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.

Listen to Dr. Goh read this poem, available exclusively on Neurology® for the iPad®.
Psst, pst.
Mother grasps, her still-warm hand, responded by a
psst, pst.
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, pst.
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, pst.
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.
Lost in translation
Orlanda Goh

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