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Seven-Oh-Seven

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Seven-oh-seven tells me I'm his muse. Not in a dirty old man way, though he is old and a man and dirty when I haven't wiped the stool from his behind.

He draws my portrait each day I am his nurse, draws my portrait on the backs of surplus paper plates with crayons and markers and other supplies scavenged from some deceased art therapy program.

At home, two hundred and thirteen paper plate portraits line the walls and now the ceiling of my bachelor apartment. One time, I brought a date home and he asked what was with the plates, but I couldn't tell him on account of patient privacy and anyway that was the only time I ever saw him. He didn't get art.

Seven-oh-seven has been in room 707 for fifteen months, two weeks, and five days. He scratches off the days on his bedside table like a convict in solitary. He calls the nurse manager "the Warden" and me "his Jailer." I tell him he has a dry sense of humour and he just shouts, "Jailer,



Jailor, Jailor!” and I laugh and laugh and sometimes little tears spring to his eyes like they do when something is just too funny.

Seven-oh-seven is too sick to go home, but not sick enough to go anywhere else. Actually, he doesn't have a home anymore or any things anymore, because he doesn't have any money anymore because he has been in hospital for fifteen months, two weeks, and five days.

Sometimes, on nights, he looks up at me after I've finished giving him a bed bath, after I've switched off his overhead light and the room is lit only by the reflected fluorescence of the hall, and he asks me if he's going to die here. I laugh and tell him he's not going to *die*, but he just looks away and asks to be alone to work on his portraits. I give him his space. Artists need their process, I know! I'd be an artist too if it would pay the bills.

Sometimes, when I think of Seven-oh-seven, I think of him as Seven O'Seven—like he's an Irishman, though he isn't one, or at least I don't think he is. I told him this once and he put on a fake Irish accent and started swearing and cursing at me (pretend like, on account of how close we are), and he was so good that by the end it almost sounded as if he meant it. I told him he was quite the actor, that he should have been on Broadway, but he just said he was tired.

Lately, Seven-oh-seven's portraits have entered, like Picasso's, a blue phase. In Midnight Blue and Sky Blue and Maximum Blue and Denim Crayolas, he draws my portraits, which are becoming more, I guess, impressionistic? Expressionistic? With the



crayons it is hard to tell. He has started an art installation in his room, spelling, in a single letter per plate, the words “When am I getting out of here? When am I getting out of here? When am I getting out of here?” on the walls.

Last Monday, I came to work and walked by room 707 except Seven-oh-seven wasn’t in there and neither were his plates or his crayons or his colouring pencils. Instead, there was just some woman with a heart attack. After rounds, I asked the doctor who’d been on call over the weekend what had happened, and he told me that Seven-oh-seven had been hoarding his sleeping pills and they found him dead Sunday morning with not even a note or anything. Then the doctor leaned in and pulled up a picture on his phone. It was another paper plate portrait but this one was of him. He grinned and then he whispered to me, “You know, he told me I was his muse.”

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