

## Day 376

It's day 376 of the Covid-19 pandemic in America.  
I'm standing outside of an abandoned Sears  
directing people to their vaccine appointments.  
They drive through the lot, pull into the old tire and oil garage,  
get their shot in their car and drive away.  
Safe and efficient.  
It's not lost on me how strange this is—  
This new normal of ours.

As the day winds down I meet Don  
80 years old, couldn't make an appointment.  
Scared.  
I tell him to wait with the growing line of others  
desperate to receive the leftover shots  
drawn from the last vial of the day.  
13 cars wait.

The cold air stings my eyes  
the only part my mask won't cover.  
I want to hide behind it  
because we've been faced with the impossible task  
of deciding the order of priority.  
Just a couple of volunteers  
determining who might get  
A lifesaving vaccine today  
at an abandoned Sears, in an old tire and oil garage.

We walk car to car, taking down ages, professions and order of arrival.  
They don't give you a handbook for this.  
A list is made.  
Then bad news.  
3 appointments left and 3 shots remain.  
They'll be no extras today.  
We're told to send everyone home.  
We walk down the line to disappoint everyone.  
I'm sad but also relieved  
to not have shouldered that choice.  
I feel like the worst human on Earth.  
Or at least, the worst one today  
at an abandoned Sears, near an old tire and oil garage.

We come to Don.  
I tell him to call a number to schedule an appointment.  
He says he'll try again.  
Two more shots are spoken for. It's 4:00.  
My walkie talkie chimes.  
There is one shot left. Who is in the parking lot?

Don is.  
I literally jump for joy.  
Don, I say. It's your lucky day.  
I'm so glad you're still here.  
He grabs my mitten through his car window  
Thank you, he says  
with tired, glinting eyes  
that have had far more time than I have  
to see both the best and the worst  
that this silly speck of dust in the universe has to offer.  
Thank you.

He drives through the lot  
into the vaccine bay  
and as I packed away our things  
I saw him get that shot.  
The last one of the day  
at an abandoned Sears, in an old tire and oil garage.

Suddenly  
the world is so heavy.  
Things are so wrong but so right.  
I'm crying in a bathroom stall.  
3600 people died today.  
Don got his vaccine.  
It's day 376 of the Covid-19 pandemic in America.

*\*Patient name changed for confidentiality*

*[REDACTED] This experience was a real-life ethical dilemma in which a challenging decision needed to be made. While I learned to handle this from an objective standpoint, I also found myself connecting with*

*a particular patient and fighting for a positive outcome for him. I suppose this was practice for becoming the kind of doctor I want to be – balancing the need to make objective decisions while leaving a place for human connection, compassion and empathy. This experience taught me that people are always worth fighting for, and the value of seeing the good in all things. Moving forward, I will continue to fight for my patients and become “invested” because even though that may make me vulnerable, my patients will know that I will champion for them. I won’t hold back on making these important human connections because that is so valuable in the establishment of an effective patient-physician relationship. I know I’ll remember this day throughout my career.*