

Bites



we have moved like a brakeless train all week long
traveling through overcrowded halls
to overheated patient rooms
doubling back through to do urgent procedures,
signing those notes promptly
hustling to that phone meeting
paging and telemetry alarms
pair well with this machine-like feeling
now the clock strikes noon
we hear the news: *"There is food in the break room!"*
in a rush we descend to carve out our share
the only thing we crave more
than the food we are about to eat
is that sacred stillness in the air
when we take the pressure off our feet
clean our hands,
take our seats
first bite
silence
punctuated by
sequential crunching
a refreshing slurp
one by one, we look up

to full cheeks and knowing smirks
the inevitable, *"Are there any more napkins?"*
satisfied gulps, tense shoulders relax
a giggle makes way for a real, *"How is your day?"*
there is a certain reverence to it all
cleanse our bodies and our minds
come together, take our time
to break bread over last night's barbecue
or today's food truck on 12th avenue
for a moment we can be ourselves without distraction
fill our stomachs, fill our souls
this parasympathetic performance was lovely,
but now it must end
like drops of water on a broken levee
with a phone call, work drips, then floods back in
remaining bites interrupted by a voice on the line
"The hemoglobin is what? I will let my team know."
here comes the tidal wave of the afternoon workload
the crinkle of foil, the snap of closing tupperware
fade to the cadence of hustled steps down stairs
until next time, we will savor these bites we shared

—Antoinette Pusateri, MD