

POETRY | SPRING 2020

Trendelenburg

By Arany Uthayakumar

Machines exchange urgent tones
like lost ships searching in the night.
Opalescent blue light bathes the walls,
seeming to transform operating room
into watery depths of ocean.

But the only waves I see
are the gentle rise and fall
of your heartbeat,
of your brain waves—
alpha, beta, delta, theta—
reassurance that as you sink
into unconsciousness,
we can bring you
back to shore.

Your torso draped,
and eyes taped shut,
a silence hangs between us
where your perky voice
chirped questions
just fifteen minutes before.

Hysterectomy?
More like Hysterical-Ectomy!
You had giggled,
upon realizing the screen
would soon bare your uterus,
In high definition for all to witness.

Good thing I went for a Brazilian
were your last words to me,
as clouds of sevoflurane
cloaked you in anesthesia's haze.

Gradually, the table slants.
Lying supine,
feet now above head,
you are suspended
in the balance.

The first few moments
with your head hanging low,
and face facing mine,
are always a bit jarring—
to glimpse someone nearly upside down,
deep in a slumber I command.

Is it difficult to surrender,
to let someone see you
beneath skin, underneath flesh?
To let them manipulate gravity,
as you tilt towards a state
neither upright nor upturned,
but somewhere in between?

Your vulnerability
suddenly reminds me of my own.
Of how Life as we know it
could be upended any moment,
control capsizing into uncertainty.

You walked in today
trusting that in spite of
one hundred minutes—
six thousand seconds
where you would not be sovereign
of your mind or body,
you would walk back out,
no doubt regaling us further
with gems of rakish humor.

Perhaps then,
the best we can do,
is not froth in existential quandaries,
but greet them with grace
as you did me,
waxing comic along the way.

Arany Uthayakumar is a first-year medical student at the Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell in Long Island, NY. She is gradually finding her feet as a New Yorker, and identifies very loudly as a Californian native in the meantime. Her identity has been intricately shaped by the Bay Area's fine educational communities: UC Berkeley for her undergraduate education, and the Pegasus Physician Writers of Stanford School of Medicine for her journey and discovery of self as an aspiring physician-writer. She has been working on a novel about the resilience of displaced Tamil civilians in the aftermath of Sri Lanka's genocide and daydreams about writing when she should be poring over anatomy and histology textbooks.

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