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THREE POEMS

BY THERESA EDWARDS

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The Nurse on Percy

On the boulevard
moans ricocheted through the first floor
of the small green cottage—
the high school nurse's rental.

Trees with two-toned trunks,
bubbled texture,
seemed to melt as we passed.

Our father told us not to go down that street.
We didn't listen.

My brother and I smoked our cigarettes,
radio blaring from the sunroof of his black Mustang,
Going 40 in a 25.

Our father said if he ever caught us on Percy Boulevard,
he would make sure we never went on it again.
We didn't listen.

He told us not to smoke.
We smoked.
We listened to music he said would make us deaf.
We were deaf.
driving Percy—
too fast
too loud.
Brassy moans—
music blaring from my bro's car didn't stop the dog's itch
to screw the new bitch across the boulevard.

We felt the hit—
cigarette and spit flew out of my brother's mouth
as he slammed the brakes.

We saw the nurse, "Florence Nightingale" half naked,
run to her beat-up mongrel,

his limbs in curb trash.

We saw our father stop suddenly behind the front door screen
of the nurse's rental.
He shielded his shame, revealed to us the reason why
we always had to detour.

What Was Left

My mother watched my father die.
A blender of crushed tomatoes exploded
over the wall, rug, floor,
her.

I helped her scrape
red chunks:
blisters off her face.

We pressed towels into the rug,
watched the beige appear
like dried sand—
the kind we swept off the docks
at my uncle's marina.

My mother cursed the broken top,
remembered buying the blender for sauce on Sundays.

The Smell of Alcohol

Mount Sinai Hospital—
she watched the stiff tube on the wall
suck memos up over the nurse's station.
Like a clear snake ready to attack,
the tube hung still.

She was afraid,
papers ascended,
end of chute slammed shut.
Suction made her blink her big brown eyes,
her baby fingers gripped my right hand tightly.

Before her fevers reached 105,
I saved her from convulsions.
Took her temperature every four hours,
Gave her St. Joseph's aspirin for children,
crushed like orange grizzle in her applesauce.

104 degrees—
her face flushed,
her ear scorched my cheek as I got her ready for the sink.
Tepid water and baby washcloth,
rubbing alcohol in a plastic bowl on the counter,

vapors intoxicated us.

I rubbed alcohol over her tiny body—
stainless shined beneath her little legs,
her hands causing slight, clear waves
to fold against her belly.
I held her soft back,
gently washed her face, behind her ears,
spots burning most,
mixing clear with clear to fight the heat.
Strong, bitter fumes pressed against my temples.

Her eyes stared at something in the corner:
a part of her fever lingering from the day before,
a vision in the air,
the tube at Mount Sinai,
her next trip to the doctor,
where she'll watch the "snake,"
cry, and say, "Mommy, dat?"

At the bank drive-thru,
I watch the metal door slide open
like a vertical confessional screen
Container carries my pay check,
up, down the tube.

She sits in the passenger seat,
a young, beautiful woman.
Not remembering our trips to the hospital,
she watches me watch the check's path.
I see a clear vein carrying her blood
in a fevered body
ready for the sink,
to catch the fever of unknown origin,
eliminate the snake.

I feel her long, strong fingers grip my right hand.
"Relax, we know where it's going," she says.
"Mom, the money'll come back."
I laugh,
check the air for the smell of alcohol.

Theresa Edwards is married, has two sons, and is an adjunct writing instructor and tutor at Marist College. Her poetry has appeared in *Pitkin Review*, *Chronogram*, *conatus*, and *The Spoken Wheel*, one of her short stories published in *The Mosaic*. She has written musical compositions, including work for mixed media, and has finished a novella, titled *The Ride*. Theresa holds a B.S. (cum laude) in Music, Mercy College; a Professional Artist Diploma—Music Theory and Composition, Westchester Conservatory of Music; an M.A. in English, Western Connecticut State University; and will complete an M.F.A. in Creative Writing, Goddard College, next July. She was coeditor of *Pitkin Review's* spring 2006 issue.