

Paper Crane

Category: Poems

written by Sarah Nitoslawski | January 22, 2016

Sarah Nitoslawski

T-cell lymphoma in the brain
MRI flooded with glaring, white-hot streaks
Devouring cerebellum and frontal lobe

A scrawled note in his chart:
"difficult and disinhibited
Neurology—please re-assess"

At the sight of our starched white coats
He reaches shakily for the toothbrush on his meal tray
And begins to frantically scrub at his teeth
Wide dark eyes boring straight through us

He does not want us there.

He spits loudly into a garbage can
Dribbles of runny toothpaste streak his chin
And trickle down the front of his sweatshirt

The resident clears his throat.
"Sir, we are here to perform a quick neurological exam"

"I don't...want...to play...your games"
His speech is sluggish and slurred
Facial muscles contracting tortuously
Grimacing to force out the words

"You are...all...bullies"

He shakes his head furiously
Choked sobs catch in his throat
"You...disrespect...ME!"

His voice quavers with anger and dysarthria.

"I.....AM.....ART"

His trembling hand reaches out
Plucks the wing of a paper origami bird
Folded from a lab requisition form
Numbers haphazardly dot its beak and belly

"THIS...IS...my...art..."
His voice is softer now

"look...at...this"

He pulls back and forth on the tail

The room is now silent

Except for the gentle, rhythmic rustle

Of the paper crane flapping its wings

About the poet:

Sarah Nitoslawski is pursuing an MD, CM degree at McGill University in Montreal.

About the poem:

"Entering my years of clinical work, I have been startled and privileged to catch people in such raw and real moments. My poem is a gentle reminder to look beyond the medical diagnosis, to search for what inspires patients and guides them through their illness. Even when the clinical situation is dire, there is often a flutter of hope to be found."

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer