

Scavenger Hunt

Michael B. Pitt, MD

He was younger than my shift had been,
making his world debut a block from Lake
Michigan
on the eighth floor
of the second tower
of the women's hospital.
Shortly after his first feeding,
his nurse spotted something that won him an
instant one-way ticket,
with lights and sirens,
down Michigan Avenue,
to the children's hospital,
where I'd just arrived for my first day in the NICU.
I had yet to transfer my ID badge from the strap of
my bag where it typically spent the night,
to the pocket of the scrubs I'd just changed into,
when my attending poked her head into the call
room with a challenge.

*Go examine the baby in room 11 and tell me what's
wrong with him.*

I arrived blinded at what to expect,
yet even when my eyes were given permission,
they missed it.
Everything seemed normal;
perfect even.

Open soft spot, red reflexes, symmetric palmar
grasp, regular heart sounds, clear lungs, stable hips.

I was even able to count the requisite 3 vessels on
the freshly clamped umbilical stump.

Everything was where it was supposed to be.
He was a textbook normal baby.

I realized this must be a trick question—
put the new intern in front of a healthy baby and
make him sweat.

I ambled back into the hallway and made eye
contact with the attending,

hoping a smile would unmask the prank.
There was none.

Just a curious brow raise, and then
did you find it?

Damn, there was an *it*.

Give me another chance.
I turned the overhead lights on this time,
and began the search anew.
Ten fingers and 10 toes.
Nostrils open.
Gluteal creases symmetric.
I had nothing.
I rocked back on my heels to pivot towards the hall
when the fellow rescued me,
when she leaned in the room and whispered,
“Pssst. He has no asshole.”
I'd made it to the gluteal clefts on round 2, but
hadn't gone far enough.
I leaned down and looked closer, and for the first
time stared at something I'd only read about in
textbooks before.
Smooth skin where the opening of the rectum
should be.
Imperforate anus.
Hidden in plain sight.
All else perfectly where it was supposed to be,
the handiwork of a designer for sure,
just missing the final punctuation mark of the
signature.
The dotting of the I.
Sure enough, a surgeon would complete that design
a few hours later,
freeing the baby to lead a healthy
and quite literally productive life,
all before my badge returned to the strap of my bag,
on that winter day,
when 2 new assholes were formed in the hospital by
the lake.



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