Eyes

By Jonathan McMann

“Una mirada no dice nada
y al mismo tiempo lo dice todo...”

Do you ever look at yourself in the mirror? Like really look? Do you ever stand there, with your bare feet on the cold floor, staring at your eyes, letting your eyes stare back? I do. I do not know why I do it or what I am hoping for in these moments. Something about this time, though, is so eerie, so silent and revealing. For it is in those few seconds that I see myself. I see a man. A man, full of dreams and desires, tortured by fears and failures, filled with love, but fraught with timidity. I cannot decide if these moments are real, if the anatomical has, in fact, given way to something much more visceral, but I would like to think that they are. Maybe I am just crazy, or maybe, in these precious seconds, my eyes have opened and I have seen into my soul.

What is this connection between sight and the soul? At times, the two feel so congruous. What is seen triggers something deep within me. I am moved, swayed, changed. The experience of my eyes conforms to the patterns of my heart. Those times, “good” or “bad”, feel human; they feel right. There are other times, however, where my sight feels skewed. What I see does not register in my heart. The signals travel along the synapses all the same; from neuron to neuron they go, but I still feel nothing. Nothing changes. In those moments, it is if I am lifeless. I watch life go on around me, seeing everything, but experiencing nothing. So I crave the moments where I see. Ah! How I yearn for them! They make me feel alive.

What if I looked at my patients in the same way that I want to see the world? What if, as I stand by their bedside, looking into their eyes became something more than that a passive, lifeless experience of the world? What if, in that moment, the doors to both of our souls were opened? What would happen? How would we respond if we gazed through instead of looking at each other? Would it be glorious? Would I be able see what triggers that deep, visceral awareness of their existence? Despite their poor condition, would they feel more human in that moment? More loved and understood? I would like to think so, so this is how I want to look at my patients. As people. People with an anatomy and a soul, people who long to feel alive.

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