

## Sample Nonfiction: DRAWING BLOOD by Anne Dimock

She calls my name, the weary looking lab tech, and I follow her to her station. I recognize her, she has done me several times before. She might remember that she has drawn my blood but probably not, for I am one of hundreds of patients she has drawn that month. I would be a vague face in her memory, registered as nondescript, polite, and not squeamish. I recognize her for her plainness. Of the ten or so lab technicians who've gained access to my blood, she stands out for being so plain. Everything about her expression and speech says "I'm not really here, really I'm not." Remarkably plain. This time I look closer.

She is fretful, worried, sad or depressed. Her mouth is one straight line bisecting a set jaw, the kind of expression I recognize in myself sometimes, an expression that is a habit of years, of toughing something out, a habit one must make a conscious effort to change. Eye contact is as brief as possible, she hides herself behind her impassive face. I avert my eyes too because I can no longer stand to see a needle being inserted into my arm. Since the slow disintegration of my veins from the treatment, my veins are hard to find, hard to penetrate, hard to coax a good flow out of them. There's a flicker of recognition of this difficult arm and I watch her as she goes about the work of sounding the depths of my forearm with the pads of her fingers. Like sonar, radar, or a metal detector, she looks for that which is unseen and almost impalpable. Similarly, I watch her.

She furrows her brow and I can see all her private worry erupt into little creases. She's professional in her work--of course she is--and unaware that I can see her tension of sick parents, not enough money, husband having an affair, and sister suffering from mental illness. She is on the cusp of not being young anymore and something about the choices she made long ago

bothers her, choices that brought her here where she is trying in vain to find my vein. They bother her profoundly, though she thinks she keeps it all hidden behind her expressionless features. She believes, and mostly she is right, that a lifetime of plainness shields her from the interest of others in the particulars of her life. She wears a light dusting of make-up, I can see the particles of powder sitting on the fine facial hair. It is an unnatural shade of pink. The crease between her brows deepens and more wrinkles appear. I look at her hair, a pale, plain brown with a hint of gray. There is a part halfway down the middle before the hair hangs in bangs that are brushed back over the sides. The hair hangs in slight clumps--she will shampoo her hair tomorrow morning, she just squeaked by today. She uses a blow dryer or a curling iron to sculpt her hair. It too is plain, uninteresting and common; a million women with not enough time or imagination wear their hair this way. She is one of the women men don't see.

She hits a vein but the scar tissue gives her trouble. She slowly moves the needle around. She knows it hurts me and she's sorry for that and asks if I want her to withdraw the needle. I tell her that I want her to get the blood and to keep going. I'm not watching her anymore but looking away, tapping my foot and my other hand, breathing shallowly. She digs some more and finally gets the blood. I must have made some alarming sound for she breaks out of her impassiveness, looks me dead-on in the eyes, and speaks. "Are you O.K.? Do you want some juice?" I tell her no and try very hard to reassure her that I won't faint on her. What I really want to do is curl up in a ball and cry because this is just the latest of several indignities committed upon my body this afternoon.

Skeptical, she asks again. I reply "No, no, I'm fine, really" and fake a smile. She completes the blood draw and labels all the tubes, cleans and bandages my puncture, disposes the needle. We both repair our sudden exposure as I get up to leave and she moves on to the next.

It's so easy, this slip back into invisibility, like ice melting in water. And all I felt was the prick of a needle.

