

Lemonade Songs

This afternoon I dropped my cell phone down the drain and ran the garbage disposal until the noise and the smell made me stop. I ripped the landline off the wall and threw it from our apartment's tenth-story window. In the morning I go into the hospital for the last time. The damn doctors can pester me all they want when I get there; I want tonight to be for me and my little girl. Tomorrow every physician at Jefferson University hospital will surround my bed like crazed fans mobbing a rock star. They'll vie for preferential treatment, claim a bond that never existed when I was a lowly surgical assistant. They'll just have to write their papers without me. I can't talk about Spark, or the dust. If I were to urge them to make sure every household in the city stockpiles a hefty supply of lemonade they'd want to scan my brain again. I'm done with all that.

My doctors, they'll elbow the cops – and my mother, if she can stand to show up – out of the way and throw questions at me right up until my death. They'll talk about me like I'm not even in the room and call me Patient Zero. I won't correct them.

No one can know who Zero really is.

Odette is singing to herself in the living room. She's probably been singing for a while, but I'm only hearing it now since she switched off the TV. I set down my glass of lemonade and turn off the pasta – it'll get soggy, but no time to worry about that now – and hustle to hush my child before she starts another verse. I'm too slow, and she gets through the whole thing before I can stop her.

"That's enough, Nightingale," I tell her. She begins again, but I scoop her into my arms before she can sing more than a couple of words. I try not to think about how much lifting her tiny body hurts me these days. Instead, I spin her around until she's laughing and I'm sure her attention is on me.

The songs only seem to work if she really puts her entire three-year-old mind to them, so I sit her at the kitchen table where I can keep an eye on her and distract her again if needed. I sink into the chair beside hers and scoot the little basket of crayons and scratch paper that is our centerpiece over where she can reach it. She starts rooting in the basket. Papers scatter as she looks for her favorite colors: blue, brown, and yellow, all worn down halfway or more.

I tell her to practice making straight lines and she goes right to it. Odette's drawing lines at a second-grade level. She gets a lot of practice. It's the only activity that seems to quiet her endless need to sing the dead back home.

*Hello~o, Murder,
are you sleeping?
You're a good girl,
timetocomehome*

*Wake uh~up, No-Eyes,
your kids miss you.
They love love love you,
timetocomehome*