
POETRY | FALL 2017

Breathing in Hospice

By Alina Siddiqui

“Sit here and breathe,
Think about the sacred space you are entering.
And when you enter, do NOT cry!”

She commands.
Exposing a strength
I hadn’t realized the dying could possess.

Wooden stool below the poster outside the bedroom door,
This is not optional, I despair.
19-year-old hospice volunteer on her first shift.

I know what I’ll see when I enter,
after I acquiesce to her demands.
87-year-old Ruby on a ventilator,
only a few more days left to spend with her broken lungs.

Surrounded by family who have sat in this stool outside her room
digging deep into memories
richer than anything I could imagine –

And what I cannot imagine
is sitting here.
Sitting and thinking and breathing
all at the same time,
and not shedding a few inexperienced tears.

Alina Siddiqui is a senior at Barnard College studying neuroscience and race & ethnicity. She is interested in the intersection of medicine and racial and social equity, and is passionate about using art as an agent of change and a promoter of wellness.

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