
POETRY | SPRING 2021

Countertransference

By Paavani Reddy

I saw her. Wilted and wide eyed,
jaw and limbs resting loosely, without
an ounce of tension, except for
the endeavor of her shallow breath.

Her daughter, sober, awake,
rests her forehead by the cloudy window
sill. She is not mine,
and yet I know her.

Years before, when my toes
could not reach the floor,
my grandmother and I hummed along,
as old songs scratched on the radio.

I raked my arm in bushes for blackberries;
her steady hands would knead them to jam.
I read by her side, sprawled in the light,
as she watered the lazy plants on her wall.

I have fragments: the edge of her *saree*,
my hair blending into hers on winding drives home,
the crinkle of her gum wrapper,
as she hands me a piece, flowers falling out of my pockets.

Our last time together, she lay in a pale green gown,
cheeks sank inwards, as if nothing
could tether them. Her eyes outwards, gaze
fixated on a vacant corner.

There was no recognition.
Only the buzzing monitors, and a
grumbling heater. She was mine,
and yet I did not know her.

My patient sighs in her stupor, and I find
that I am fixed on her daughter, who searches us
for relics of an answer. We have

nothing to offer but small words.

“She’s still my mother,” her daughter says,
a trace of a question. I picture them together,
laughter in the illumination of flickering TV lights.
And here again, in a pale green gown. “She is,” I agree.

Paavani Reddy is a medical student at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, IL. She graduated from Northwestern University with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology, and was named a James Alton James scholar, awarded by the Dean’s Office to three seniors who demonstrated excellence in the social sciences. After graduation, she spent a year in South Korea with the Fulbright Program. She is passionate about health equity, education, and the arts.

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