



THE ITALIAN

Two young boys, coming from different places, meet and become friends for a short time.

Langston Harris

The Italian

When I was fifteen years old, I had open heart surgery in the summer. The summer surgery would give me time to recover and rehabilitate before returning to school in the fall. When I was in recovery at the hospital, I shared my room with an Italian boy about my age. While he was waiting to go into surgery, we were able to have a few short conversations. Even though I could not speak Italian, he knew English pretty well and we became as friends quickly. He told me about how his parents had been waiting for an appointment with our well known cardiology hospital. They were all excited, although also a bit afraid of what was ahead. I was fascinated that, although about my age, he was allowed to be served a glass of wine with his meals.

When I left the hospital, my new friend was in recovery shortly after his surgery and we didn't really get to say goodbye properly. I asked my parents to bring me back to the hospital to say goodbye to my friend and they agreed. So, a while later, we drove the thirty miles or so to the hospital. My friend was going to be released from the hospital shortly and I was excited to be able to see him and say a proper goodbye. They left a few days later to return to Italy.

We went back to the hospital a few weeks later for a checkup where I learned that my friend had died, I think from some kind of complication unrelated to his surgery. I thought about what he had told me about waiting for the surgery and wondered if that had had an influence. It made me very sad. Now, over sixty years later, when I think of this story it makes me sad because I don't remember, or maybe never even knew, my friend's name or where he was from in Italy. I've only been there a few times but I always wish that I could have made contact with my Italian friend. I also wish that I had not been that teenager who should have paid more attention to more important things in life than I did at the time.