

I still can't wrap my head around the way that we can take the organs from an almost dead person and save another almost-dead person. It doesn't seem fair that one must die for the other to be saved. I have always had the little heart on my driver's license beside a smiling photograph of 16-year-old me. When the DMV worker had asked me, rather disinterestedly, if I wanted to be an organ donor, I confidently answered, "Yes!" If only I knew then the magnitude of what I was signing up for—a life for someone in exchange for my own.

The pager next to my pillow at night reminds me that, in an instant, I can make good on my promise. The small heart on my license indicates that yes, I do want to save another life if my own cannot be saved. Whenever the pager goes off, I take time to read about the donor. Last week, there was a 12-year-old girl who strangled herself with the shower hose. Her lungs went to one of my patients and she lives on through him. Another was about an 18-year-old boy who fell out of the bed of a pick-up, an innocent moment that took a young man's life. His mother gave the painstaking report that I so carefully read in the Tuesday morning light of my bay window.

I grieve for them all, unsure of how to acknowledge and respect the complicated emotions I feel as a result of their deaths. I am filled, not with sadness, but another feeling that I cannot describe. Someone lost their baby last night—it is not my grief to carry and yet I clutch it to my chest. I felt the need to mend something that I did not break, wanting to give this mother justice for the child she lost. I want to grab the hand of the 12-year-old and show her all there is to live for—even if she can't possibly see it now. We sit crisscrossed before one another and she does not wrap the hose around her neck and her grandfather does not find her naked body hung from the wall. He does not weep those visceral, animalistic cries and her grandmother does not run to find her husband desperately giving his small granddaughter untrained CPR. I hand her anterograde memories: polaroids from the future as she graduates high school, and perhaps, she becomes a wife or a mother or a transplant surgeon. I want to show her that there is so much to see, feel, and live for. Her baby cries in my arms and suddenly, I awake to the shrill beeping of the pager—everything is the same.

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