

Shift Report Prize for Poetry

Transfiguration

by Stacy Nigliazzo

Whispered in the Ambulance Bay at 5am

Be a light, a living

prayer, always

your child;

courage,

composure,

kindness.

Let no one die in the hallway today,

please.

Slow down,

slow

down,

slow

down...

In Memoriam

for Jerry, Houston paramedic who died of Covid pneumonia on August 3, 2020

We painted your colors on the ceiling of the ambulance bay,

lit flameless candles,

read your name.

When Christmas cases bloomed

and the snow came,

we doubled our morgue's capacity,

lost power as the generator sang to shouts of

vents!

bi-paps!

oxygen tanks!

Saturation

And when the rain bloodied its knees through every window

we learned to breathe under

water,

gasping

on the surface—

lily of the valley,

swept,

sunk—

The Elysian Fields

“...no snow is there, nor heavy storm, nor ever rain...”
(*The Odyssey*)

When the last bed is taken,

and patients are already booked two in each room,

where shall he go?

When the last hallway spot is filled,

and the aisle by the ambulance bay formerly used for broken IV poles,

and the recliner that sits next to the supply cart but still in the eye-line

of the charge nurse,

and the black chair in the blind corner,

and the corridor along the admit desk that can hold six stretchers but only has outlets

for three cardiac monitors and two oxygen concentrators,

and the alcove saved for CPR calls because it has a curtain and wall-mounted

oxygen

and buys us time to pull someone else out of a room

and into the hallway on a stretcher,

and where will *that* stretcher go—

and who shall care for him

when the nurses are pressed and the doctors can't

keep up, and three of our staff are among those

admitted and waiting for beds in the lobby,

and the travel nurses are overrun

after only two days of clinical orientation,

and how shall we shield his cough that sounds like the bark
of my dog, Homer, from when I was seven
and he was fifteen and suddenly left to live
on a farm
where he could run with other dogs in rolling fields, and drink
milk just expressed from a Holstein cow
whose udder never waivers, and sleep
in a hay-filled stall curled beside a Shetland pony,
where ventilators are planted in groves
like pomegranates,
and oxygen tubing and stylets are sown into the green hair of the earth,
and waterfalls spill over
with convalescent plasma,
and streams swell with Remdesivir,
and bottles of corticosteroids are plucked like apples from the trees
each morning, and bushels of N95 masks
are packed in pallets in a red barn flanked with pearl-lined gates,
and evening meals are blessed with songs from a golden lyre
as we dine with friends, family, and colleagues we've lost
at tables ripe with summer-sweet fruit
that never sours
and wine that never turns.

Transfiguration

Mouth of the river;

grackle-eyed,

knife in the water—

Above His Bed

Nothing by mouth

FALL RISK

Nods head - responds verbally to daughter Helen (via *Zoom*)

please make eye contact with me

Sharon

Blackfoot daisies are your favorite flower.

His first gift,

a mood ring that still shines blue.

And last night,

here, in room 302,

after your first grandchild helped you visit via *Zoom*,

I counted the steps of his galloping heart with my fingertip.

He called me by your name.

Self-Portrait As A Thousand Vessels

“...nobody’s clapping anymore”
(*JAMA, December 2020*)

God bless the artery

burned blue;

hive of lung

alight,

clot of bees in bloom—

Morning Glory

Bruises beneath our fingernails;

petals, purple and blue—

staccato strike

of daylight—

About the poet: **Stacy R. Nigliazzo** is a nurse and the award-winning author of two poetry collections (*Scissored Moon* and *Sky the Oar*). Her poems have appeared in the *Bellevue Literary Review* and *JAMA*, among other publications. She serves as co-poetry editor of *Pulse*, *Voices From The Heart of Medicine* and reviews poetry for the *American Journal of Nursing*.