
POETRY | FALL 2022

In the 70's

By Nancy Smith

In the 70's,
we counted microdrips of Lidocaine
to control the premature looping of electricity.
The heart is patient
the seizures are rare
we are trying our best.

Before the microchip
calculated it,
we unfurled the formulae.
Cardiac Index, SVO2
Big A to little a
ratio
grades of oxygen consumption
the number production
bangles and clicking heels of an ICU
nurse.

Later, many survived the witnessed arrest
so well
without the looping perseverance.
Cold, rubbery armor
so simple
ICU
freeze in your place
till your heart catches up.

Later still,
the acid
of time releases so much.

I see you
your head is full of birds
your skin gelid alabaster

your tears bewildered
my best act
a cover
warm
from the hospital's secret chest.

Nancy Smith is a retired registered nurse, who moved through many of the venues of hospital nursing, but who worked mostly in an Intensive Care Unit. Smith found herself searching for the poetic voice when she, her patients and co-workers were gathered together during times of pressure, something we call stress. Poetic imagining seemed to expand the space for her. Smith and her family live in rural Maryland, where she has designed an acupuncture practice.

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