

Pajama time/Pandemic time

Liana Eskola

Rita Charon,

the godmother of narrative medicine,

knows words and patients.

She knows doctors too--what we give, what we lose, what we need.

How we cry.

How we hush our own beating hearts.

She knows about pajama time,

and all the words we whisper, intimate, to our dictation software:

Our run-on story-poems of suffering and numbers and plans

with painful indentations and ironic octothorpes

(the kids call them hashtags).

She asks us: What happens to our other words?

Mine seem lost.

I have worries before words--I feel the former before I can say the latter.

Sometimes I can't ever say them.

The worries beat a rhythm in my left ear,

pulsatile tinnitus that's only there when I lie down at the end of the day.

If I listen closely, worries' words beat their rhythm there, too:

Failure.

Isolation.

Sadness.

Grief.

Loss.

Loss.

Loss.

LOSS.

My pajama time with my patients, in their charts,

has me cradling them in the warmth of my thoughts,

as my words for them flow into the lifeless virtual space.

I hunger for their handshakes--cool, frail, sweaty, or wrinkled.

Do they read my thoughts?

Do they see how much I love them?

My pajama time with myself overflows with the worries.

The pulsatility beats time for me.

Yet there is the occasional moment,

when consciousness is leaving me,

and my sleeping husband's warm arm drapes heavy across my chest,
and silence sets in.

A wave of softness washes over me:

I have done some good.

And I am deserving, apart from it.