

# Right Brain: Cogwheels and Crystals

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## Abstract

“Cogwheels and Crystals” is a reflection on how difficult it was to see a patient with Parkinson disease in the office as the daughter of a man with the same diagnosis. The immediate challenge was maintaining composure and professionalism, fighting the urge to stay blissfully unaware. The poem explores my feelings as I set out to perform a thorough interview similar to any other: discomfort with confronting potential future realities, reminders of the ways my father’s disease limited his involvement in my childhood, and guilt for perhaps not caring for him enough as I spend my days caring for others with similar struggles.

he is here today, fidgeting, can’t sit still,  
my crystal ball.  
i look though i don’t want to.  
my white coat feels stiff, rigid on my body and  
the cogwheels begin cranking restlessly in my head.

he is here today, hand trembling as he adjusts his glasses.  
i do not wish to fast-forward to The End of my father,  
but my crystal ball is here today.  
i am tasked with asking him to tell me about the things i want to hide from.  
i close my eyes for a moment before i begin,  
and i am a small child again doing homework on the kitchen table.  
the smell of indian spices cooking is quite strong to my sister and me, but my dad is none the wiser;  
something we called a quirk.  
and then i am in high school proud in my gown, tassel hanging.  
we are late because my dad is struggling to tie his shoes. he can barely get the spoon from the bowl to  
his mouth at the reception.  
and then i am back here  
i don’t want to see how this ends.

my crystal ball is here today.  
it feels like morbid curiosity; i ask him details,  
about how his medications are failing, about how he cannot move his body to eat, bathe, wear his  
clothes. his voice is a whisper.  
i wonder how long before my dad loses his voice.  
how long until he gets to this part?

i counsel and send my crystal ball away, heart heavy,  
and immediately call my dad.  
i stick my hand in my coat pocket, it sinks  
and i sink into a chair  
i don’t tell him that i’ve seen the end.

is he talking a little softer than usual?  
i ask him cordial questions, about work and weather  
and hang up before he realizes i am crying  
about cogwheels and crystals.

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From the The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University, Providence, RI.

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