

The Circulating Nurse Enters the Operating Room

Category: Poems

written by Cortney Davis | August 7, 2015

Cortney Davis

Let me not be blinded by the glare of the spotlight
or distracted by the tangle of plastic tubes,

the stink of anesthesia waiting in its multi-chambered
monolith of sleep. Let me stand beside the patient

and look into his eyes. Let me say, *we will take care of you.*
Let me understand what it is to be overcome by fear.

Let me secure my mask and turn to the counting and opening,
the writing down. Let me watch closely and, if I have to,

tap a surgeon's shoulder, *watch it*, if he seems on the edge
of contamination. Let the cutting and suturing go well.

Let the blood that saturates the gauze be red; let the organs
be glassy and pink; let the sickness be lifted out

and taken away in a stainless bowl. Let the patient wake,
mumbling his *thanks*. Let the stretcher arrive

and the linens be white. Let the patient be lifted
from the thin table, waving *goodbye, goodbye*

as he is taken to recovery, where other nurses are waiting
with oxygen, with warm blankets, with eager hands.

About the poet:

Cortney Davis, a nurse practitioner, is the author of five poetry collections, including [Leopold's Maneuvers](#), winner of the Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Poetry. Her nonfiction publications include [When the Nurse Becomes a Patient: A Story in Words and Images](#) and [The Heart's Truth: Essays on the Art of Nursing](#), both from Kent State University Press. Her honors include an NEA poetry fellowship, three Connecticut Commission on the Arts poetry grants, the Connecticut Center for the Book Non-Fiction Prize and three *American Journal of Nursing* Book of the Year awards. Her website is cortneydavis.com.

About the poem:

"Early in my career, I worked in the operating room. The circulating nurse's

job is to work outside the sterile area, observing the surgical team and helping them to maintain a comfortable, safe environment for the patient. In this role, I felt keenly aware that while the surgeon and scrub nurse were focusing on the operative field, and the anesthesiologist on the patient's level of consciousness, I was the patient's advocate, overseeing all to ensure our patient's safety. This poem is a prayer—my look back to that intense time when I hoped that the surgery would go well, that I would understand the patient's fear (and my own) and that I would help keep him safe until he could be released into another nurse's care."

Poetry editors:

Johanna Shapiro and Judy Schaefer