water's edge to fish for small aquatic creatures. The fallen leaves drift lazily with the current of the darkened water. I somberly realize that the hour is late. With a sigh I pull myself to my feet, feeling very refreshed and relaxed. To me this "wonderland" is a happy escape from the hustle of the city and a place where I can dream and appreciate nature and God.

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The Operating Room

Chester Livingston

It was solid comfort to sit beside the massive, square window and watch the swirling sheets of rain drench everything this late fall evening. There would have been little pleasure in just watching the rain if it had not brought back memories of the evening during which I was permitted to attend a major surgery at a naval hospital. I had been in the service about nine months, and I was in my advanced training, which is the last training before going overseas. I was put in the medical corps when I enlisted because of my experience in the pharmaceutical field. Although I worked in the laboratories most of the time, I came into personal contact with the doctors. One of these doctors, who was to perform this operation, happened to like me very much. So he asked me the morning before if I would like to watch the operation. I was a little hesitant about accepting the doctor's invitation. I was not sure my fortitude could stand seeing the human body cut on and the results. Once I fainted while a doctor was bandaging my fingers that I had caught in a sander at school. But I knew that I would never have the opportunity again. I had heard before I had enlisted in the navy what a remarkable job the doctors were doing saving the lives of the service personnel. So I convinced myself that I should go.

I arrived at the hospital about seven o'clock that evening, and I was met at the door by three fellow corpsmen. Having walked two blocks in the steady downpour, I looked like an old mop. They took me into the preparation room where they gave me some clean, dry clothes and prepared me for the operation. After changing my clothes I went to the sterilizing room, where I watched the corpsmen removing the instruments, dry and glistering from within the large nickel sterilizers. I felt tense, keyed-up.

I followed the last tray into the operating room. The room was empty save for the "sterile" corpsman, who was arranging
the instruments on a semi-circular table beside him. I waited by the huge, dark windows, and I sensed the night outside and the brilliant light above the table. The corpsman and I talked. The anesthetist entered, and behind him came another corpsman and the patient, restive and strangely frightened — they had not talked to him much. As he was lifted onto the table, I saw his face: he was a very young man. The anesthetist went to his side and in a low voice talked confidently as he applied vaseline and gauze. Then he climbed upon his stool at the head of the table, and slowly dropping the ether, he talked. I could smell the heavy ether fumes, for I was close. The anesthetist slipped his fingers under the patient's jaw and began to "force" the anesthesia. Except for one or two coughs the room was quiet, and all the time I watched the regularly heaving chest. Then the surgeons came in. The head surgeon smiled. I liked him because he was so quiet and smiled like that. They scrubbed, and one by one they were helped into their sterile gowns, starched and creased, and they worked their dry thin gloves over their hands. The operation was then begun; and I could sense nothing except rapid hands, the instruments, a soft-shoed corpsman moving outside the island of light, and one or two sponges on the tile.

This was my greatest experience, I thought. My wet hands grasped one another firmly behind my back. The surgeon explained something to me; I looked at him without saying anything. I shall remember it always. I did not sense the body, only the chest and the rasping breathing. Something slipped, and I did not move as the instruments deftly clicked and closed over the vessel. I saw things within the body — there was very little blood. Finally the wound was closed and sutured. I stepped back. I saw the rain still falling in torrents, but that was secondary to this. The gloves snapped as they were pulled off, and I turned around and saw the corpsmen out in the corridor; they were talking over the operation. Now I felt the heat and the wet gown sticking to my back and arms. The doctors and the corpsmen were talking about something, and someone asked me to help move the patient back onto the cart. He was warm and so relaxed that he seemed helpless. I walked back to the room beside him and helped put him under the heavy brown blankets. When I got back to the dressing room, only one doctor was there. The rest had had to hurry away. He soon left, but the last thing he said was, "I have an appendectomy tomorrow at ten. Come in and see it." I sat down and looked at the pile of crumpled, damp gowns heaped in the corner. "Come in and see it."