



BREADTH

READING POST-CALL POETRY

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Author's note: Years ago, I came across an essay by Danielle Ofri in *Poetry Magazine* in which she described reading poetry to medical students and residents on the wards at Bellevue Hospital. Nowadays, when I ask my learners for feedback at the end of each rotation, hardly anyone compliments me on my chalk talks. Almost everyone offers appreciation for the poetry. The following poem is based on a true story.

In the footsteps of Danielle Ofri

The young physicians file in apprehensively inspecting
scattered chairs laminate tables a lone sofa splashed
with sunlight. Despite the shade of fatigue their minds

are constantly computing navigating algorithms mastering
games. Which is why I gave them warning after making rounds
and slashing the day's check boxes we'll pause for post-call

poetry. The word itself against the starkness of the wards is startling
so we begin with something easy lines straight and free flowing
no masking the poet's intention a call to listen generously.

The confident resident used to speaking with authority
speaks with authority and buoyed by his endorsement the others are
engaged. I raise the stakes let them steep in metaphor riddle them

with syntax just beyond our reach. We will no longer tolerate
a hierarchy of meaning one resident conveys from the corners of
her eyes seeming pleased. I sip Doctor Pepper deliberately.

The final poem conjures a landscape so distinct it suggests
an alternate universe a dazzle of light tincture of sea spray
that prickles the senses precisely. For thirty rarefied seconds

nobody speaks. We soak in the sun and stretch like cats in our seats.
Before we break our MD PhD, lean, bespectacled twists as if to leave
instead unfolds a sonnet that he penned and clears his throat to read.

continued on page 2