

ANOTHER COUNTRY

JUDY BEBELAAR

The body in this mechanical bed
is not my body, the mind is not mine either—
a specimen in ether, a was-brain in a was-body
that used to dance.

This is another country.

I've been in one like it once or twice,
bright, murky, somewhere, nowhere.

Out there, from the land of the well, visitors pass by
and can't help but peer into these sickrooms,
rubberneckers at our accidents.

It's natural. I've done the same.

Out there, beyond those who gaze in at us, buildings, hills and
trees, sky.

It's good to look. I leave my curtains open.

Elroy, I've named him, is my constant companion,
with his crown of stainless steel hooks,
his translucent bags, his warning beeps and lights.

I'd like to walk out with the well people,
but this silly gown, and Elroy.

Sometime in the long night
of clatters, of lights and thermometers,
somewhere in a nearby room,
a woman wails her loss.
The body in that metal bed was all she had.
All of us—the well, the unwell, the dying—
are silent. We listen; we know.
She knows, but rails against her knowledge,
long and hard, in undulating waves,
until she too joins the silence.

A sluggish struggle continues in the body-not-me.
The not-mind tries to track it, indolent, impotent.
Sleep comes and goes and comes
until early light filters through the windows.

Men and women in green, smiling, gather at the foot of my bent bed.
They are from the country of the well. Aren't doctors always well?
I don't speak their language, can't remember the important question
before they are gone.

Enter Tenzin, who has never been to her Tibetan homeland.
Every country is yet another country but she makes herself at home,
though she complains she can't just borrow an egg where she lives now,
and people don't just drop by to eat.

Tenzin comes in and dispels the darkness. The room crackles with her
laugh.

They didn't tell you why the antibiotic was changed?
They have to tell you. You need to know. I'll find out. You need a vase?
I'll find one. I'll call the doctor. I'll look it up.
She clicks furiously on the computer. *Ha! That's it!*

Tenzin is indomitable. I'm catching it.
*Elroy, come on. We're going out there. I don't care if they stare
at the tubes from under my gown up to your silly crown.*

Bebelaar: Another Country

So we go out into the corridor: sad or serious men
hunkering over food that smells strange to my hospital nose,
my stomach three days empty;
a group of women sit on folding chairs and talk,
empathy written on their shadowed faces.

And I know there is no answer,
just negotiation—between the chemical dripping
and my body's response; the something not-me
that's built a nest for itself,
and the part of me trying to get rid of it.

On my side too: friends,
the man in the lab who laughed and flirted,
my cat who looks straight into my eyes with trust,
my husband who's exhausted with worry, who doesn't give up
with his new ideas (the psychic nutritionist, an MRI instead of a CT scan),
dumb luck, Tenzin,
and my own determination.

Let's go, Elroy.