

Penrose was aware that some department chairs not only seemed to know all their underlings' identities, but could actually greet them by name and ask them about the welfare of their spouses and children when passing them in the hall. With Penrose it was the opposite. Whenever he ventured out of his office, a preemptive look of preoccupation on his face, he would be assailed by volleys of "Good morning Dr. Penrose," and "How are you, Dr. Penrose," to which his only defense were unconfident and nonspecific salutations such as "Howdy!" and "Nice to see you!"

With the exception of the residents, with whom Dr. Penrose had a peculiar resonance, he had a difficult time remembering the identity and function of anyone whose acquaintance he had made at work since 1978. The only new name he had managed to commit to memory was Joanne Bartlett's, but this accomplishment did not mean that he could associate the name Joanne Bartlett with an actual person. Penrose could vaguely remember being introduced to a Joanne Bartlett at a meeting, and recollected that she was a thinnish, fiftyish, brownish-haired woman who had worn a skirt. There were no less than forty women meeting that description who stalked the halls at CSM on any given day, and to Penrose they were all Joanne Bartlett until proven otherwise. He wished that he had the confidence to call out "Good afternoon, Ms. Bartlett!" without so much as slowing down to steal a furtive glance at a name-tag as he passed one of these women, not because he truly cared, but because it would have made him seem

so much more in command. But the knowledge that there could be only one—or at most two—Joanne Bartletts at CSM and the resulting deduction that the call of “Good afternoon, Ms. Bartlett!” would be in error over 95 percent of the time made the exiting of his office a painful notion for him.

In fact there were zero Joanne Bartletts at CSM. The real Joanne Bartlett had retired four years earlier—a fact that, had it been known to Penrose, would have brought him little solace. There were still the other thirty-nine females whose identities were a mystery to him. And what about all the blondes, the redheads, the plump, the young, the African Americans, and Asians, and the people wearing pants? No, Penrose was safer at his desk. Let anyone who wanted to see him make an appointment.

The rashness of his decision to leave his safe-room began to dawn on him, and his resolve began to fade as the sound of the shredder obliterating his assignments receded into the past. Three minutes earlier, a thousand Joanne Bartletts waiting outside his office could not have compelled him to remain within it, but no sooner had he passed from the administrative hallway into the wide beyond, he spied a thin, beskirted figure approaching him from the far end of the hall. Thinking quickly, he escaped into a nearby stairwell and descended one floor, breathing thick relief. Upon emerging from the stair and turning right, he was horrified to encounter not one, but three potential Joanne Bartletts coming out of the elevator. Spinning on his heels, he scampered in the opposite direction, heading toward the clinic, where the familiar faces of the residents would no doubt calm his beating heart. As soon as he entered the clinic, he spied a Bartlettic nurse heading in his direction with a urine sample. Seeing that Providence had supplied a chart in the wall pocket outside an examination room directly in front of him, he snatched it just as Robert Montefiore was reaching for it, and burying his face in it entered the exam room rapidly, pulling the door shut with a grateful bang behind himself.

“Safe!” he gasped, taking a few moments to recuperate with his head resting on the door panel and his eyes shut. Suddenly realizing

he was not alone, he snapped his eyes open to find himself face-to-face with a plump twenty-year-old pregnant woman in a hospital gown sitting on the edge of the exam table. It had been ten years since Dr. Penrose had actually encountered a patient in an office setting, and the situation in which he now found himself might have been unnerving were it not for the overwhelming virtue of the fact that the woman could not possibly be Joanne Bartlett, as the chart had already identified her as Maria Gonzalez. This meritorious trait of non-Bartlettness firmly established, Dr. Penrose was inclined to deal leniently with her intrusion upon his private moment of thanksgiving. He cleared his throat, shifted his weight from foot to foot like an old boxer testing his stance, loosened his shoulder and neck muscles by rotating his head first clockwise, then counterclockwise, straightened his bow-tie, hitched up his pants, adjusted his genitals, and strode toward the desk.

“Hello, Miss,” he said confidently. He was surprised at how easily the greeting issued from him after all these years. *Just like riding a bicycle*, he thought. *Yes sir, the old man hasn't lost the legendary bedside manner.*

“Hello, doctor,” said Maria Gonzalez.

“Let me just take a moment to leaf through your chart, here.” Laying the chart on the desk, Dr. Penrose sat down and began turning the pages. He reviewed the problem list, the vital signs, flow sheet, and labs. Just like old times. The feel of a chart in his hands, a patient on the table, a fetus under his care. It was all coming back to him. That indescribable satisfaction of being a physician, of having a patient trust you with her well-being, of establishing human relationships and participating in life's sentinel experiences. Fulfillment, a small wave of recollection lapping coolly at his ankles, refreshed him. He was happy.

Dr. Penrose launched into an ecstatic exposition on pregnancy, beginning with ovulation and ending with involution of the uterus after expulsion of the placenta, touching upon maternal circulatory and respiratory physiology, fetal development, and the neuropharmacology of labor. As he spoke, he alternately shifted his gaze from the sketches

he drew on a note pad to the patient, who nodded at him every few seconds, a look of appreciation on her face. After forty-five minutes, he finished his lecture. "Do you have any questions?" he asked patiently. He was prepared to meet with her as long as necessary.

Maria Gonzalez continued to nod at him silently. Then, when she was certain that he had ceased talking, she added, "*No hablo Inglés, señor.*"

Dr. Penrose was thunderstruck. Things weren't the same after all! Apparently, patients no longer even spoke English! He saw the cruel irony of it all. What he had celebrated as the return of his professional happiness was in fact nothing more than a mirage, the harsh judgment of a cosmic court sentencing him to sit behind the chairman's desk until the end of his professional existence. With a great, heaving sigh, he got up, staggered toward the door, muttered an "*uno momento, please-o,*" and lurched from the room. Seeing Montefiore exit from a different patient's room, he handed him the chart, mumbling "She's ready for you now."