

# The nurse left work at five o'clock

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## In Time

The nurse left work at five o'clock. A urine sample was left on a food tray, stacked on a cart, and rolled to the food service kitchen, not be discovered for hours, a sample not collected again until the following day, so the lab didn't get a result, the diagnosis was delayed, and the suffering of the patient prolonged. Leaving a urine sample on a food tray was a stupid mistake, and the nurse will be written up.

The call center representative had been on the job four hours, and took a "lunch" at five o'clock: two slices of cold pepperoni pizza, a Granny Smith apple, and a can of root beer. The call center representative sought solace in the break room, where the mull of the other operators was more distant, like the chattering of insects at night, the rise and fall of tiny creatures vying to be heard. And the leftover pizza was delicious.

From the drive-thru window of the bank at five o'clock, the teller eyed the tedious line of cars that snaked around the building. The bank teller kept a novel under the counter for the slow times, with a way of reading that looked like staring into the computer screen, as opposed to staring into the book. The bank teller was a college student, not a particularly good one, because working at the bank cut into study time, and the books the professors ordered were too bulky to hide under the counter. This novel was about a man who rescued a commuter from the subway track with a train approaching, the opening scene suspenseful, and the Herculean rescue achieved in the nick of time, this character no ordinary character, despite humble claims to TV cameras. And the novelist seemed to suggest that really none of us is ordinary. We can become

ordinary. But we have intelligence, we have desires, we have talents.

The nurse sometimes stood in the room of a sleeping patient and turned on the TV to The Lifetime Channel, or to The Lifetime Movie Channel. The nurse chewed gum like a high school kid who wouldn't be told what to do. In the patient's eighth-floor room, the nurse had stared down at a water skier who skimmed over the river in wide arcs, and the urine sample was set on the wrong tray. Nobody's perfect. But the nurse never took the job home, never apologized, and mistakes washed off in the shower like sleep.

The bank teller wanted to be an interpreter in another part of the world, the possibilities open but narrowing. In college, one can pretend time stands still, the teller unable to tackle a foreign novel without a language dictionary, which wouldn't go unnoticed, the back and forth between books too obvious. And the drawer sometimes came up short—so that would be one more thing. Meanwhile, reading novels in English felt like progress and the walls of the bank faded away.

Everywhere, it was five o'clock, the hour to awaken from daydreams, the sun sinking and expanding, a blood orange. Pavements shimmered in dissipating heat. Lots emptied. Moods lifted with anticipation of alcohol, and of night. Commuters boarded or departed subway trains, no one fell to the track, and no one was inspired to heroism. Familiar news anchors summarized the marvelous day in straightforward prose.

Shadows stretched from buildings as dogs were walked on leashes, the facades of the workday exchanged for the facades of the home. The moon appeared in the sky a white ghost. And the souls of the living yearned for release.

