

Once in a Hospital in Madison

Jenna Rindo

You were working graveyard shifts with Paula who often deserted you and the stable but critically ill patients to take a smoke break out back by the dumpsters.

Almost always nauseated, you blamed it on bad biorhythms, the research that detailed decreased life expectancy for night workers too exhausted to cite and notate the evidence

desperate as you were for your shift differential. Turns out it was those things and your unplanned pregnancy. The worst shift started on the dark commute. You ran right over a Virginia Opossum big as a Beagle

(though learning and discrimination tasks rank opossums above dogs) the thump of wheels over flesh struck a strange taste of dread. Your penlight, used to assess equal and reactive pupils

cast a circle over a Jill's pouch, a dozen joeys once latched onto thirteen nipples now smashed, her hairless prehensile tail too long, too flat. You swallowed down acid, turned homesick for

Richmond, for the city streets clotted with cars, majestic with statues of dead heroes from the war between the states. Your shift ticked slow and pink while you kept thinking of those transparent babies.

When Paula came back from her "breakfast break" you stalked out of the unit, fished some coins from the hospital lobby fountain, used them to buy a vending machine cookie, studded with stale M & M's.

When you returned, Lorenzo was going ashy and gray. You disconnected his vent tubing to suction his trach with saline but the alarm never rang. Between five and six he coded. Paula bagged him while you

insufficiently compressed his chest and the code team clunked in with their cart pushing epi and other drugs that failed to stimulate. Before you called his next of kin, you knelt over the staff commode heaving up chunks

of forbidden cookie again and again. Rainbow colored lumps swirled then sank to the bottom of the bowl and lodged there, bright, still as road-kill.

Jenna Rindo lives in rural WI with her husband, children, flock of Shetland sheep, and other, less domesticated creatures. She worked as an RN in pediatric intensive care and now teaches ESL. Her poems have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The American Journal of Nursing*, *Bellingham Review*, and others.