

PRETTY LITTLE ANGELS

Hope the elevator will be slow, or out of service,
but it pings open the second I touch the button.
At least it's empty. At least, for the slow ascent
to the fourth floor, there's time to compose
what to say. How to say it. Nod to the nurse
who nods back, smiles – or frowns, can't tell,
don't stop to ask. Don't want to know. Pass tables
set with plastic cloths, acrylic vases, lurid
pink carnations. More pretense. Mom's door
is closed, a new sign, her scrawl on white paper:
Knoc befor Enter. Letters large at the top, shrink,
drift to the lower corner. Tap. Wait. Tap again. Push
the door open, peek in: she's still in the bed, sheet
tucked under chin, quilt bunched at the foot. That
smell: disinfectant, floor polish, piss. Hesitate
to enter, to wake her startled and afraid. Or
not wake her. Too long a pause until she croaks,
Is that you? Ease in, shrug off purse, jacket,
it's hot in here. Open curtain, let in light, air.
The floor a spill of photos, crumpled notes.
She's been moving things again. Losing things.
Crying on the phone about lost things. What
has been taken from her. What she misses
so much, has willfully abandoned. Clinging
to memory, she has turned her back
on the pigeons cooing on the sill, the children's
singsong in the park across the street. Hears
only sirens – police, fire, the ambulance
she waits for, that will come for her. *When
will it come?* She clutches my wrist. *Where
is your father? Is he really dead and buried?*
And when I say *Yes, years now*, she begs,
*Will he wait for me? All this time in heaven
with the pretty little angels, won't one get
her hooks in him before I'm let to go there?*

