

Patient Doctor

A chasm yawns, stretches its arms back,
blinks its eyes contentedly. I find myself on the floor.
Please check my blood pressure. Check my blood sugar.

The coyote yip of the siren rolls me horizontal
to Washington Hospital E.R. Drunks in agony
roll past my gurney. My nurse spins on her heel.

They've parked me next to the white board. I see
myself through my nurse's eyes: middle-aged woman
in a gurney, looking like the worried well.

Chest pressure, chills, fatigue, tachycardia, hypertension.
Good panic attack story. But labs start to come back:
high white count, sed rate through the roof.

Bacterial infection? "Her heart rate's not coming down."
"Hang a saline bolus." Someone pages Dr. Steckel.
"That's me," I say, "Won't someone call extension 4197?"

Blank stares of disbelief. No one answers the page.
Code Blue on the floor above. Pedestrian vs. car
rolls by me, doesn't look good.

If they moved me into a private cubby,
my heart rate might come down. I close my eyes,
slow my breathing. Bring it down, bring it down.

Lord, it's raining. My bladder's filling. Let me out
into the mud-flushed world. I promise never to steal
those green twisty ties from the produce section again.

Jan Steckel is a writer and a former pediatrician who was forced to retire from practice early because of an acquired physical disability. Her poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction have appeared in numerous publications, including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Yale Medicine*, and *Scholastic Magazine*. Steckel's writing has been widely anthologized and has won various prizes. Most recently, her first full-length book of poetry, *The Horizontal Poet* (Zeitgeist Press, 2011), won a 2011 Lambda Literary Award. She lives in Oakland, California. "Patient Doctor" © 2013 by Jan Steckel. Contact author: jan.steckel@post.harvard.edu.

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