



Before We Can Begin

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We are hearing music, she and I alone together.
We are hearing music, waiting for the remote interpreter to connect.
We are hearing a piano, Chopin perhaps,
she, worried and searching
me, trying not to be in a hurry.
I have already spoken with the triage nurse
and reviewed the fetal heart tracing,
want to say things are reassuring, ask if they have chosen a name
but the internet is buffering and the music continues.

Here is too much time
and I am a fish made aware of the water.

I think of my own daughter, who, at five and awake with the sun,
took me out to run, by a mud puddle where we witnessed a dozen
Eurema lisa—
one of a few butterflies I readily recognize—
suddenly startled into rising confetti, a celebration perhaps,
they'd been spared our steps.
And if I could I would like to convey
that later that day, while hanging the drawings we had made,
I thought I had discovered the greatest joy of all:
being present in the moment no matter how small with those we love.
Yet I am brought back, aware of her
eyeing me above, fearing the worst, like a sentencing,
waiting, as she still is, for her prognosis.
So I squat to her level, reduce my size,
try to casually sanitize my stethoscope
and share an exasperated glance
at the source of the melody, now having played awhile
then parent-to-parent sway my head side-to-side
to which she manages a little smile.

Her shoulders relax
a willow tree once a gale has blown past.

And although we are still watching the wheel-of-wait spin
now we are listening to the Minute Waltz
before it ends, before we can begin.

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