

Shirley's Smile

At first, you held my hand and reassured me
that you wanted me there with Mike.
Then you began your journey away from us.

After a few days of sitting with you amid tubes and beeps,
it occurred to me that you no longer knew my name.
You seemed to claim it didn't matter –
names aren't as important as faces.
So when you jerked yourself awake,
startled to once again be in a foreign place,
I would say, "There, Shirley, it's alright"
and then Mike's gentle voice: "Keep your hands down, Mom."
But we didn't want to chasten you
and it wasn't alright.

We silenced our voices to match yours
and learned to talk with our eyes.
The last time I smiled at you,
you smiled back.
Mike saw the tenderness
you gave to me.

And then, an hour later,
you weren't there,
disappearing into a space
we can't yet see.

I will always remember
how your light blue eyes
relaxed into a relieved smile,
waving me goodbye.

Jan Brown
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