

## Field Notes From a Health Care Worker in America

By Jane Newkirk

Not unlike a scrappy hotel on the edge  
of a hardscrabble town, empty  
mini-fridge and a view of nowhere,  
every bed a single, no sounds

of lovemaking or fights between lovers  
seeping through walls, just beeps  
of IV lines and liquid meals  
completing their course downstream  
to the body,

And calls to be cleaned  
or to get out of bed unnoticed  
by an underpaid staff who lean  
on desks as if at a bar,  
thumbing their phones, in no hurry.

Here is where I come in, with you  
in bed, worry smeared in your eyes  
from a terminal diagnosis delivered  
at breakfast, the smell of stale eggs  
on an untouched tray lingering  
like the silence

that asks only to bear witness  
to the hair knot slicked  
on the linoleum floor and a rank  
gauze tossed to the trash  
and missed.

Here is where you'll learn  
the sound a plastic pillow makes  
against your ear in the ritual attempts  
at sleep between vitals.

Here is where you'll learn  
that prayer has no deductible  
and the miracle of pharmaceuticals

no charity.

Here is where I measure  
the smallness of my body against  
the bigness of your heartbreak.

I have no wisdom to share.

But here is a washcloth warmed  
for your face, and here  
let me open the blinds  
to the sky's faint blue.

---

**Jane Newkirk has worked as a cook, bread baker, visual artist and art gallery owner. She works as an occupational therapist in a long-term acute care hospital in Jackson, Mississippi.**

---

© 2022 *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*