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poems
by
doctors

In the Giraffe House

Pascale Petit

Visiting you in the hospital
is like going into the giraffe house,
to peer down into that deep pit
where they overwinter.
Your head sways towards me,
a map of *terra incognita*.
Your legs wade as if through the sea –
my clown-on-stilts, sleepwalker
in desert pyjamas, your eyes too soft,
your mouth so slack the upper jaw
moves away from the lower
like you've taken out dentures
but have to chew over the same word.
If only you could remember who this visitor is
high up in the viewing gallery.
I want to commemorate your youth
in the savannah, my giraffe mother.
I'm only passing through to shelter
from the cold. It's freezing outside
and I wanted warmth
but you are all the colours of drought,
the cracked riverbeds of your skin
a jigsaw no one can get right.
I rest my palm against the partition
and my breath blurs your lips, the long
blue tongue that keeps licking the glass.

From *The Hippocrates Prize 2015: The Winning and Commended Poems*, selected by T Dalrymple, R Gross, F Oyeboode and S Rae, eds MW Hulse & DRJ Singer. The Hippocrates Press, 2015. © Pascale Petit. Reprinted with permission.

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