

Advice to a Junior Resident

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I.

Medicine does not
always find you at your peak, will not
wait for your best day, cannot
stop to consider how little you have left.

A time will come
when you question your decision,
second-guess your determination,
reconsider your life and the direction it is taking;

for me, it was the twenty-third of August,
the day before we lost our beloved dog.

II.

He was on my mind as afternoon faded into evening,
as late hours of night became early hours of morning.
It soon became clear that medicine's inexorable march
would not be halted; its machinations could not be slowed.

I found myself
thinking of him, of our years together,
as I interviewed a patient before their surgery,
as the page resounded for a stat craniotomy,
as the first trauma call was activated,
as we started another surgery, and still another.

I lost myself
responding for patients who were hurting and in pain,
though I was hurting and in pain.
I dreaded the emptiness he would leave
and desperately wished to be home,
even if only to stave it off a little longer.

III.

Days like this come – they do for us all –
but they also will pass.
When patients were in need and called out for help,
I was there to answer, just as you will be;

for even on our worst days, we are there
endlessly striving to make a day better, a life better.
We willingly surrender a small part of our present,
empowering our patients with the best chance at their future.

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