

# In the Pediatric Ward

Category: Poems

written by Tess Galati | March 12, 2010

In this forest of tubes and bottles,  
Children wander in sleep.  
A dying bird drops  
From the corner of my eye.  
The night nurse floats through paths  
Tending the rooted tubes,  
Weighing the pause between breaths.  
In the dark, a man's voice  
Stuns like a hunter's gun.  
We wait for dawn.

Last night we cried—four worn children  
Facing their walls, and I,  
Handing out animal crackers.  
Willow's bones are flaking  
John's eye refuses light  
Paige's ears close up and  
Something is eating the soft parts of  
Adam's knee.  
We know these things and we cry.

The children force the beds to do acrobatic tricks.  
They've decorated the sheets with urine, gum, and ice cream.  
Shrieking, they dribble gravy; Collages bloom on the floor.  
They glue flies to the walls, punch holes in dolls and blankets.  
The children are not civilized, and the women have left off makeup.

After the baths, the doctors  
Visit their explanations  
Upon the numbered beds.  
They know about bones, eyes, ears,  
For they've inspected the bodies.  
They neither laugh nor cry.  
We humor them, for we see  
That their suits are too tight,  
Their shoes pinch,  
And they've had little sleep.

But at three in the morning,  
Adam and Willow whimper,  
Aquarium gurgles  
IV fluid drips  
Vibrators hum  
A dying bird falls  
And the night nurse's thighs  
rub, rub in the hall.

**About the poet:**

Studies in language and psychology led Tess Galati PhD to found [Practical Communications, Inc.](#) and begin a practice that teaches the art and craft of writing to adult professionals. When she is not teaching doctors, lawyers, engineers or other technical professionals, Galati may be found in her garden digging in the dirt or tending her beehives, on a plane traveling to some beach or playing with her grandchildren, Apollo and Alexandra.

**About the poem:**

In 1972, my three-year-old son was recuperating from a mild case of chickenpox when his knee swelled up overnight. A *staph* infection diagnosis put him in the pediatric ward of a small-town hospital. What followed was weeks of uncertainty, continuous intravenous antibiotics, surgery, isolation and many tears. I was scolded for spending the first night on the floor next to his crib and for violating visiting hour rules. My son's body healed, but his spirit was wounded: To this day, he cannot enter a hospital without feeling sick to his stomach. Pediatric wards are better now, of course, but no matter how brightly they're painted, it's a paucity of love and touch that leads to the cold desolation I tried to capture in this poem.

**Poetry editors:**

Judy Schaefer and Johanna Shapiro