

CONSOLATION

On an otherwise quiet weekend,
the hospital gutted of the usual flurry of people
being made well, a family gathers in the empty
lobby. One's sobbing. It looks almost normal
until I remember the only visitors allowed
now are death, and for death.

Between my first patient with shortness
of breath, and the second with shortness of
breath, I sit in the room of a lonely
old man, and he tells me about his life,
grief for what's happened; terror
that the devil is chasing him down
and it's only a matter of time. Even with the best
medicines, he says, the voices don't completely

go away. At home at night my children
cry out with a fear they cannot name. I can
not name it either. But

they say it will be spring soon
coiled buds will open again
and a yawning dog, his nose up,
will take the scent of birth into his lungs
in exchange for the tired air within. If prayer
works at all, it is only in the givenness,
the guarantee, and tonight the stars shine
and the wind sings and I believe,
despite everything, in resurrection.

—*Brent Schnipke, MD*
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Illustration by Steve Derrick