

Therapeutic Privilege

S. Van McCrary

I don't want to know, but I do.
He has lived for 90 years
and smoked for 65.

Short of breath,
his daughters bring him in.
On the scan, a lung mass cries cancer,
need for more testing.

The daughters say
Don't tell him,
this knowledge will kill.

Yesterday, he said *Talk only to my daughters.*
Today a problem,
he asks *Is the news good or bad?*

My pager erupts.
Soon after, a brief phone report.
I think, *The patient should decide.*

At the meeting the daughters keen,
It will destroy him.
Faces red, tears flowing, fists clenched,
Let him get back to his TV ball games!

But the team has heard him say,
I don't, but I do.

Hours later, a compromise reached,
we say *This calls for more tests.*
Is that what you want?

He listens carefully,
then with a small shrug,
I've had enough.

It appears he means it—
best for all.
A thumbs-up from the resident.
From me, a sigh.

His eldest daughter and I stand in the hall.
Then I am a tattered Teddy bear,
stuffing on the floor from her fierce embrace.

Twenty years of ethics consultations,
my first hug.

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