

Sing for Me

by Jack Swenson

A Satire

I have dubbed the nurses Squirt and Tonsils. I have given them names. They are friends, the best of friends. Squirt is the night nurse; Tonsils toils during the day.

I am weary of being in the hospital. I am bored, bored to death. I ask the doctor when I can go home; he says "Soon." It's always the same answer. Soon.

Several people in suits come in and have me sign papers. They never smile. There are insurance forms to fill out. I don't understand a word of it. What can I do? What do they *expect* me to do? I sign where they tell me to sign.

Sometimes my friends come to see me. Gordon smuggles in a bottle of beer. It tastes awful, and I feel odd afterward. Or is it oddly? (For a time I have no sensation in my fingers.) Warm and fuzzy, that is how I feel. Tonsils catches me with the beer and takes it away from me.

That evening when Squirt comes on duty, she informs me that she has heard about the incident. She will have to administer punishment, she says. She winks at me and leaves the room.

I wish that I could remember what happened. It was a car accident, I know that much. I believe that I was driving. But was I by myself, or were there other people involved? I don't know. Do you? No one has said a thing, and I have not asked.

The next day the doctor comes in and looks me over. He pokes and presses here and there. He takes measurements with a tape measure. He scratches the tip of his nose. "Hmm," he says. Yes, that is what he said. Can you believe it? Can you fucking believe it? The man is an idiot.

That night Squirt comes in at 3 a.m. She is going to kill me, that woman. She is going to get us both in trouble.

The next day my employer comes to see me. "Don't worry about a thing," he tells me. "We gave your job to Harold, but when you are well, we will consider you for the first opening we have."

You know what it's like when you are in the hospital. It's like a dream. You get confused. Did that really happen? Did Kitty and Gerald drop by to say hello? Did I have a lamb chop for dinner last night or the night before? Did the little Mulatto nurse come by with a pain pill, or was it somebody else?

I try to read. I have Harry bring me some books. *La Nausee* and *Crime and Punishment*. I would have preferred something by Proust or Gide.

I am beginning to worry. There is something that they are not telling me. I am afraid that something bad is going to happen. When I was a child, I had nightmares. I dreamed about hellfire and damnation. It is like that. That is what it is like.

I don't know what I would do without the two nurses. They comfort me. They make me lie still. I am not afraid when they are with me. No, when they are at my side, my fears depart. I tell the women that they are angels. Angels of mercy. I tell them that surely goodness and mercy will follow them all the days of their lives.

