

Q U E R Y



Today I celebrate my own ineptness by paying tribute to the mentors who deserve better, the people who — no names — are not responsible for the sorry amalgam that is my knowledge, the desert of my skill set. Let no important informational bit be elicited, no crucial physical finding be found! I hereby proclaim that, on my personal calendar, today is Oops Day, and I am the mascot of bumblehood.

My mentors deserve a grand ceremony, a magnificent to-do in which they individually take the podium and, shaking their head, say: *Doctor, what were you thinking?* Lights dim on cue as a projector shows the home movies of medical school, the dumb moments where I answer armadas of questions wrong, fail to make good first impressions and generally flounder in the business of diagnosis, treatment and discharge.

Like all other professionals, physicians require gradual growth to assume their role, but my incompetence is not to scale: the yuk-it-up moments of this gala evening reveal the student doctor in perpetual pratfall, slipping on missed illnesses arranged like a trail of banana peels. I watch the film reels of that sad-sack white coat serially screwing up, listen to the presenters as they narrate the vintage boobos and choice groaners of yesteryear. The greatest hits package:

The chest-tube incident. (*Ha ha.*)

The Christmas call day of no return. (*Ho ho.*)

The charts dictated with obscenities in them. (*Did he really do that?*)

The cafeteria fracas. (*Hee hee.*)

The time he got punched by a patient. (*Wait, my sides are splitting!*)

My mentors take the stage, regaling the audience with an endless supply of laugh-track tales until a point at the end of the evening when the lights dim to the intellectual wattage of the guest of honour. A spotlight appears on me, and the laughter dies; I walk down the aisle of the auditorium toward the podium.

Doctor, this is your life!

Confetti falls as I accept my award, the first annual booby prize of Oops Day. The spotlight shifts, revealing a hospital bed; on it is a big trophy, tarnished and dented, offering up my smudged reflection as I walk toward it. I have no speech prepared, just a question for the evening's presenters, my former mentors:

Is it just me? Am I the only one? Am I the sole fool, fumbling toward improvement, the guy with ghosts he'd rather let rest?

The trophy looks like it's been around; perhaps some of the presenters earned the award themselves a long time ago. I say my piece of apology to them, absolving my attempted mentors of any blame, ending my speech with my anthem of medical buffoonery: *Uh, I'll have to look that up.*

I then carry the abused trophy out of the auditorium and into the night, where I will keep it safe for a very long time.

— Dr. Ursus