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poems
by
doctors

Street-wise

Wendy French

Somewhere in a North London street near Northwick Park
a retired doctor pins his butterflies, worries about sex.

Elsewhere in the street a siren stops outside
a two-up, two-down where paramedics collect
a woman with a fluttering heart.

Somewhere in an East London street near the London
a young doctor revising for her MRCP dreams of take-aways,

Chicken Biryani, Tarka Dal.
Elsewhere a man dials 999, he doesn't want to die.
Whisky half drunk and paracetamol gone.

Somewhere in a South London street near King's
a woman gazes into the gas fire, thinks about her husband

and the locum who came at 3am, drank tea.
His own father recently dead and his mother who keeps
all doors unlocked for her husband's return.

Elsewhere near UCH a woman's contractions
Increase as she phones her partner, he's not at his desk

so the neighbour drives her as fast as he can and leaves her
to the student on duty who comforts her between groans.
The partner enjoys a light lunch. Pint of pride.

Somewhere in a London street a man comes near to dying.
His car skids sideways on ice. Approaching cars close in.

He thinks after one death there is no other.
A stranger helps him shuffle along
until stillness returns.

In the same street the old doctor remembers climbing
the snow-ridden hills, a bride by his side and he still feels

her bracelets, purse, red felt hat.
And there's his grandson with Down's who loves to touch velvet,
collect stamps and who lives in a home on a West London street

where the Hammersmith closes. Wards full of flu-ridden adults.
Next door to the doctor little Louise in the wheelchair

drinks orange through a straw, cries throughout the night.
The physician turns back to his moth, the Bloodvein,
a splayed sacrifice and sighs.

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Chosen by Femi Oyeboode.

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