



Taking Sides

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First, do no harm...

A junior resident on rotation, new to the place,
first case of the day, I met the surgeon at the scrub sink.
Now gowned and gloved, we faced each other,
the anesthetized patient between us.

Silence ticked by to the sound of the ventilator.

“Well why don’t you ask for the scalpel?” he said.

“Thank you for the case,” I blurted out, “but the hernia’s on your side!
I admitted him last night.” We spoke through masks, but I could see
his eyes broached no error.

“What? I’m sure you’re wrong. I read my office notes this morning.
The chart’s over there.” He signaled the circulator, “Bring it over...see left!”

“Scalpel,” I said, the knife snapped into my gloved hand...then
the thought could he be wrong? I’d trust myself. “Wait, I’m sure I’m right.”

“We’ve got to know. Wake him up!” to the anesthetist.

Eyes...now everyone looking at each other—
wondering, judging.

I watched the man awaken, still strapped down
under sterile drapes, puzzled
when asked which side, then mutter “Right.”

“There was a question, now none,” the surgeon said,
turning to me. “Took spunk!”

But I knew I had hesitated, almost
stayed silent...and made the wrong cut.

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