

*The Donor and Daycare*

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When I drop my daughter off at daycare in the morning, dressed in blue scrubs, I must look like a I'm on my way to save a few lives at the nearby hospital. I wave "bye-bye" to the babies and the teachers, smiling as I go.

A few hours later, I am up to my elbows digging around in a cold, dead body. This is anatomy. I take the scalpel or the scissors and slice through some skin, some connective tissue, but often it is easier to just take my hand and blunt dissect.

My gloves become slick with fluid, so much so that I have to change them midway through the lab. I cut and pick off fat, hair, things in my way, throw them in the bowl. The air is thick with the smell of formaldehyde and, in the background, there is the sound of a saw.

My team and I joke around, listen to raggatón, pause to compare the pretty illustrations on the computer to the colorless structures in front of us.

"This *must* be the superior mesenteric artery," my friend says.

"It can't be," my other teammate says, and they go back and forth for the next couple minutes.

When our time is up, we cover "Bob," our anatomy donor, in a thin sheet, then a body bag, and then close the metal table covers over him, which never fail to make a harsh, loud noise as they bang together.

In the lab, I wash my hands and forearms like I am scrubbing into a surgery, rinse my hands a couple times more in the bathroom before I leave the building, and then sanitize my hands in the car for good measure. At home, I throw my scrubs in the laundry and jump in the shower as quickly as possible. Everything else can wait: I've got to get the dead off of me.

Only after this ritualistic cleaning can I pick up my daughter. When the daycare director asks, “How was your day?” I think, what would she say if she knew what I had done today? Here there are bright colors and sweet baby smells and cute voices.

I hug my daughter close to me and she is warm, tiny, alive. She’s nothing like Bob. She cries when I try to wipe her nose and smiles when I give her a kiss.

But, of course, she is like Bob. She has the same organs; somewhere in her compact body there’s a superior mesenteric artery. My daughter’s pediatrician had said babies are fun because you can feel everything in their abdomens. I had even tried myself after the appointment, pushing on my daughter’s belly, feeling for her intestines, but I just made her laugh.

One time, I didn’t have the chance to shower or change between anatomy lab and daycare pick up, and I felt like I contaminated everything and everyone in the daycare center. Several months before, my friend told me she had to reschedule a date with my daughter and me, because she had to go to a funeral earlier that day. “I don’t want to visit a baby the same day I’m at a cemetery, you know?” she said. I did know, but there I was, crossing that line. I didn’t want the babies to come close to my shoes, which had perhaps caught a drop of fluid from the lab.

Because, in truth, the harsher thought is that Bob was like my daughter once. This old person whose face I liked to keep covered, whose tissue I pried apart, whose heart I had cut out of his body, was born a baby, had grown up into a boy, became a man who likely had children of his own.

It’s easier to keep the two separated—old, young; alive, dead—but sometimes there is no option but to span that bridge.