



Test Results, Positive

By J. Trig Brown, MD

There is no magic in my bag
No aces up these white coat sleeves
No healing spells, no tricks to please
No Merlin's song to save the day.

To comfort you should be my trick
Should be our goal, our common boast.
To do no harm, my solemn oath
Is jeopardized by what I know.

The words I chant will shake your soul
Will bubble forth to change your life
Like sorcerers with beards of white
Will make you yearn for days gone by.

The news I bring is from the void.
It summons grief, directs the storms.
A crimson cape of life's dreams torn
This wizard waves before your eyes.

I mix my brew, you toss it down.
The genie's out, the truth is loose,
Your perfect health: a painful ruse.
No magic words will save you now. ❖

A Shoulder Softly Touched

By J. Trig Brown, MD

On the surface, the Triangle Hospice 5-K FunRun appears to be just another road race. At the starting line, I stand among a crowd of healthy men and women of all ages. Their brightly-colored tee shirts brag about prior conquests, a 10-K here, a marathon there. In an instant, the starting horn blares and I join the pack pounding the pavement through the streets of historic Hillsborough, North Carolina.

The course winds through old neighborhoods where spectators rock on porches, sipping their morning coffee. Many glance up from their newspapers with looks of surprise. Somewhere breakfast is served; the smell of bacon mocks our lean pack as we hurry past. A few leaves, chased by the early October breeze, flutter across our trail. We run up hills and down, eventually turning back toward the sleepy business district.

Before long, these steep hills wear me down. My legs are heavy. I sweat despite the cool morning air. With chest heaving, I struggle for breath. My gut aches as if I have run into the fist of an attacking prize fighter. My pace slows and the summit of the current hill seems fixed in the distance.

Ahead stands a group of Hospice volunteers and staff. They cheer. They coach. They energetically jump up and down. They shout words of encouragement and clap frantically for me to continue. One extends a hand holding cool water to moisten my lips. Another softly touches my shoulder as I inch past.

Their images fill my head. I see their hands bathing a dying cancer patient. I hear their soft voices whispering words of encouragement to their young patients with AIDS, telling those who are dying that they are not alone. I picture them supporting the families who ache so strongly under mountains of grief. I visualize them nurturing, comforting, calming, and caressing. They touch, soothe, and steady. These images lift my chin, straighten my back. Their words lighten my legs and lift me over the summit. They propel me effortlessly toward the finish line. These images give me the strength to press on for those who can no longer run. ❖



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