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Hybrid Poetry by H. K. Hummel



I.

My mother looks god-awful. The night nurses have shaky hands. My father tears six pages off a wall calendar and points: It's Thursday now. My husband said good-bye. I can't remember our telephone number. When I close my eyes, I see neon. I'm told the baby is stoic. I have pneumonia, radioactive breast milk. This might be a heart attack. My hands are unrecognizable. Someone washed my hair, painted my toenails. The respiratory therapist yells, *try harder*. When he returns at 2 a.m., he kneels and draws blood so, so gently, I name him the Zen master of needles. I've been dreaming about juggling too many things, dreaming I've been stuck in a dark airport terminal. Nighttime quiet of the ICU: the loneliest thing I know.

II.

We need what we need. A birth, a hemorrhage, a hysterectomy, multiple blood transfusions, six days on life support. An ER doctor, three obstetricians, a hematologist, pulmonologist, cardiologist, infectious disease specialist, nuclear medicine specialist, anesthesiologist, priest. Teams of nurses, respiratory therapists, a speech pathologist, physical therapist, lactation specialist, family counselor. An ultrasound, cystoscopy, ten chest X-rays, pulmonary V/Q scan, pathology report. Blood products, morphine, radioactive technetium macroaggregated albumin, technetium DTPA. Feeding-tube nutritional supplements, metoclopramide, antibiotics, Diflucan, Tylenol, iron supplements. Sum total: \$131,004.62.

III.

If the orchestra hall is demolished. If the subtle twinges of a violin sonata and the after-hum are lost. If the tiny filaments of stereovilli stopped fluttering in the labyrinthine inner ear. If we don't think of it as mythical. Instead: nuanced. A ripple effect of muscle and nerve. If we don't dismiss a woman as neurotic. Hostile. Frigid. Disinterested. If phantom pain exists, real as sutures, as scar tissue. If we say amputation.

Art Information

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