

## **Peaches and Acorns**

Being early, I park my lone car and walk in my starched white coat.  
I march through the halls, with my badge clacking, and pass the dark cafeteria  
Where I buy coffee and a cookie on days I wear jeans and carry notes,  
But this morning I pressed my pants and wiped my glasses.  
Today I am speckless, being carried to the top floors of inpatient otolaryngology.

Though it seems I have made a wrong turn, went down the stairs inside of up  
Because every set of inner doors are shut to me, my badge happy to light the boxes red.  
It's no entrance until after 6 o'clock for those who don't yet have the knowledge.  
Yet my watch ticks against my wrist, pushing me forward to find a way until  
I see the lit door, open because the minute hand has finally crept over twelve.

An inauspicious start, my mom might say over the phone pressed into my ear,  
The monkey year is the luckiest year for every one but the monkey herself -  
As if luck were ripe peaches I had been gathering in all the other years,  
Saving for when the monsoon would hit, one stacked on another in a tucked away cave  
Only for me to find, when the moon looked away, that they had been eaten without me.

I sit with an older student as he points out the intakes and outputs, how  
Each cup of water this gentlemen drinks becomes a commentary of up and down arrows.  
Even his stool is measured precisely, numbers that turn the stench clinical.  
I don't know why these numbers were taken, I don't know what the drugs do  
After the gentlemen picks them up and swallows them with help from his cup of water.

Later, I find out after shaking his hand and telling him I am no one important,  
It is too bad that he cannot swallow the pills I pretended for him to take because  
There is a hole in his neck, a small black crevice kept open by a rim of metal -  
Two other holes by his sides and a plastic bellow that holds yellow drippings,  
And five of us are gathered around the bed, craned to hear him whisper:

"Yes, I was very sick before but I am doing well now, even with a few holes.  
I walked today, up and down the hallway, shuffling and waving hello to strangers.  
Perhaps tomorrow I will shuffle to the cafeteria, holding the railing along the way.  
In a week, I will go visit a small lake with my wife, take her hand and we'll go walking  
Along the edge where the cattails meet bedrock, looking for a tucked away cave.

When we were younger, my wife and I ran around the lake with our dog.  
We would stop when our lungs were sharp with air and look for acorns -  
Plucking them from the root tangles of oak trees for our pockets,

Stacking them at the mouth of the cave to mark our presence but gone the next day.  
I suppose that some creature needed them more than our memory."

I wonder as we exit his room if I had pilfered from their cave, taking an acorn or two  
Before an exam or a plane flight, and I wonder who has snuck away from mine,  
Tasted the sweet peach and the stickiness that runs down the mouth.  
They must have needed strength in that moment and seen a quiet shelter,  
A shrine for spirits down on their luck and a beacon of plenty to share.