

Mechanical Man

Spread-eagled in full restraints,
Donald Bates glares at me,
a plastic tube in his throat
connecting with a Bennett respirator
whose dials dictate his breathing.

The lump under the skin of his chest,
a Medtronic pacemaker
since his November heart attack,
clicks its seventy beats a minute.

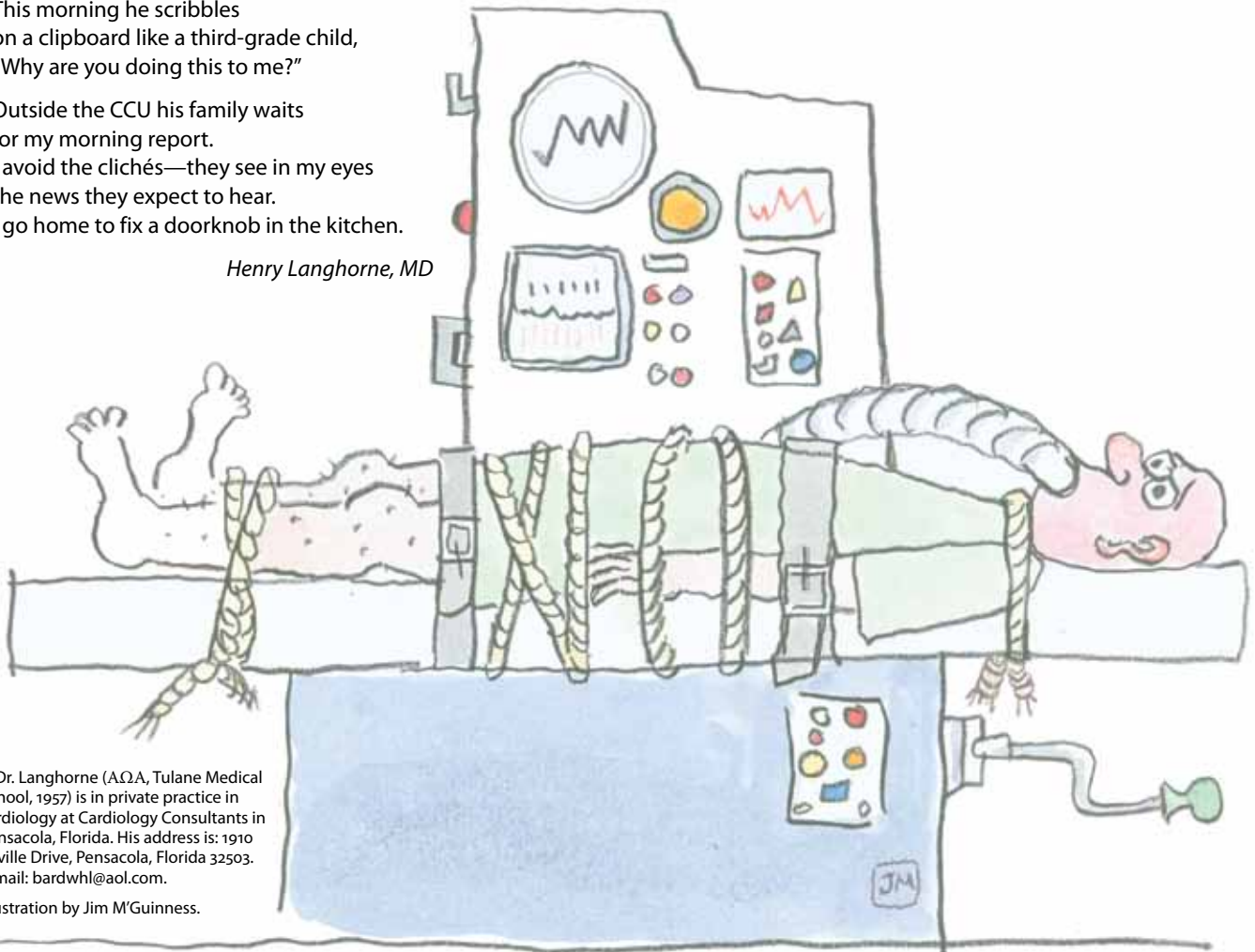
Each night they debate their total control
as he struggles to sleep—
the respirator, heaving and sighing
in a *whish thump* voice
challenging him to live without it,

the electronic genius inside his chest
boasting its control
of pump and flow to every organ
needed to survive.

This morning he scribbles
on a clipboard like a third-grade child,
“Why are you doing this to me?”

Outside the CCU his family waits
for my morning report.
I avoid the clichés—they see in my eyes
the news they expect to hear.
I go home to fix a doorknob in the kitchen.

Henry Langhorne, MD



Dr. Langhorne (A.Ω.A, Tulane Medical School, 1957) is in private practice in cardiology at Cardiology Consultants in Pensacola, Florida. His address is: 1910 Seville Drive, Pensacola, Florida 32503. E-mail: bardwhl@aol.com.

Illustration by Jim M'Guinness.