



A final bargain

“We wanted to do so many more things. We had a whole list....”

Kristel Leung, BSc

She won me over with a coin trick,” he said with a small smile, his eyes crinkling at the corners.

“You know the one where you put the coin in one hand, and make it disappear? She took my dollar and placed it in her left palm, and with a wave it was gone. For a split second, I was annoyed, because that dollar was hard earned. Then she laughed at my expression and opened her right hand, and there it was.”

A pause. There was only the steady beep coming from the monitors. Beep... beep... beep.... The ventilator sighed, breathing out life. He sighed too, and shifted his weight, crossing his arms.

“She didn’t trust me at first. Told me that she had a bad habit of being too optimistic. That she would meet a man that she liked and got along with. She would write a story in her head of how life could play out. How their personalities matched or they shared the same humor. She would imagine how promising their lives would be, what it would be like to grow old together. And each time, she would be disappointed. Not because of him or for who he turned out to be, but at herself for believing in a fantasy that she so desperately wanted to have. So when she met me she said she would only focus on the *now*.”

His voice trailed off, and he glanced to his right. He took her frail, limp hand tenderly in his and began playing with the gold band around her finger.

“The day I proposed, she didn’t cry or smile. She looked straight at me, her face blazing, and said, ‘Promise me that you will still stay with me, even when you hate who I am. That you won’t give up on me, even when I’ve given up on myself.’ And I said ‘I will.’”

He looked at me and studied my face.

“Now you’re telling me that I can’t keep that promise.”

He became quiet, and his eyes glazed over.

“I did break that promise once. I got busy with work, and so did she. I became too accustomed to my life with her. Like cologne or perfume, losing its smell after wearing it day after day. It wasn’t that I loved or hated her, I was just indifferent. I stopped thinking and appreciating. And *her*... she was new to town and a fresh face at the office. We started chatting more and more. And then....”

He inhaled sharply and squeezed his eyes shut, trying to will away the pain of the memory. When he spoke again, he was hoarse, the regret clawing at his voice.

“I told her what had happened, and she understood. She took the truth so graciously... so accepting, so forgiving. She was always good at that, understanding people, understanding me. When I asked how she learned, she said it was from growing up in a household with parents who bared their humanity every day they fought. She knew firsthand what hatred and despair did to people, and she decided

Ms Leung is a medical student at UBC in the class of 2016. Her interests include storytelling inspired by encounters in the medical world.

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that she didn't want it for us. It made me despise myself even more for hurting her, hurting us. But after, it was almost as if the threat had only made our bond stronger."

He coughed and cleared his throat.

"She knew. She had known that something was wrong for a while. She started losing weight, and lost her appetite. I caught her once trying to scrub off blood in the bathroom. She was tired all the time, and had these crippling migraines. The terminal diagnosis wasn't surprising for her."

Beep... beep... beep.... The ventilator jolted as the motor started up, drowning out the monitors with a steady hum.

"This morning, she asked whether I wanted to go on vacation over the long weekend. She had this silly grin on her face, like a giddy young girl begging her parents for ice cream. She just stepped out to get some coffee beans and must not have seen the taxi...."

He choked back a sob. Slowly, he bent over the bed rail, cupped one hand under her chin and kissed her. He began combing his fingers through her hair peeking out of the bandages.

"We were going to go to our friend's cottage up in Whistler... bring up our dogs, visit some friends. It's too soon. We wanted to do so many more things. We had a whole list...."

He sighed and drew himself up. The lines on his face ran deep, showing years of experience and memories, accentuating his piercing stare as he spoke.

"Can you give me some time?"

With a nod, I moved to leave.

"I'll be here when you're ready."

I bundled up the trails of my cloak and lowered the hood. With a wave, I was gone. **BCMJ**

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New support for medical students with rural interest

A total of \$100 000 is available for up to 20 medical students who demonstrate an interest in practising medicine in rural and remote communities in BC. Annually, up to 20 medical students will be given individual awards of \$5000 to support their pursuit of practising rural medicine. The award is offered by the BC Ministry of Health and Doctors of BC with the goal of strengthening efforts to attract more doctors to rural and remote communities.

The first British Columbia Rural Interest Awards have been granted to UBC medical students who come from a variety of rural communities or have demonstrated an interest in entering rural medicine once training is complete. The British Columbia Rural Interest Award will be given to:

- Up to seven third-year students who have completed the Rural Family Practice Clerkship or the Integrated Community Clerkship.
- Up to seven fourth-year students who have completed a four-week rural elective.
- The remaining awards are granted to first-year students upon admittance to UBC Medical School.

For students applying upon completion of the third-year Rural Family Practice Clerkship, Integrated Community Clerkship, or fourth-year rural electives, the deadline is 30 June 2015. For first-year students applying upon admittance to UBC medical school, the deadline is 30 September 2015.

The awards were established through ongoing funding from the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues, a collaborative committee of the Ministry of Health and Doctors of BC. For information on eligibility and application deadlines, visit rccbc.ca/education-and-cmecpd/medical-students/reap/british-columbia

-rural-interest-award. For information about the collaborative committee of Doctors of BC and the Ministry of Health, visit www.doctorsofbc.ca/resource-centre/physicians/hand-books-guides.

Read about a few of the current winners on the *BCMJ* blog (bcmj.org/blog/listings).

Quality Improvement Toolkit online

The Divisions of Family Practice recently launched a new Quality Improvement Toolkit on the Divisions of Family Practice website. The toolkit is a guide to getting started, planning your improvements, implementing your ideas, and sustaining your improvement efforts, and it explains how to integrate QI techniques into your everyday work. It offers resources, videos, tools, and templates that cater to users at all levels of experience—those learning the basics, looking for practical tools, or creating strategies to engage a team and build project momentum. Learn more about the toolkit at www.divisionsbc.ca/provincial/qi.

Dr Pollock's work in Haiti featured in Post

On 15 March 2015 the *National Post* ran the story "BC doctor delivers unusual foreign aid to Haiti by teaching surgeons to perform safer circumcisions." Dr Neil Pollock recently spent a week in Haiti training surgeons to perform circumcisions with the hope that the operation will assist in the fight against HIV in the country. Dr Pollock cites recent research suggesting the procedure can cut spread of the disease significantly. Dr Pollock is also in talks to deliver similar training in the Kwa-Zulu-Natal province of South Africa, a place harder hit by HIV than almost anywhere in the world.