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WAITING IN THE WAITING ROOM

Sharon Mollerus

They walked in while I was reading a six-month old copy of *People*. Somebody has anorexia; a 35-year-old pop star married again. No one subscribes; we just read the mangled copies in waiting rooms, the staples falling out, pages ripped; it makes us feel better. There's a cheery gas fire on with fake logs, and the décor is pasteled winter scenes hanging from papered walls.

She was an old woman short of breath, but not too hampered in the volume of her voice. "I wish I could just die and get it over with," she yelled. Her nice neighbor brought her in, a lady with an enormous purse who can't be any younger. "How long you been feeling this way?" the triage nurse asks. "For years." She's been taking nitroglycerin for her heart; her friends share it. "But it's expired," she's told. "You can tell when it doesn't tingle anymore under your tongue. Who's your doctor?" "Doctors kill you," she said. "That's why I don't have one. They stuck a needle in my mother, and she died right then. I saw it all." She gives over her hand to have her pulse taken.

The old guy in the bright blue vest at the volunteer desk shrugs. His shoulders are hunched as he slowly gets up and circles the room, turning on the lights. It's storming outside, long wires of lightning, hard cracks of thunder, brought down like a hammer on cement. All the flower arrangements are in silk; the drooping star-like white flowers fall over the reception desk.

I wait for my son to finish his visit, then I'll wheel
him to the car. At his house I'll help him into
the hospital bed that's set up in their living room.
I'll stay until his wife comes home from work
and back from picking up their little girl from
daycare; the child's too young to understand that
her father, on the other hand, doesn't want to die.
I hand the old magazine off to the old woman's
nice neighbor.