



The Nurse's Job

by Veneta Masson

*"...with Mom so sick and everyone asking
where's her sister, the nurse..."*

The nurse's job is to make it better
whatever it is

(even a child knows this)

to smooth the forest of furrowed brows

to explain pathologies and pain

to say it will be all right

when it will

and when it won't

to relieve, to be there, to stay.

I have failed at my job.

Even a child knows this.

I offer sporadic intensive care

long-distance counsel

and two thousand miles of excuses.

My absence must smack of
malpractice.

And yet, in the end

there is sanctuary at St. Rose.

As two nurses wedge

between me and her bed

I know I can't distance myself again.

I cling to the rails

confess that I, too, am a nurse.

You're not a nurse here,

you're her sister

one says, swaddling me

tight in her arms.

I believe she has loved a sister.

I believe that she has known shame.

She does not say

it will be all right

but in her presence

I give in to grief

I begin to let go.

This nurse is doing her job.