

Harpooning the Vein

By Shawna L Swetech, RN

Are they prominent and soft, or fine
like dark thread? Are they hidden
beneath spongy layers of adipose?
And the skin, is it thick like tanned leather,
or thin like a white veil separating
the inner and outer worlds?
Should I use a tourniquet?
Will the vein distend and harden,
roll from the needle's probe?
Or will binding pressure burst
the thin blue line, ecchymosis
purpling the tissues.

Take a deep breath, I say,
imagine your vein is a caterpillar,
fat and juicy. I swipe antiseptic
across the target, twirl the steel
stylette in the cannula.
Please, God.
Please let me get in, first stick.
I can't think of this as real now,
can't think of causing pain, injury.
The angiocath becomes a harpoon,
the arm a lifeless fish.

I pierce the flesh —
Don't move now! and wait
for crimson flashback in the needle's hub.
Score, there it is. I hook up tubing,
chevron the paper tape over and under,
place a see-through dressing.
Blue lights flash, the IV pump
beeps to life.

Yes. I have been granted the power again.

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