

Poetry

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You saw the birds again, you tell me,
when I visit you early in the morning.
Two golden birds with long necks,
you think they may have been cranes.
You noticed them last night in the hours before sleep,
sitting in the corner behind your IV pole,
so still you wondered how long they had been there.
You watched them for many minutes, but then they flew
up to the table folded over your bed,
their wings huge and shimmering and streaked with pink,
touching down briefly next to your packets of graham crackers
before flying over to the window and disappearing.
You point to the window and I walk over –
blue-purple sky, snow on the sidewalks,
slow lanes of traffic.
I know they aren't real, you tell me.
You are sitting looking up at me, one leg dangling over the edge of the bed,
one leg deep under the blankets.
We have told you to press a button to call your nurse, each time you see something,
to correlate with the EEG on your scalp tracking your brain waves.
Reading the nurses' notes, that morning, while eating my bagel and cream cheese:
1:27 pm – pt pushes button to notify RN that he has seen several squirrels
4 pm – pt sees 3 black crows
Once, you push your button not because you have seen something,
but because your roommate started to make strange noises –
When the nurses come in, they find your roommate in status epilepticus,
and he is immediately transferred to the ICU.
When we thank you profusely, you say, *I was so worried about him*.
Late in the afternoon, we go to stick a needle in your back
to sample some of the fluid around your spine.
It takes us a long time to find the right place.
The sunlight coming in from the window is very bright.
You lie with your knees to your chest, the curve of your back facing us.
You talk to us about the ocean in the town you grew up in.
About the way it came up to the very edge of the buildings.
In the evening, I walk past gutters of melting snow.
In the laundry room at home, I watch my white coat in the dryer,
turning over and over on itself in the darkness.

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