Traumata
Sudden impact with sounding
to chill the collective spine of the workplace.
A sound heard in the dusty corner,
at the high grated window,
shaking the coffee sitting on the break room table.
A sound that marshaled some to run
to run like they were ten
with a new pair of All-Stars.

Sound carried one to kneel beside the wounded.
With no thought,
no breath taken
he moved the crushing tonnage off and away.
Moments later this near ton
was full bird colonel weight,
like some unseen hand had slipped
on a few added bells to the bar.

Now time moved slow and surreal
in the thick slurry of trauma.
His bod lay limp
and loose across the rough pallet.
One soul gentled his head in lap
with the intimacy of mother and child.

Firefighters and paramedics moved to and fro
the workers froze in place,
psyches locked in trance
of helplessness and shock.
The traumata was lifted up and whisked away.
For moments that hung
as though generations were passing,
as though forty years were wandered in wilderness,
they all remained in place.

Then another sound
a phone ringing in a distant office,
the movement of the hands on the courthouse clock.
A door slammed.
And they all moved
back in place
back in place.

Robert W. Duvall
The Great Physician, Board Certified

those who once whispered God's name
with eyes reverent closed in prayer
the Good Book clutched to tender breast
now espouse psychoneuroimmunology
pounding thick tomes of clinical trials
by golly, it's proved true at last: religion is good for you!
O to find frocked as God, the serpent science!
faith in things unseen now replaced by cold hard fact:
all the rules, regs and disciplines yield not just stuffy
righteousness, but better yet- improved medical outcomes!

Four poems by W. H. Shirk

under the care of physicians

the doctors come out and tell the family
that their already extensive tests reveal
that they don't quite know what is wrong
but that they are going to "conduct further testing"
(this, no doubt, because they are experts, and
it angers them that an obviously very ill patient
should beat them at their own game and leave them
looking as ignorant and helpless as the family)
it is hoped by all that the patient will not die
before it is decided what is wrong, that further testing
will somehow be therapeutic, at least for the family
(sometimes a diagnosis is as good as a cure:
Oh, well if it was that, he had no chance...) and will
somewhat justify the whopping bill the dead man will receive
for the mistake of dying under the care of physicians.
in the elevator

at each stop we readjust our positions
shifting instinctively unconsciously
creating equal maximum distance on all sides
2nd floor six people shuffling this is not hard
at the 3rd two more reduce margins to inches
at the 5th floor there is this threatening influx
of newcomers, immigrants, intruders, invaders
actually it's only four more people but they're big and
the situation has become critical people are almost touching
bumping rubbing, my own nose itches but if
I move my hand I will scratch someone else's butt
on 6 five people step off, at 7 three more, the air freshens I can
scratch my nose and stand in the center of a comfortable
column of clear space, at 9 there are just two of us
separated by the full breadth of the car
she is one of those beautiful young nurses
we share eye contact and a smile
I want to hold her but I stand my ground.

Beebadobba-doobadobba

-To Loren and Ethan

"What's the Secret Word?
The angry king demands of the
meek supplicants who had come
seeking his favor: a small girl
dressed in an old lace curtain,
supposed to be a princess, and
a little boy wearing bear foot slippers,
pretending to be her puppy-
no excuse me, her pet lion.
"Well, what is it?" the king shouts.
"Beebadob, um beeba oh I forget!"
"Say it or I will eat your dog!"
She smiles and stamps her foot, "I can't!"
"I'm a lion!" says the lion.
With a scowl, I scoop up the puppy
onto my lap and pretend to bite his neck,
he squeals flailing and she attacks in his defense...
We tumble to the floor, arms and legs
tangled in laughter and dusty lace.

They're teenagers now and have
other kings to see, but I remember
two kids on the road to bright tomorrow
who couldn't remember the secret word.
But I do: it's Beebadobba-doobadobba..
I think it meant play with us now
because we can't stay here much longer.
Karley's Cry
On a hillside neatly dressed with cold, stark stone,
A lonely gray warrior keeps vigil row upon row.
The people gather.
They wear a stiff upper lip.

The strange, quiet box is set down to rest,
Its contents draped in the colors of a nation served.
The breath of kindred hearts is sucked from aching lungs.

Then the silence is broken,
Not with the word of prophet or priest,
But in the tender, anguished cry of a child,
Raised unashamed, unceasing.

She gives voice to hearts that bleed behind shaded glass.

B. Wayne Morris

The Cup Was Bittersweet
This poem reflects two communion services for a long-term patient: in the first, the dry white wine available through the hospital was used; the second, on the day of his death with his estranged wife present, was celebrated with sweet grape juice.

The cup was bitter
Sharp and dry and unyielding
His light was dimming
Obscured by clouds of death.
Whispered prayers, hushed petitions
Endless hours that all too soon end.

Did he know I was there or how much I cared?
Was the bitter cup fruitful with love?

The cup was sweet
Syrupy and dripping ... with regret.
The labor of his death's birth
The pain of her life's death.
Quivering hands, convulsions of despair
Endless hours that never end.

Did he know she was there or how much she cared?
Was the sweet cup fruitful with love?

Gwen Becka
The Chaplain’s Day

It is just an ordinary day.
Monday morning, rushing about, making breakfast, packing lunch.
The woman drives her daughter to school.
When she comes back,
The man
Her husband
The father of the child climbing on the monkey bars
Is hanging by a rope from the second floor staircase.
In the hospital, she touches his already cold cheek.
“He looks like he is sleeping,” she says to the chaplain.
Such courage,
She pulls the blanket back and the angry red mark on his neck
Screams at her.

It is just an ordinary day.
Sun dazzling, children’s laughter,
Pool toys bobbing on churning water.
All eyes blink.
And he slips unnoticed under the surface.
At the hospital, the words blur:
“Sorry. Brain dead.”
The silence of their child is deafening,
The stillness of his small body jolts them.
But they hear the words.
One boy dies and five other children will live.
The numbers are right.
But they don’t add up.

It is just an ordinary day.
Quiet room, light dim, footsteps and laughter in the hall outside.
Three men sit around the body
Guarding,
Protecting.
When they ask the chaplain to pray,
She makes a terrible mistake.
She closes her eyes a split second too late.
And sees three grown men bow their heads over the woman they love.
The mother, the wife.
A sacred moment of such terrible intimacy,
No one should see it.
The deathbed, a burning bush, holy ground.

It is just an ordinary day.
They are all ordinary days.

Beverly K. Hartz
Chaplaincy
God, divine giver of life
You, the final reconciliator,
The one who decides
when a life is over.
Stay with me.

Help me be with
the grandson, who
grieves on his knees
at his grandmother’s deathbed;
with the Jewish man, who
prays for the first time;
with the atheist who
believes in charity
and tells his life story
as he waits for
a pacemaker;
with the premature baby
I baptize before surgery;
with the 37-year-old
double lung transplant, who
hasn’t slept in four days;
with the 74-year-old, who
doesn’t know if
he wants to live or die
and begs me to decide;
with the grandmother, who
dies just after we arrive.

Help me hold the space
for the drama of
this life and that death,
bring bravado to
the people
so they can see
through your eyes
the hugeness,
the meaning,
the royal largesse
in the love stories
of it all.
This heart-way
comes up accidentally,
leads by listening,
crawls under sorrow,
leans into pain.
This heart-way
takes big cowboy breaths,
misses nothing of reason,
and knows much more
than I do.

Julie Sara Kramer

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