



Illustration by Eleeza Palmer

If Billy Collins were a doctor

If Billy Collins were a doctor
he would finish morning rounds in the evening,
because, as you know, there is a window
in every patient's room.

He would stand, perhaps sit, at the edge
of the empty bed, corduroy legs in divine cross,
pen in hand, notating on the back of the day's patient list
the vitals of the morning shade elms.

Across the room, behind him, is an old man
or, perhaps, an old woman—waiting—with an IV here
or a catheter there. A half-drunk glass of water
evaporating on a half-eaten dinner tray.

In every hallway, he would be compelled
to pause, irregularly, and jot jottings
in his tired journal. Press firm against a sterile
alabaster wall or a crinkled gurney and write ungloved.

Were you there you would see his wide-eyed
diaphoresis as he spied the billowing sails
of an open hospital gown. He, struggling to scribble
the loftiest ancient simile—"as a trireme," "like a dhow."

Eventually, he would engage the EHR,
enter the hell of a daunting divine comedy.
Hunt and peck like a foraging Neanderthal
to order restraints and a sedative—or two.

All this would weary him, force an escape
from the careworn families wanting revised updates,
chasing through a lost side door, the white coat
that covers his poetic tracks.

He would waver toward a disremembered car,
forgetting not to look back at gauzy
hospital windows, from the outside in.
The crave of salt, pen pillared at the ready.

—Aaron M. McGuffin, MD