

INTRODUCTION

I was chatting with a medical school friend of mine who is now a general surgeon in San Francisco. We were trading war stories, as surgeons are apt to do. One of John's was about a guy who came in on Halloween night with a stab wound. He had been at a costume party. He got into an altercation. And now here he was.

He was stable, breathing normally, not in pain, just drunk and babbling to the trauma team. They cut off his clothes with shears and looked him over from head to toe, front and back. He was of moderate size, about two hundred pounds, most of the excess around his middle. That was where they found the stab wound, a neat two-inch red slit in his belly, pouting open like a fish mouth. A thin mustard yellow strip of omental fat tongued out of it—fat from inside his abdomen, not the pale yellow, superficial fat that