

H&P

How old are you?
65.
Any medical history?
No, sir.
Anything new?
No.
Any allergies?
How about surgeries?
Not that I know of. No.
What do you do?
I'm a retired vet,
but since I moved back home again
I work in construction, and
the odd job or two.
And where do you live?
Well doc, d'ya know that bridge?
The one over by River Ridge?
Yes.
Well.

He looks away.

Do you smoke at all?
Drink alcohol?
Any drugs?
I smoke, but I'd like to quit,
and each night I drink a fifth,
usually vodka—
on the streets
it's better than any sheets—
and yes, sir, from time to time
I take a hit.
Of what?
Mostly heroin, sometimes meth.
Depends on what I can get.
Have you ever been tested for HepC?
How about HIV?
Yessir, I have HepC,
but you see
the meds, I can't pay,
I don't have insurance
that's why I'm here today.
Do you have any family?
Yes, two kids. But we lost touch.
These days, well
I'm not around people much.
I'm sorry.

I reach over and take his hand.
His lips tremble.
He starts to stand.

I don't mean to cry
He says as he squeezes shut his eyes.

It's just been awhile since
some—
since someone's—
it's just been awhile
y'know?

My speech is thick
but I manage to smile.

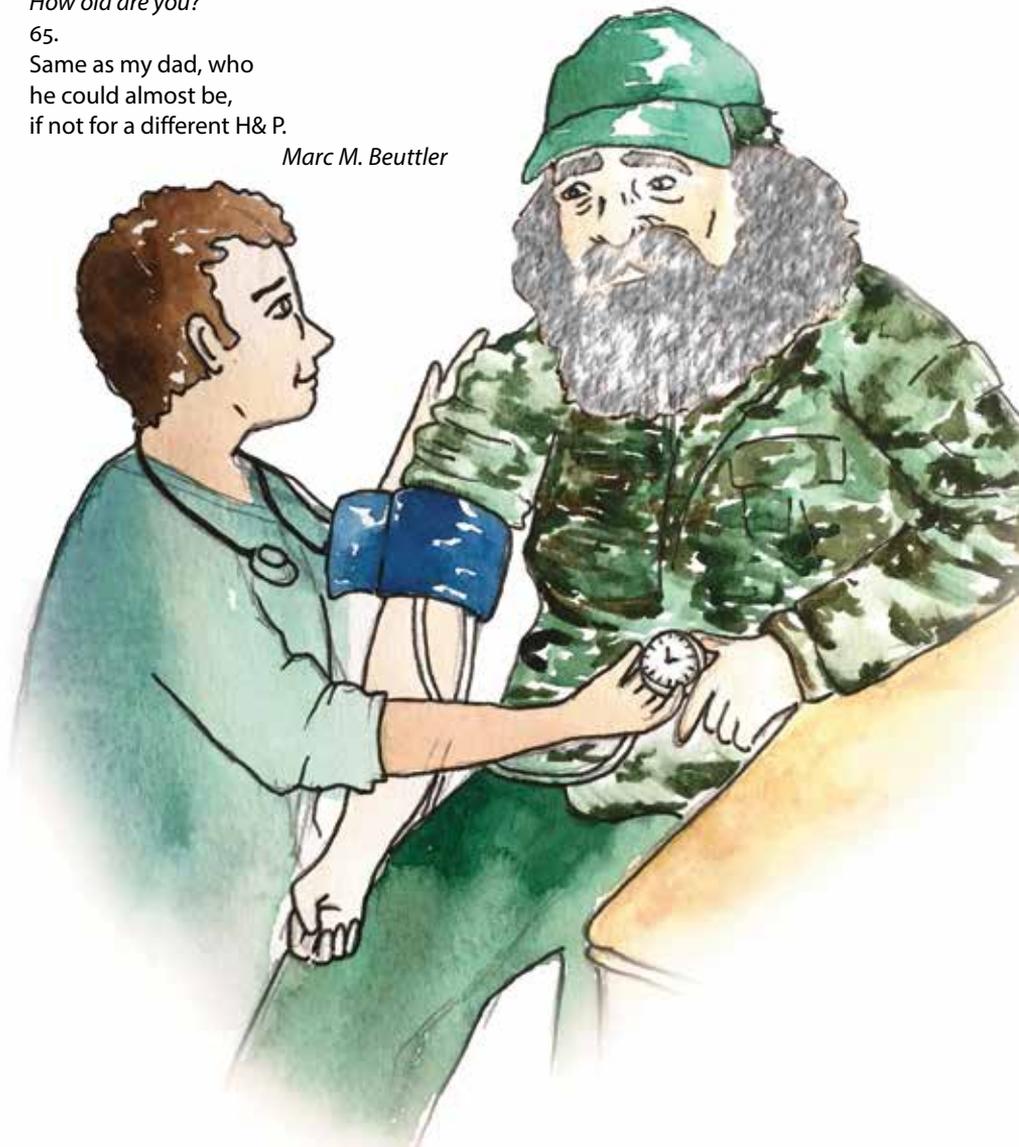
It was good to meet you
I swallow and say.
We'll see you back next Thursday.

He moves for the door,
the one he came in
just 30 minutes before
with his clothes too big, or
himself too thin.
I watch him.

How old are you?

65.
Same as my dad, who
he could almost be,
if not for a different H&P.

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Mr. Beuttler is a third-year medical student at Louisiana State University School of Medicine in New Orleans. He has a Master's degree in bioethics from New York University. His poem won first prize in the 2017 *Pharos* Poetry Competition. Mr. Beuttler's e-mail address is mbeutt@lsuhsc.edu.

Illustration by Laura Aitken