

Sunrise, Sunset

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HOW TO CITE: Smith BR. Sunrise, Sunset.

Fam Med. 2023;55(1):59–60.

doi: [10.22454/FamMed.55.202982](https://doi.org/10.22454/FamMed.55.202982)

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I.
It is her first visit
and she has a lot to say.
She just turned six
and presents with a cough.
Her words spill out
like bubbles seeking the surface.

“I lost a tooth, did you see?”
She grins wide and you notice
this isn’t her first.

You tell her,
“I hear tomorrow is a big day”
and she nods like a bobblehead.
She squeals, “It’s my first day there
tomorrow! I’m not nervous!”
and you smile,
wondering if by saying it
she is hoping that makes it true.

“I hope I can make friends.
I hope people like me.”
As she talks, she looks at you with wide eyes
and you can see her hands shaking.
You feel the static in the air, a pregnant pause.
Every word will matter here.
“I’m glad you’re not nervous,” you say,
“Even though this is a big change.
Because people are going to love you.”

She smiles and springs up
like a jack-in-the-box.
She turns to leave, then stops.
“How is grandpa? My mom said
he’s moving somewhere new tomorrow
but I haven’t heard him complain.
He’s so brave.”

You know there is an opportunity here.
You turn to her and smile back, then say,
“I think you should ask him yourself!

I bet he would love to talk.”

II.

It is his last visit
and he has a lot to say.
He just turned eighty-six
and presents with a cough.
His words spill out
like sand through an hourglass.

“I lost a tooth, did you see?”
He grins wide and you notice
this isn't his first.

You tell him,
“I hear tomorrow is a big day”
and he nods like he's moving through tar.
He whispers, “It's my first day there
tomorrow. I'm nervous,”
and you nod,
hoping he knows that saying it
is an act of strength, not weakness.

“I hope I can make friends.
I hope people visit me ”
As he talks, he looks at you with wide eyes
and you can see his hands shaking.
You feel the gravity of the moment, its weight.
Every word will matter here.
“I know you're nervous,” you say,
“Because this is a big change.
But you have people who love you.”

He smiles and hauls himself up,
waving away the hand you extended to help.
He turns to leave, then stops.
“How's my granddaughter? Her mother said
she's nervous about making friends in first grade
but I hope she's excited, too.
She's so brave.”

You know there is an opportunity here.
You turn to him and smile back, then say,
“I think you should give her a call later.
I bet she would love to talk.”

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This poem was inspired by my experience shadowing in family medicine.