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poems
by
doctors

Offerings

Cate Bailey

On the ward Christmas gleams in glittering delirium.
She and I; the last awake, sit half watching the TV,
the fallen side of her face cast
in the cyanosed glow of a school nativity.
Tonight she does not speak of the sun's rays burning through her,
the hum of electricity in her mind,
of gods or other devils.

*I had a baby, she says
as simply as one might offer milk with tea
or spread out a clean sheet.
He was taken from me.*

I know these things, on paper,
in files,
unauthored statements of fact
handed down, unquestioned,
and unasked.
Almost biblical;
her thirty volumes of loss.

But I do not know the sorrow,
the neat, coherent stab of it.

I reach for her
And blindly graze the mollusk sheen of her forearm,
the pearly edge of scars.
I cannot bear to look at the exquisite truth –
the shear and shimmering grief
garishly illuminated with each pulse of fairy lights;
red, yellow, blue.

My bleep chimes;
the false release of someone else's need.
I mumble empty-handed apologies
and her expression returns to a blunt vacancy.
In that instant she closes like a seam,
caving inward to her muted shelter,
away from the taunting chorus of other people's children.

In the corridor the soft procession of dinner trolleys depart,
the distant carol of crockery sinks underwater
and I rush winded into the barren night.

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