

Darwin was more masculine than his neuter-sounding name and more mature than seventeen. He had a rugged, yet cultured look to him. He had dressed in slacks, loafers that looked new, and a button-down long-sleeved light blue shirt. Appropriate and attractive, she thought, slightly surprised that he wasn't wearing a tee, jeans, and flipflops. Mother shepherded them into the drawing room with a view of the ocean and left for the kitchen. Father offered the boy beer but he preferred a diet soft drink, and father worked at the back of the room at the wet bar. Helen was alone with the boy, facing him but angled also to the view over the water that was spectacular with the late afternoon sun in a cloudless sky.

"Helen," the boy said, as if reestablishing which of the two sisters she really was. "I've heard so much about you."

Probably untrue, rote, and a cliché, but still nice to say. He seemed

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confident, undaunted by the size of the house or the prominence of her family wealth and status. Her father returned with drinks for all on a tray.

"Father said you were a good student," she said to Darwin.

"The best," her father said. "Tell her what your grades were in Pittsburg," he said.

"Pretty good," Darwin said.

"Straight A's," her father said. "He wants to be a doctor."

Helen smiled. "I can't imagine why."

"What does that mean?" her father asked.

"It's not the best of professions."

"Don't be mean, Helen," her father said. "What's better?"

"Your life is all work," she said to her father.

"But it's satisfying."

"My father was an internist," Darwin said. "My mother a researcher in basic science."

"Are they here?" Helen asked. "You're from Cincinnati, aren't you?"

He shook his head no. "From Pittsburg. They died years ago."

Helen was eager to establish her point and her control of the conversation. "Doctors work mainly on a one-on-one personal level, don't you think? Don't you ever want to improve all of humanity?" she asked. "Like a vaccine, or an indestructible artificial heart?" She wasn't sure why she was challenging this boy. He was smarter and more accomplished than she would have thought if she had taken the time to think about it. But she wanted to demean him a little; in all honesty, she thought he should show her more humility, and more awe at the Malverne family's collections and accomplishments. That was it. He refused to be the least bit overwhelmed by her or the social setting ... even though he was obviously out of his usual realm. Not many from the Midwest had penetrated the Malverne top levels of Hampton society. Shape up, she thought. She did deserve more respect than he was showing. Well, that was her problem, wasn't it? What difference did it really make what this boy thought? He was unworthy of her attention. She'd just let him converse and she'd think about other things for a while. After all, she would never have an interest in him.

"I guess," Darwin said.

Dr. Malverne glared at Helen. "Don't be cantankerous, Helen.

I would agree that creating a new, more efficient computer code to monitor a treatment can make a difference for society, but the impact

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on people's lives is tangential and variable and not easy to define. At least helping one person at a time to a longer life without pain and suffering is a measurable way to make a difference, step by step." She didn't respond; her father's argument had value. But she still felt defensive about her opinions.

"My father cared about patients," Darwin said. "Whether they hurt after treatment. Being sure the test results were explained to them as

soon as possible so they wouldn't worry. That is different than creating an artificial organ that extends life, but you have no way to know how the patient feels or thinks, or whether it really does extend life. It's what you value as your contribution to patients ... to others."

That was a lot more erudite than she had expected.

"The best medicine changes people's lives significantly, and usually for the better," her father said. He was on a roll now, close to pontificating. "And in the communal sense, every individual health advance—cure or therapy—raises the longevity and quality of life of the population and contributes to how to do better next time." Ponderous, pompous, thinking, she thought. And mostly male too! Doctors could be so irritating at times.

"But the caregiver is at personal risk, sometimes," she said, reflexively carrying on. "Why choose a profession that might kill you? You can't do much in your lifetime if you die from a contagious disease. You get pricked with a needle, turn HIV positive, you don't have the same potential to make an impact at any level as staying healthy and developing the super antibiotic or the foolproof vaccine." She still didn't care about this issue in the least, but she again had risen to enjoy the confrontation with her father