

Similar Girl

Most of the hospital's emergencies lay
on gurneys that made a chickadee noise—
eent eent eent—as they rolled on rubber wheels.

But the girl sick in her belly just walked in
clinging tight to her purse, protecting the pain,
as if she feared its being kicked.

Meanwhile an old woman whimpered in the next room
help me, god help me—here's the main thing I learned:
if trouble comes with an odor,

everyone scrams. That's how it was in the ER
where I ghosted the halls for the red appliqué
the ambulance corps wore on its sleeve.

In the kitchenette lounge, one surly doc asked:
Who's going to tell her she's knocked up?
—cut to the girl who'd been waiting for hours

lit by a long bulb flickering out.
As for the doctors, well it would be easy
to harp on their chuckling, or sneer at the gum

they snapped with the vampire prongs of their teeth
or the way they used cold half-cups of coffee
to drown their cigarettes. But it was them

who called me to press on the man
whose heart had run through the course of its years,
millions of spasms in the box of his ribs—

later, on my donut napkin
I would calculate: a quarter billion.
And though they made fun of the similar girl,

they brought a step stool for me to climb on
for the minutes required for their clear conscience
to declare him dead. (Six.) Their jimmy-legs tapped

as they studied the clock, while I studied the chest
bending under my palms
while the old woman cried *somebody help me*

while the young woman hugged her purse like a doll
while *tick tick tick* O miraculous ticking of ticks:
life ratcheted up inside her.

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