
ESSAYS/PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Long hair

SARAH H. LIPSCOMB, R.N.

Inpatient Hospice Unit, Duke University Health System, Durham, North Carolina

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My hair is long. Long enough to sometimes get caught between my back and the back of a chair, tilting my chin up at an unnatural angle. I wear it in a braid, and I lean over my patients, accidentally grazing the tender pale of their inner arms or stomachs, eliciting little gasps or smiles, or a restless flutter of hands, swatting me away. I've had the urge to hack it off, chin-level, straight across. Everyone says, "No! Don't do it. You're sure to regret it."

I cared for a woman my age, synovial cancer of all things, with brain metastases. Resected and wholly radiated, she arrived at the inpatient hospice where our paths crossed. I adored her right off, her sharp-tongued humor extraordinary. She told me I was her favorite, but she still raised hell for me, demanding to get up when she could barely hold up her head, throwing her legs over the side rails, wild. Expletive after expletive. But she knew I would do whatever she wanted, saying out loud how concerned I was about her falling from the bedside commode while si-

multaneously wrapping my arms beneath hers and counting down from three.

When she stopped asking to get up, I was devastated, knowing where we were going. On one of our last evenings, I was leaning over her and stroking her hairless head, running my finger along her brow, my own face getting that patchy-pink it always does before the slow tears well. The room was dim and deep blue, with no lights on and the sun almost down. She parted her eyes and reached out, holding my gaze. She clasped my braid in her swollen hand. She pulled on it, up and down, again and again, and then softly said, "I am going to call you Eeyore from now on . . . Eeyore . . . Eeyore," she sing-songed, eyes closing as she drifted back to wherever she had been.

Christopher Robin's sad and lonely donkey, patched and painfully aware, his heart on his sleeve. As a girl, he was my favorite. Our similarities already clear to me even then. I smiled. "You've got me all figured out," I whispered back.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Sarah H. Lipscomb, 4023 North Roxboro Road, Durham, North Carolina 27704. E-mail: sarah.lipscomb@gmail.com.