

The Secret Keeper

By Emily De Ferrari

He was a night shift doc on labor & delivery.
She was a later-mother wannabee, a nurse, green.
He told her he'd had a vasectomy.
She started finding bobby pins in his bathroom.
The control stayed pink but the test turned blue.
She made an appointment.
Her friend called that morning to say she was sorry, but she couldn't drive her here.
Or pick her up.
You have to take a cab home, her friend said. Promise me you'll take an cab.
She tucked 2 subway tokens into her bra, and told her friend for sure, she would take a cab.
Lying flat on her back, legs in stirrups,
memorizing the hyper colors of a New York City map loose by one tack
in the acoustic ceiling, she heard the automatic door open.
Her eyes swallowed the room as his voice stumbled over her intake papers.
I pulled her knee socks down around her ankles,
the elastic was cutting the circulation,
she pulled them back into place.
When he sat between them, she lifted to one elbow.
He didn't look up.
She fell back with a crinkle and a tear of the white paper.
She held the napkin-like blanket over her thighs.
She wanted weight.
His instruments entered her without his usual reassuring narration.
She stared hard at the ceiling.
Let him do it. And keep it to himself.
In the recovery room,
linked to the quiet of other women,
I saw her feel for the remaining subway token in her bra
When I brought her tomato juice and crackers, she called me Knee-Sock-Nurse
and thanked me. I handed her the form to sign that she was going home accompanied.
She scratched an X with so much force she tore the paper,
pushed out her lower jaw and held it there,
took the subway home
and kept that secret like all the others she had made that day.
She didn't expect that I'd recognize her
when we met, both grey,
working hospice.
She greeted me asking if I were still
pulling socks down
before procedures.

Her ability to recall
all the details, told me
how very well she had
kept this secret.

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