

From *University*, by John William Grisham (Aloha Lounge Press, 2013):

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9:15 A.M.

Biology 107 was a daunting experience.

For Megan Brunelle, the coursework itself was not unduly burdensome. Yet the classroom's sheer size dwarfed anything she'd envisioned.

Inside the cavernous lecture hall, on the second floor of the Arts and Sciences building, nearly two hundred students sat, diligently transcribing Professor Corbin's remarks on cellular structure. More people in this class alone, Megan guessed, than the entire student body at Academy.

The eldest of five children, Megan had grown up in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where her father owned the Pie-in-the-Sky Pizzeria. From kindergarten through ninth grade she'd attended St. Hippolytus' School, a weather-ravaged concrete structure abutting the church of the same name. Where students wore Navy-blue uniforms, and handbells were used to signal the end of each period. Where kids joked that the perpetually-strapped school could quintuple its income overnight by charging \$91.77 monthly per head instead of per family, and where the student handbook's *in terrorem* provisions included a \$25.00 fine for gum chewing.

(Still, despite its quirks, one grew attached to the place over time. At her ninth-grade graduation ceremony the tears had flowed like waterfalls, with lifelong rivals embracing one another, the strains of *To Sir, With Love* filling the church where most of the class' members had been baptized.)

Her high-school years were spent at the Academy of Our Lady of Lehigh Valley, an all-girl institution known to locals as "the Nunnery." There, her piety and solemn demeanor had been the butt of constant scorn. Her classmates dubbed her the Blessed Virgin, while spreading rumors that she was forced to invent sins at confession. Megan rarely deigned to acknowledge her tormentors, instead finding solace in her own faith.

She could not remember a time when she hadn't wanted to be a nurse. Family tradition held that she'd chosen her life's calling at age four, seeing a child-nurse in an ABC picture book. Yet even now, having entered Met's nursing program, she would wait another two years to begin her

clinical studies. The freshman and sophomore curriculum consisted mainly of anatomy and biology courses, among other science prerequisites.

Sighing softly, she again scolded herself for her lack of patience. And refocused her attention on the front of the room, and Dr. Corbin's observations on the Golgi apparatus.

11:00 P.M.

“So how did you do on Space Invaders today?”

Megan asked this in a perfunctory fashion, straightening the sleeves of Dwight’s Porky Pig nightshirt.

“Got to forty-one thousand. I was on the 25<sup>th</sup> screen.” His upper body leaned forward, their noses nearly touching as he sat on the mattress’s edge. After changing Dwight and getting him into bed, Megan would spend the night in the room, as the schedule ordained.

“Is that good?” The nightshirt in place, she began fixing his hair. The dull earth-brown hair matched his eyes, as did the tortoiseshell glasses she’d earlier removed.

“You could say that.” Dwight smiled chivalrously, having broken a hundred thou once last summer.

The eight-to-eleven shift was the most taxing for Megan. Before putting Dwight to bed, it involved brushing his teeth and taking him to the toilet. The shower room’s narrow stalls made the latter task difficult, and sometimes a suppository was needed to move things along, so to speak. As a future nurse, she was not squeamish about this aspect of her duties...but lifting Dwight in and out of the chair was murder. At 104 pounds—a figure she once exaggerated in order to give blood—Megan was not built for strenuous labor.

You’re all going to get stronger this semester, Glanbury Institute liaison Glenda Turner had told the attendants last week at their orientation session. Though of course, it wouldn’t happen overnight.

Megan began untying Dwight’s shoes. Like all of his shoes, they were designed to accommodate the curl of his toes from loss of muscle tone, and removing them was a chore. One down, one to go, she thought idly when the left sneaker came off.

Dwight’s first week had been a qualified success. Like other freshmen, he’d felt overwhelmed by the volume of reading his courses required. The people he’d encountered were well-meaning but dense, often discussing him with his attendants as if he were far away. Some wondered aloud if he could speak, while others seemingly thought him retarded. (He was in *college*, for Chrissakes...)

“There!” Megan deeply exhaled as the other shoe at last came free. From here, changing him into his pajama bottom would be a snap.

Her task completed, she turned off the lights and knelt piously at the

foot of her bed. At which second Dave Logan's stereo next door began blasting *Highway to Hell*.

Megan remained kneeling until the assault had passed. And after a minute of silence, crossed herself and began saying her prayers.