

To Lose Like a Nurse

By Siobhan McKenna

To lose like a nurse, you must comfort souls lying warm and silent, minds medically sedated and wandering elsewhere. To lose like a nurse, you must carry on soundlessly while listening to the daughter of the comatose father, a double knee replacement turned cardiac arrest, holding a bedside vigil. You hear her speaking of his loves: aimless drives and sundown cigars as her brother takes a turn reading aloud green construction paper letters adorned with crayon hearts, “Dear Grandpa.” To lose like a nurse, you must know how to breathe while submerged under intimacy and precisely where to slice your palm against the sharp corner of isolation—you gasp for air, *this is not your grief*. To lose like a nurse, your dreams must blur into the loops the physical therapist drew in the air with the father’s knees, bruised and limp, essential post-surgery exercises “just in case”; you awaken to the grim reality of healthcare providers offering improbable possibilities—so as to not quite lie. To lose like a nurse, you must have that day seared into your memory, the day you passed his room, and all had disappeared: the machines mimicking human organs and the radio relieving the silence, the supine silhouette never stirring and the nearly palpable petitions gone. All of it. Except you and the tape. The tape wearing fuzzy flecks of green and clinging to the wall everywhere the crayon hearts were torn down, and you, standing still and straining to reach your arms around a space that you will never be able to clasp.

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