

Burnout

Day's eye-ache 30 hours missed
awakens anesthetized limbic paths
that I walked for hours
and hours
now lit by midday light.

But I feel no sparkle of tears
nor the dull chest-weight of sadness
like I could that first July.

Then, I stole moments in lonely corridors
and spoke with a voice-tight timbre
and cried in the car on the way home
living—for a moment, an hour—my patients'
pain.

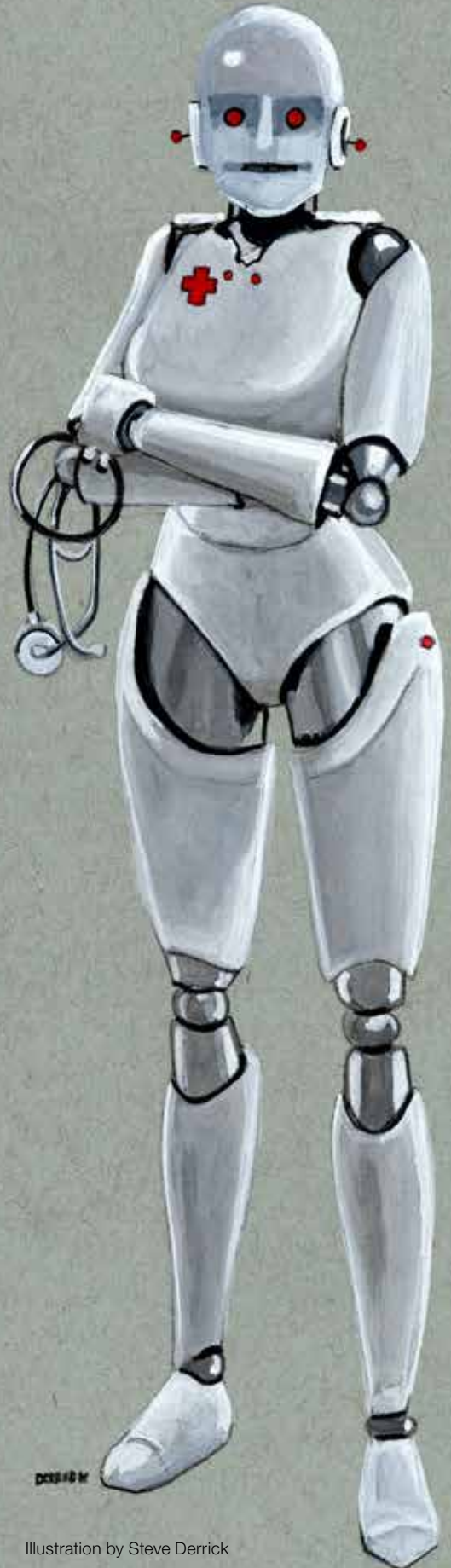
Today, after the tumor won, she cried
and I called the time as one does
and I hugged as one hugs
and I said what one says.

What a great actor I have become.

When the weight on my chest
(if I can even still feel it)
and the tightness in my throat
(if I can even still taste it)
gives way so easily to an aching fatigue
that makes me cold to a widow's grief
and numb to a daughter's embrace,
and deaf to memory's whisper.

I wonder in awe
at this efficient physician
but ask
in tired
thoughts
fragmented:
Where have I gone?

—Christopher L. Coe, MD



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