

Shadow People

Look to the side, away from the well-lit path

There they stand, blending into the walls and shadows

Of the dimly lit corridors where they remain mostly invisible

The students and doctors hurry past

In white coats, with smiles and laughter

Not seeming to notice those in the world on the periphery

Of their hope-filled and happy lives

Not seeming to see them at all

Shadow people see each other

But leave themselves to their own realities

Somewhere in the dark chapters of their own lives

Not speaking, they nod as they pass

Acknowledging another shared but never wanted moment

Alone, together, in the empty stairwells and cafeterias

Dwelling in the stale halls for finite eternities

Of grief and worry

Glimpsing through windows that show them the world goes on

Paying them no mind, seeming not to care

As days pass, some also pass away

No longer having someone to tie them to this place

The anguished cries, of one voice

No matter the age or language

Signal a world of sorrow

And an empty place that feels like it will never again be filled

From time to time the grieving pierces the edge of the world of light

For all to notice, for a moment, only for a moment
Before they look away and return to their undisturbed, busy lives

But now and again a former shadow person

Who now wears his shadows on the craggy wrinkles of a face
That has seen much sadness, tempered by some measure of joy
Whose eyes see, with glasses prescribed by grief,
All the way to the edges of the hospital corridors
Takes just a moment to turn his head toward the shadows
And offers a quiet, knowing smile, and a whispered hello

In those few who see us, we also see

In their eyes, windows to wounded souls
Their suffering and heartache
And I feel them seeing these in me
For a brief moment, they share their pain and hope and compassion

Shadow people never leave their darkness completely

They bring it to clinic, along with their loved ones, or their memories of them
And they look unexpectedly up into eyes like their own
Cheerful but with a kindred sadness, that let them know
They are felt, and heard
Without the need for anyone to say a word
No need to explain one's experience
The recognition that they are seen brings a little hope
Into a life that may remain broken and filled with despair
That brief shared smile, a moment of care
Is like coming up for a first breath of air.