Lost in translation

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Day 21—

Psst, psst.

Zee lays in bed. Her hair is in
one thick ponytail. It is higher
than she usually tied it. We know
from photographs clipped to a line
like clothes hanging out to dry.
They run from stand to stand;
from monitors to IV saline.

Psst, psst.

She may not approve of her
current hairstyle
but it allows her head
to rest flat on the bed. It doesn't matter
either; chlorhexidine may not be her type
of scent. Her eyelids are not closed and
yet her eyes aren't open. Zee is absent,
but present—only as much as
the girl in the photograph.

Psst, psst.

Her chest rises, her chest falls.
We watch them
behind sliding doors;
time slowly crawls. Her mother is
reading to her. Is there a clearer way to tell her
her daughter's condition may not worsen
nor change for the better?
Of course, it can't be when this mother
is stroking her daughter's hair.

Each new day, Zee's mother willfully weaves her fairy tale.
This mother's bedtime story prolongs this tragedy.
Abruptly, an innocuous blood vessel raged and took her life.
Stubbornly, we now rage against the gentle dying of the light.
We tell the translator to say, there is a place for comfort elsewhere—
Zee's brother interrupts.
He translates
and mutates the reality of his sister's mortality.

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Psst, psst.

Mother grasps, her still-warm hand, responded
by a

psst, psst.

Her daughter is here—she is laughing in the picture
pasted on the wall. She is as cheeky as she was in
that picture of when she was small. Or perhaps
she is but a ghost of her past, her body a
warm coffin her loved ones can
behold.

In the morning the Attending speaks.

Hi my name is Doctor.

Speak no Eng-lish!

Hi.

I

am

the

doctor

taking care of your daughter

Your daughter has a big bleed in the brain
her exam today hasn't changed much we
think we can send her out to another hospital
tomorrow.

No.

Stay

here.

*Other hospital no
machine.*

Psst, psst.

Zee's mother grasps, her still-warm hand, holding
a pocket-sized dog-eared paperback. She reads
strange words I do not understand—
perhaps a childhood song or a holy verse
in the native tongue of their
homeland.

Psst, psst.

Her hair must have
grown half an inch now. Dry scabs of skin
surround the roots of hair on this
very still head. Mother sings her songs to
bring her home, not knowing
perhaps, she is
already there.

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Neurology 2012;78:e101-e102

DOI 10.1212/WNL.0b013e31825182f2

This information is current as of April 23, 2012

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