

# A Simple Song

Category: The Waiting Room

written by Joseph Zarconi | May 2, 2016

When my mother doubled over with belly pain, my girlfriend and I insisted on accompanying my father to the emergency room. There in the waiting room we sat, deep into the night, waiting for news about my mother.

I was struck by the hustle and bustle of the waiting room, at such a late hour, and the desperation of those who sat as we did. The second hand on the large wall clock lurched forward second by second, lending a kind of rhythm to this experience we shared with so many strangers from our community.

A gravely ill man broke that rhythm when he fell with an alarming thud into the hard, pale blue plastic seat next to my girlfriend. I guessed him to be homeless, with a musty odor, intoxicated and wavering, disheveled and disconnected, perhaps not as old as his appearance suggested. Leaning sleepily and uncomfortably close to my girlfriend, he began to sing to her. "Lay, lady, lay. Lay across my big brass bed." He knew the whole song. My father helped him up and asked him to sit somewhere else, and he staggered out the large, glass doors and into the darkness.

Now, after so many years of caring for the sick, I reflect fondly upon that encounter. It occurs to me that he and we had arrived in that place in search of the same things: to mitigate the sense of aloneness and isolation imposed by suffering, to know that our suffering mattered, and to lay a woman down on a bed and provide her comfort and love.

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