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# Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story

By John Pielmeier

Scissors.

Clamp.

-O.R.

-Dr. Rogers for Dr. Carson.

Doctor?

-Yes?

-Ben, it's Mark.

I need to see you up in my office.

A special-needs case just came in.

Okay. Soon as I'm done.

They were born by cesarean  
and, against all odds, they're still alive.

Their physician from West Germany  
called me this morning.

Occipital cranopagus twins  
have never both survived a separation.

Yeah. He knows that.

If they're not separated...

they'll spend the rest of their lives in bed,  
on their backs.

The hospital wants me  
to fly to Germany and examine them.

Ben, are you gonna do this?

Nobody's ever done it.

In situations like this, one baby always dies.

Welcome to Germany.

We've been anxiously awaiting  
your arrival, Dr. Carson.

Allow me to introduce

Peter and Augusta Rausch.

Thank you for coming.

-How do you do, Doctor?

-My pleasure.

And this is Johann and Stefan.

I wanted to kill myself  
when I learned the truth,  
but I realized I would be killing  
And then, as soon as I saw them,  
my heart melted.

Please don't ask us to choose between them.

Well, they don't appear to be sharing  
any organs, which is good.

Though there are parts of the brain,  
such as the vision center,

that aren't completely separated.

-We won't know until we get on there.

-How soon can that be?

Well, first we have to solve the problem of exsanguinations.

-Exsan...

-Bleeding to death.

It's the reason why cranial separations have never succeeded.

You see, babes have very little blood, and unless I can figure out a way to keep them from bleeding out, I can't risk performing this operation. I'll do it.

Good.

Thank you. I'll notify the doctor in Germany.

We'll schedule the operation for a month from now?

Make it 2. Make it 4.

Still haven't figured out how to save them both, huh?

I'm working on it.

Number 12, 14. Number 13, 27.

Number 12, 14. Number 13, 27.

Number 15, 33.

All right, class,

hand your test back to your neighbor.

All right, how many did you get right?

Kathy?

-25.

-That's excellent, Kathy.

-Mark?

-30.

Good for you, Mark. You got them all right.

Benjamin?

Benjamin, how many did you get right?

-None.

-Nine?

Why, Benjamin, that's wonderful.

I'm so proud of you.

Not nine, Mss Williamson. He got none.

You'd think he'd get at least one right.

He got one right last time, 'cause he was trying to put down the wrong answer.

Hey, Carson, we know  
you're the dumbest kid in the class,  
but did you hear what they said on Cronkite  
last night on the news?  
You're the dumbest kid in the world.  
He hit him! He hit him!  
Bennie, how could this have been  
an accident?  
Well, it was almost an accident.  
Mom, I never would have hit him  
if I remembered I had the lock in my hand.  
The boy had 5 stitches,  
and his parents are very upset.  
I'm not sure how to discipline your son,  
Mrs. Carson.  
I'll handle it.  
I'm also very concerned about his grades.  
Have you seen his latest report card?  
So, what happened? You weren't getting  
grades like that in Boston.  
Boston was easier.  
They didn't ask us to do much.  
Well, I ain't asking you, either,  
I'm telling you.  
You weren't meant to be a failure, Bennie.  
-And you can control your temper.  
-He called me a dummy...  
And you can bring your grades up, too.  
I know you can.  
-I'm dumb, Mother.  
-No, you ain't.  
You're a smart boy.  
Listen to me. Listen to me.  
You just ain't using that smartness.  
Now, if you keep getting grades like that,  
you're gonna spend the rest of your life  
mopping floors in a factory.  
And that ain't the life I want for you.  
That ain't the life God wants for you, either.  
Yes, Mother.  
I'm gonna have to have a talk with him  
about you and your brother, Curtis.  
No, no. He invited us  
to the game tonight, remember?

Why don't you and I go?  
And get me Candlestick Park, please.  
Hey, Mother. You're home early.  
They didn't need me  
as long as they sad they would.  
You finish your homework?  
Most of it.  
Bennie, you're gonna run your eyes  
sitting so close to this TV.  
-You do your homework?  
-I need help.  
-Curtis, help your brother.  
-I gotta finish my math.  
Mother, I need help.  
-What you need help with?  
-This history. I don't really understand it.  
-Well, what don't you understand?  
-Like, all the words.  
Could you read this for me?  
I need new reading glasses.  
Why don't you tell me what it's about?  
It's about Thomas Jefferson  
and the Declaration of Independence.  
-What is this word?  
-Sound it out.  
'self... Self...  
'And it...'  
-Self...  
-Look at me.  
Can you tell me what them  
cereal boxes is on the shelf?  
Sure.  
-I mean, can you read them?  
-Not this far. Can you?  
Looks like I ain't the only one around here  
gonna be needing glasses.  
Tina, Sarah, Kathy, Bennie.  
Congratulations. You're doing much better.  
Yes!  
Well, it's an improvement, all right.  
And I'm proud of you for not getting an F.  
You're a smart boy.  
-But you both can do better.  
-I'm doing the best I can, Mother.

-How? I don't know how.  
-Well, I don't know how.  
We're just gonna have to use  
our imagination.  
I don't got one.  
Of course you do.  
everybody got an imagination.  
-Not me.  
-Of course you do.  
Listen to me. If I say,  
'Once upon a time,  
there was a little blue mouse,'  
don't you see a little blue mouse?  
-No.  
-Bennie.  
-Mother, my brain's too dumb.  
-Boy, your brain ain't dumb.  
It is, Mom.  
You got all the world in here.  
You just got to see beyond  
what you can see.  
-What is this, a race of some kind?  
-Betty, slow down.  
You act as though this were your last meal.  
We've got to write your  
contest essay tonight, Father.  
Oh, well, in that case,  
maybe you had better hurry.  
-Don't choke.  
-I'll get it.  
I never saw it to fail.  
Every time we sit down to eat,  
the phone rings.  
I know how to stop it, Daddy.  
When the phone bill comes, don't pay it.  
-Not a bad idea.  
-That was Joe Philips, Dad.  
He wants me to come up  
to his uncle's farm this weekend.  
-Isn't that great?  
-But how are you gonna get there?  
Joe's got a license. We could drive.  
The last time he took a trip,  
he wrecked his dad's car.

Whose car is he figuring on wrecking  
this time?

Yours.

-He thought...

-I know what he thought.

But I wouldn't trust Joe Philips  
with a pogo stick.

Please, Dad. I'll be careful.

How can you be careful if he's driving?

You never let me do anything.

I'm not gonna let you do this.

-You'd think I was a juvenile or something.

-When you act this way, you are.

-Now eat your dinner.

-I'm not hungry.

Then excuse yourself and leave the table.

Mother, come on, we'll be late for church.

You all go on ahead without me, honey.

Mama's having one of her days.

All right.

I'm reminded of the story

of the missionary doctor and his wife  
who were surprised by bandits.

You see, these thieves were terrible men.

Bloodthirsty. Vicious.

They not only robbed their victims,  
they slit their throats and laughed  
as they watched them de.

You all don't hear me.

This poor doctor and his wife  
ran for their lives

as the thieves chased them  
across rocky, barren land.

These missionaries' feet  
were cut open by sharp stones.

Their clothes were torn by brambles,  
and, finally, they came upon a great fortress,  
but the Bandit King was right behind them.

The doctor ran up to the front door  
of the fortress and tried to open it.

But it was locked.

If only someone would let them in.

No one was there.

And the doctor and his wife hid, but the

Bandit King saw them and drew his sword.  
There appeared to be nothing  
that could save God's good people.  
The Bandit King was after me,  
and so I hid under some straw,  
and a blue mouse came out  
and scared his horse.  
And I got away. I saw it in my brain.  
That's good.  
That's your imagination working.  
But it was real, it was really real.  
-Did I say it wasn't real?  
-It's not real.  
-That's why it's called imagination, dummy.  
-Shut up.  
Watch your mouth, Curtis.  
Mother, I want to be a doctor.  
A missionary doctor, just like the one  
Pastor Ford told us about.  
You can be anything you want to be  
in this life,  
as long as you're willing to work at it.  
That goes for you, too, Curtis.  
God will not abandon you.  
excuse me.  
I need to talk to someone.  
I have a darkness I can't control.  
Come with me, ma'am.  
Let's see if we can help you. All right?  
I've spent my childhood in foster care.  
When my husband, Mr. Carson, married me,  
he was my ticket out of there.  
-How old were you?  
-13.  
We were happy.  
We had a lovely home, 2 beautiful boys.  
Then what?  
I don't like to talk about it.  
He had another wife and kids.  
When I found out, my life fell apart.  
When was this, Mrs. Carson?  
But I couldn't leave my husband  
'cause my boys needed their daddy  
and I didn't know



how I'd make it on my own.

-Are you still together?

-No.

I found out he was dealing drugs,  
so me and the boys moved to Boston.

-I've got a sister there.

-Why'd you come back to Detroit?

I got the house in the divorce, and I kept it.

I rent it out for income,

but I've been saving money in a cookie jar,

and me and my boys

are gonna move back in.

-How do you support yourself?

-I clean houses, and I baby-sit.

That's about all I can do.

Nobody knows this.

I'm so dumb, I can't even read.

And I fear my boys

are gonna turn out the same way.

And nothing's gonna work out.

I try to fight these feelings.

I don't show them to Bennie and Curtis.

But, lately, I can't stop them.

I even think about killing myself.

Mrs. Carson, what would you say

to checking yourself in with us?

-No.

-Just for a little while.

-I can't afford to do anything like...

-Don't think about the money.

We'll find the money.

Boys, I'm gonna be going away

for a little while.

What? What do you mean?

-Where?

-Just for a few weeks.

I'm going back to Boston

to see your aunt Jean Avery.

-Can't we come with you?

-No.

You got school. You got homework.

-So, you're just gonna leave us alone?

-Of course not.

Sister Scott is gonna come

and stay with you.

In the meantime,

I want you boys to do me a favor.

I want you both to learn

your times tables while I'm gone.

-What?

-No way!

You can do it.

Do you know how many there are?

-That could take a year.

-Won't take my boys a year. You're smart.

Not that smart. Nobody can memorize them.

I did, and I just went to the third grade.

-But it's hard work.

-Well,

hard work ain't never hurt nobody.

Besides, you ain't going outside to play  
till you learn them tables.

Wait. Mother, please, no.

Come on, that's not far.

Come on, Mother.

You're the meanest mom in the world.

-5 times 4.

-30.

-No.

-31?

This isn't a guessing game, Bennie.

Bennie, listen to your brother.

-Here you are, Mrs. Philiman.

-Thank you.

-Mildred?

-No.

-Kathy?

-22.

-Mark?

-25 out of 25.

excellent.

Benjamin?

-Benjamin?

-I didn't cheat.

I didn't say you did. What's your score?

Sister Scott! Sister Scott!

I got an A!

I got an A.

Sister Scott! Sister Scott!  
I got... Mother!  
-I missed you. I missed you.  
-I missed you, too.  
I know all my times tables.  
I got them all right, except for one.  
Let me see. I knew you could do it.  
I knew you could do it.  
Professor Burket,  
I'm Mrs. Carson, your new cleaning woman.  
-Mrs. Carson.  
-Sir?  
-The kitchen floor.  
-What about it?  
It sparkles.  
Well, your last cleaning lady  
didn't do a very good job.  
What I do, I do the best I can.  
The last cleaning lady was me.  
My late wife was very sick.  
I took care of her and not much else.  
-I'm sorry.  
-Thank you.  
Sr.  
-Did you read all these books?  
-Most of them. Why?  
Just curious.  
Take the rest of your men off the post.  
They can stay with Corporal Dolan's family  
in Salt Lake till Barker's gone.  
-Yes, sir.  
-Come to think of it,  
-you better stay there yourself.  
-Yes, sir.  
-Hey, why'd you do that for?  
-What's going on? I was watching that.  
You boys watch too much television.  
-Not that much.  
-No more than everybody else.  
Don't worry about everybody else.  
This whole world is full of everybody else.  
From now on, you're gonna pick 3,  
no, 2 pre-selected programs per week.  
-A week?

-You're crazy. I mean, this is crazy.  
And that's after you finish your homework.  
What are we gonna do  
with all our free time?  
I'm glad you asked. You're gonna go  
to the library and pick out 2 books,  
and, at the end of the week,  
you're gonna hand me a written report  
about what you read.  
-2 books a week?  
-I don't believe what you're saying.  
-I can't even read one.  
-We cannot possibly survive  
-without television.  
-Well, you're gonna start now.  
Why you waste all that time  
watching the TV?  
If you used that time to develop  
your God-given gifts,  
it wouldn't be long before  
folks was watching you on TV.  
-Man, there's a lot of books in here.  
-Shut up, boy. It's a library.  
'Hearing the great roar made the young man  
wonder if he had chosen wisely.  
'Maybe it was a trick.  
'Was there really a tiger,  
or just a recording of a tiger's roar?  
'Maybe there was a tiger  
behind the other door,  
'and he'd de like  
all the other princes before him.'  
That's good, Bennie. That's real good.  
Mother, what's this word?  
I need to get new reading glasses.  
Sound it out.  
Ag... Ag...  
Agriculture. A-G-R-I-C-U-L-T-U-R-E.  
-Agriculture.  
-excellent, Benjamin.  
Kathy. 'Combine.'  
Combine. C-O-M-B-I-N-E. Combine.  
For a 20-point bonus, here's your toss-up.  
You know, several limericks begin,

''there was a young lady from Perth. ''

Limerick is in Ireland.

For 10 points, where is Perth?

Australia.

Wow. How could they know so much?

-Right, for 10 points.

-I don't know.

And, finally, for 10 points,

what poet describes...

Bennie, come on, we're gonna be late.

excuse me.

Do you have any books on rocks?

Okay, class,

what about this one?

Does anybody know what this is?

Anybody?

Yes, Benjamin,

can you identify this rock?

-It's obsidiane.

-Obsidian. That's right.

Do you know how it was made?

Well, it was formed after a volcanic eruption,

by the supercooling of the lava

when it hits the water.

The volcano erupts,

and the lava flows down red hot.

So, when it hits the water,

the elements coalesce,

and since that water is cold,

the air is forced out,

and the surface glazes over,

and the lava becomes hard,

and that makes obsidiane.

I mean obsidian, sorry.

May I see you after class?

-What happened?

-I'm sorry.

What are you sorry for?

Someone unlocked the door.

Look at this.

You know what that is?

That's a whole other world, Benjamin.

You just stepped into a whole other world.

Magnitude. M-A-G-N-I-T-U-D-E. Magnitude.

Mark. ''Perpetuate.''

Perpetuate.

''the feast

''of unleavened...

''the un...''

-Unleavened.

-Unleavened.

Yeah.

B, come on. I gotta go.

Bennie, are you in there?

What potion had a sort of mixed flavor  
of cherry tart, custard, pineapple...

Alice In Wonderland.

The potion

which Alice in Wonderland drank,  
which made her grow into various sizes.

Tell me, when Cain settled down  
east of Eden, in what land did he live?

-In the land of Nod!

-In the land of Nod.

Right. For 10 points.

How many tales in The Canterbury Tales?

-24.

-Right.

coming up. Here's your toss-up.

A leading major-league baseball player  
and the layer of the earth between...

Mantle. Mickey Mantle.

Right. Between the crust and the core...

Wow, you were there before

I had the question.

Okay. Rutgers, for 20 points.

-''saunter.''

-Saunter.

S-A-U-N-T-E-R. Saunter.

-''Lacquer.''

-Lacquer.

L-A-C-K-E-R. Lacquer.

Sorry, Cliff.

Benjamin, if you spell it correctly, you win.

Lacquer.

L-A-C-Q-U-E-R. Lacquer.

-That is correct.

-Yes! Yes!

The certificate for the student  
with the highest academic achievement  
in the 8th grade  
goes to Benjamin Carson.  
Before Benjamin takes his seat,  
I have a few words I want to say.  
Benjamin is a boy of color.  
He has no father in his life.  
He comes to us  
with tremendous disadvantages.  
There's no reason  
you shouldn't have done better than him.  
What's wrong with you kids?  
You're not trying hard enough.  
You should be ashamed.  
The certificate for outstanding  
citizenship goes to Alexia Courtney.  
Right, for 10 points.  
All right, here's a 20-point bonus, Brandeis.  
Identify the composer.  
-Vivaldi.  
-That's right, for 10 points.  
This picture by Monet would be classified  
as French Impressionism.  
For 10 points, how is this picture classified?  
-Primitive American.  
-That's right.  
Turn off that thing!  
-I'll turn it down.  
-No, I like it. Turn it up.  
Won't Mrs. Graham  
knock on the ceiling again?  
Let her knock. We're moving.  
We're moving?  
That speech your 8th-grade teacher gave  
ticked me off, so I went to the bank.  
I've finally saved up enough money  
to take back that house  
we've been renting out.  
So, starting next fall, you're going  
to a school that appreciates you.  
Hey, Carl, you heard what Goodwill did  
with all the clothes so old and so ugly  
-even the winos didn't want them?

-What?

They gave them to New Blood over there.

Do we have any money left?

-What do you mean?

-I need clothes for school.

-You got clothes for school.

-Old clothes.

-Good clothes.

-Not good enough for Hunter High.

I've seen the clothes them kids wear.

They're cheap.

No, they're not.

I didn't say they weren't expensive.

I said they're cheap.

Most folks that wear cheap clothes  
on the outside are dead on the inside.

The folks I work for,  
they buy clothes that last.

That's what I try to get you.

Take Professor Burket. I wash his clothes  
every week, and they always...

Bennie, don't you be slamming around here,  
and don't you walk away  
when I'm talking to you!

Hey, Carl, they should use Carson's shirt  
in class as a chemistry lesson.

-A chemistry lesson?

-Yeah,

'cause it smelled so bad it killed all  
the bugs that was breeding inside of it.

They was breeding

because your mama wore it.

I think you're confusing that  
with your mama.

Her clothes are so raggedy,  
even the mummy turned them down.

Your mama's so old,  
she's the mummy's mama.

Your mama's so old,  
your daddy's a dinosaur.

Your mama's so old,  
her birth certificate says ''expired'' on it.

-Man, where we going?

-Come on.



You got the money?  
-I need clothes for school.  
-You got clothes for school.  
Not good enough for Hunter High.  
Come on.  
Jerome.  
This is my man.  
Give him the money.  
Okay.  
-Morning.  
-Morning.  
Why aren't you wearing the pants I got you?  
Don't they fit?  
I don't know. I didn't try them on.  
-Why not?  
-They're the wrong kind.  
What you mean, they're the wrong kind?  
I paid good money for them pants.  
That's too bad.  
You can take them back if you want.  
I can't take them back.  
I bought them on special.  
Well, that's too bad,  
but I'm not gonna wear them.  
I'm fixing this window myself, Bennie,  
so I'd have money to get you them pants.  
That's your problem.  
Look, throw them away!  
I'm not gonna wear them!  
You can't have  
everything in life you want, Bennie.  
-I can! I will!  
-Not as long as you keep going  
down this path.  
Talking smart and acting stupid!  
-Well, if I didn't know any better...  
-Shut up! Shut up!  
-All you do is preach at me! Shut up!  
-Bennie!  
-What are you, crazy?  
-Get off! Get off!  
I said stop it! All right, all right!  
You can buy whatever you want.  
You pay the balls,

you pay the balls next month.  
I'll bring home every dime  
I make in cash and hand it to you.  
-What you got left, you keep for yourself.  
-Now you're talking.  
Hey, B.  
-What's this crap?  
-It's not crap, all right.  
Shut up.  
-You like this? You call this music?  
-It's better than what you like.  
Hey, man, quit proving how stupid you are.  
You don't have to act so ignorant!  
-Go to hell, man.  
-What'd you say to me?  
Get off me!  
Bennie, what did you do?  
Joe.  
Get a teacher or something.  
Lord. Lord, you have to  
take this temper away from me.  
Please. Please. Just take it.  
The protesters are here in Central Park,  
And there has been a significant showing...  
It is, in my opinion, the most amazing organ  
the human body holds.  
By stimulating one section of the brain  
of an 85-year-old,  
you can bring back, verbatim, memories of  
a newspaper article read 60 years before.  
Consider your own brains.  
They've absorbed and digested  
enough information to bring you here,  
which is no small achievement.  
Your dreams are all possible  
because of 3 pounds of gray matter.  
We can describe it physically,  
but that won't give a clue  
as to how it does what it does.  
Which is why I've devoted my life,  
as a surgeon, to probing its mysteries.  
How did you do that?  
A lot of time away from home,  
my wife would tell you.

But dedication and intelligence  
are the easy part.

You also need an incredible  
hand-eye coordination, which is a gift.  
A brain surgeon? My goodness.

Well, I always sad you can do  
-anything anybody else can do, Bennie.

-Anything anybody else can do, Bennie.

-Only you can do it better.

-Only you can do it better.

Don't laugh at me, it's true.

-Your grades are good?

-They're fine.

Now, tell me, how's that girlfriend of yours?

-My mother says hi.

-I can't wait to meet her.

You think she's coming  
for Parents Weekend?

Not if I'm not here.

What? What are you talking about?

Candy, you're a triple major.

I'm having trouble with just one.

-Trouble?

-Yale's too much for me.

What am I doing here, anyway?

You got a scholarship.

You were third in your class.

Yeah, and everybody else here  
graduated first.

My grades are lousy, especially chemistry.

If I don't pass this final exam,

I lose my scholarship,

which means I can't be a doctor,

-which is the only thing...

-Slow down.

What are you good at?

What are you good at? When it comes  
to studying, what works best for you?

I don't know.

Reading. I'm good at reading.

If all I ever did was read, I'd be just fine.

Instead, I got to sit through  
all these boring lectures

-8 hours a day...

-Well, skip the lectures.  
The professors don't care.  
-That'll only make things worse.  
-They can't be any worse than they are now.  
Hey, what do I know? Maybe I'm just...  
No, no, no. No, you're right.  
-Thank you.  
-You're welcome.  
-Joseph Lister.  
-Pioneered the compound microscope,  
and made surgeons wear clean gloves  
and swab wounds with carbolic acid.  
Newton's 2nd law.  
An applied force on an object  
equals the time change of rate  
of its momentum.  
-The formula for methane.  
-No.  
-Propane.  
-No.  
Finish them.  
You don't need the book.  
You got the book inside you.  
Well, congratulations, Mr. Carson.  
You have arrived with seconds to spare.  
everyone, open your test booklets.  
And begin.  
Maybe we should ask. Right?  
See you guys later.  
-What? What? What?  
-I got an A.  
Now, you know,  
now that I'm gonna be a neurosurgeon,  
you shouldn't marry me  
'cause I probably won't be home much.  
Is that a promise?  
Johns Hopkins accepts only 2 students  
a year for neurosurgery residency.  
This year, we have 1 25 applicants.  
So, why we should take you?  
I have good grades  
and excellent recommendations.  
As do all of our applicants.  
Johns Hopkins is my first choice.

It's my only choice.  
You have confidence.  
Yes, that's good in a neurosurgeon.  
But tell me something,  
why did you decide  
to become a brain doctor?  
The brain...  
It's a miracle.  
Do you believe in miracles?  
Not a lot of doctors do.  
There's not a lot of faith among physicians.  
I mean, we study reports,  
we cut open bodes,  
it's all very tangible, sold.  
But the fact is, there's still so many things  
we just can't explain.  
I believe we're all capable of  
performing miracles, up here.  
I believe we're all blessed  
with astonishing gifts and skills.  
Look at Handel.  
I mean, how can he compose something  
like the Messiah in only 4 weeks?  
This is the channel,  
the source, the inspiration  
for unbelievable accomplishments.  
-You like classical music?  
-I love it.  
I do, too.  
I think we'll get on quite well together.  
Nursing supervisor to second floor, please.  
Nursing supervisor to second floor, please.  
Good morning.  
Good morning.  
You're late. Mr. Schwartz in 301  
needs to be taken to surgery now.  
No, I'm not an orderly. I'm the new intern.  
Report to Dr. Farmington for rounds.  
Dr. Carl, please call 2-4-8-8.  
This young man has a disease  
called von Hippel-Lindau.  
It's very rare and causes multiple tumors  
throughout the brain.  
He has his second surgery tomorrow,

and it will most likely cripple him.  
Carson, draw some blood.  
Doctor, according to his charts,  
he may be anemic.  
-I don't think...  
-Well, I don't care what you think.  
You do as I say.  
Don't think you're special, Carson,  
simply 'cause there's no one like you  
in this department.  
If you don't change your attitude,  
I'll get you kicked out of neurosurgery  
faster than you can say, ''Yassuh.''  
-Are you fished?  
-Yes.  
Fine.  
Hey, buddy. Let's get you going here.  
How was it?  
Bennie?  
Ben?  
Good morning.  
Good morning, Nurse Smith.  
He was ht with a baseball bat.  
He's deteriorating rapidly.  
Please tell him that all the neurosurgeons  
at Hopkins are away at a conference.  
I am a resident. It is illegal for me to operate  
without an attending physician present.  
I can't reach Dr. Farmington,  
and I can't reach Dr. Udvarhelyi.  
If someone doesn't operate  
on this man soon, he will de.  
Go for it.  
I'm not qualified to do a lobectomy.  
Thy will be done, Lord. Amen.  
Scalpel.  
Foley.  
Bipolar.  
Cottonoids, please.  
Radiology, please call to page.  
Dr. Udvarhelyi wants to see you  
in his office ASAP.  
You operated on this man  
without permission, without supervision.

You put this hospital  
in serious legal jeopardy.  
Had this man died,  
your career would have been over.  
You did very well, Dr. Carson.  
I congratulate you  
on taking the proper action,  
in spite of its possible consequences.  
Okay, come on, move, move. She's seizing.  
-I want you to see it, too.  
-Okay.  
Okay, okay.  
They'll give you something  
to make you better.  
-I don't have...  
-Okay, all right.  
-It's getting worse, Doctor.  
-Just relax, relax.  
Ben, have a look at this.  
The patent's a 4-year-old  
by the name of Cynthia Gonzalez.  
She's been having seizures  
since she was 18 months.  
She now has about 100 a day.  
They only affect her right side,  
but they're so frequent,  
she's forgetting how to walk, talk, eat, learn.  
She's been diagnosed with Rasmussen's.  
Her parents have been told  
there's nothing to be done.  
It's the only time she's seizure-free.  
When she's awake,  
she lives between convulsions.  
She's been on 35 different medications  
over the years.  
Sometimes they're so strong,  
she doesn't recognize me.  
She's beautiful.  
One doctor called her  
a mentality-retarded epileptic.  
Well, I'm here to tell you that she's not.  
Do you really think you can help?  
I can try.  
The left side of Cynthia's brain

is like a troubled kid on a playground  
beating up on her own twin.

Now, you control that kid,  
and the playground's at peace.

How do we do that?

There's an operation  
called a hemispherectomy.

It involves removing  
the seizure-prone part of the brain.

-What?

-How will she be able to live or survive

-with half a brain?

-It's not as bad as it sounds.

We don't know why, but a child's brain  
has a remarkable ability to recover.

It's as if the brain cells haven't decided  
what they want to be when they grow up.

They take on the functions  
of the diseased cells

and then eventually

restore the neurological function.

-You think there's a chance this will work?

-Yes. I do.

But it is a gamble.

There's no way around that.

If Cynthia survives,

she could be paralyzed on her right side.

The left side of the brain  
controls the speech area.

She may lose her ability to speak.

Have you done

one of these operations yourself?

No. I have not.

How you feeling?

Wishing it were 4 months from now.

Why? So we can get less sleep  
than we do now?

Good night.

Your mother called today.

She sad the movers are coming in a week.

She's so excited.

Me, too.

So, are you ready?

For my mother or 2 more babes?



For tomorrow.  
Scalpel.  
We are now exposing the skull.  
Put more pressure on the edge, please.  
Drill.  
Please change to a footplate.  
Saw.  
Penfield 3.  
Removing the skull to access the dura.  
Holding skull flap for reconstruction.  
We need to reduce the swelling.  
Inserting to relieve fluid pressure.  
I've removed the entire  
left hemisphere of the brain.  
Cynthia, can you hear me?  
Can you open your eyes, sweetheart?  
We're all done.  
Let's see those pretty eyes, sweetheart.  
Come on.  
It's time to wake up, Cynthia.  
Let's see those pretty eyes, sweetheart.  
Can you open your eyes?  
Let's see those pretty eyes.  
We're all done now.  
I don't know why she's not waking up, Ben.  
How is she?  
It took twice as long as we thought.  
She lost 9 pints of blood,  
which is double her normal volume.  
But she came through just fine.  
Though it might be a while before we know  
if she can move or speak.  
Mommy?  
-Daddy?  
-Oh, my God.  
I love you.  
Thank you.  
Baby.  
She talks, she hears,  
she thinks, she responds.  
There are no additional signs of weakness.  
-Dr. Carson...  
-Dr. Carson, how is this possible?  
The brain's a miraculous organ.

How long have you been practicing?  
I completed my residency 3 years ago,  
but I haven't yet taken my oral exams.  
Are there any more seizures, Doctor?  
So far, the seizures have subsided.  
Grandma!  
-Grandma!  
-Grandma! Grandma!  
Baby.  
-Your daddy...  
-Hey.  
You're gonna love it here.  
Ben.  
Ben. Honey, wake up. Wake up.  
I gotta go to the hospital.  
I gotta go to the hospital.  
Oh, no.  
Get ready to crossmatch  
with 2 units of blood.  
-Yes, Doctor.  
-Ben...  
It's best you wait out here, Dr. Carson.  
How do you feel?  
Do you feel any contractions?  
Okay, ma'am,  
this might feel tight around your arm  
when we take your blood pressure.  
Okay, hook up the fetal monitor.  
Oxygen to help you breathe.  
Here you go, Mrs. Carson.  
Breathing okay?  
Just take it slow. You're doing fine.  
Your wife will be fine, Dr. Carson.  
She'll be just fine.  
But I'm sorry to say we lost the babes.  
I'm so sorry.  
There was nothing I could do.  
There was nothing I could do.  
What time is it?  
-Shouldn't you be on duty?  
-I am.  
I mean neurosurgery.  
-Your patents need you.  
-You need me.

I have you. Go to work.

-Down this hall.

-Okay. Thank you.

Doctor, where have you been?

You're late. What happened?

-I've been calling your house all morning.

-I'll make up for it.

That's...

Good girl. Hey.

She's a good girl. Yes, you are.

She's a big girl.

Okay. I love both of those hands.

That's very good. Very nice.

How are you feeling?

How are you feeling now?

Help me, Lord.

Ben, I've just been told you want  
to hold off the operation on the twins.

The sooner we operate,  
the better the chances for recovery.

I know, I know, but they'll bleed out.

I can't figure out a way around that.

Look, you're the best pediatric neurosurgeon  
in the world.

-You may think I'm the best.

-That's why they chose you.

If you can't find a solution, no one can.

Just like old times, huh?

You and me in the kitchen,  
doing dishes after dinner.

except in Detroit,  
we didn't have a dishwasher.

Yes, we did. You're looking at her.

So proud of my boys.

Curtis, an engineer, you, a doctor.

You're still thinking  
about them Siamese twins, aren't you?

Sometimes I feel like...

I don't know, Mother.

Like a faucet that's all dried up.

I felt that way plenty of times.

The thing is,  
you got to find out what's blocking it  
and move that thing out the way.

I don't know what's blocking it.

Sure you do.

You may not be able to bring back  
your babes by saving these,  
but, even if you fail,  
at least you did something.

Bennie.

You can do this. Sure you can.

You got all the world in here.

You just gotta see beyond  
what you can see.

Yes. Come on.

-Yeah.

-Yeah.

-Hello?

-Mark, we're a go.

First off, we'll need to have the room wired  
with emergency power,  
in case there's an electrical failure.

Then we'll need 2 of everything,  
enough people on each team  
to cover both babies.

We'll need an anesthesiology team,  
a team of cardiac surgeons,  
a team of plastic surgeons,  
a team of neurosurgeons.

And we'll need to figure out how to fit  
all 50 of us into one operating room.

Each team must rehearse  
their respective procedures step-by-step,  
and each team must develop scenarios  
for the worst possible things  
that could happen.

If one baby des,  
we need to separate him as fast as possible  
and give all shared tissue  
to the surviving twin.

Cardiothoracic will start their procedures

**at 6.:**

Hello, again, Peter, Augusta.

Welcome to Johns Hopkins.

Your sons' blood vessels  
are like tiny faucets

with only so much blood to lose.  
Now, if we can turn off the faucets,  
we can keep your sons from bleeding.  
The only way to do this  
is to stop their hearts.  
-Stop their...  
-It's not a new procedure.  
It's been used by cardiovascular surgeons  
for years.  
It's just never been applied  
in a situation like this.  
Now, we can do it in infants for an hour  
without causing brain damage.  
-But that hour is critical.  
-Why? What happens in that hour?  
We'll stop their hearts,  
then spend that hour  
reconstructing all the blood vessels  
so that when their hearts start again,  
there won't be  
any life-threatening loss of blood.  
All in one hour?  
Which is why  
we've rehearsed and rehearsed,  
and why we need to pray.  
-You pray, Doctor?  
-very day.  
I'm removing the pericardium  
to be used later as vascular tissue.  
Cardo is done. All yours, Ben.  
My light, please.  
Scalpel.  
I've opened the dura and revealed  
the venous sinus that they share.  
I'm going to start separation now,  
starting below the torcula.  
There's a lot of bleeding.  
Close it up. We'll try a different area.  
Vital signs are stable.  
Lord, it's like a lake of blood, it's huge.  
Stitch.  
We have to start hypothermic arrest.  
Ben, we can't stop the hearts right now.  
We haven't fished separating all the veins.

If we do it now,  
it'll cut too deeply into our hour.  
If we don't stop the hearts, they'll bleed out.  
-Start cooling the blood.  
-Cooling.  
Prepare to inject the saline coolant solution  
to replace the blood.  
Aortic cross-clamp.  
Cardiologic needle.  
Blood cooling to 20 degrees.  
The hearts are stopped.  
Turn off the heart-lung machine.  
Okay. We have one hour to finish separation,  
rebuild the severed veins  
and reconstruct the torcula.  
Pick up.  
Bipolar. More suction, please.  
Dr. Wong, call the page operator.  
I'm now separating the sagittal sinus.  
Okay. Prepare for separation.  
Right.  
Set.  
I'm ready to go.  
All right, on my mark.  
-Slowly.  
-easy.  
Get ready with the drapes.  
Make sure we don't contaminate the field.  
Get that drape, too.  
-Go ahead, hang it.  
-Adjust that light, please.  
I got the drapes.  
You adjust the drape?  
-Anesthesia? How does it look?  
-Give us a few minutes, Ben.  
Start the restructuring of the torcula.  
This is taking 3 times as long  
as I thought.  
It's just too darn small.  
Pressure's coming down, Ben.  
Done with vascular reconstruction.  
-Turn on the pump.  
-Yes, Doctor.  
-Start re-warming the blood.

-Yes, Doctor. Warming the blood.  
I don't think I can do it in time.  
You don't need the book.  
You got the book inside you.  
Done.  
Start the pumps. Warm the blood.  
Starting the pumps.  
Get ready to start the heart, baby one.  
Paddles in, baby 2.  
Clear, baby 1.  
Okay. Do it.  
Baby 2. Charge to 10.  
Clear. All right, do it.  
Looks like sinus rhythm.  
-Start closing up the chest.  
-Closing.  
Begin closing the dura, Dr. Long.  
Closing, Ben.  
Stitch, please.  
Stitch, please.  
Someone let the parents know  
we're almost finished.  
Yes, Doctor.  
-Close them up. Dr. Long?  
-One more stitch, Ben.  
Disconnect my light, please.  
Light, please.  
Neuro's clear.  
Plastic surgeons, prepare to begin.  
Thank you, Ben. Plastics, stepping in.  
Ultrasound tech to Labor 4, please.  
Peter.  
Doctor?  
Which child would you like to see first?  
Thank you. Thank you.  
Thank you.  
-Good.  
-Yeah.  
I'm okay.  
-Okay.  
-Yeah?  
Okay.  
-All right.  
-Congratulations.

Fantastic. Nice work.

Good job.

Ben, congratulations. Incredible job.

Nice work, Dr. Carson.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you can give

Dr. Carson a moment, please,

he'll be happy to answer

all of your questions

as soon as he steps up to the podium.

I always sad,

you can do anything anyone else can do,

-only you can do it better.

-Only you can do it better.

That goes for you, too, Mother.

-I love you.

-I love you.