Non-Intensive Care

Everything is white. Strange. Clean. The foyer of another world.

An IV connects my hand to the stand beside my bed, connects me to *this*, to *them*, as nothing has before. My eyes sweep the warmly lit room, passing over the other beds, and fixes on the room's only real splash of colour: a diagram of a set of lungs, with labels pointing to different lobes. That's what makes me aware that I am breathing strangely. That's what makes me aware that, for everything I have survived in my life, I can't take this in.

Cruelty, I know too well. Abuse, yes. The deep dread of someone's anger.

But not this.

Are you in pain? The nurse asks, suddenly there again and seeing my tears. I shake my head and murmur something dismissive, and after checking the drip, she smiles and leaves.

I can almost see her there in front of me: my seven-year-old self, battered and broken to the point where she should have been taken to the hospital. She should have been in a place like this, but my father had only taken another beer and walked away, and my mother was always too busy. Too busy to help.

Too busy to love.

I close my eyes against the whiteness, against the peace, and press a hand to my heart.

No one will come to see me, of course. There is no one even to tell about the crash. Healing is a long weather-beaten road, and I know I have further to go.

But that isn't the point.

I remember year after year of being the only person to ever care for me. Of being unwanted. Unloved.

And I snuggle deeper into the comfort of the sheets, basking in the memory of the nurse's smile. I feel love in the hands that work this place,

the carefully cleaned floors, the button I can press to call someone for the first time in my life to ask me what is wrong.

And my heart breaks and heals together again, like bones that have mended out of alignment, finally set to right.