

Fingertips

Poetry

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It echoes at night,

The atonal spaces in between
The water tower and the bedtowers.

Even with ears humming from the thrum of call bells
And alarms and orders and presentations,
I cannot avoid the resonance on my way home.

Tonight I am interrupted,
A silence too loud to walk through.
I am met by the shadow
Of a woman pacing across a window, saying
Wait.

Remember why you are here, what is done,
The world of those upper floors.
Backlit by the stairwell, a man on a cellphone leans against the wall.

I'm starting to mix the record the way I want,
Easier listening— filtering out and tuning away
These waiters, the family, the watchers,
The wringing of the hands, the tense calls,
The reminder that
Names are inevitably tethered to being.

Three months, and they're already devolving into routines,
Checks on a list, lines on a board.
I don't get impressed so easily anymore.

But if I were, would I be able to eat with a dead man in the next room?
Could I watch a chest tube drain without doubling over, vicarious pain,
Send a woman home to no health insurance,
Watch a daughter lose her father in a matter of hours,

Their cardiogenic shock?

Never has there been so elusive an answer.

As I cross Emergency Drive,

I pray for a little callous to stave the pain so I can play for longer, reverberate for days,

But I also hope to keep the softness, that fine sensitivity,

That makes me able to play in the first place.