

Matter of fact

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Neurology® 2018;90:139. doi:10.1212/WNL.0000000000004841

Her face was matter of fact when she heard the pronouncement.
The neuropsychologist was her colleague; he remained professional,
but slipped in some sympathy with the data, which I could not appreciate.

She didn't display a mask of depression, or Parkinson disease.
Her face remained pliable, not pleased, but neither terribly pained,
no exhibition of perplexity, or petulance, or surprise, a pensive look,
retaining its complex grace, a quiet reserve, a solemn alertness,
the beauty of humane consciousness, with no further expectations.

In her own practice, she had encountered early Alzheimer disease first-hand:
that wonderful younger woman, whose baby she had delivered,
working in accounting until the numbers became exotic, then alien;
she had told me about that patient, with shock, sadness, and resignation.

But I didn't understand this. I wouldn't. It was the guy, his tests, the setting.
At home, I made her try to draw a clock, count backward, recite words, and
copy intersecting rectangles. She tried, this good doctor who had always
bested me in calculus, organic chemistry, and marriage. She wasn't angry.

So how could I be mad? She was setting the example, as she had done
her whole life, her whole career, without pessimism or regret, or fanfare,
just ready to go on, even though her words and steps might mutate,
unpredictably, ever aware of the possible endpoints, with each of us
now grappling this present moment, trying to recognize its identity.

Dedicated to IRJ, MD; suggested by Meryl Comer.

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this poem.

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