

LULLING

for two voices

18

"They're just not holding out any hope at all now."
They'd stopped even the IV. By the time I got there,
My mother was so dehydrated, she couldn't
Cry. It had been snowing all day, not that the blinds
Had been opened. Too dehydrated to cry,
But when they moved her, she sobbed.

By 10 p.m., my brothers and their wives and kids,
Our last uncle and all our aunts had cleared out.
Neal went to the lobby to read. Her room was dim,
Now, thankfully, after a forty-five minute ordeal
In the brightest possible glare, three nurses
Taking increasingly anxious turns trying to restore

A slipped Heparin lock to my mother's elusive vein.
Finally! One of the nurses, relieved, telling her
"I'm gonna tape that down real good now,
So's you don't have to go through that again."
Too dehydrated to swallow, Mother nodded,
Nodded as she had to me earlier, when I said

"I love you." Too dehydrated to say hardly anything,
She groaned "I love—uhhn—you too—uhhn. Uhhhn."
"She likes you to stroke her forehead," Neal had said.
Neal gone out to the lobby, the rest gone home,
The white sheets, the minutes into the morphine,
And me in the den-like gloom, preparing to settle.

She sobbed
All now
To cry
Got there
The blinds
She couldn't

To restore
And kids
Three nurses
Cleared out
Minute ordeal
Was dim

I said
Elusive vein
Mother nodded
Telling her
That again
Good now

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I went over to my bag for my book and my shawl.	To settle
But first I needed to get a good look at her, and so	Hardly anything
She opened her eyes. And just fractionally,	The morphine
Turned her face toward me. She watched	Uhhn. Uhhhn
My hand as it went to stroke her forehead. I knew	Gone home
Myself to be shadowy because she followed	Had said

The alien hand with her flattened eyes	She followed
As an infant at night follows a mobile's shadows	My shawl
In the light from the hall. Of the song she sang me	I knew
When I was small, I remembered mainly	And so
The tune: hmm hm-m swe-et Afton la da dah, da dum	She watched
Hm hm hmm.... Hm hm hmm, flo-w-gently....	Just fractionally

Her forehead so dry and stretched with pain,	Just fractionally she followed
I stroked, and hummed and hummed, past the time	She watched my shawl
When one of her long, long breaths did not return.	And so I knew