Captive

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This is an original piece that has not been published before and is not under consideration elsewhere.

The author reports no conflicts of interest.

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*Artist Statement:* “Captive” (Figure 1) is a digital art piece that I created in Affinity Designer and the artificial intelligence software Midjourney. It depicts a person imprisoned between a pair of colossal lungs. It is inspired by a patient I met who had chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). He was a former smoker with a 30-pack-year history, and his face fell whenever he talked about smoking. He described a deep shame and shared that he sometimes felt he was “just getting what [he] deserves.”

During my last visit with this patient, he told me there was something he wished his healthcare team had been able to understand: a constant sense of feeling imprisoned and betrayed by his lungs. With tears in his eyes, he cataloged the innumerable ways his life had changed post-diagnosis. He said that at times being in the doctor’s office or the hospital felt like a desperate chance to convey the sheer magnitude of how upended he felt – a short few minutes to share years of experiences.

This piece is a reflection on this patient’s experience. The lungs towering over the figure represent the immensity of life changes a respiratory diagnosis can induce. The figure stands in front of a metal grate, meant to evoke the tension between needing one’s lungs and feeling betrayed by them. The piece is intended to be a visualization and reminder of how our patients may consider respiratory diseases – not as puzzles out of a textbook, to be seen, treated, and discharged, but rather as frightening potential tectonic shifts in the course of their lives.