

We're Here With Some Flowers For You

i wasn't there. so i can only imagine it like this. with dim lighting casting strange shadows against the white hospital walls. (which, why are they always white? i would want to be warm, if i was dying.)

a private room, because this is a good hospital, and so it's expensive, and also, in this town, empty. something we can afford now, something he probably hated. (and i would hate it, too, if i was dying and there was no one to talk to but my children who have jobs and the nurses who have jobs and the promise of flowers from my grandchildren who i have driven away.) the room is cold, too, like the whole building, and when you walk in through the automatic doors out of the hazing beating Alabama heat, the shift is jarring. there aren't enough blankets on the bed, so grandma brings some from home, more each time, the thick ones, the Korean ones, the ones that are *heavy*, the ones that were woven to withstand thin walls and no heater and Korean winters (the ones that don't get much use here).

(when i was young, they suffocated me. too weak to pull them off myself.)

it smells like mothballs, from the blankets. i won't even bother mentioning the hospital smell. if you know it, you know it, and if you don't, i won't be the one to change that. once, there were sweet ribs—not American ribs, but the ones that have three little bones embedded in the side, and that's your handhold to rip off the meat, juicy and sweet (which are my favorite food, other than wild-grown blackberries from home.) the doctor says no more, though. it's hard on the stomach.

grandma wants to argue. dad says in a soft voice, *i'll take care of it, mom*. he walks to the doctor and says in a soft voice, *okay*. little brother says to grandpa, *can i have that*, and points at his plate. stepmother cuts in, *just take mine*. uncle laughs softly and says, *have some of mine, too*. there's an elephant in the room. (there's two elephants in the room.)

grandpa's mouth never quite closes anymore and he mostly looks at the ceiling. *hi*, the elephants say softly, *we're here with some flowers for you*. grandpa looks at them. dad says, *hey, dad, we're all here today*. soft and raspy voice from the man on the bed scratches the air, *and the kids? what of the kids?* dad gestures to the elephants. dad says, *they sent flowers*. soft and raspy voice from the man on the bed says, *and the kids? what of the kids?* the elephants won't look at anyone. the shadows turn purple and deep like a bruise. the sun is going down.

echoing through the room. *what of the kids?*