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Medical Mother's Pantoum

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Amy Fleury

MEDICAL MOTHER'S PANTOUM

You walk in with war in your hair
and clutch the IV pole like a mace.
A careless dopamine infiltration,
yet another line infection, mistakes

that make you clutch the pole as a mace.
You've paced a circle of protection,
yet there's another infection, mistakes
or arrogance. The new night resident

paces into the circle of protection
around your child's bed. With a spasm
of ignorance, the night resident knew
you were probably right, but ordered

a round of meds though you spasmed
in panic at the damage they'd do.
You were definitely right, but orders
aren't up to you, just an exhausted mother

who panics and is damaged. They do
mean well and the nurse vouches for you.
You aren't up to it. An exhausted mother,
who dozes in in straight-backed chairs,

means well. The nurse vouches for you.
She's seen you fill your notebooks
with doses and data in the bedside chair,
watched you kiss your baby's face.

She notes how your eyes fill, looks
away when the tears at last let loose
from your lashes, kiss your baby's face.
Half the day spent on the phone,

tears of anger at last let loose, away
from your child's bedside. For what?
To spend half the day on the phone
pleading over insurance claims.

What could happen at the bedside?
You learned to lean in during rounds,
pleading for them to hear your claims.
You won't be shamed into silence.

You learned to lean in during rounds
to avoid errors or a careless infiltration.
When they try to shame you into silence,
you walk in with war in your hair.