

## Running the Scans Gauntlet

By Amy Haddad

Begin the scans ritual with a fast from midnight until dawn. Walk a few blocks to the warren of buildings where the gauntlet commences. Board the elevator to Nuclear Medicine on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, check-in, wait, bare one arm for a wide bore needle. Let them push radioactive juice into the IV line. Lift your arm for a bandage to save the IV for later injections. Run to the next building through a skywalk past a line of people in pink, teal and green scrubs at the Dunkin' Donuts stand. Descend to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor to Radiology, check-in for the CT scan, wait. Others with white ID bracelets and bandaged arms wait too. When your number is called, go to the changing room to strip naked to the waist. Drink two tall bottles of chalky contrast medium. Choose from vanilla, strawberry, or mocha. Mocha is the best. Watch the expectant rise of patient faces when a name is called; if it is not your name, return your eyes to the morning news with no sound, captions, or remote control. Follow a tech to the bathroom to empty your bladder. Offer up your arm with the IV for a blood draw to see if your kidneys can handle the dye. Wait. Drink a large glass of water to hydrate. Follow a tech to the bathroom to empty your bladder again, then on to one of the freezing CT rooms. Let the techs position you on the platform. Place your arms overhead, let them weave the IV line through your fingers to keep it in place. Notice the techs retreat to a room made of lead where they watch you through glass. A disembodied voice commands, "Take a deep breath. Hold it," as the platform slides out of the tube. "Now you can breathe," the voice says. Breathe. Take another deep breath. Hold it. Let them hit you with the contrast dye - a thousand chemical blows that flow through your body and oddly concentrate in your groin. Feel the false, warm humiliation of wetting your pants. Let the sensation pass. Run to the changing room, retrieve your clothes, retrace your steps through the skywalk, past the line of people in scrubs at the Dunkin' Donut stand, up to Nuclear Medicine on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor for the last blow of the day. Beg to have the IV removed before going to the bathroom to empty your bladder. Climb onto the bone scan platform. Lay swaddled and still for two hours as you pass in and out of the scan's invasive gaze. Once released from your bindings, put on your shoes, and walk the few blocks back home.

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**Amy Haddad is a poet, nurse and educator who taught in the health sciences at Creighton University where she is now a Professor Emerita. She is the 2019 recipient of the Annals of Internal Medicine poetry prize for "Families Like This" for the best poem published in the journal. She won 3rd place for the 2019 Kalanithi Writing Awards from Stanford University for her poem "Dark Rides." Her first chapbook, "The Geography of Kitchens" was published by Finishing Line Press in August, 2021. Her first poetry collection, "An Otherwise Healthy Woman," was published by Backwaters Press, an imprint of the University of Nebraska Press in March, 2022.**