

LULLING

for two voices

“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.
But first I needed to get a good look at her, and so
She opened her eyes. And just fractionally,
Turned her face toward me. She watched
My hand as it went to stroke her forehead. I knew
Myself to be shadowy because she followed

To settle
Hardly anything
The morphine
Uhhn. Uhhhn
Gone home
Had said

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

She followed
My shawl
I knew
And so
She watched
Just fractionally

Her forehead so dry and stretched with pain,
I stroked, and hummed and hummed, past the time
When one of her long, long breaths did not return.

Just fractionally she followed
She watched my shawl
And so I knew