Empathy

Casey Golomski

University of New Hampshire, Durham, casey.golomski@unh.edu

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Empathy

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I met the limit of empathy long after one bleary day, when light opaquely let itself in the ICU’s ten inch-wide window and from which one can only see a brick wall.

The bays were rounded in a half-ring. Pain cut back, for now, with stomach injections, respirators, and Ativan. “No one came to see me,” he said, wet and blinking.

That year his psychiatrist came around once every month and a half—a fellowship at Harvard, then at McLean. The hospitalists were many though: after every admission, they were different every day.

Do you remember us? We’ve been to this unit thirteen times since September. We called the police.

Clinically, each time you want a verbal affirmation—“Do you feel you want to die?”

I met the limit of empathy in the in-ability to gauge the interpretive threshold of suicidality, in slow, mute death.

* Casey Golomski
  casey.golomski@unh.edu

1 University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, USA