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## A Refrain for Jane Doe

*Ashley J. Choe*

Her skin steals the heat from mine, and I  
surrender it willingly. My hands pump  
stale blood from her heart by way of her  
chest with each staccato of her ribs before it  
sucks back into its chambers.

Cacophony ensues. Then we listen in rest for the  
harmony of a regular rhythm, breaths held.

*Stay cool and calm. Don't show weakness.*

But it never comes together in major chord.

Our twenty-minute *goodbye* has

my sweat and her blood  
oozing uselessly to the floor. It  
drips down and pools with my  
emotions. They don't belong.

*How could I have saved her?* I think

about how I will tell her family  
her heart is wholly in asystole, but theirs is  
beating while broken.

*They want to see your humanity.*

I reach out for their hands and end up  
collecting their heat—incidental payment for the  
twenty-minute recital. Sans encore.

*Cold hands, warm heart*, I'm told.

Unless the hands are cold because the heart is.

"She was fine yesterday," they reason. But the sun

sets and resets, a metronome, and sometimes that  
step toward stepping down becomes  
a free-falling trill without reason.

*They just want answers.*

My fingers played through her whole range of  
skin temperatures with practiced memory, but her name is  
barely familiar. My intimacy was with her  
problems – the plan. And while I try  
to pluck her name from  
the puddle on the floor, I hear their hearts  
belt out a cry. But my eyes cannot stand  
to look because these hearts do not need  
my help to strum their beat.

*She was more than just a patient.*

Discordant echoes follow me home. They become  
mine—a crescendo waiting to be released  
to nothing.

*Cardiac arrest.*

And there ends her refrain. But the  
reverberations miss their cue  
to cease.

*You cannot share her life story.*

So, instead, I whisper anonymous death by  
measures – confining each complete minuet  
to digest its theory. *Strong, but humanistic.*  
Fed pieces until the whole is  
lost. Nameless because her name sticks  
to my lips while the melody escapes. Instead I  
bleed my own name in debt onto each  
death certificate.  
Silently scripting their notes  
to sound until I have given  
my whole self away.

*Dr. Jane Doe.*

## **About the Poet**

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