

Patient Belongings

Category: Poems

written by Wynne Morrison | June 9, 2017

Wynne Morrison

A man a few feet ahead of me
is pulling a rolling carry-on,
a clear plastic "belongings" bag tied
to the top by a white drawstring.

I can't resist a glance in the bag,
like a stranger who wonders about lives
in the elevator or grocery line.
It holds some clothes, playing cards,

the ordinary things. And lying on its side
is a small helicopter, its unpainted
wooden slats as thin as split popsicle sticks,
a broken rotor bent awkwardly

into a corner of the bag. Whether snapped
in the rush of packing or during
the boredom of hospital days, someone
has decided it is worth bringing home.

One more thing that needs to be mended,
this reminder of taking flight. Days
they might wish could be forgotten
may one day be turned into a game.

About the poet:

Wynne Morrison practices pediatric palliative care and pediatric critical care at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, where she directs the pediatric advanced-care team. She also teaches in the professionalism and ethics curriculum at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. "Writing poetry helps to keep me sane."

About the poem:

"The events in this poem occurred exactly as described. I felt a bit like a voyeur looking at the contents of the clear plastic bag. Wondering what led the family to carry the cheap, broken toy home fueled my speculation about the hospitalization: Had the child been injured? Had the child been brought to the hospital by helicopter? Was the toy a prop from child life to help make sense of the experience? It also made me aware of how much our patients and families must have to 'mend' their lives after they leave."

Poetry editors:

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