, to how I felt,
Before my thoughts began to melt.”

And something in me shifted then,
Beyond the role of “student” when
I saw that healing isn’t just
In pills or plans or clinical trust.

It’s sitting in the in-between,
In what is heard and what is seen,
In quiet moments set apart,
In learning how to read a heart.

The humanities had always seemed
Like distant fields where poets dreamed—

But here they breathed, alive, aware,
In every word she chose to share.

A novel couldn't quite contain
The syntax of her hidden pain,
Yet still, her story asked of me
To witness it and simply be.
Not fix, not rush, not force an end,
Just stay a moment and attend.

No grand solution, no neat end,
Just presence offered as a friend,
A quiet nod, a softened gaze—
A different kind of clinical phrase.

I left that room less sure, it's true,
But somehow seeing more than I knew,
For medicine is not just a skill—
It's learning how and when to sit still.

To honor minds that twist and turn,
To listen more than we try to learn,
To see the person, not the sum—
And know how far we've yet to come.

And though I'll study, train, and grow,
There's one thing she helped me to know:
That true care begins where answers end
And healing starts when we attend.