

First Saturday Night at the Nursing Home

Category: Poems

written by Erika D. Walker | November 29, 2019



I stare at my chicken patty,
the limp lettuce, pale tomato
sliver, open the small
mayonnaise packet, even though
I don't eat mayonnaise.
I pour my milk, set the carton
on the table, slide aside
the red Jell-O. If I don't look
up, I won't be where I am.
Father wears a blue dress shirt,
not his own, stares,
not speaking, not noticing
the shirt is buttoned wrong,
brown stain on the front.
His hair stands straight up
and wild, blown by some private
windstorm. A woman alone
at the next table, tied
to a wheelchair, howls
each breath, in and out,
low and loud, over and over.
I try to breathe outside of her breathing,
but I cannot. Not even the watery
Christmas carols pouring through

the dining room can drown
her out. I want to scream,
to shut this woman up. I want
to grab my father, spin
his wheelchair around,
take him back home, back
to last week, back to twenty years ago,
away from the chicken patty
that resists my knife.