



CNA Clinicals Day #3

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It was mud.

All mud. His language lost in pain
and loose teeth, and it may have been
important, may have been a plea

for a priest, a cigar, or forgiveness for
stealing his sister's lunchbox, his brother's
wife, and do you think we fill in
other people's cracks to heal our own?

Some days, I drag soap over broken bodies
to convince myself that I am clean.

My instructor never turns their groans into stories.

She pokes a straw through his chapped lips
to shut him up, and has me hold his wrist
to feel how blood leaves the extremities
when the heart begins to scream, feel how

his pulse shakes like a wet, caged bird.

He jolts.

He'll squirm less when he's dead
my instructor jokes, and laughs
when my hands jump to cover his ears
betraying my need to protect this patient

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from her sharp truth, her rough decree
that to the world, he is already unhearing
unseeing, unformed, already dispersed

beyond our reach, beyond revision
the way fire burns wood into ash
the way that ash and water
will forever be mud.

“CNA Clinicals Day #3” by Anneka Johnston was awarded third place in the William Carlos Williams Poetry Competition.

Anneka Johnston grew up in West Michigan and attended Kenyon College, majoring in English with a special certification in creative writing and minoring in chemistry. Continuing her lifelong commitment to avoid sunny weather, Anneka moved to Chicago following graduation and worked in a Suboxone clinic at the height of Chicago’s opioid epidemic. She began searching for the common ground between medicine and the humanities and became passionate about giving voice to patient experiences through narrative art. She is currently a fourth-year student at Loyola’s Stritch School of Medicine and is planning to pursue a career in psychiatry.

Anneka’s poem “CNA Clinicals Day #3” is an exploration of how caretakers struggle to make meaning out of death.

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