

“Air hugging an angel”
By Emily Buongiorno (CNL 2018)

First day on the inpatient psychiatric floor, my periwinkle
student scrubs crisp but heavy around my tingling skin--
That’s when I met her.

You see, suddenly her eyes were glued to mine in the most
Intense, still way, her deep indigo blue glossy eyes

Is there anyone there?

Like a humming bird my dark brown eyes tucked behind
A pair of new tortoise shell glasses nervously dart back
And forth under her concentrated stare until
Eventually I give up-- I couldn't stop letting her see inside of me

What do you see?

“Jesus loves you.”

We didn’t cover this in class yet, but I nod

“He really loves you. You know that.”

After many seconds that seem like minutes,

She smiles a smile that seemed childish, a

Toothless grin of sorts

“He knows you. Everything about you.”

And I’m still staring into those deep sea eyes, lost

Swimming in them, peacefully and recklessly at the same time as
she demands in a voice that is crinkly but purposeful:

“You must have faith, faith moves mountains”

She sealed that statement in with a stern stare

And I fidget a little and was relieved as we

Start inching down the everlasting hall but

Her eyes slowly, mechanically, magnetically find mine again

“Your friend died, didn't she? You had a friend that died.”

And a chill washes over me and she keeps adjusting her gaze

Like a camera trying to focus like she’s trying

To see a part of me that's tucked away
Deep down
And I don't know why but I almost cried as she continued staring at me
In silence, an uncomfortable yet beautiful silence.
Her eyes turned soft and in a consoling tone she offers again
"Jesus Christ loves you."
And I nod and she nods knowingly and
It takes her a few more quiet moments
Before she believes me and finally we continue down that
Linoleum hallway, the wheels of her walker
Chiming in and we talk like old friends, slow and childish about rabbits
Having good eyesight because they eat so many carrots and
Baby deer being so beautiful,
Too beautiful to kill and I smile and she smiles
And she asks if I use Colgate to brush my teeth.
She tells me my sled when I was a little girl
Was wooden and red and I always liked to paint.
And then, as if she had seen them for the first time,
She noted, "Your eyes are brown. Do you know what they say
About people with brown eyes?"
I lean in anxious to hear,
"You are smart"
It was as if she knew my insecurities, my quiet inner doubts
of whether I was meant to be here, the ones that
Chisel the inside of my stomach and make my heart hammer in my ears
"He will help you. 'I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.'"
And a sense of peace flurried down on me, like a fresh miraculous snow
"I wish I could give you a hug but there is that rule about touching here," she sulked
"We can an air hug," I suggest and
Her face lit up and her eyes laughed, like shiny stones, radiant sapphires
"An air hug! I never heard of that!

And it was by far the most meaningful hug I received in weeks.

Then gently, I closed the door, watching her beaming mysterious unforgettable
Face disappear behind the thick wooden slab.

But I couldn't stop thinking about her:

The hyperreligious, delusional, auditory hallucinative, schizoaffective patient

And that night I found myself peering into my own eyes a little deeper, a little deeper.

How did she see? What did she see?

And then I proceeded to brush my teeth
with a tube of toothpaste that read Colgate.