



Monsoon exams

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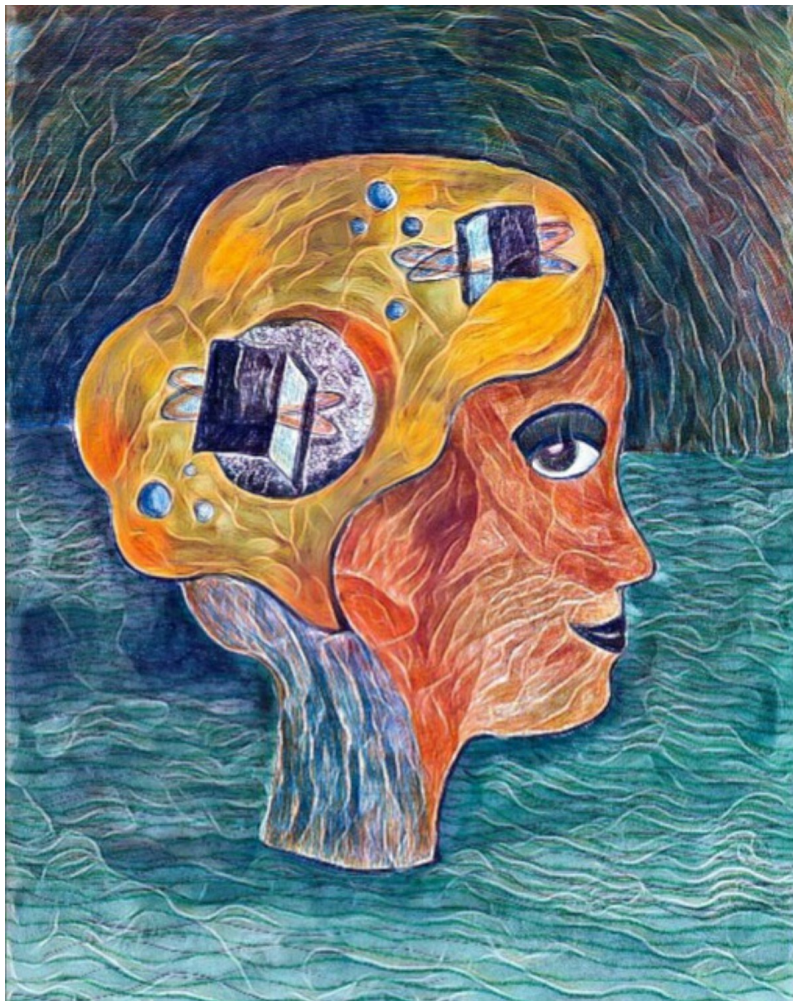
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Why do they schedule exams in August?

In the middle of the rains, the wards are full of people with water- or air-borne diseases. Why did I imagine dengue and malaria were restricted to October or

March? I must have read about it somewhere and now it's tucked away in my memory. Never mind leptospirosis and fungal infections - we can blame Nature for those - we have beds occupied by patients with fractured femurs and

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tibulae. They fell into or because of potholes in roads and not because they were driving fast or anything: what does the government do with the road-taxes we pay? Admin says they pay for our salaries, don't grumble. Noble profession means 'do not give opinion'. Brain crackles: like soldiers, we lose some rights when we become nurses.

My umbrella buckles under the incessant rain and strong breeze. I'm wet. Shivering. Late. I'm revising the notes I made last night. They, the stapled papers I scribbled on, are securely wrapped in a plastic bag and tucked into the pocket of my new synthetic-leather bag.

After the one-hour paper, I will have a viva. Oral examinations scare me. One has to make an impression on the examiners, no? I have a vision of the diagrams and chapters in my book, in my head. But that's not enough. Case studies of patients admitted and discharged will be gone through. I have re-read the medical record files of at least twenty complicated cases - I should be confident, but I invariably go blank when I'm asked a question by a stranger.

Clammy sensation in my abdomen. They say the brain and the intestine are directly linked.

I recall the important points. The neurons in my brain fire. Snippets of information trigger off larger bytes of what I'd read in my textbook. My tutor's voice resonates in my head, soothing but sharp. "Read, understand, practice,

revise," she always says. Obstetrics, ophthalmology, orthopaedics, oncology: even the spellings are difficult for one who has studied in a vernacular language until the class XII Boards. At eighteen, the choice to become a nurse was dependent on the marks/percentage one scored. And the ability of parents to pay fees. 'Donation fees', tuition and term fees, examination fees, transport fees. And then the charges for hostel, food, uniform, linen-washing and cafeteria.

Focus. I must pass. I must pass.

I enter the ward and Matron scolds me for a) stepping in a moment late, b) dishevelled hair, c) missing out on a dose for the neuro-case in bed no 17 - geriatric patient with whiny relative. Re-focus. Never mind the exam, patient-care matters more.

The grey-clouds outside the window and the grey-cells in my skull disallow calm, collective thoughts.

Until I enter the room and adjust the I-V line. Blank eyes follow my hands. Trusting. A flicker of a smile on a wrinkled face. Experienced, but naïve.

Pulse, temperature, B-P normal. I smile back. Exams will come and go, marks will rise and fall.

The clouds have parted.

The hint of a rainbow.

Cheers!

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