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I Dream of a Needle / Articulate, Please / When the Screen Retracts

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I Dream of a Needle

boring into my back,
searching for furrows

in discs of bone. Last
week, Dad's blood

drenched piles of gauze.
Look away,

the oncologist said,
drawing marrow

from his pelvic wing.
He feels only pressure,

no pain. Hurt
sounds different: a knock

after midnight when winds
moan 'round the door

and joints unhinge.
I bend into notes

bruised as the winter sky.

Articulate Please

To *pronounce*, she says:
place the stethoscope
on the patient's chest
and listen for the lack

of a beat; press
fingers on arteries
in the neck and wrist,
making certain

you feel no pulse.
I begin to see
why doctors
omit the end

of the phrase.
But right now,
I need to hear
all of it—

every syllable, every
inaudible sound,
even if I, too,
must hold

my ear close
to a stranger's mouth—
so I can imagine
what I utterly am not, yet.

When the Screen Retracts

we turn to each other:
doctors, nurse,
therapists, chaplains—
nine in a hospital auditorium

for three hundred.
Photos of the recently deceased,
fully fleshed in living color,
dissolved into the digital.

What we just said
consoling unseen
family members—
not forgotten,

sadness, yes...
but love...alive—
seems safe,
our mouths re-masked,

until we gather
off stage. There,
something begins
to form, indistinct

from ourselves:
all our grief, sorrow,
and despair
stunning

as the ruby pendant
just above the neckline
of his nursing scrubs,
brilliant as it rises with his breath.

About the Author

Susan J. Sample, PhD, MFA, writer-in-residence at Huntsman Cancer Institute, University of Utah, is author of *Trapped in the Bone-House*.