
POETRY | SPRING 2020

The Sick Room

By Sarah Schlegel

When it was his sick room, he was watching birds.
He had a book with hundreds of sketches:
sparrows, chickadees, the painted bunting.
He flipped the pages from his bed as each one landed,
flashed that startling red,
a hovering black tip.
He found them and flipped on.

I wonder now what he heard
through the windows she'd washed so completely
so he wouldn't miss a thing.
Did he hear each scuttling footfall on a perch,
or just their piercing, heart-wrenching song?
Did his grandchildren drown them out
as we called from the garden?
"Good morning, sweetheart,"
he laughed as he patted the bed beside him.
"Come watch with me."

It was her sick room twenty years later,
and then it was a room of teacups.
Her grandchildren, the young men and women
sitting across the table,
clinking our cups and watching
as she lifted and placed hers down untasted.
"Come sit with me," she smiled.
She didn't notice the crumbs on the cloth
that we brushed away,
the floor a constellation of party scraps
in the light of the well-washed window.

Sarah Schlegel is a pediatric resident at Boston Medical Center and Boston Children's Hospital. She has been passionate about literature and creative writing since childhood and first became involved with narrative medicine as a medical student at Stanford Medical School. She is thankful for the chance she had to participate in workshops, creative writing classes, and writing retreats at Stanford and looks forward to continuing to write as a physician. She has published in university literary journals at Stanford Medical School and Harvard University and in the Boston Globe. She is deeply grateful for the years she had with her compassionate and courageous grandparents, who inspired this poem.

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