

Sack of Meat

by Paula Bomer

The Nurse left work at five o'clock, walking down Dekalb Avenue toward Flatbush. He didn't frequent the bar closest to the hospital, although he guessed other nurses and doctors from Brooklyn Hospital did. He liked to pretend that he cared about his reputation, or pretend that he had a good one. He was still in his blue scrubs, still wearing his crocks. He hadn't shaved that morning; his hands had been too shakey. That had made things at work sort of interesting, but not for the first time. He got a few more "that hurts!" than some days, from yanking on a tube awkwardly, or moving the needle too much while giving a shot. He thought about the time the anesthesiologist, reeking of booze, confided in him, saying, "today is a really bad day to have surgery." He lit a cigarette and bumped into someone. He was going to say sorry or excuse me, but he got a dirty look, so fuck it.

 Aaah, his bar. A seedy little place off the Fulton Mall, with a warped pool table and low level Mexican coke dealers. He drank a double bourbon neat and ordered another one. After two more, he was feeling better. He went out to smoke.

 "Got a light?" How ugly was she? That was his first thought. His second thought was, is she on crack? Man, words came pouring out of her skinny self. He half tried to follow them. And at the end of his cigarette, he started to try to get some words in himself. It half worked. They threw their cigarettes into the street and went back in, sitting next to each other. He bought her a drink. Shit, he made a hundred grand a year, he always bought the drinks. After another double, he thought she was pretty. Warm seeming. Maybe her eyeliner was halfway down her face, but she had something. She did. And best of all, he hadn't seen her before.

 They went out for another cigarette.

 "Are you a doctor? You look like a doctor."

 "Yeah, I'm a doctor."

Two blocks away, at the ten dollar an hour hotel, she bent over the bed, still talking. She'd argued for twenty-five, seeing as how he was a doctor, but he got her down to ten. Shit, he bought her three drinks. That was twenty-five right there. And then, there it went, all of the warmth he thought she had, and all the nice feelings he had felt- he had, hadn't he?- went out the ash black window of the room, out the window and onto Livingston Street. Fuck her, he thought. Fuck her for arguing for more money. Fuck her for smelling bad. Fuck her. And then he thought, should I do it? Should I do it? People die all the time. He knew that. Hell, two people died at work today. What was a life? A sack of meat.

