

I'm Afraid of the Brief Empty Space

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I'm afraid of the waiting room where patients wear slacks and slip-off shoes
and families read the pages of last month's magazines;

I'm afraid of the aide who calls my name, staccato and without love,
who walks before me down the long hall, never looking back;

I'm afraid of the johnny coat—its cold exposure—and of the black tubing
looped on the wall and the clear tubing hooked to the oxygen tank;

of the nurse who comes with her IV bag and hollow needle,
asking my name and why I'm here, as if she doesn't know.

I'm afraid of the orderly who arrives with a wheelchair to roll me away,
of the white room and the scrub tech busy with her Mayo tray of shiny tools;

of the doctor who waves to me from the scrub room, his mouth
moving under his mask, and of the circulating nurse whose eyes say nothing.

I'm afraid of the brief, endless space, the metal taste, the ringing in my ears
and the utter blackness into which I fall and do not know I'm falling.

I'm afraid of waking in the tilting room, of the circle of curtains
and the microphone voice of the nurse who calls my name;

of her snack of ginger ale and crackers—one fizzes too loudly,
the other breaks with the sound of bone and scatters over my body.

I'm afraid of the long wait for pathology, for the prognosis and how
at home when the doctor phones he will first ask if I'm well, then if I'm alone—