

Stitching Mr. Lasseter

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Poetry in the names: suture, stitch,
the needle driver has drive,
the throw of a stitch,
how it can be *interrupted*,
or one long song pulling the edges ever closer
until they nestle, and the unwound wound,
once agape, telling no more secrets.

Big gash, drunk forehead:
a smiley smile, a goofy grin.
The old man fell, and he smiles
as he tells me a song,
something about bedroom slippers
and a trip. The paramedics
picked him up outside a bar.

I draw up the percent xylocaine
from the red bottle, my 20-gauge sucking it up,
switch to 25-gauge and spread goodwill around:
swell the smile to a big Jagger pucker
and grab the needle driver,
the suture, and say:
you're frozen,
thinking of lips kissing a post in winter.
I want to grab his second mouth
and make high-pitched funny noises,
but the nurses would talk again about Dr. Neilson
so I grab the vicryl suture
with the driver and begin: bite in, bite out,
throw a knot, double, triple, cut.

I'm sewing up a Dali face
as I wonder what this mouth
would really say, given the chance.
I'm leaning close enough to hear
the pop of needle tip piercing tough tanned tissue,
and I wonder too about the interrupted technique,
about how I'm not giving this mouth
a say, how my deep bites tie its tongue,
how the upper and lower flaps
have come together nicely,
how his life will never,
about the beauty of the word *ever*
and as I bid goodbye to wobbly Mr. Lasseter
of the slippered fall I wonder why ERs
aren't like the hair salon,
equipped with hand mirrors
so that patients can see.
Seven days, I bid him,
the stitches need to come out,
and the pursed-lips will become a scar,
yellow skin whitening and tightening,
condemned to the ghost of a smile.

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