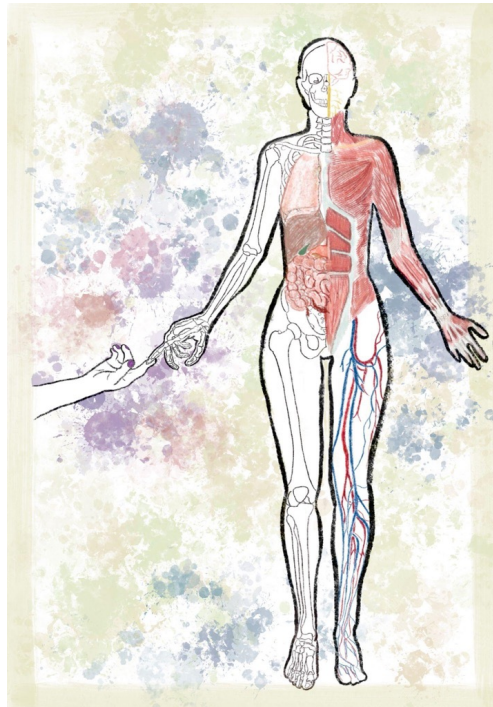


Purple Almond-Shaped Nails

Visual Art + Prose

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As I made my way to the anatomy lab for my first dissection, a surge of anticipation and fascination swept over me. The intricate language of human anatomy, which I was just beginning to unravel, captivated me. I marveled at the thought of deciphering the complexities I studied in lecture halls, written on the canvas of a real human body.

Upon entering the lab, the scent of formaldehyde heightened alongside my excitement. I recalled the material I had studied the night before: *the medial border of the scapula is attached to the ribs by the serratus anterior.*

At the dissecting table, I joined my peers in assembling scalpels and carefully unveiling the cadaver. While some of my teammates attended to the lower extremities, I took charge of unwrapping the arms. It was then that my initial enthusiasm, driven solely by intellectual curiosity, began to wane.

As I lifted the cadaver's hand, I noticed her nails filed and neatly shaped in an almond-like fashion and painted a vivid shade of purple. My thoughts began to swirl. *Did she purposefully choose purple as her final color? Whose hand had she held in her last moments? Who now longed for the warmth of her touch?*

Blinded by my initial, purely educational fixation upon learning anatomy, I had lost sight of the person she had been before her passing. In front of us was more than just a body – more than organs, bones, and muscles. Her life story was veiled by the limited details—her medical history and the potential cause of her death—I could gain during the dissection.

Throughout each lab that semester, I approached each incision and the delicate removal of fascia with a deep appreciation for our donor's vulnerability and resilience. Organs marked by vascular calcification and traces of her intraocular lens implant ceased to be mere clinical structures. Each part became a symbol of her lived experiences, a personal narrative I would never fully uncover, yet one I had the privilege of intimately glimpsing and learning from.

My donor became my greatest teacher, not only in the wonders of human anatomy, but also in the profound lesson that every interaction with another human being, whether in life or death, is a privilege. She gifted me with a sense of humility that I am determined never to lose sight of, especially when encountering patients who, like her, entrust us with their most intimate selves during their most vulnerable moments.

a b o u t • a r t i s t

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Julie Hwang is a medical student at UNC School of Medicine. She received her Bachelor's from Duke University, where she studied Visual Art in Narrative Medicine. As an aspiring psychiatrist, she hopes to integrate both the wonders of science and humanities to make medicine a holistic healing process. She has previously published in *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine* and hopes to continue making art throughout her medical career.